Edited by
Lena Jayyusi &
Anne Sofie Roald

# MEDIA AND POLITICAL

# CONTESTATION

# IN THE

# CONTEMPORARY

# ARAB WORLD

A Decade of Change

# Palgrave Macmillan Series in International Political Communication

**Series Editor:** Philip Seib, University of Southern California (USA)

From democratization to terrorism, economic development to conflict resolution, global political dynamics are affected by the increasing pervasiveness and influence of communication media. This series examines the participants and their tools, their strategies and their impact. It offers a mix of comparative and tightly focused analyses that bridge the various elements of communication and political science included in the field of international studies. Particular emphasis is placed on topics related to the rapidly changing communication environment that is being shaped by new technologies and new political realities. This is the evolving world of international political communication.

**Books Appearing in this Series**

*Media and the Politics of Failure: Great Powers, Communication Strategies, and Military Defeats*
  By Laura Roselle

*The CNN Effect in Action: How the News Media Pushed the West toward War in Kosovo*
  By Babak Bahador

*Media Pressure on Foreign Policy: The Evolving Theoretical Framework*
  By Derek B. Miller

*New Media and the New Middle East*
  Edited by Philip Seib

*The African Press, Civic Cynicism, and Democracy*
  By Minabere Ibelema

*Global Communication and Transnational Public Spheres*
  By Angela M. Crack

*Latin America, Media, and Revolution: Communication in Modern Mesoamerica*
  By Juanita Darling

# Media and Political Contestation in the Contemporary Arab World

## A Decade of Change

*Edited by*

*Lena Jayyusi and Anne Sofie Roald*

palgrave
macmillan

# Contents

# ILLUSTRATIONS

## FIGURES

## Tables

# Acknowledgments

We hope that this book will serve to throw light on the manifold and complex dynamics that (continue to) emerge at the interface of media and politics in the Arab world, and on the endogenous understandings and frames of the actors on the ground as they engage in various lived and consequential contestations about the world they inhabit.

# Introduction

*Lena Jayyusi*

Since this book was first conceptualized, the Arab world and its media landscape have undergone some profound changes. Across the region, popular uprisings have catapulted a struggle over legitimacy, resources, political power, and representation. Various political visions have burst out into an open contestation over the shape of government, social order, and their relationship to the global order. At the same time, in some places more overtly and forcefully than in others, the major powers of the global order, namely the United States and Western Europe, have visibly intervened to try to shape the outcome. In all of this, the media have played a key role: catalyzing emergent discourses and positions, projecting events, and triggering intense arguments, both about the shape of politics and about the role and politics of the media itself.

The idea for this book, however, had taken shape before the Arab upheavals of 2011. It emanated from the pressing sense that there were emerging dynamics in the Arab political landscape that could have profound implications. A shift in political actors and activities, and a series of contestations and realignments, were visibly in process across the Arab region. The media landscape had at the same time been shifting and changing globally, and the region was no exception. Yet these changes were not all of one piece. While media developments in the United States, for example, pointed in the direction of increasing concentration, compartmentalization, and a narrowing down of public choices and discourses within the mainstream media in favor of a corporate consumer culture, in the Arab world, they seemed to point to increasing participation and a widening of the discursive media landscape away from the government monopoly of communicative space.

The launching of al-Jazeera satellite channel in 1996 had heralded change in the nature of regional media dynamics, and triggered

hopes for the development of a public sphere in which debate over issues of real concern to the ordinary person might take place openly. Yet it was perhaps al-Manar's (the Hezbollah channel) coverage of what was an iconic moment in the contemporary history of the region that revealed the cutting edge of media coverage, and its pan-Arab mobilizational impact. This was the unprecedented coverage of the Israeli military's withdrawal from South Lebanon in May 2000, and the simultaneous mass return of the local population to their homes, some after 18 years of occupation, which was covered in live detail on the newly launched al-Manar satellite channel. This was neither just spectacle (Kellner 2003: 2012) nor merely a "media event" (Dayan and Katz 1992), but a transformative and shared mediated political event, later credited by some Arab observers as having been a catalyst for the onset of the second Palestinian Intifada. Henceforth, the cascading events that the region was to witness during the next decade were covered by the new media in ways that seemed to transform the ordinary Arab spectator often into a live "witness" wherein a sense of "vested engagement," rather than mere spectatorship, was inscribed and mobilized. The witnessed events are experienced as endogenous to, or embedded in, the individuals' own lived concerns, and the engagement with them serves to expand his/her lived repertoire and imaginaries. Thus, the nexus between political activity and media forms and practices had become very salient well before the tumultuous events of the Spring of 2011, and their subsequent trajectories. With the diffusion and increasing sophistication of social media in the first decade of the 21st century, ordinary individuals would repeatedly constitute themselves as virtual real-time "participants" in the mediated events they were witnessing, and indeed sometimes as mediating agents themselves, through their own uses of new media.

The "power" of media was in this sense elaborated and increasingly enlarged in the few years preceding—and the decade subsequent to—the turn of the twenty-first century. What can make the new media powerful, then, is not its informational quotient alone but, at a deeper level, the modes through which it reshapes visibility, subjectivity, and agency. Transformations in these contribute to the processes of political and social change. The media landscape in the first decade of the millennium had changed profoundly enough to be able to catalyze transformative processes along these dimensions.

When discussing media and political contestation, one central and unavoidable question presents immediately: *how do media practices and strategies interface with structures of power*? How do they amplify or collide with them? What does that tell us about the contemporary

moment, the media-government nexus, and the structures of the contemporary order? More specifically, what do the modes of media engagement with the significant moments of the first decade of the twenty-first century (including the subsequent coverage of the so-called Arab Spring) tell us about the nature of the contestations within and around the Arab world today, and about the nature of "mediation" and mediational practices in the elaboration of such contestations, as well as the shaping of the publics implicated in them?

A "public" is always indexed to a particular issue and/or condition; it is never a fixed figure. Publics mutate and transform, and are as much engendered by, as they engender, policy and strategy. Any investigation of political practice and political or social change needs to consider how discourses, constituencies, and publics are mutually shaped, shift, and reshape the field of politics. Contestations can shape and engender conflicts, as they can reshape adversarial relationships, reconstitute old alliances, and engender new ones. The transformations in media forms and usages themselves have enabled new visibilities and voices, and thus fostered the emergence of new solidarities and alliances.

Hirschkind's contribution focuses on Egypt on the eve of the 2011 revolution and explores how the practice of blogging transformed the possibilities of political action, enabling it to cross boundaries between different political constituencies, Islamist and liberal-secular, in opposition to the Mubarak regime. Blogging enabled the emergence of a shared discourse between otherwise distinctly oriented publics, a discourse embedded in what became publicly visible, through blogging and the online circulation of videos, as a shared condition of violent subjugation by the same agents. Despite the closure of the specific historical moment that Hirschkind elaborates, his discussion and insights can suggest that new "asecular" alliances might yet reemerge, given the current trajectory of events in Egypt that in many respects reconstruct and amplify the practices, parameters, and conditions of the Mubarak regime.

Lamloum's chapter also indexes the mutating and intersecting nature of publics in political practice. She notes the overlapping and multiple nature of the identifications (and thus constituencies and publics) in the discourses of Hezbollah: resistance to Israeli colonialism on the one hand, and its Shiʿi constituency on the other, which saw itself as relatively disenfranchised within the Lebanese political map. Lamloum closely analyzes Hezbollah's media strategy in relationship to its anti-colonial agenda, but also teases out how the nature of its primary constituency and base membership at some point seemed

to collide with that agenda and its larger significance, and suggests that this meant it could not entirely sustain the engagement with a wider public. Clearly this is, in part, also related to variously mediated activities by other parties which mobilized a different register of "belonging," and were able in some contexts to motivate a response that engaged or pointed more to the "makeup" of the party rather than to its explicit discourses and self-avowed agenda. This, however, needs to be part of the field of interrogation itself, and a project that follows from the questions and pathways pursued in this volume.

The Sunni-Shi'i divide has been one that has been increasingly constructed, represented and played out in various media since, at the very least, the Israeli defeat in Lebanon in 2006. "Divides," like "alliances" are a feature of political practice—they are played out and fashioned in relation to perceived or actual interests. Tracing the origins of the contemporary Sunni-Shi'i divide as a public discursive practice should be a project for prospective inquiry, given its current and catastrophic salience in the region. It is interesting, for example, that while during the early phase of the US occupation of Iraq, it was the "Sunni triangle" that was repeatedly phrased within mainstream western media as the "problem" for "order" in the region, after the Israeli war on Lebanon in 2006, the "Shi'i crescent" ("Shi'ite crescent") became the ascendant phrase, both in western media discourses about the area, as well as in various regional ones. Both, however, tended to suppress and deflect from the profound disorder and destruction of the social fabric resultant from the US/UK occupation of Iraq. It is notable that in some current reappraisals, the emergence of ISIL (aka ISIS) is traced back to the invasion of Iraq and the US fostering of sectarian conflict, including the enclosure of different communities within partition walls (see e.g.,Zunes 2006; Bright 2007).

Focusing on the posters that are a significant feature of Palestinian public space in the Palestinian Occupied Territories, Haddad explores contending publics, and their alternative visions. These posters, he argues, embody and reproduce the contentions of distinct subjectivities fostered by, and embedded in, the historical trajectory of the Palestinian condition of dispossession, and are underpinned by the structure of the post-Oslo Palestinian political economy. The contestation is between those who continue to see the necessity of resistance against Israeli colonial occupation, and those who assert that the negotiations ostensibly begun under the Oslo Accords more than 20 years ago are still the way forward. Through the analysis of distinct poster genres in Palestinian public space, and their production,

distribution and consumption, he explores these contestations, and their claims to authority and power.

Clearly, one strand of inquiry points to the problematic revolving around the mediated construction of political subjectivity: how does the perceptual character of a medium, and the practices it makes possible, contribute to the shaping of a political subject? Hirschkind specifically explores the materiality and phenomenological character of the medium and its potentiality for producing a shared experiential moment, a shared oppositional subjectivity. The gritty sound of the colloquial used in blogs and the fuzzy and unstable sound-image of the cellphone videos that were circulated by Egyptian activists of different political hues, helped, for a while, to produce a shared language between them, across ideological divides. Here, the medium itself is a constituent of the perception and reception of the communicative act, and shapes the experiential connotations of the mediated content. Hammami identifies the three phases of Tunisian Facebook usage, and argues that these social networking media were spaces for the construction of visibility, a mode of political being and action that is shaped and enabled by the very nature (potentialities) of the medium, and thus, in turn, reshapes the context of action and is further reshaped by it. Kraidy discusses how the transformation of visibility amplified by reality television reconfigures the relationship between the individual and the social offering new templates for self-fashioning. One might also add that the visuality of the posters Haddad analyzes constructs an experiential sphere where the contentions are visible, perceptually accessible, and may thus more urgently help to engender immediate responses, identifications, or desires.

In all the above cases, the different media in use display, reconstitute and re-engender distinct subjectivities. This is the terrain of a media phenomenology where the material potentialities of the medium shape the perceptual and relational nature of the experience, and thus help shape a particular mode of subjectivity, and the modalities of action that are embedded in it. Further inquiry into the phenomenology of the media is particularly critical in view of the widespread diffusion of social media and their sometimes critical valency in shaping accounts, truth claims, positions, and structures of believability, especially when embedded within mass media broadcasts, as we witnessed during the events of the Arab Spring of 2011, and after.

The question of materiality in a broader sense emerges strongly in this volume. A number of the chapters raise the persistent and irremediable centrality of the material in relation to mediated politics.

Amahl Bishara takes it on explicitly as she discusses the issue of news reporting. The foundational and abiding pretension of this practice is, of course, the claim and obligation to cover the news as they happen: both in the sense of timeliness and objectivity. As Bishara argues, however, the freedom of expression and the right to information is subject to the freedom and right of access to the site of news. Thus freedom of expression, like many of the freedoms and human rights enshrined in UN Covenants and the discourses of western liberal democracies, fundamentally rests on other more foundational rights: the right to freedom of movement in this case. Violating the right of movement, and thus access, of Palestinian reporters, or foreign reporters (as in the Wars on Gaza; as well as in coverage of various events in the Occupied Territories) fundamentally subverts the production of news that are alternative to those circulated from the centers of power. Aouragh also points to the materiality that in the end necessarily embeds practices of cyber resistance. Despite the freedoms and cross-boundary activism enabled by digital media and web 2.0 technologies, they nevertheless are constrained by the ultimate materiality of the media themselves: they depend on an infrastructure, which in the colonial context is always already constrained and contained by the dominant (military-industrial) power complex. These are of course also technologies, as Auoragh argues, whose uses enable surveillance and the identification, location, and targeting of resistance and grass roots political action (see also Jayyusi 2011).

The persistence of the colonial in the Arab world remains a critical locus for understanding dimensions of the media/politics nexus. Aouragh, Bishara, Haddad, and Lamloum all speak to this. It is the colonial context that motivates and empowers Hezbollah's appeal, its pull, despite the alternative potential for a sectarian push (whether by constituents and actors external to Hezbollah or internal to it). The contending publics in Haddad's chapter are self-constituted in relation to the colonial condition, and the metrics of resistance and/or accommodation to it within a complicit global order. Even in Tunis (a country that does not share a border with Israel), as one of Hammami's examples reveals, the colonial question (for which Palestine is site, index and symbol) animates mobilizational responses and discourses—these are not merely rhetorical figures, but matters of significance for various constituencies in the country.

The cultural contestations that Kraidy illuminates may perhaps also be understood within the wider historical context still deeply striated by the colonial and its local projects, as experienced and articulated

by various parties. Kraidy looks at the politicization of transnationally mass-mediated popular culture, (in the form of music videos and reality television), and locates what may be described as the "Arab culture wars" at the intersection of Islamism, nationalism and cultural globalization. Focused on the role of the media in forming and contesting Arab modernity, he examines the discourses surrounding the two cultural genres within this tri-partite intersection. Clearly, where national identity and secular nationalist modernity become problematized in the context of both colonial projects and imperial interventions, or various configurations of authoritarian power, one trajectory of identitarian affirmation and opposition may be transposed into the sphere of "tradition," which, in the end, can take on a life of its own. Kraidy's analysis introduces us, however, to the complexity of the cultural encounters between the local and the global, as manifest in music videos, and the diverse, and sometimes antagonistic forms of response to them. Reading through Kraidy's analysis, it is of note how popular cultural contestations are not merely *about* politics: they are central *constituents* of it. The female body is one fulcrum of the contestations: it is often in and through the female body that both the "modern" and the "traditional" (Islamist) are constituted, rather than in and through other alternative forms of materiality and life. The female body becomes a cultural text, and a site of radical dissension. We are reminded of Chatterjee's (1994) discussion of Indian nationalist politics under colonial rule, and the way the "private" sphere of family and women—the "spiritual" sphere—became the ultimate site for nationalist affirmation in the context of a public sphere shaped and dominated by a foreign power.

Gender politics and modernity is the subject of Hayat Howayyek Atiyya's chapter. In many areas of the Arab region, more women graduate from higher education institutions than do men (including notably in the Gulf as well as Gaza and the West Bank), yet they are still highly under-represented in the decision making sites of the media professions. Howayyek Atiyya's chapter is a study of four major channels in the Arab world during the decisive decade between 1996 (when satellite television was introduced into the Arab world) and 2006. Focusing on three Gulf television stations and al-Manar, each representative of distinct ideological orientations, yet all affiliated with various socially conservative stakeholders, she explores the roles allocated to women professionals. We are introduced to some of the women and their concerns through their own voices: the disposition of the woman's body and her "visibility" and "appearance" interbraids and collides with the issue of her

professional role as decision maker, or producer of ideas within the public sphere. Howayyek Atiyya ultimately positions the problematic within a semiological (for some perhaps a provocative) reading of contemporary media practice in some of these media channels as embedded in what she calls "the collective historical unconscious": the traditional historical pattern that inscribed the role of different females, concubines versus free women. The gyrating Haifa Wahbi and the professional female Lebanese news anchor who appears on the TV screens of Gulf stations would both be, by this reading, indices of a traditional divide and a modern take on it at the same time. Nevertheless, because of the public visibility afforded the professional woman through the television screen, she suggests that there is a potentiality here for women's advancement which ultimately depends on the ability to transcend the ethics and aesthetics of a global order built on consumption.

Both women and Islam have been consistent loci of western scholarly and popular interest—liberal and conservative—in the Arab world, all too often reproducing familiar orientalist tropes, and ultimately implicated in imperial projects. Roald's chapter does much to complicate the representations of these two axes of politics and culture in the region. She explores the distinct contribution of female scholarly religious preachers and their interpretations on TV. Her study looks mostly at female preachers in Egypt, but also touches on the UAE which stands out among Gulf states in having an explicitly developmentalist gender agenda. Not only do these women preachers practice in the public sphere (something fundamentally made possible by satellite television), but they publically address matters of sexuality on screen. Roald asks whether this is an index of an emerging individualist turn in contemporary Islamic discourse.

Comparing Kraidy's discussion and Roald's makes possible the re-imagining of the "divide" between modernity and tradition, as classically presented. The debate on the relationship between (and indeed the conflation of) "modernity" and "westernization" is relevant here, and has of course been an important discursive field in the Arab world, as elsewhere. The need to understand the modalities by which conceptions of, and orientations to, modernity emerge locally in any place steers us to the discussion of alternative modernities, and the sometimes complicated imbrications of the traditional and the modern in contemporary forms of living, including the modern reinvention of tradition (to draw on Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). This approach allows us a field of vision and revision beyond classic western-centric formulations.

Abdel-Fadil's contribution may further help deconstruct orientalist frames of discussion, as it explores how the Islam Online controversy between Qatar based funders and local Islam Online staff in Cairo unfolded. Here the contentions in focus are within what might, from an exogenous perspective, appear as the same constituency. Different versions of, and approaches to, issues seen as relevant to Muslims are revealed. Analyzing the different frames involved in the contestations, this discussion does not only reveal the variety of Muslim publics (also made evident in Eickelman and Andersons' notable volume, 2003), the varying agendas of Islamically oriented actors, and the character of Muslim/secular intersections, but it also reveals the play of power in the discursive politics of the media. In this chapter, as in Haddad's and Aouragh's, power and political economy are critical to the understanding of the discursive media landscape. Indeed, more studies that analytically detail the modes by which discursive frames and constructions may be strategically linked to, and embedded within, political-economic constellations of action, are vital for an in-depth understanding of the media/politics interface.

That all these contributions are generally framed from within an endogenous perspective, articulated through the frames in use by local actors and participants, has implications for media scholarship on the region. First, the thrust of the analysis is not reduced to the question of "democratization," a somewhat tired motif in much literature on media in the Arab world. While this issue is indeed a significant constituent of many endogenous debates, challenges, and expectations, it is not the singular one that drives, explains, or embodies the concerns and symbolic/material intersections of life for various local constituencies. Second, where it is a critical component, it does not necessarily present as, or within, the western model of "liberalization" with which some media scholarship has been preoccupied. The latter preoccupation represents a projection and transplantation of exogenous considerations and interests onto a region where "democratization" can fundamentally and overtly involve the issue of decolonization, and/or the demands for social and economic justice, or for national sovereignty over resources. Instead, the contributions in this volume look at actual contestatory sites, and the media's practico-symbolic dynamics within them.

Hammami's contribution explicitly critiques the unreflective use of western inspired models as he discusses the uses of Facebook in the Tunisian revolution. He addresses this issue directly, arguing that the application of the pure (normative) Habermasian model of the public sphere to Arab media is misguided, and obscures the actual

transformations and practices at work. Exploring the emergence and uses of Facebook in Tunis, on the eve, during, and after the revolution against Ben Ali's regime, he suggests that a proper understanding of the Tunisian public sphere can benefit from drawing on both a modified Habermasian model and the Arendtian approach at the same time, and needs to be embedded in an understanding of the historical transformations of the public sphere in the country.

Indeed, the application of the Habermasian model to the Arab world is often an instrument by which the Arab world, and its media, are found to be fundamentally "lacking." Yet clearly the contemporary moment in the West is one in which the public sphere has become distorted through the mechanism of media concentration, market consumption, imperial project, and the manipulations central to those. The theorist who insists on finding a singular "lack" in the Arab world (ala Lynch 2006, who is correctly critiqued on this point in Hammami's chapter) is extrapolating from an idealized model that does not exist in actuality. Being based on an external and idealized normative metric, the resultant analysis and assessment is more likely to distort and obscure, rather than reveal, the actual dynamics of situated media practice in the region.

In fact, Habermas's model ([1962], 1989) has been critiqued by various scholars (Fraser 1992; Negt and Kluge 1993) as overlooking multiple constituencies (women, proletarians), whose invisibility in the public sphere of emergent modern Europe meant that the model was, from its inception, an idealization of bourgeois life. One can of course add to this the exclusion and invisibility of colonial subjects, given that the emergence of this "public sphere" coincided with the expansion of European empires. This is a distinctly important dimension for understanding the developing European social conjuncture at the time, since the enormous wealth afforded the European bourgeois order and its propertied institutions was ultimately accumulated in the colonized world. Certainly, in the first decade of the twenty-first century, this linkage (both its legacy and its reconstructed forms and projects) remains a constitutive element in the trajectory of political life, and a critical component of the conditions that shape fields of action, institutions, and spaces of public discourse.

Here an important difference is apparent between some mainstream western writing on Arab media and most of the perspectives offered in this volume. The expulsion of "history" at significant analytic nodes from some media scholarship has theoretical consequences. Note, for example, Lynch's comments (in Plumer 2006) on the Arab sense of injustice at the role of colonial and neo-colonial interventions

in the area, comments that seem to suggest this is merely a subjective construct. Commentary or analysis in this vein ends up valorizing western self-descriptions and privileging them as both reflections of actuality and standards of truth. In so doing, such an approach of course risks also de-historicizing western political practices and media discourses, and reifying the pretensions of particular political players over others.

There are, of course, some distinct differences between media practices in the Euro-American world and in the Arab region, as there are between the socio-political orders that embed these media practices. But the understanding of any site of practice has to be made in its own endogenous terms, its self-understandings, and its lived history, and it also needs to address linkages and connections, differences and intersections, continuities and ruptures. It is hoped that this book will make a genuine contribution to this.

## References

Bright, Arthur. 2007. "Baghdad's Sunni/Shiite Security Wall." *Christian Science Monitor.* April 20. Accessed January 11, 2014, at: http://www.csmonitor.com/2007/0420/p99s01-duts.html

Chatterjee, Partha. 1994. *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Dayan, Daniel and Elihu Katz. 1992. *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Eickelman, Dale F. and Jon W. Anderson. 2003. *New Media in the Muslim World: The Emerging Public Sphere*, Second edition. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Fraser, Nancy. 1992. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in Craig Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, pp. 109–142.

Habermas, Jürgen [German (1962), English Translation 1989]. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Thomas Burger (trans.). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Hobsbawm, Eric and Terence Ranger, ed. 1983. *The Invention of Tradition.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Jayyusi, Lena. 2011. "The Power of Technology and the Technology of Power" (online), At: http://english.dohainstitute.org/release/6b034830-433c-4ba2-9ed5-66ccf9ede776. Doha, Qatar: The Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies.

Kellner, Douglas. 2003. *Media Spectacle.* London and New York: Routledge.

Kellner, Douglas. 2012. *Media Spectacle and Insurrection, 2011: From the Arab Uprisings to Occupy Everywhere.* Critical Adventures in New Media. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Lynch, Marc. 2006. *Voices of the New Arab Public Iraq: al-Jazeera, and Middle East Politics Today.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Negt, Oskar and Alexander Kluge (1993). *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Plumer, Bradford. 2006. "Voices of the New Arab Public: An Interview with Author Marc Lynch." *Mother Jones.* January 12. Accessed November 18, 2014, at: http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2006/01/voices-new-arab-public-interview-author-marc-lynch

Zunes, Stephen. 2006. "The US Role in Iraq's Sectarian Violence." *Foreign Policy in Focus.* March 6. Accessed on November 30, 2014, at: https://www.globalpolicy.org/component/content/article/168/37432.html

# The Egyptian Blogosphere and the Revolution of the 25th of January

*Charles Hirschkind*

## INTRODUCTION

How has the development of the Internet, and particularly those platforms referred to as social media, changed the conditions of political mobilization and action for people around the globe? For many political commentators, the uprisings of 2011 in the Middle East seemed to provide an answer to this question. The ouster of the Egyptian president, in particular, and the role played by social media in organizing the massive demonstrations calling for his removal, were initially taken by many as evidence of a new political terrain made possible by Internet technology. It is interesting to note that, while the Egyptian protests from the beginning were frequently characterized as a "Facebook revolution," this characterization was very rarely applied to the Libyan uprising, despite the importance of Facebook and the Internet for the Libyan activists. This discrepancy points to a certain moral preference informing much of the theorizing on social media, whereby it is non-violent forms of popular mobilization (as the Egyptian revolution had been mistakenly described), rather than violent struggles, that express the media's potential. We don't, for example, talk about the US war in Afghanistan as a "Facebook war," despite the fact that American soldiers stationed in that country relied on blogs and other social media, both to circulate information about combat conditions, and as a lifeline to stay in touch with their families, friends, and fellow soldiers back in the United States.[1] Social

media, in other words, are viewed by military strategists today as a key to sustaining the morale of troops stationed abroad, and, therefore, are essential to maintaining the war-making capabilities of the US government. In addition, states themselves have increasingly turned to social media as an instrument of political propaganda and thus a component of military strategy.[2] My reason for mentioning this issue here at the outset is simply to point out that social media do not in and of themselves tilt the terrain of political conflict in favor of any particular constituency or political project. What needs to be examined, rather, is the way different political actors working within distinct contexts of political struggle have sought to exploit the new infrastructural conditions and indeterminacies such media introduce. In what follows, I examine one particular trajectory in the use of social media, that of the Egyptian blogosphere as it emerged over the 10 years leading up to the 2011 uprisings.

Today, the enthusiasm and optimism generated by the 2011 uprising in Egypt is rapidly becoming a distant memory. As this book goes to press, Egyptian political life remains caught in the grip of a repressive state-military apparatus that, by many measures, exceeds the worst years of the Mubarak regime. The Muslim Brotherhood, a vital participant in the broad movement that swept Mubarak from power, has been outlawed, over a thousand of its members and supporters killed, and many thousands more imprisoned.[3] Media outlets in Egypt have largely been brought into line with the state perspective, with most pro-Brotherhood voices silenced by censorship and intimidation. While levels of popular support for the violent crackdown on the Brotherhood have fallen since their high point during and shortly after the coup against the elected president Muhammad Morsi, enthusiasm for the repressive measures remains substantial among the Egyptian public. General ʿAbd al-Fattah al-Sisi, who led the coup against the elected president and then oversaw the campaign to violently extirpate dissenting voices—especially the Brotherhood—from Egyptian social and political life, has become the president.

The reasons for the collapse of Egypt's short-lived experiment with democratic reform are many. Clearly, many observers of the initial uprising in 2011 underestimated the loyalty of Egypt's bureaucratic, military, and judicial institutions to the Mubarak regime. Moreover, the Brotherhood's decision to put forward a candidate for the presidency after they had promised not to, combined with their failure to reach out to other political parties and constituencies once they were in power, alienated many of those who had initially respected the legitimacy of their electoral victory. These conditions, among others,

set the stage for supporters of the deposed Mubarak regime, together with most of the country's liberal intelligentsia, to launch the vast anti-Brotherhood campaign that resulted in the removal of president Morsi, the outlawing of the Brotherhood and its designation as a terrorist organizing, and the killings and mass arrests aimed at eradicating the Brotherhood's remaining political base.

From today's point of view, what was most striking about the Egyptian blogosphere that developed in the years prior to the 2011 uprising was the extent to which it contributed to the elaboration of a political discourse that cut across the institutional barriers that had long polarized Egypt's political terrain, between more Islamicly-oriented currents (most prominent among them, the Muslim Brotherhood) and secular-liberal ones. Since the rise of the Islamist Revival in the 1970s, Egypt's political opposition had remained sharply divided around contrasting visions of the proper place of religious authority within the country's social and political future, with one side viewing secularization as the eminent danger, and the other emphasizing the threat of politicized religion to personal freedoms and democratic rights.[4] This polarity had tended to result in a defensive political rhetoric and a corresponding amplification of political antagonisms—a dynamic the Mubarak regime had repeatedly encouraged and exploited over its 30 years in power in order to ensure a weak opposition. What was unique about the blogosphere I examine here was the extent to which it had engendered a political language free from the problematic of secularization vs. fundamentalism that had governed so much of political discourse in the Middle East and elsewhere. The practices of reporting, critiquing, argument, not to mention satire and humor, that shaped the corner of the Egyptian blogosphere I am concerned with resist categorization in terms of the binary of religion and secularism—terms that have so forcefully shaped modern political life—but were geared to creating an arena of discursive engagement that transcended the institutional forms within which these categories were so thoroughly rooted in Egypt. Thus, while many of those who wrote and commented within the blogosphere were involved in Islamist organizations, and identified themselves on their blogs as members of these organizations, the political language they developed online departed radically from that used within these organizations.

Here I want to address some of the ways the practice of blogging changed the conditions of political discourse and action within Egypt, and set the stage for the overthrow of the Mubarak regime.[5] The public arena of activist blogging I describe responded first and

foremost to the question, how can effective political agency be established today in the face of the predations and repressive actions of the Egyptian state? And, concomitantly, what forms of political critique and interaction can mediate and encompass the heterogeneity of religious and social commitments that constitute Egypt's contemporary political terrain? While the political blogosphere was certainly enabled by a politics of tactical alliance among participants of differing political orientation, the form of discursive interaction that emerged from this tactical engagement produced unique practices of public reason and dialogue. The fact that this effort at finding commonality across Islamist-secularist lines subsequently collapsed back into a radically polarized political field does not make the effort any less important, though it does highlight the fragility of the alliance. In this moment, when political life in Egypt seems to leave little scope for imagining a route to a better future, the innovative political forms pioneered by the first generation of Egyptian bloggers offer an important resource for contemporary political thought.

## Emergence of the Blogosphere

The blogosphere that burst into existence in Egypt around 2004 and 2005 in many ways provided a new context for a process that had begun somewhat earlier, in the late 1990s: namely, the development of practices of coordination and support between secular leftist organizations and associations, and Islamist ones (particularly the Muslim Brotherhood)—a phenomenon almost completely absent in the prior decades.[6] Toward the end of the decade of the 1990s, Islamist and leftist lawyers began to agree to work together on cases regarding state torture, whereas in previous years, lawyers of one affiliation would almost never publicly defend plaintiffs from the other. This period also saw various attempts by Islamist thinkers to found political parties (most famously, the Center Party, *Hizb al-Wasat*) on a platform capable of attracting members well outside the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist formations, including Christians.[7] Overall, however, such attempts had little success, owing to the Egyptian state's refusal to grant legal authority to these parties.

The most successful experiment at reaching across Egypt's political spectrum came in 2004 with the emergence of what is called the *Kifaya* movement, a political formation that brought together Islamists, Muslim Brothers, communists, liberals, and secular-leftists, joined on the basis of a common demand for an end to the Mubarak regime and a rejection of Jamal Mubarak's succession of his father as

president.[8] *Kifaya* was instrumental in organizing a series of demonstrations between 2004 and 2007 that for the first time explicitly called for the president of Egypt to step down, an unheard of demand prior to that moment insomuch as any direct criticism of the president or his family had until then always been taboo, and met by harsh reprisals from the state. *Kifaya* not only succeeded in bringing huge numbers of people of different political persuasions into the street to protest government policies and actions, they were also the first political movement in Egypt to exploit the organizing potential of the Internet, founding a number of blog sites from which to coordinate and mobilize demonstrations and strikes. When *Kifaya* held its first demonstrations, at the end of 2004, a handful of bloggers both participated and wrote about the events on their blogs. Within a year, the number of blogs had jumped to the hundreds. A few years later there were 1000s of blogs, many tied to activism, street politics, solidarity campaigns, and grassroots organizing.[9]

Two key events highlighted the political potential of blogging in Egypt and helped secure the practice's new and expanding role within Egyptian political life. It had long been known that the Egyptian state routinely abused and tortured prisoners or detainees (hence, the United States' choice of Egypt in so-called rendition cases). For its part, the state has always denied that abuse took place, and lacking the sort of evidence needed to prosecute a legal case, human rights lawyers and the opposition press had never been able to effectively challenge the state's official position. This changed when Wael Abbas, whose blog is titled *al-Wa'i al-Masri* ("Egyptian Awareness"), placed on his blog site a cell-phone recorded video he had been sent by another blogger that showed a man being physically and sexually abused by police officers at a police station in Cairo. Apparently, the clip had been filmed by officers with the intention of intimidating the detainee's fellow workers.

Once this video clip was placed on YouTube and spread around the Egyptian blogosphere, opposition newspapers took up the story, citing the blogs as their source. When the victim was identified and encouraged to come forth, a human rights agency raised a case on his behalf against the officers involved that eventually resulted in their conviction, an unprecedented event in Egypt's modern history. Throughout the entire year that the case was being prosecuted, bloggers tracked every detail of the police and judiciary's handling of the case, their relentless scrutiny of state actions frequently finding its way into the opposition newspapers. Satellite TV talk shows followed suit, inviting bloggers on screen to debate state officials concerned

with the case. Moreover, within a month of posting the torture videos on his website, Abbas and other bloggers started receiving scores of similar cell-phone films of state violence and abuse taken in police stations or during demonstrations.

This new relationship between bloggers and other media forms became a standard: not only did many of the opposition newspapers increasingly rely on bloggers for their stories, but news stories that journalists couldn't print themselves without facing state persecution—for example, on issues relating to the question of Mubarak's successor—were first fed to bloggers by investigative reporters, once they were reported online, journalists then proceeded to publish the stories in newsprint, citing the blogs as source, and this way avoided the accusation that they themselves wrote the stories. Moreover, many young people took up the practice of using cell-phone cameras in the street, and bloggers began to receive an increasing number of cell-phone videos from anonymous sources that they then put on their blogs.

A second event that brought bloggers to national attention also concerned police abuse: during a *Kifaya* demonstration in May 2005, 1000s of riot police and paid thugs attacked a small group of about 100 protesters, including many women, who were beaten and harassed by the attackers. A number of bloggers were present at the event, and immediately posted cell phone videos and extensive descriptions of the attack on their sites. These accounts then made their way first to Egypt's opposition press, then to the international press, including al-Jazeera, and finally to the courts. This and subsequent blog exposés on sexual harassment in Egypt raised to national public attention an issue that until then had rarely received acknowledgment in any of the popular media. Indeed, at the end of 2008 a court judge sentenced two men to three years in prison on a sexual harassment charge, an outcome that was unimaginable until the blogosphere forced the issue into the realm of public debate.

These events played a key role in shaping the place that the blogosphere would come to occupy within Egypt's media sphere. Namely, bloggers came to understand their role as that of providing a direct link to what many of them called "the street," conceived primarily as a space of state repression and political violence, but also as one of political action and popular resistance. They sought to render visible and publicly speakable a political practice—the violent subjugation of the Egyptian people by its authoritarian regime—that other media outlets had not been able to easily disclose, due to censorship, practices of harassment, and arrest. This includes not only

acts of police brutality and torture, but also the more mundane and routine forms of violence that shape the texture of everyday life. For example, blogs during this period frequently included reporting on routine injustices experienced in public transportation, the cruel indifference of corrupt state bureaucrats, sexual harassment encountered in the streets, as well as the many faces of pain produced by conditions of intense poverty, environmental toxicity, infrastructural neglect, and so on. Additionally, the focus on torture and police violence among bloggers must be understood not only as a moral rejection of such practices. The images of state violence circulated on blogs provided a visual anchor for a much broader sense of discontentment with the authoritarian, neo-liberal regime, and with the poverty and desperation that its policies imposed on Egyptian society.

## The Alliance Online

I have described a couple of key moments in the emergence of political blogging in Egypt and its important relation to opposition movements in the country. I want now to sketch out some of the features that gave coherence and unity to the heterogeneous currents that make up this arena of public dialogue and citizen journalism. Activist bloggers from across a wide political spectrum were brought together online through a shared sense of what were the most pressing political challenges Egyptians faced. Four issues helped to define a common moral stance: a forceful rejection of the Mubarak regime and a demand for its end; a stand against *tawrith*, or "succession"—specifically Jamal Mubarak's succession of his father as president of the country; a demand for the expansion of political freedoms and the creation of fair and democratic institutions; and a condemnation of routinized state violence. (Notably, these same demands provided the points of common ground for the demonstrators in Tahrir square and throughout the country in early 2011.) A fifth point of convergence lay in a concern with the plight of the Palestinian people and an insistence that Arab states have a responsibility to protect them. Stands on these issues were marked on blogs with small banners, some linked to websites of associations and solidarity groups. Although those who came to this common ground did so through different institutional experiences, and brought with them different conceptions of the place of religion within politics, they wrote and interacted within this corner of the blogosphere as participants in a shared project. These issues, in other words, provided common

ground for the forms of social documentary and commentary found across both leftist and Islamist websites.

For Islamist activists and members of the Muslim Brotherhood, this agenda marked a radical shift. Up until that time, Islamist political arguments had focused on the importance of adopting the *shari'a* as a national legal framework, and on the need to counter the impact of Western cultural forms and practices in order to preserve the values of an Islamic society.[10] In fact, an earlier generation of intellectuals linked to Islamic political parties had, since the mid-1980s, emphasized the necessity of democratic political reforms. Leading Islamist writers such as Fahmy Howeidy, 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Messiri, and Tariq al-Bishri had attempted to build a movement that would bring about an end to the rampant corruption afflicting Egypt's political institutions and establish a solid basis for representative governance, but their viewpoints generally remained marginal within Islamist political currents, and the organizations they tried to establish were largely undermined by the state.[11] For many of those making up the new generation of Islamist activists, however, the goal of creating a flourishing Islamic society must start with the reform of Egypt's stultified authoritarian system, and therefore, with the development of a political discourse capable of responding to the requirements of this task. This political reorientation can be seen in a statement made by Ibrahim al-Hudaybi [also El-Houdaiby]—an important voice among the new generation of Brotherhood members and a well-known blogger. Writing in the context of a debate with fellow Brotherhood members about the future of the organization, al-Hudaybi suggested that the Brotherhood's slogan, "Islam is the solution," be replaced by the religiously-neutral "Egypt for all Egyptians."[12] I would caution, however, against a hasty assumption that the abandonment of religious references—a constitutive feature of the political blogosphere I am addressing here—can be taken as a symptom of the secularization of political life in Egypt.[13] Rather, and as many of the bloggers I spoke with in Cairo insisted to me, what is marked by this shift is a recognition of the necessity of creating a language of political agency capable of encompassing the heterogeneity of commitments, religious and otherwise, that characterize Egyptian society. Blogs, I am arguing, provided a unique space for the elaboration of such a form of political discourse, and enabled the creation of new models of political citizenship, including by those who are concerned with preserving the Islamic character of Egyptian society.

## Sensory Politics

In order to highlight the sensory politics undergirding this practice of activist journalism, I want to trace its overlap and departure from a somewhat different arena of ethical and political discourse. In my earlier work, I discussed the emergence in Egypt of what I called an Islamic counterpublic (Hirschkind 2001; 2006). Articulated by the wide circulation of popular cassette-recorded sermons among the lower and lower-middle classes in Cairo, this public arena connected Islamic ethical traditions to practices of deliberation about the common good, the duties of Muslims in their status as national citizens, and the future of the greater Islamic community. Sermon tapes provided one of the means by which Islamic traditions of ethical discipline were accommodated to a new social, political, and technological order, to its rhythms, noise, its forms of pleasure and boredom, but also to its political incitements and its modes of citizenly participation. Within this context, public speech was geared less to the formation of political policies than it was to the cultivation of a pious dispositions—the embodied modes of expression understood to facilitate the development and practice of Islamic virtues, and therefore, of Islamic ethical comportment.

Notably, both the cassette sermon and the blog, in different ways, exploit a kind of noise in order to articulate a domain of social-moral existence that defies the normalizing discourses of the state. Recorded live at the mosque, on low tech, low-priced equipment, sermon tapes reproduced, not simply the discursive content of the sermon, but all of the surrounding noise—the horns and other street sounds, the pious (and raucous) responses of the audience, as well as all of the noise accumulated on the tape in the course of being passed along and copied from one listener to the next (Hirschkind 2006: 8–12). In their multiple layerings of electronic and urban interference, tapes became a privileged technology within a social world of pious listeners, what I called an Islamic counterpublic. Egyptian political blogs, I want to suggest, also exploited the epistemic value of a certain noise, two kinds in particular: the gritty abrasiveness of the vernacular and the fuzziness and instability of the video sound-image produced by the cell phone.

Outside of modern literature, Colloquial Egyptian Arabic has rarely been used as a written language. Attempts to assign it the status of the authentic voice of the people have always been limited by classical Arabic's proximity to the Quran, and thus to what has remained

for most Egyptian Muslims an exemplary voice, one not only central to the variety of citational and recitational practices through which one cultivates a closeness with God, but also pervasive within daily speech, as a common stock of expressions through which the most mundane actions find their ethical framing. Classical Arabic, in other words, has never become just a written form, but has always remained tied to its resonant sound, a sound essential to and formative of parts of one's most intimate voice.[14] Hence, within the cassette-sermon public I have written about, the ethical and rhetorical resources of classical Arabic are necessary to political action and reflection.[15]

The use of the colloquial within the blogosphere I am describing is more, or other, therefore, than just an authentic voice of the people. On one hand, and most obviously, its distance from the writing styles of other textual media signaled a judgment on the illegitimacy of Egypt's political institutions, not simply those of the state but also the organizations of political opposition that, from the standpoint of many Egyptians, had long been overcome by corruption and bureaucratic inertia. Such writing highlighted its independence from the dominant discourses of Egyptian political life that circulated via print and televisual media. But recourse to written colloquial Arabic did more than simply mark a distinction. Many of the most popular blogs, those most frequently visited by both the secular-leftists *and* Islamists I spoke with in Cairo during 2008, pushed this distinction further by deploying a particularly vulgar form of the vernacular. The fact that people affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood or generally supportive of Islamist currents within society found such writing valuable, persuasive, and insightful was striking given the emphasis on pious modes of speech and comportment found within Islamist associations. As I mentioned, the media forms developed by Islamic reform movements in modern Egypt have foregrounded the rhetorical powers of Quranic speech to transform and improve the sensitive listener. How do we understand such a radical departure from that tradition by some members of this generation of Islamist activists?

Take for example the comments of a blogger I spoke with named Fatima, a woman who also wrote for the popular website Islam Online, and practiced a more strict form of personal piety than many Egyptians (not shaking hands with men, and so on). In one conversation, Fatima mentioned to me that one of the blogs she visited most frequently was that carrying the name Malcolm X, one of the popular Egyptian political blogs that was well known for its author's liberal, if not excessive, recourse to the Egyptian vernacular's crudest expletives. Fatima said that although she often found the language

excessive and disturbing, the blogger's political insights, his ability to give expression to Egypt's dire political predicament, were without parallel and well worth putting up with the verbal assault. Even more surprising, she then told me that she frequently told him in person that he should reform his language. They had come to know each other as members of a group called Solidarity Committee against Violations of the State, an association put together by online activists. It is the experience fashioned within the blogosphere and the resultant practices of political engagement, I want to argue, that made possible such exchanges and forms of cooperation. This observation was not exceptional: many of the young people I spoke to who were, or had been, affiliated with the Brotherhood emphasized, though not without some ambivalence, their appreciation for bloggers who mined the rougher edges of street language.

These comments need be understood in light of the specific use to which text and image was put within the blogosphere. As a primarily visual space, blogs during this period left behind the resonant word at the heart of Islamists projects of reform, and instead assumed the task of putting on display, objectifying state violence, as a pervasive condition of the contemporary Egyptian experience. Despite its reliance on a colloquial form, the style of expression, which had in some ways come to define the Egyptian political blogosphere, twists away from the verbal utterance, becoming a scandal, unhinged from the languages that shape and sustain ethical community. What it lost in utterability, however, it gained as a material artifact, a disfigured social body visually registering a condition of generalized violence. It is written colloquial, in other words, it was able break with its own sound and all of the ethical attachments of aurality within Islamic rhetorical traditions, and come to inhabit the visual frame of the blog as an icon of disfigurement and subordination, of collective injury.[16]

This fracturing of language is also a fracturing of ethics from politics, what might be described as a process of secularization, one founded on a split between two sensory modalities—eye and ear. Notably, one of the primary points of tension and conflict between Brotherhood bloggers and the older directorate had been around the issue of whether *da'wa*—the activity of promoting adherence to pious standards—could be separated from politics without undermining the Islamic quality of society: a question that many of the younger Brothers had affirmed in the positive (Lynch 2007a; 2007b). For those making up the new generation of Islamist activists, the goal of creating a flourishing Islamic society had to start with the reform of Egypt's stultified authoritarian system, and therefore, with the

development of a political discourse capable of responding to the requirements of this task. To be effective, they argued, such a discourse had to be disencumbered from the pedagogical project of ethical reform that had been central to Islamist political thought and practice. The blogosphere I have been describing contributed to this project, less in terms of the development of a political discourse than as a site wherein political affects were solicited and honed, where the experience of a violated national subject was objectified and cultivated.

The cell-phone videos that circulated widely within the Egyptian blogosphere also accorded with, and enhanced, the perceptual habits I have been describing. Many of the videos recorded encounters between state security forces and demonstrators. The fleeting, unsteady, often unfocused images testified to a surreptitious eye, threatened, evasive, bearing witness again and again to acts of state repression. The sounds heard were a blend of automobile noises, voices from the crowd, stray expressions of fear, amazement, and outrage from those filming. Beyond documenting specific acts of criminality by state security forces—an extremely important function—these films in their endless variety and extensive proliferation created a vast tableau of a society under siege, or what bloggers simply call the "street."

## Protocols of Discourse

Interestingly, the protocols and practices of interaction in the blogosphere during the years before the 2011 uprising were not always recognized outside it. For example, when I spoke to secularist bloggers, many tended at first to dismiss the idea that they would have anything to do with Islamists; that on Islamist sites you would only find things like calls to kill impious actors and writers. When I pointed out that their own sites included many links to sites of people self-identified as Muslim Brothers, and that in their own online writings they commented positively on the participation of Islamist activists in organizing demonstrations and building public awareness of pressing political concerns, then they would begin to note exceptions. In other words, the kinds of statements and interactions within the blogosphere cross cut divisions, divisions that still remained marked—in speech and associational life—outside it. While they recognized the difference between their political commitments and those of other bloggers, they engaged each other with an orientation to creating conditions of political action and change, and therefore sought to

develop arguments, styles of writing and self-presentation that could bridge these differences and hold the plurality together. As one secularist blogger put it in commenting on the protocols of online engagement, "The atheists reign in their contempt for religion, while the religious bloggers—who would not even accept the existence of non-believers in the first place—can now see some shared values."

This also means that online participants frequently ended up engaging with topics, arguments, and people they would not have tended to encounter offline. A Christian blogger I spoke with, who contributed to this arena, used the example of gay Egyptian activists, noting that while many of the bloggers would be uncomfortable associating with people who they knew to be gay in real life, because of the interactions of self-identified gay bloggers in the blogosphere, many online participants—both Islamist and secularist—had come to recognize a common ground with them, and to value their contributions to a shared critical project. Once a topic acquired a momentum in the blogosphere, even those who might otherwise avoid it were led to engage it openly as a condition of sustaining the arena of discourse to which they had collectively forged and remained committed. Islamist contributors to this project had to address topics like sexual harassment—an issue that would have rarely been raised in Egypt, but even more rarely in Islamist circles—and to think about them publicly in a style that acknowledged the heterogeneity of viewpoints among their readers. Insomuch as bloggers, both secular and Islamist, positioned themselves within this arena of activism and discourse, they necessarily addressed this question and others, including problems of religious minorities (copts, bahais and *shi'a*), and issues of freedom of expression and freedom of religion.

The style of reasoning characteristic of this blogosphere foregrounded a language of individual self-reflectivity and critical engagement while eschewing what is understood to be its opposite: denunciation and dogmatism. In this, it followed a trend long ago recognized by scholars of contemporary Islam (Eickelman 1992; Eickelman and Anderson 1999). As with the practice of blogging in much of the world, this commitment to individual reasoning was marked rhetorically by an insistence that one was speaking outside of all institutional affiliations and strictly for oneself. Bloggers exploited the blog format, particularly the personal profile page, in order to fashion an online persona that transcended the stereotypes that functioned to limit political argument. Thus, the blogspot protocol of providing a personal description, replete with favorite films, books, and blogs, was used to create and sustain, less a unique

individuality, than a sense that one is an "ordinary Egyptian," not a Muslim Brother, not a Coptic Christian, not a communist, but someone with the likes and dislikes of other Egyptians. Thus, in striking contrast to the situation today, one's self-declared identity as a member of the *Ikhwan* did not exhaustively define one's social, political, and religious identity, as other aspects of self were highlighted and displayed. This allowed for the possibility of linkages, the articulation of shared interests and desires that otherwise would have remained hidden, or at least fail to find institutional expression within existing forms of affiliation and political action. According to one prominent Brotherhood blogger, 'Abd al-Mun'im Mahmud, this particular form of self-display helped to "humanize" Brotherhood Members, to show the extent to which they shared tastes and desires of other Egyptians, and in so doing, opened up possibilities of mutual recognition and alliance foreclosed by reigning stereotypes. Mahmud's own site was called *Ana Ikhwan*, "I am the Brotherhood," a title that calls to be read ironically as "I am the [Muslim] Brotherhood, and yet . . . I am much like you."[17]

The rhetoric of individual self-expression and reasoning—I say rhetoric not to suggest it was a false claim but to keep in mind that it is not simply the desire for self-expression that oriented the discourse, but an intimately collective political project—went hand in hand with an openness to engage with a global political culture. One saw this openness quite dramatically on websites like Islam Online, a site that a number of Islamist bloggers wrote for until early 2010, when the site's Qatari administrators decided to close down the Cairo office (see chapter 10 in this volume). While space does not permit me to go into the importance of such Islamic websites in relation to shifting practices of dialogue and news reporting, I will briefly draw a couple of examples, based on conversations I had with Islam Online writers during 2008. First, I would note that Islam Online, a site dedicated to promoting a correct understanding of Islam and which addressed issues understood to be of relevance to Muslims, frequently hired non-Muslims to work for them. As a journalist writing for the website explained to me, "we don't see any problem having non-Muslims write for us, as long as they are not addressing religious issues." A second and striking example of the openness and lack of dogmatism on this site can be seen in their decision to hold a live open forum with, and about, Muslim gay activists in the United States, a number of years ago. No other media agency in Egypt—secular or religious—would have hosted such an event. Note as well that Islam Online published a review of *The Jewel of Medina*, a book

about the prophet's wife 'Aisha that many considered to be one more example of Islam-bashing disguised as literature. The reviewer did indeed find great fault with the book on both historical and aesthetic grounds, but, against many other voices, argued that it was better to engage with such books openly and critically, instead of through censorship. This view, that one must remain open to what is taking place in the world, marked a significant change from the defensive posture taken by an earlier generation in regard to Western media and culture. This is not to say that this generation of Islamist activists and bloggers were simply adopting Western cultural models (many of the Islam Online writers I met, as I mentioned, insisted on strict observance of a variety of religious duties). Rather, it points to the way secularization was no longer the primary enemy in the way it had been, a stance evident in a far less defensive posture by young Islamist writers.

This attitude of critical engagement among bloggers from the Muslim Brotherhood met with considerable resistance from the older generation of Brothers that continued to dominate the organization. Many younger Brotherhood members turned to the blogosphere in this period to elaborate a serious and sustained critique of the old guard and its policies—and were in return severely criticized by the old guard, who forced some to shut down their sites.[18] It was particularly the willingness of the young bloggers to discuss openly and publicly questions regarding the governance and direction of the organization that the older generation found unacceptable.

## Conclusion

As I noted above, one aspect of my earlier work in Egypt concerned the emergence of what I called an Islamic counterpublic, one for which the cassette recorded sermons and other religious oratory played an important constitutive role. The political blogosphere I have been describing departed from this Islamic counterpublic in some key aspects. Most notably, the web-based arena was predicated on a separation of *da'wa*—the activity of promoting adherence to pious standards—from politics.[19] This separation was evident in the shift from a discourse imbued with the performative and poetic resources of the Quran and other Islamic ethical genres to one centered on the concepts of a modern democratic political order (a shift further emphasized by the extensive use of vernacular on blogs). As I mentioned above, a key point of conflict between Brotherhood bloggers and the older directorate centered around the question of

separating *da'wa* from politics, with many of the younger generation
insisting that such a move was necessary (Lynch 2007a; Shehata and
Stacher 2006).

There were also, however, ways in which the practice of blogging
was built on and extended certain trends developed in the public
sermon I described. An obvious overlap, of course, is found in the
emphasis on deliberation and contestation as necessary to the reform
of Egyptian social and political life. There is also a similarity in the
way the conditions of production of the two media forms—the cas-
sette sermon and the blog—facilitated the articulation of a domain
of social-moral existence that defied the normalizing discourses of
the state. As I noted above, both gave expression to a space of vio-
lence, a violence whose impact was registered on both speech and
vision (e.g., the trembling and surreptitious eye of the cell phone
video). They also both constructed a new kind of agency within this
domain, in the case of the blogs, an agency conceived in explicitly
political terms.

Lastly, both the counterpublic and the blogosphere of the last
10 years shared a concern for social discipline: what, in the *da'wa*
arena, is often called *tahdhib*, or the polishing of one's ethical capaci-
ties, and what most of the bloggers I spoke with referred to as *tathqif*—
from the word *thaqafa*, meaning culture, here deployed to suggest
a process of inculcating skills of political judgment, reasoning, and
argument. As 'Abd al-Mun'im Mahmud told me, "Our aim is not to
build a political party or bring about a revolutionary overthrow of the
government. Our goal in blogging, rather, is to bring about political
consciousness, to create a culture of informed engagement, a willing-
ness to challenge and critique the state." This goal was to be brought
about not by the embodied disciplines of *da'wa*, though it did involve
the development of the attitudes and dispositions that made dialogue
and critique between Muslims and Christians, between Islamists and
secularists, within the blogosphere, possible. In this sense, it necessi-
tated the fashioning of a set of political virtues that, while not Islamic
in and of themselves, were understood, at least by Islamist bloggers, as
necessary to creating the political conditions within which an Islamic
society might flourish.

The value of the discursive and institutional resources developed
by the online activists I have described were dramatically confirmed
during the Egyptian revolution of Spring 2011, and many of the
political bloggers who pioneered the media form were there in Tahrir
Square throughout the demonstrations. In my view, the most striking

demonstration of the contributions of these activists to the revolution lies in what Hussein Agrama has called its "asecular" character (2011). By this, he means that the demands articulated and the actions taken in the protests in Tahrir and beyond were not informed by, or responsive, to the twin categories of secular and religious—categories that constitute a key reference point for modern styles of political reasoning. Agrama explains the notion in the following terms:

> [T]he term *asecularity* specifies a situation not where norms are no longer secular, but where the questions against which such norms are adduced and contested as answers are no longer seen as necessary. It is a situation where we can be genuinely *indifferent* to those questions, the ways that particular stakes are attached to them, and their seeming indispensability to our ways of life. As a result, such moments open up spaces for us to think beyond our current predicaments (2011).

Evidence of such indifference could be seen in the way collective prayers were held in Tahrir during the demonstrations. Despite the fact that hundreds of thousands of people prayed collectively in the Square on multiple occasions during the uprising, no one at the time—neither in Egypt nor outside the country—pointed to this act as evidence of the influence of religion on the political movement. On the contrary, most commentators tended to emphasize the secular character of the revolutionary movement. This is rather striking, given how sensitive observers of Middle Eastern political trends (both local and international) are to the intrusion of religion into political arenas—what is often decried as the instrumental use of religion for extra-religious (i.e., political) goals. Such acts of collective prayer, in other words, were unmarked in terms of their secularity or religiosity. The actions taking place in the Square were in this sense *asecular*, unfolding in accord with a rationality and a purpose indifferent to the frames of reference authorized by the opposition of secular and religious. One lesson to draw from this, following Agrama, is that it "may not be necessary to have a principled distinction between religion and politics to express an ethos of democratic sensibility" (2011). This unique form of political reasoning, as I have argued here, owed a debt to the pioneering efforts of Egypt's activist bloggers.

## Final Comment

In 2012, this fragile experiment in asecular reason became a victim of a political calculus built upon the demonization of the Muslim

Brotherhood, and accompanied by a broader condemnation of "Islamist politics" *tout court*. An earlier willingness by Egyptian liberals to engage openly with activists and thinkers from the Brotherhood and other Islamically-oriented associations has been superseded by shrill assertions of secularism as the only acceptable political stance. Those suspected of so-called "Islamist sympathies" are now viewed as enemies of state and are regularly reviled in Egypt's public media. Egyptian society remains dangerously polarized, and violence—both by the state and by new radicalized groups—continues to grow.

Much of this analysis presented here was written in an earlier, more hopeful moment, prior to the current state of polarization. It offers, for that reason, a useful reminder that the lessons of the 2011 Egyptian uprising for the Middle East are not that Islamists cannot be democrats, as some have taken it to be, but that only a politics that overcomes the ideological trap of secular vs. religious will be capable of bringing about real change. As we have seen, that task cannot be achieved by a few Internet activists alone when such a binary reason remains densely woven into the institutional and political fabric of the nation, ready to be mobilized whenever the governing regime finds it useful. Indeed, if there is one thing that the tragic turn of events in Egypt's recent history has taught us, it is to be skeptical of the utopian futures proffered to us by the enthusiasts of new media.

[An earlier version of the article appeared in Revista Dialectologia y Tradiciones Populares 65 (1), 2010: 137–153 and is reprinted with acknowledgment to Oriente Moderno© Instituto per l'Oriente C. A. Nallino (Roma)]

### Notes

1. For a discussion of social media use within the military and, particularly, military blogs, see James Dao's article in the *New York Times*, May 2, 2011: A17.

2. A good example of this can be found in Rebecca Stein's discussion of the Israeli government's use of Facebook and the video-sharing site, Youtube, in the days immediately after the raid by Israeli commandos on the Gaza Flotilla (Stein 2011).

3. Five hundred and twenty-eight supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood were in 2014 condemned to death by an Egyptian court for the murder of one policeman, the largest mass death sentence handed down in recent history anywhere in the world.

4. For useful discussions of Egyptian political life and the role of Islamic movements see Abdo 2000; Beinin and Stork 1997; Baker 2003.

5. In this paper, I address one small corner of the Egyptian blogosphere defined around a shared emphasis on contemporary national political concerns. The majority of Egyptian blogs are not explicitly political but focus on any number of themes, from movies and music stars, to poetry, to fashion, to calls for greater piety.

6. On the reconfiguration of Islamic authority in Egypt, and in the Middle East more generally, see Agrama 2010; Hirschkind 2006; Mahmood 2005; Salvatore 1997.

7. On the emergence and career of *Hizb al-Wasat* see Norton 2005; Stacher 2002; Wickham 2004.

8. The co-evolution of the *Kifaya* movement and Egypt's political blogosphere has been examined by Radsch (2008). My own understanding of the *Kifaya* movement owes a considerable debt to Talal Asad's insightful comments about the sense of moral imperative underlying its formation, found in his essay (2012).

9. The by-far most useful analysis on the Egyptian blogosphere can be found in two articles by Marc Lynch (2007a; 2007b). For a more general treatment of Internet use and the growth of blogging in the Middle East, see Bunt 2009: 131–176.

10. Useful analyses of the Islamist movement in Egypt are found in Baker 2003; Mahmood 2005; Salvatore 1997; 2001.

11. All three of these men contributed significantly to oppositional political movements in Egypt over the last 30 years, and while they were not directly involved in organizing the demonstrations of Spring 2011, their contributions to Egyptian political life certainly helped set the stage for the events that transpired. Prior to his death in 2008, al-Messiri was the general coordinator of the *Kifaya* movement. Al-Bishri was appointed by the Committee of the Armed Forces to oversee the revision of the Egyptian constitution following the forced removal of Mubarak from power. For his part, Howeidi was a member of a committee of prominent academics and political thinkers who began to hold talks with the Egyptian military while the demonstration were still taking place. For a discussion of these three figures and their contribution to Egyptian political life, see Hirschkind 2012.

12. Al-Hudaybi's viewpoints are discussed in Lynch 2007b.

13. Nor can this shift of reference be understood as the triumph of a nationalist perspective over an Islamic one. From its first inception early in the twentieth century, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt had always incorporated a strong nationalist orientation into their social and political agendas. See Mitchell's 1993 excellent account of this movement.

14. See Haeri's (1997) insightful discussion on the politics of language today in Egypt. As Haeri notes, another reason that classical Arabic has retained its status as the primary language of political writing and oratory owes to the importance assigned to it by Arab thinkers and

politicians as a medium of Arab unity. These thinkers viewed attempts to give priority to colloquial forms as complicit with Western aims to break up regional solidarities.

15. On the ethical and devotional dimensions of classical Arabic, see Graham 1985, 1987; Padwick 1996; Sells 1999.

16. This injury is also registered graphically in some instances, through the practice of stretching out single words across the entire screen through the repetition of one or more of the word's letters.

17. http://ana-ikhwan.blogspot.com/

18. See Lynch (2007a) for an insightful discussion of these tensions within the Muslim Brotherhood.

19. On the history of daʿwa in the modern Middle East, see Canard 1999; Mahmood 2005; Waardernburg 1995.

## References

Abdo, Geneive. 2000. *No God but God: Egypt and the Triumph of Islam*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Agrama, Hussein Ali. 2010. "Ethics, Tradition, Authority: Toward an Anthropology of the Fatwa." *American Ethnologist*, 37 (1): 2–18.

Agrama, Hussein Ali. 2011. "Asecular Revolution." *The Immanent Frame*. Accessed December 12, 2014, at: http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2011/03/11/asecular-revolution/

Asad, Talal. 2012. "Thinking about Religion, Belief, and Politics," in R. Orsi (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 36–57.

Baker, Raymond W. 2003. *Islam without Fear: Egypt and the New Islamists*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Beinin, Joel and Joe Stork. 1997. "On the Modernity, Historical Specificity, and International Context of Political Islam," in J. Beinin and J. Stork (eds.). *Political Islam*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997, pp. 3–28.

Bunt, Gary. 2009. *Muslims: Rewiring the House of Islam*. Raleigh: University of North Carolina Press.

Canard, Marius. 1999. "Daʿwa," in *The Encyclopedia of Islam* (CD-ROM, version 1.0), Leiden: Brill.

Dao, James. 2011. "Military Blogging Goes Mainstream." *New York Times*, May 2, A17.

Eickelman, Dale. 1992. "Mass Higher Education and the Religious Imagination in Contemporary Arab Societies." *American Ethnologist* 19 (4): 643–655.

Eickelman, Dale and Jon Anderson (eds.) 1999. *New Media in the Muslim World: The Emerging Public Sphere*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Graham, William A. 1985. "Quran as Spoken Word: An Islamic Contribution to the Understanding of Scripture," in Richard C. Martin (ed.), *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, pp. 23–40.

Graham, William A. 1987. *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Haeri, Niloofar. 1997. "The Reproduction of Symbolic Capital: Language, State, and Class in Egypt." *Current Anthropology*, 38 (5): 795–806.

Hirschkind, Charles. 2001. "Religious Reason and Civic Virtue: An Islamic Counter-Public." *Cultural Anthropology*, 16 (1): 3–34.

Hirschkind, Charles. 2006. *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Hirschkind, Charles. 2012. "Beyond Secular and Religious: An Intellectual Genealogy of Tahrir Square." *American Ethnologist*, 39 (1): 49–52.

Lynch, Marc. 2007a. "Young Brothers in Cyberspace." *Middle East Report* 245 (Winter), http://www.merip.org/mer/mer245/lynch.html

Lynch, Marc. 2007b. "Blogging the New Arab Public." *Arab Media and Society*, 1. Accessed December 12, 2014, at: http://www.arabmediasociety.com/?article=10

Mahmood, Saba. 2005. *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Mitchell, Richard P. 1993. *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Norton, Augustus Richard. 2005. "Thwarted Politics: The Case of Egypt's Hizb al-Wasat," in R. Hefner (ed.), *Remaking Muslim Publics: Pluralism, Contestation, Democratization*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, pp. 133–160.

Padwick, Constance E. 1996. *Muslim Devotions: A Study of Prayer-Manuals in Common Use*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications.

Radsch, Courtney C. 2008. "Core to Commonplace: The evolution of Egypt's Blogosphere." *Arab Media and Society*, 6. Accessed December 12, 2014, at: http://www.arabmediasociety.com/?article=692

Salvatore, Armando. 1997. *Islam and the Political Discourse of Modernity*. Berkshire: Ithaca Press.

Salvatore, Armando (ed.) 2001. *Muslim Traditions and Modern Techniques of Power (Yearbook of the Sociology of Islam)*. Berlin: LIT Verlag.

Sells, Michael. 1999. *Approaching the Qur'an: The Early Revelations*. Ashland, OR: White Cloud Press.

Shehata, Samer and Joshua Stacher. 2006. "The Brotherhood Goes to Parliament." *Middle East Report*, 240 (Fall), http://www.merip.org/mer/mer240/shehata_stacher.html

Stacher, Joshua. 2002. "Post-Islamist Rumblings in Egypt: The Emergence of the Wasat Party." *Middle East Journal*, 56 (3): 415–432.

Stein, Rebecca L. 2011. "The Other Wall." *LRB Blog*, April 19.

Waardenburg, Jacques. 1995. "The Daʿwa of Islamic Movements," in Actas, XVI,Congreso Union Europeenne d'arabisants et d'islamisants, Salamanca, AECI/CSIC/UEAI, pp. 539–549.

Wickham, Carrie Rosefsky. 2004. "The Path to Moderation: Strategy and Learning in the Formation of Egypt's *Wasat* Party." *Comparative Politics*, 36 (2): 205–228.

Blogs

http://ana-ikhwan.blogspot.com/

# The Three Phases of Facebook: Social Networks and the Public Sphere in the Arab World—the Case of the Tunisian Revolution

*Sadok Hammami*

## INTRODUCTION

On December 17, 2010, a young Tunisian man, Mohammad Bouazizi, set fire to himself in front of the county headquarters of Sidi Bouzid. On the same day, Facebook activists streamed videos of people protesting in front of the county headquarters. After a week of protests, when the first victim of the confrontations fell, photographs and images were fed into Tunisian television intended to portray a conspiracy organized by "extremists" and "opponents" who threatened the security of the Tunisian state. Meanwhile, Facebook was overwhelmed with protest videos, at first through covert exchanges, then, as the protest strengthened, through sharing and publishing on personal pages. On the evening of January 14, 2011 al-Jazeera channel, which had played a decisive role in coverage of the protests by airing the videos produced by the Facebook activists, announced the flight of Ben Ali from the country.

The Tunisian revolution constituted a unique event in modern Arab history, triggering radical political changes all over the Arab world. It is framed as a democratic revolution, one neither based on an ideological model, nor effected by organized political and intellectual elites, nor coming as a result of a foreign military intervention, but a sudden historic event in a part of the world western elites had

considered outside the course of universal history. Media and political discourses in the West, and even in the Arab world, viewed it as a revolution materialized through the new media, Facebook in particular. Within this narrative of uniqueness, the Tunisian revolution appears as an offspring of the technological revolution, indeed the prototype of the "modern" revolution, utilizing the new media in their entirety, including blogs and social networks (Facebook and Twitter), in order to achieve the collapse of the system and advance the life of both individual and society.

The Tunisian revolution generated two dominant approaches. The celebratory narrative of the "Facebook revolution" or "the Net revolution" magnifies the role of technology and implies some kind of technological determinism. It projects the revolution almost as a product of Facebook, its applications and inherent revolutionary potentialities, celebrating the "decisive role" played by the new media in effecting the revolution and emphasizing the role of social networks in bringing down the system. The young protestors in Tunisia are a new type of revolutionary, armed with Facebook, waging an electronic war against surveillance systems and censorship. They write and publish texts of incitement on Facebook pages, and wage their struggle within the context of virtual communities, mobilizing protestors through them.

The second approach involves a kind of social determinism. Here, the revolution is a product of social and economic causes. In this sense marginalized groups revolt against the regime and bring it down through a variety of means: mobile phones to capture scenes of the protests in the field, and Facebook, to publish these videos. The user becomes the primary actor, and the new media become tools utilized to his advantage.

The epistemic challenge is to go beyond these two approaches The answer lies in understanding the relationship between Facebook and the new media on the one hand, and the protests against the regime and the revolutionary process on the other, placing this relationship in the context of the historical developments of the media and communication sphere in Tunisia. This approach is more difficult as it requires us to confront the dominant media narrative that reduces the Tunisian revolution into a single decisive cause. It allows us to understand the compound nature of the events without falling into the trap of negating the role of technology and presenting it as merely a means, or over-determining its role and representing it as the main cause of the regime's downfall.

This study aims at understanding the relationship between the new media on the one hand (social networks and Facebook specifically),

and the Tunisian revolution on the other. Through rejecting the discourses of both minimization and over-determination of the role of technology, this study seeks to understand the events within the cultural context of Tunisian society, linking the uses of Facebook to the historical process of the formation of the Tunisian public sphere. This historical cultural approach will enable us to understand the place of Facebook during the revolution without treating it as a mere tool, or alternatively regarding it as the main cause of the revolution.

If we contextualize the use of Facebook we discover the continuous interaction between the net and its social context. Social networks do not work in isolation from the transformations of the public sphere within which they operate, rather they constitute one of its spaces. When we look at Facebook from this perspective we can talk about three distinct phases of Facebook in Tunis:

In the first phase, Facebook was a public space for the representation of social life, and interacted in a unique way with the spaces of the Tunisian public sphere. In this phase, the political uses of Facebook were limited. In the second phase, Facebook embraced a variety of unique forms of dissident expression that made it a "revolutionary scene." This phase heralded the politicization of the entire Facebook network. In the third phase, Facebook became a plural multi-dimensional public space, a space for the representation of social life on the one hand, and for engagement in political life on the other—a space that interacted in new modes with the public sphere and thus *transformed* it.

## The Public Sphere

The concept of the public sphere is suitable for conceptualizing the interactions between the Facebook network and political and social processes, However, the concept has its limitations, being linked to a Western cultural context with normative implications related to a specific theory of democracy. It is however possible to extract the normative and cultural features of the Habermasian approach, in order to critique it and attempt to retrieve an operational concept that will allow Facebook to be considered as one of the many spaces of the public sphere.

### The Habermasian View of the Public Sphere

The Habermasian concept of the public sphere refers to the public spaces (book clubs, reading circles, reading societies, salons, coffee houses and subscription libraries) that emerged in the eighteenth century in France, Germany and Britain. Members of the bourgeoisie

met in these public spaces and shared their opinions and discussed matters related to art, literature and politics. These spaces evolved in parallel with the increase in the numbers of the reading public, and the debates were marked by rationality and egalitarianism. Rational public debate became the medium through which public opinion was formed and public opinion became the measure for resolving practical issues related to public life (Quéré 1992: 77).

From the Habermasian perspective, it can be argued that the public sphere is a symbolic sphere mediating between state and society (Wolton 1997: 397). Formed from spaces where citizens meet to exchange ideas and deliberate public issues, it is connected to democracy; media changes from a system of recognized, traditional functions (entertainment, information, and education) to a fundamental source of democracy as an instrument for self organization through deliberation. In this framework, the public sphere is an indicator of good governance and intellectual and political freedoms requiring constitutional guarantees of fundamental civil liberties, such as freedom of expression, of assembly, and of thought, as well as the availability of an information system independent from the state's authority.[1] Other requirements are legislation that protects the free exchange of information, a culture of transparency and openness, and a civil society that guarantees citizens accountability and participation in the public sphere. In addition, Habermas stresses what he calls the "culture of freedom" since the "political possibility of the public sphere does not only need guarantees provided by the institutions of the State of law, but also requires traditions and patterns of socialization and a political culture specific to a population which has become accustomed to a culture of freedom" (Habermas 1997: xxxi).

### Alternative Approaches to the Public Sphere

Habermas' theoretical definition is not the only way to characterize the public sphere. His normative characterization of the public sphere restricts its universality, as he makes it a standard for evaluating the democratic nature of the public sphere and the rationality of public deliberation. It also becomes an aspiration of the democratic society that, according to Quéré, will not be satisfied with just any kind of public sphere (Quéré 1992: 81).

This contrasts with the alternative "esthetic approach" (Breton and Proulx 2002: 204), which is not based on the discursive, deliberative, and rational dimension. Ferry suggests an approach that considers the public sphere from the perspective of the publicity of ideas, opinions,

and social events, and of their representational mechanisms, (Ferry 1989). Here the public sphere is a framework through which the process of media representation of social, political and cultural events is realized. It is a mediated communicative space that publicizes opinions, ideas and social events. In this sense, the public sphere includes social ideas, opinions, and events that are reported in the mass media. Thus, according to Quéré, the public sphere becomes "the system through which the group represents itself" (Quéré 1992: 81), or the "medium through which humanity gazes at itself" (Ferry 1989: 21).

Representation, publicity, and visibility are not limited to discourse, but extend to image, voice and other means of expression that contribute to transposing ideas, opinions and events from a group's narrow social framework into the wider public scene. Ferry believes that the public sphere has expanded vertically and horizontally. It has become the domain where one community communicates with other communities (horizontal expansion). At the same time, the national public sphere has gone through a crucial change manifested in the appearance of new issues, events and personalities, specifically related to the private sphere (vertical expansion) (Ferry 1989: 21).

The second non-Habermasian approach is concerned with the public sphere as a domain where events, personalities, and ideas, become visible. This public sphere assumes the existence of an audience capable of reflexivity, and of publicly expressing opinion about events and ideas. As such, this approach is characterized as an aesthetic one, as it relies on the human ability to judge public events, discourses and opinions. This aesthetic approach to the public sphere is based on the thought of Hannah Arendt who considered the public sphere the space in which the person becomes manifest to others. In this sense, the public sphere is the space of appearance because it is a scene where individuals and groups reveal themselves to one another, and where events become visible.

The concept of the public sphere, in Arendt's analysis, is a multilevel one. Social life entails the existence of others, and people see and hear each other in the public space "The presence of the others who see what we see and hear what we hear assures us of the reality of the world and ourselves" (Arendt 1998: 50). Arendt further argues that:

> Since our feeling for reality depends utterly upon appearance and therefore upon the existence of the public realm into which things can appear out of the darkness of sheltered existence, even the twilight which illuminates our private and intimate lives is ultimately derived from the much harsher light of the public realm. (Arendt 1998: 51)

Accordingly, our sense of reality is entirely connected to appearance; to presence within this public realm where things are free from "the darkness of sheltered existence."

The public sphere, from Arendt's perspective, is the domain of human activities that is not connected to a particular spatial dimension. The public sphere is not natural or given, but is rather a human construct, connected to the human being's activities, and to his/her achievements and the relations he/she creates between achievements and activities. It entails, therefore, continuity as it exceeds the people who form it, and continues after them. This is what gives it a transcendental nature.

From this perspective, the public sphere is a space of appearance that is constantly renewed through human activities and it vanishes with the disappearance of these activities. It is thus a virtual space that exists when there is a desire for shared action and achievement (Tassin 1991). That is how the public sphere becomes a shared domain that gathers and separates people at the same time, like a table, to use Arendt's metaphor (Arendt 1998: 52).

The public sphere requires this duality of the multiple and the common. Within this framework, the end of the shared world heralds the end of the public sphere as in the totalitarian system where the tyrant stays apart from the people and people are isolated from one another out of fear and suspicion. The totalitarian system, according to Arendt, is not similar to any other system. It is a system that opposes human existence that is founded on multiplicity, dialog, and common action. Accordingly, the totalitarian system is bound to vanish because of its inability to make room for visibility.

However, the collapse of the public sphere as a result of the cessation in the production of the "common world" also materializes in mass societies, when people turn into hysterical crowds, acting as if they were members of the same family with similar visions "each multiplying and prolonging the perspective of his neighbor" such that every member in the crowd acts as an extension of the other (Arendt 1998: 58).

In the two cases, the totalitarian society and the mass society, the individuals turn into entities governed by pure subjectivity, and deprived from seeing or being seen by others. The individual becomes a prisoner of pure subjectivity and of his merely personal experience. In this sense, personal life disconnected from the shared world means deprivation from reality and from others. Freedom and equality, from this standpoint, are liberation from private space and entry into the public sphere and visibility within it.

The public sphere is founded on the multiplicity of perspectives in light of which the world materializes, and without which we cannot imagine the production of criteria and standards. Every person in the common sphere occupies a different position from the others. This differentiation establishes difference and excludes uniformity. The richness of public life is tied to this difference and to the diversity of positions, perspectives and horizons. Thus, the public sphere requires a multiplicity of subjects addressing the same issues, because the common reality is a product of diverse and intersecting perspectives. The public sphere is what is inhabited by a multitude of spectators who consider the same things from different perspectives. This diversity is embodied in the space of visibility, which constitutes, in addition to a common world, the second dimension of the public sphere.

The space of visibility begins to take shape the moment people meet through speech and action. This, therefore, precedes the formal constitution of the public sphere and other political systems, that is to say, the different forms through which the public sphere is constituted.

### The Tunisian Public Sphere: Dynamics of Foundation and Transformation

The combination of.the two approaches discussed above—the rational and dialogic Habermasian approach and Arendt's esthetic and representational one—will help us to understand the public sphere in the Arab context. We can thus both consider the mechanisms of representation and publicity for political and intellectual views and for social events and, at the same time, analyze and evaluate the public sphere from a political and democratic perspective, organized around public debate. Despite its normative nature, the Habermasian approach helps us to understand the practices that are linked to political debate, which were embraced by Facebook both before and after the revolution. By using it, we can formulate criteria for evaluating public debate and its frameworks (traditional or new media), the freedom of access (legal and cultural obstacles), the representation of political pluralism and cultural diversity, the status of minority opinions, the degrees of stereotyping in the public sphere, its elitist or mass character, and the nature of the issues raised within it (political, social, cultural, and religious). As for Arendt's model, it enables us to approach the forms of visibility in the public sphere that are related to human life, and the forms of diversity and

multiplicity that are embodied within this sphere, and within the activities connected with the representation of the lifeworld.

Proceeding from this dual approach to the public sphere, we can suggest that the public sphere in Tunisia worked according to the following models; the authoritarian sphere model and the national multi-spaced public sphere model.

### The Authoritarian Sphere Model

A public sphere conforming to the authoritarian model was gradually formed with the building of the modern post-independence state, and lasted to the beginnings of the 1990s. The mass media (radio and TV) were subordinated to an authoritarian administration and utilized by the state to spectacularize its authority and power. Media worked according to a vertical, authoritarian, noninteractive, and pedagogical model, highlighting the state's influence and power. It aimed for intellectual discipline and political loyalty, and the concealment of social diversity.

Habib Bourguiba, leader of the national movement against colonialism and first president of the country, used television in particular to promote his views of development. A modernist, he used television to encourage education and knowledge, support the fight against old tribal and clan mentalities and outdated traditions, and free women. Media was intended to be in the "service of development" in order to educate people into new values and "catch the train of civilization." This was particularly done through Directions from the Supreme Combatant, a daily television program devoted to Bourguiba's speeches.

With the escalation of the crisis of the state, the closure of the political system, and the absence of opportunities for political participation, at the same time as the spread of education, the media changed into a tool for consolidating the authority of the leader and the dominant elites, and for marshalling intellectual discipline and loyalty.

During the seventies and eighties, the state faced protest at universities (from leftist and Islamic movements), and confrontations with the trade unions. From 1978 to 1987, the year Bourguiba was removed from office, Tunisia witnessed political and social crises due to the state's inability to change from a "liberation and development" state to a democracy. Television in particular became a means dedicated to the public visibility of the paternalistic leader and the elites associated with him. Rather than a mechanism of visibility, television

became a mechanism for making political and intellectual diversity, indeed the society as a whole, invisible: it did not only reflect the dislocation of state from society, but often *produced* it.

### The National Multi-Spaced Public Sphere Model

This model emerged in the early nineties with the appearance of satellite channels and the internet, which weakened the state's control of the national public sphere. It expanded vertically with the emergence of a virtual public space in which agents, events, and issues from everyday life and culture, as well as political and social life, finally became visible. The virtual public space expanded also horizontally when it opened up to satellite channels that form the "Arab public sphere." This vertical and horizontal extension was closely and critically connected to technological transformations that contributed to the decline of the role of the state. Consequently, the national public sphere became a collection of spaces formed by the traditional media (print journalism, radio, television.) and the new media (the internet and its various spaces). It was also characterized by its openness to the "Arab public sphere," with its pan-Arab orientation. Within this context, the new media (blogs, discussion forums, social network sites) form a virtual public space representing one of the spaces of the national public sphere.

### Virtual Public Space

To understand the particularity of this virtual space, a different view of the new media is required that breaks with the instrumental approach of media as primarily agencies for transporting, delivering, informing, reporting, and influencing. The break with this naïve and utilitarian view represents a move from the problematic of delivery and transmission to the problematic of mediation. The new media establishes a multi-dimensional space with both interpersonal and collective interaction, and new modes of writing (e.g., blogging), as well as traditional communication forms, such as advertising and marketing. Multiple agents are active in this sphere: economic institutions, political parties, governmental organizations, virtual groups, obscure individuals, both organized and unorganized discourses, and institutionalized and noninstitutionalized practices.

In this view, the new media has a complex cultural, educational, and technological nature. Lievrouw and Livingstone (2006: 2) propose an important definition going beyond the instrumental: "the

new media" refers to the new technologies and their associated social worlds. They are an infrastructure constituted by three levels: the instruments, that is, the means and material tools (computer and mobile phone), the practices (blogging, chatting, and marketing), and the social organization. The new media then are not a purely technological phenomenon, or means that may be adapted by the user according to his will, but embody possibilities and applications that the user may activate within his/her social and cultural context.

### Globalization and the Mechanisms of Hegemony

The new media contributed to the sabotage of the entire system of control and hegemony. Whereas the state had been able to control the traditional public sphere through a variety of mechanisms, the new technologies for satellite broadcasting and, subsequently, the different internet applications (blogging, forums, and social networks) were, from the early nineties, sabotaging the mechanisms of dominance, especially the mechanism of control of media visibility and invisibility.

Communicative globalization has liberated individuals from the control of the state. Satellite channels, for example, impaired the mechanisms of mediation when it came to religion. The state in Tunisia had controlled the mosques and the appointment of preachers, and through the Ministry of Religious Affairs, it used to specify the content of the Friday sermon in order to "fight extremism" and its manifestations, such as the veil. Satellite channels have, however, provided access to new religious discourses, and to Tunisian political elites who had been banned from appearing in the national media. Tunisians acquired instruments of communication, publishing, and visibility in the public sphere, and Facebook became an alternative space, enabling the appearance of those who could not appear in the traditional public space. Blogging platforms and social networks reinforced the individual's cultural autonomy and provided new possibilities of expression.

While authoritarian cultural policies and monopoly over media had contributed to preventing the intellectuals from communicating and interacting with society at large, they were equally unable to appear within the virtual space. By contrast, new hybrid elite groups, particularly among youth known as "internet activists," helped damage the regime's image through their critiques of the policies of surveillance and censorship. They produced new discourses given to the narration of daily life, social critique, and discussions of public

issues. These elites did not, in general, have a definite political project, nor did they rely on a particular ideological frame of reference. Rather, through defending the freedoms of access and expression, they attempted to reveal everything the authorities tried to conceal, often using pseudonyms.

Within this framework, bloggers in particular contributed to highlighting the authoritarian nature of state policies. A large number of blogs were blocked, but the bloggers waged multiple campaigns against the system of surveillance, receiving extensive media coverage and support from important international organizations such as Reporters Without Borders.[2] They invented "Amaar 404" as a pseudonym for the Censor, borrowed from the term "Error 404" that appeared on blocked pages. Unlike other Arab countries, Gulf countries in particular, the Tunisian regime did not admit to practicing censorship. In April 2010, the internet witnessed an extensive blocking campaign that covered a large number of Facebook pages, some of which were nonpolitical. This campaign raised strong reactions from bloggers who, on May 22, 2010 organized a protest, in flashmob format, in the main street of the capital, chanting slogans against the Censor and against the political police. These two bodies turned from a "source of fear and terror into a source of sarcasm and fun, translated into thousands of pictures and video clips that were exchanged extensively on the Internet, in addition to successful media coverage by the biggest news channels" (Rezgui 2011: 13).

During the revolution, the impacts of globalization were visible: the alternative conduits of information made available by the new media and the various international initiatives and movements working for the defense of virtual freedoms, all participated in subverting the image of the regime and its authoritarian media system. Within this general context, Wikileaks published the American diplomatic documents. Through satellite channels (al-Jazeera in particular) and international online newspapers, the Tunisians were informed of sensational details of corruption in Tunisia, and of the American administration's view of the regime.

Furthermore, two weeks before the revolution the "Anonymous" movement launched the "Tunisia Operation," a campaign against the system of internet censorship and surveillance in the country. During this operation, attacks were carried out against official and governmental sites, and important sites were sabotaged and blocked, including Ben Ali's official and personal sites. The Tunisian regime tried to confront the operation but failed, contributing instead to its promotion. Subsequently, the "Tunisia Operation" was covered by

international newspapers. This contributed further to damaging the Tunisian regime's image, which lost its ability to broadcast its voice on the Internet.[3] The "Tunisia Operation" falls within the frame of the "Anonymous" movement's defense of virtual liberties: it accused the Tunisian regime of spreading lies as well as hiding the truth from the citizenry. The movement demanded the liberation of the Internet in exchange for stopping its attacks on official Tunisian sites.

## The Three Phases of Facebook

The Facebook network is not separate from the Tunisian virtual public space. It is one of its most important constituents, its status having increased in recent years. The network hosted a great variety of activities, which gradually took shape in the context of the struggle between the traditional authoritarian public space and the alternative virtual public space. Our basic claim is that the Facebook network in Tunisia has gone through three phases, each characterized by specific uses: social, political, or revolutionary.

### The First Phase: Facebook as an Alternative and Parallel Public Space

*Authoritarian Administration of an Emerging*
*Public Space*
In August of 2008, the number of Facebook users was estimated to be between 16,000 and 28,313.[4] In June of 2009, the number had reached 580,000 users, that is, more than 20 percent of all internet users.[5] In February of 2010, this increased to 1,113,000; and in November 2011, it had reached 2,730,000. This is more than 25percent of the population of the country and 76 percent of all network users. Youth aged 14–18 years old constituted 40 percent of the users. Generally speaking, Facebook has been the most visited site in recent years.[6]

The increase in the use of Facebook was a decisive change in the virtual public space that took on an alternative and parallel character. Prior to the widespread use of Facebook, internet use had been primarily limited to e-mailing, surfing, chatting, communication between institutions, public relations, and internet banking. Blogging was limited because of censorship. When Facebook appeared, a new virtual space started to take shape through the establishment of online social relationships (profession, family, friendship, virtual groups), and in the form of intimate as well as political self-expression. This space hosted all social groups.

This emergent virtual space had two facets: it was a functional space that included all sites within the official Tunisian domain (the .tn domain), but was controlled by the state through the Tunisian Internet Agency,[7] the only body authorized to issue licenses to host sites in Tunisia. At the same time, this space hosted communication activities that were banned in the .tn domain, such as blogs, chat fora, and homepages.

The regime sensed the "danger" of Facebook, and blocked the network on August 24, 2008. A few days later however, the President personally intervened to reactivate Facebook. The daily Tunisian French-medium newspaper *Le Temps* wrote "we learnt that the President of the Republic has intervened personally to unblock the Facebook network as soon as he knew it was blocked." Several comments thanked "Mr. President" for his understanding and interest in the subject, and for his "new initiative," while others appealed to him to open the Youtube and Dailymotion sites.[8]

One of the outcomes of this back down was the awareness that the social network "is larger than the Tunisian surveillance system and that it is the most effective means to expose the regime's anti-freedom of expression practices" (Rezgui 2011: 10). Facebook facilitates the "airing of banned videos and their downloading from Youtube, and promotes the increased presence of regime opponents as it allows a larger visibility compared to the blogging space that experienced constant blocking from the authorities" (Rezgui 2011: 8). Some believe that this governmental blocking was linked to the mining basin events of 2008 in the south-west of Gafsa.[9] During these events, Facebook activists used all applications available (Rezgui 2011) to publicize the social protests of citizens against the regime and the repression they had been subjected to.

In addition to the blocking of internet sites, governmental and private media launched extensive campaigns to discredit Facebook and to intimidate its users. The Tunisian press published a number of important articles about its "dangers," attempting to frighten the Tunisians from using it by talking about its treacherous pitfalls (such as suspect identities).[10]

Thus, technology became a painful dilemma for the Tunisian authorities. On the one hand, the regime worked hard to promote information technology as part of the modernization and development process. It encouraged the use of information technology in schools, administrations, and economic institutions, as well as in the family through reductions in the cost of internet connection and through extending high bandwidth internet. The technological infrastructure,

however, became a tool for independence from the regime, and a means to oppose it. The regime's wager with respect to managing the internet as a technology with functional objectives, while eliminating its political dimensions through surveillance, ultimately failed.

*Early Practices of Mobilization, Opposition, and Critique*

Young people learnt the practices of mobilization and critique on Facebook even before the revolution. During protests in the city of Ben Gardan, a border town specialized in unorganized trade with Libya, several Facebook pages supported those detained by the state as a result of the protests. One example was the Facebook page of "The Local Follow-up Committee for the Events in the City of Ben Gardan."[11] Another important example of the use of social media for critique was the protest mounted against the private satellite TV channel, Nessma, founded in 2008,[12] which presented itself as a "North African and modernist" channel. A number of virtual youth groups protested against the channel, especially after it aired *The House of Saddam* series. The group "all Tunisian people are one hand against Nessma channel" was the most important. This group's Facebook page turned into a virtual space for discussion, within which readers' comments, articles, audio and video materials, and caricature images interacted together. Some users produced a video ("Nessma Scandals") consisting of a montage of scenes from various Nessma TV programs, as evidence of the channel's hostility to the authentic cultural values of the Tunisian people. Opponents of the channel hacked into Nessma's promotion page to denounce it.

One can say that the opposition campaign against Nessma channel was the first social campaign that went beyond the narrow sphere of political internet activists. It signified the new capacities of youth to perform roles related to social critique and opposition to the traditional official media system, and ultimately impacted the traditional media system given the Tunisian press interacted with the protests.

Within this same framework, groups of fans of the big sports clubs, especially those who were known as the "Ultras," created a number of Facebook pages, sites, and forums, forming significant spaces at a time when sports was the only public arena available to Tunisian youth. These virtual groups allowed those fans to exert influence, especially since the regime had established mechanisms to control sports associations and banned all forms of celebration on the playing fields. It is interesting to note here that the fan groups changed during the days of the revolution into protest spaces in which youth practiced several forms of anti-regime protests.

*Facebook: A Space for Public Discussion*

Toward the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, collective multifunction Tunisian spaces began to appear on the Internet. These spaces include specialized discussion forums, such as "Tunisia Sat,"[13] which is considered the most popular Tunisian web site. In the context of the development of Facebook use in Tunisia, countless groups were formed in all fields (political, artistic, sports, religious, and social) along the lines of *Ma Tunisie*[14] (My Tunisia) group, the most popular Tunisian Facebook page (more than eight thousand members). These groups are spaces for intellectual and political discussions and interaction with articles copied from the press, photographs and video clips. Users comment in non-formulaic mode on these postings, using French, Arabic, or the local dialect.

Some of these groups, and sometimes even personal pages, are characterized by diversity of political and intellectual orientations. Discussions are often not based on set rules, and are marked by their transient nature and lack of cumulativity; they take an ad hoc form, with no strict intellectual logic that would lead participants to a compromise as no decision making is at stake. Moreover, the space available for comments does not allow the expression of views based on particular structures of thought, but encourages brief reactions, not substantiated by any evidence-based intellectual argumentation.

With the exception of the few inclusive and open groups, such as the *Ma Tunisie* page, virtual communities are founded on a sense of belonging to shared intellectual, political, religious, regional, or sporting identities, and are characterized by their prior consensus. Indeed, some groups are founded on the principle of exclusion in order to denigrate a particular person or to mobilize his opponents, with users resorting to exclusionary practices, such as deleting comments from Facebook pages, "expelling" a participant from a discussion group, or disabling the pages of some users and excising them from the virtual world. One example is the campaign promoted by the so-called "Insecticide group" against figures known as "modernists," in which 150 pages were deleted through a collective use of the Report function.[15]

Users often resorted to different forms of symbolic violence against others, such as insult, slander, and defamation. Thus, expanding the participation in public debate through the Internet can reflect and solidify intellectual dissonance rather than guarantee open and rational discussion. One can rarely find in the prerevolution Tunisian Facebook inclusive spaces that aimed at establishing open debate. Perhaps the Virtual Tunisian Parliament was one of the spaces that

tried, through Facebook, to establish new types of participation in public affairs, presenting itself as "the parliament of the Tunisian Facebook population, elected by the Facebook people, and operating through direct free elections without discrimination between one orientation or another."[16]

We can also point out the *Ma Tunisie* experiment, which is considered the most influential page with its 860 thousand friends (by November 2011). This page went through constant development as a result of its neutrality and its policy of publishing credible news, not falling into the trap of provocative, defamatory, and confrontational ideological discourse.

*Facebook: The Intersection of the Personal with the Public in Social Life*

The personal Facebook page has a dual nature, an individual and group dimension at the same time, in which the manifestation of the self, connected to other selves, interacts with the user's collective activities, in his/her capacity as an individual who belongs to a small group (sports club supporters for example) or to a large group concerned with broad common interests (the nation for example). The Facebook page is a weave of discourses (personal, intimate, and public), of media (images, videos, texts), and of constantly interacting relationships. It is a mirror of the individual that reflects his/her identity (name, date of birth, city, musical tastes) and reflects not only his/her friends, but also his/her views through the discussion groups that s/he participates in and through the causes s/he supports or opposes. The Facebook wall combines a dual dynamic, informing a new communication model that organizes the public sphere, and is shaped by the appearance of the intimate discourse of an obscure individual on the one hand, and the emergence of new forms for the expression of opinion and public discussion, on the other.

Virtual spaces represent the individual identity as they are a space for displaying the "**I**" and its features (what it is and what it wants to be).This "**I,**" however, is not content with the display of its particularity. It is also an "**I**" that is connected with others through a network of friends and communicative activities performed by a self with a collective dimension: comments on the texts, images, and videos that others post. The Facebook page becomes a domain for self-revelation to others, through which the individual gains a status in the social sphere. It informs us of the user's network of friends and his/her identity, intellectual orientations, and preferences, through

access to the groups s/he belongs to, and the pages s/he likes. It also informs us about the individual's religion, and the schools and universities attended, and so on. When an individual joins Facebook, s/he forms a network of friends and reveals his/her identity and inclinations. In so doing, the user reveals him/herself to others in this social space, as they visit the page, comment on what is written, and reflect on the images and photographs s/he publishes. The profile image itself occupies an important place in the visibility of the individual in the virtual sphere; it is constantly changing, representing a psychological state embodied in the user's profile, which takes different forms, such as a personal photograph or the image of the national flag, or an image of an artist or a political, artistic or literary personality through which the user adopts alternative identities that s/he selects.

In this sense, Facebook, for the Tunisians (like others) is a space where their personal and social activities appear at the same time. The user receives congratulations from friends on his/her birthday for example, and uses the same page to congratulate his friends on religious and social occasions. The user can also utilize his/her page to invite his/her friends to join support groups, to join discussions about social issues and to express his/her views on specific social events.

One example that shows the transformation of Facebook into a larger social sphere is the wave of rumors about child kidnapping and organ theft in the winter of 2009, which created social panic. Facebook contributed to spreading this rumor, forcing the traditional media to deal with it. In July 2009, the Court of First Instance in Tunisia sentenced a woman university professor to six months in prison for disseminating false information on Facebook about child kidnapping for organ theft, and thus causing a public panic.

Another example is the campaign against the Tunisian folk artist, Mohsen Chrif, after users circulated video clips of concerts he performed in Israel for Israelis of Tunisian origin. This campaign of defamation had vast repercussions within the traditional media. Some users demanded the retraction of Tunisian citizenship from him[17] and created a page for this purpose. Mohsen Chrif was exposed to insult, scorn, and ridicule especially through the posting of degrading photographs.

The examples above show that the uses of Facebook during the protests against the regime were not ex-nihilo. Rather, they were extensions of prior uses in which Tunisians learnt to participate in the alternative and parallel public space in various forms, which took a political bent during the protests.

### *The Second Phase of Facebook: The Virtual*
### *Revolutionary Scene*

How can we go beyond the technologically deterministic approach that locates Facebook as the prime cause of the revolution? And how can we go beyond the utilitarian approach with its social deterministic orientation that treats Facebook as merely a tool? Epistemologically, we consider Facebook in its relation with the dynamics of formation of the public sphere, the effects of Facebook on the context it operates within, and the effects of the context on the emergence of specific uses of Facebook. Thus, we consider Facebook as a public space in which *unique forms of expression of protest* are manifested.

Jacques Rancière's concept of "the revolutionary scene" is useful for going beyond the causality approach to a representational approach. Rancière suggests that there is not a revolutionary process, but rather a revolutionary scene: the revolution is the moment politics proliferates, or the time when everything becomes politics. In the time of revolution, places for representing politics and its forms become multiple, because the revolution reorganizes prestige and authority and disperses their symbolic attributes (Rancière 2003).

Rancière opposes the positivist historian who searches for cause behind appearance. Revolution, according to him, is a phenomenon that disrupts or challenges the scientific pretension that separates reality from its appearance, form from content, cause from effect, and power from its manifestation: "Revolution is a new light that organizes the political scene as well as the location of actors, the use of speech and the distribution of roles" (Rancière 2003: 52).

While he accepts that there are processes behind the scene that permeate it, the revolution is not a result or a combination of these processes: it is the scene that reveals them in their interconnectedness within a harmonious unity pointing in one and the same direction (Rancière 2003: 52).

Given that it is the scene of the redistribution of politics, the time of the revolution announces the emergence of citizens from "darkness to light." Rancière draws on Arendt's idea that darkness is the "wound of the poor," more so than poverty and need (2003: 55). In this sense, the revolution works according to the logic of exposure. The political scene is the one in which the marginalized and excluded come into the light after years of oblivion, absence, and recession in the world of darkness. Accordingly, the period before the revolution is the "night" whose darkness engulfed society as a whole, and the moment of revolution is the moment of emancipation: the speaking

being restores all his authority and attains the right to visibility. The time of revolution is the time of both individual and collective enlightenment when people participate in the collective experience, and when they become a cohesive group. The people here do not manifest as crowds of insurgent poor, but rather as a united collective that does not know division. The emancipated being is the one who lives in the space of intersection of these two moments: the moment of self-liberation and of one's emergence into the light, and the moment of collective liberation. This is how the revolution becomes a light that brightly illuminates the night of each individual and the night of all (Rancière 2003: 58).

The approach Rancière suggests intersects with the aesthetic dimension of the public sphere as it emphasizes the dynamics of appearance and visibility, enabling us to abandon the search for the key that solves the enigma of the causes of the revolution. Instead, it allows us to move toward exploring the transformations that Facebook witnessed during the revolution, exploring various forms for expressing opinions publically, and representing events and positions. When the protests erupted in the city of Sidi Bouzid, Facebook had turned into a public space, with more than 1,700,000 active users, unknown individuals or activists all of whom had already been trained in different forms of protest, criticism, identification, and support; users who had become experts in Facebook applications.

The battle over the representation of the events that erupted in December 2010, in Sidi Bouzid, constituted the challenge that the regime fought to win. After the pivotal event of Bouazizi's self-immolation, the government and the private media typically disregarded the incident. Convinced that the representation of the events through the traditional media was the primary challenge, the regime prohibited foreign correspondents from covering the events by keeping them out of the field. Facebook activists challenged the official media's video footage that showed masked people attacking a bank and accused the protesters of looting. We "reloaded the sequences on Facebook highlighting some sections that demonstrate that the footage was manipulated and false" (Rezgui 2011: 18). The videos taken by protesters began gradually to spread on the Facebook network. As the regime tried to block these pages, the administrators of these pages moved the content to new pages. The videos published on Facebook by young activists became the main source for satellite television channels, and Facebook became the only window through which Tunisians and the world could look out at the scene of events in the field.

Rouad Jebali, one of the administrators of the pages "Hidden Facts" and "Union of the Pages of the Revolution" reported, "We coordinated with young people present in the heart of the events, who would take videos and send them via video exchange and storage sites, such as RapidShare and ZipShare. The administrator would find them on these sites, download them onto the Facebook network, and distribute them extensively on the other pages which would, in turn, reload and download them onto other pages to secure the widest possible dissemination of the information" (Rezgui 2011: 17).

The representation of events on Facebook is a co-production: individual and collective at the same time. The videos posted on various pages become a hybrid mix of different elements. In contrast to televisual representation that is based on the mediation of the reporter and keeps the viewer in the position of spectator, the Facebook user is more active. S/he selects what to watch, searches for it, comments on it then sends it to friends and posts it on her/his Facebook wall. On many occasions, s/he reconstructs elements found on friends' pages, or comments on other people's posts. These various activities give a feeling of participation in the events even though s/he has never left the computer screen. Users participate in an active community that expresses itself, opposes and condemns, thus reinforcing their sense of agency to the point it almost becomes real. This method for representing events and displaying them in the public sphere within the frame of Facebook constitutes a unique and interesting change in the relation with reality. If the news narrative makes the receiver merely a spectator, Facebook applications change the user into a participant in the process of representation through the disintermediation[18] of the journalist. Accordingly, the logic upon which journalism is founded, as a representation of reality through a reconstruction of its elements, collapses in favor of the group's representation of itself within an alternative collective narrative that has multiple horizons and that is constantly in formation. From *the user's perspective*, participation in the representation of events through, for example, posting videos expressing feelings of patriotism and pride in the Tunisian identity (in particular the Tunisian flag), or raising the slogan "leave" in French, represented a revolutionary act.

The Facebook network gradually changed into a domain in which the Tunisians' enthusiasm for the revolution became clear through a number of expressive mechanisms. The most important ones were perhaps the audio and video innovations as video footage sent by young people was subjected to a process of continuous reconstruction in which each user would add a new element. These creations

produced by anonymous users do not, in fact, represent a revolutionary act in themselves; they were practically separated from the space of the critical events in the field while the main challenge for both the regime and the demonstrators was to gain control of the real "street." Rather, these creations draw their power from their symbolism, expressing general consensus against the regime on the one hand, and a kind of symbolic participation in the revolution on the other. The majority of users in fact, remained spectators sympathetic to the revolution because it had turned into a collective horizon that promised a new society.

This "participation in enthusiasm" is a mechanism connected with revolutions in general. Kant saw the enthusiasm for the French revolution evidence that it represented a humanity able to liberate itself (Kant 2000). It was the means through which the world understood the meaning of the French revolution:

"As the irruption of the idea into affect and action, enthusiasm is capable of inspiring events which break the continuum of history. The main example of this for Kant was the contemporary French revolution inspired by the idea of the republic, an event which was both the outcome of enthusiasm and source of the enthusiastic feelings in its spectators" (Caygill 1995: 176).

### The Third Phase: Facebook after the Revolution—a Multiple and Fragmented Public Space

Did the collapse of the system of surveillance over the Facebook network, the waning of political fear and apprehension, and the emergence of parties and political movements into the open, turn Facebook into a democratic public space after the revolution, one embracing politically pluralistic and intellectually diverse debate?

Facebook witnessed total politicization, as the waning of fear and apprehension, together with the removal of the Tunisian system of surveillance, allowed Tunisians to get involved in political expression through participation in public political debate. Personal Facebook pages came to contain different elements: social, intimate (relationships of friendship), entertaining (music videos), and political. Facebook became an intellectually and politically diverse space where Tunisians could freely express their intellectual and ideological affiliations, especially previously taboo ones like the support for the Islamic oriented al-Nahda movement. Moreover, the collapse of surveillance mechanisms enabled the revelation of new individual identities that had been concealed before.

Political parties and government institutions got involved in Facebook, creating their own pages to introduce themselves, and their programs, activities, and political representatives. Indeed, some parties developed their own social network.[19] Accordingly, Facebook lost its alternative, parallel, and resistant character to become a space interacting with the political and media sphere where several agents and powers co-existed; a space in which marketing strategies, as well as intimate individual worlds, and political, intellectual and ideological virtual groups, all interact. These developments in turn led to a fragmentation of the Facebook space, and Tunisians split into their conflicting political groups. Facebook's political spaces became subject to a sharp process of polarization.

These conflicts were not pursued through a balanced political discussion and Facebook did not turn into a space of mediation, but became instead a divisive space for defamation, insults, rumors, and scorn. Facebook, however, was not merely an extension of the fragmentation in political life, but deepened it, providing tools and instruments for conflict, such as the possibility to use pseudonyms in insulting and defaming others and the possibility to post unsourced material that is scandalous, defamatory, and conspiratorial. Political figures, in particular, were subject to defamatory campaigns. Several pages were created against Rashid al-Ghannushi, leader of *al-Nahda*, such as the "Fight against Rashid al-Ghannushi" page. One page had the slogan "together to send Shaykh Rashid al-Ghannushi back to London." Even Ahmed Najib Chebbi, leader of the Progressive Democratic Party, was attacked with slogans such as "Najib Chebbi and the seat, love that doesn't see light" and "Ahmed Najib Chebbi go." The struggle around chapter 1 of the old constitution illustrates the nature of the virtual political discussion: Facebook was the scene of confrontations between defenders of Islam and Arab identity who want to maintain chapter 1 (which defines Islam as the religion of the state and Arabic as its language), and affiliates of the "modernist trend" who want to abolish this chapter.[20]

Bloggers lost the glamour they had gained as leaders of the protest against surveillance, and their role diminished. Indeed, some bloggers were subjected to smear campaigns, such as the famous Tunisian blogger, Lina Ben Mhenni, who was attacked on Facebook pages, and accused of being an agent of the West when she was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.[21] The decline in the role of bloggers coincided with the emergence of a new type of anonymous actor called "page admin" or "administrators of Facebook pages," who played an important role in mobilizing and raising political issues. The El Kasbah

events 1 and 2 are examples of the ability of Facebook activists to mobilize people. Groups on Facebook as well as some political parties called for organizing mass demonstrations in the government square, the "El Kasbah," to pressure the interim government to abandon Ben Ali's former ministers. Rouad Jebali says:

> On January 16 (two days after Ben Ali's flight) we opened a new page "Union of the Pages of the Revolution" with four dedicated administrators. The page strongly opposed al-Ghannushi's government (the first government after January 14 headed by Mohammad al-Ghannushi who was the Prime Minister in Ben Ali's period) and worked to bring it down by accusing all those who participated in it of treason and of betraying the revolution, and describing them as affiliated with the ruling party. The page also supported the El Kasbah 1 sit-in by creating a dedicated Facebook page and securing video and photo coverage of its revolutionary atmosphere. And to help this sit-in succeed, we agreed to fabricate a report of the arrival of thousands of supporters on buses from all over the republic. The news spread very quickly on Facebook and even through the classical mass media. It seems that some parties became enthusiastic about the idea, and contributed to renting buses and providing means of transportations to bring protestors from the heart of the republic to participate in the El Kasbah 2 sit-in. (Rezgui 2011: 20)

Page administrators used the same technology to bring down the first interim government and to demand that a Founding National Council be organized as an alternative to legislative and constituent elections.[22] Other actions show the administrators' role in influencing political events. In May 2010, for example, the "Skandali"[23] page published a video interview with the former minister of interior, Farhat Rajhi, in which he revealed a number of conspiracies that posed a threat to the revolution, such as a potential coup against the Constituent Council, and the existence of a shadow cabinet that monitors the revolution and directs the government.

## Conclusion

In the Tunisian cultural and political context, Facebook, as a public space, took different forms. In the first phase, Facebook was an alternative and parallel public space for political expression and activism. In the second phase, Facebook was transformed into a revolutionary scene manifesting Tunisians' opposition to the regime and their enthusiasm for change, a space in which Tunisians participated

symbolically in the revolution, and represented themselves as a collective. With the revolution, Facebook witnessed the process of comprehensive politicization where everyone accessed the political arena, but this was accompanied by a widespread process of political fragmentation.

The Tunisian case indicates the mutual influence between the network and its political and cultural contexts. The net affects its cultural context because it allows specific forms of expression, agency, and organization. In turn, this cultural context affects it because these new forms of expression, agency, and organization are distinctively tied, in their significance and dimensions, to that specific context. This interactive approach to the relationship between user, medium, and context prevents us first from falling into the trap of technological determinism, where the "tool" is transformed into a power that entirely shapes the context. Secondly, it prevents us from falling into the trap of social determinism, which denies Facebook its specificity as a medium for a particular pattern of interaction, and turns it into a mere instrument that can be molded by the user as s/he likes, as if it does not have specific potentialities and applications.

This approach to the public sphere in Tunisia differs from prevailing approaches. First, it abandons the mechanistic application of the Habermasian approach (1991, 1992, 1997) that leads, in the Arab context, to two outcomes: the negation of the possibility of the public sphere in the first place, as a Western phenomenon of modernity, or a conclusion suggesting the existence of a weak, ineffective, and distorted public sphere as Lynch's approach suggests (Lynch 2006: 54). The Facebook page represents a space in which the personal and the public intermesh, and so does not fit the Habermasian principle that requires the separation of the private from the public, on which the foundational model of the public sphere was established.

In contrast, our approach seeks to formulate a new hybrid concept of the public sphere, combining the ideas of representation and discussion. Interactions in virtual groups seem to be nearer to the esthetic (Arendtian) model because they allow the individuals to appear in a public sphere, where they reveal their opinions about public issues. The public sphere is a sphere for the representation of social life on the one hand, and a sphere for consultation on public issues through discussion on the other. As such, this new nonnormative concept frees us from the domination of the Habermasian model, and opens to us a new path that allows us to study the modes of formation of the public sphere in Arab societies from the appearance of journalism up to the emergence of Facebook.

Second, instead of the approach concerned with the study of the new public sphere formed by satellite channels and the new media, this approach emphasizes the historic nature of the public sphere, and the importance of situating its study within its specific national context. This allows us to dispense with the general approach that disregards the particularities of national public spheres and, thus, the cultural particularities of Arab societies in their diversity. Yet, while the public sphere we consider is basically a national sphere (connected to a particular society), it is a multi-space sphere. One of these spaces is the Arab public space formed by pan-Arab mass media (satellites, newspapers, and virtual spaces).

The reliance on a new theoretical approach, and interest in specific national contexts, points to the importance of a critical interrogation of theoretical concepts, so that we can harness them for understanding information and communication processes in the Arab world. Ideas such as "the network revolution," "the Facebook revolution," or "the virtual revolution,"[24] seem to be closer to the popular views circulated by the media, rather than serious theoretical concepts that can help us understand the relationship between the new media and political change in Tunisia and the Arab world. Indeed, such concepts may mask the unique interaction between the new media and its specific cultural environment, an interaction that enables us to effect what might be described as "the re-invention of Facebook."

## Notes

1. See the document on "The Public Sphere," published by CommGap, the Communication for Government and Accountability Program of the World Bank, at: http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTGOVACC/Resources/PubSphereweb.pdf (accessed September 12, 2011).
2. http://en.rsf.org/tunisia-wave-of-arrests-of-bloggers-and-07-01-2011,39238.html (accessed September 12, 2011).
3. See the press release which Anonymous circulated about the "Tunis operation" at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BFLaBRk9wY0 (accessed October 15, 2010).
4. http://www.mac125.com/forums/ftopic49354.html (accessed October 17, 2011).
5. http://www.tekiano.com/net/web-2-0/2-7-435/tunisie-les-premieres-victimes-de-facebook.html (accessed October 18, 2011).
6. http://www.matunisie.com/general/les-100-sites-les-plus-visites-en-tunisie-01-09-299.html (accessed October 20, 2011).
7. The Tunisian Internet Agency (ATI), at: www.ati.tn/ (accessed October 21, 2011).

8. http://www.letemps.com.tn/article.php?ID_art=19890 (accessed October 22, 2011).

9. Gafsa is the capital of Gafsa governorate in the Southeast of Tunisia, near to the Algerian border, and is a center for phosphate mining. The area witnessed violent confrontations in 2008 between the population and the security forces, which came to be known as the Revolt of the Gafsa Mining Basin. Many were killed, and numerous political activists and trade unionists were imprisoned at the time.

10. For example, the daily *La Press de Tunisie* published an article on April 11, 2010 with the title "Questions about Facebook," discussing the negative aspects of the social network.

11. facebook.com/pages/اللجنة-المحلية-لمتابعة-أحداث-مدينة-بنقردان/145406385 481885

12. Within the framework of the relationship between Karoui and Karoui World (established by Nebil and Ghazi Karoui in Tunis), Quinta Communications owned by the Tunisian film producer Tarak Ben Ammar, and Silvio Berlusconi's Mediaset.

13. http://www.tunisia-sat.com/vb/.

14. http://www.facebook.com/pages/Ma-tunisie/103819052990231.

15. Le Djihad sur Facebook: une bêtise de plus, at: http://www.tuni-scope.com/article/3867/chronique/controverse/le-djihad-sur-face-book-une-betise-de-plus-092612 (accessed October 22, 2011).

16. https://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=157886847635 (accessed October 23, 2011).

17. See: https://www.facebook.com/anti.bibi.

18. "Disintermediation" comes from the French and refers to the elimination of the intermediary role of the journalist.

19. www.ebnim3atktl.org (accessed October 23, 2011).

20. See the page "Scandals of Secularism," at: https://www.facebook.com/Anti.laique and "Days of Jahiliyya in Tunisia," at: https://www.facebook.com/ayam.jahilya (accessed October 23, 2011).The Jahiliyya, the pre-Islamic age, signifies in the Islamic imaginary the period of darkness and ignorance. This page uses the concept of Jahiliyya to describe the expanding influence of Islamic movements in Tunisian society.

21. See "Exclusive: Scandal of The Tunisian Blogger, Lina Ben Mhenni," at: https://www.facebook.com/fathi7a.benalior (accessed December 24, 2012).

22. During the first few weeks following the fall of the Ben Ali regime, many political parties and movements called for the establishment of a constituent assembly to write a new constitution for the country, whereas other parties and groups called for legislative and presidential elections and amendments to the old constitution. On October 23, 2011, the Constituent Assembly was elected. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constituent_Assembly_of_Tunisia (accessed October 20, 2012).

23. https://www.facebook.com/scandely.net (accessed October 20, 2011).
24. These concepts were widely used in both journalistic and academic discourse to describe the Tunisian revolution.

## References

Arendt, Hannah. 1998. *The Human Condition*. Paris: University of Chicago Press.

Caygill, Howard. 1995. *A Kant Dictionary*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Ferry, Jean-Marc. 1989. "Les transformations de la publicité politique." *Hermès*, No. 4, pp. 15–26.

Habermas, Jürgen. 1991. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Habermas, Jürgen. 1992. "L'espace public: 30 ans après." *Quaderni*, No. 18, pp. 161–191.

Habermas, Jürgen. 1997. *L'espace public*. Paris: Payot.

Kant, Emmanuel. 2000. *Le conflit des facultés*. Paris: Vrin.

Lievrouw, Leah A. and Sonia Livingstone (eds.). 2006. *Handbook of New Media: Social Shaping and Consequence of ICTs*. London: Sage.

Lynch, Marc. 2006. *Voices of the New Arab Public: Iraq, al-Jazeera, and Middle East Politics Today*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Breton, Philippe and Serge Proulx. 2002. *L'Explosion de la communication à l'aube du XXIe siècle*. Paris: Les Editions du Borèal/La Découverte.

Quéré, Louis. 1992. "L'espace public: de la théorie politique à la métathéorie Sociologique." *Quaderni*, No. 18, pp. 75–92.

Rancière, Jacques. 2003. "La scène révolutionnaire et l'ouvrier émancipé (1830–1848)." *Tumultes*, No. 20, pp. 49–72.

Rezgui, Ayman. 2011. "Shabab al-Facebook wa Thawrat 14 Janvi" (The Youth of Facebook and the January 14 Revolution), *al–Marsad al-Tunisie li-l-Intiqal al-Demoqrati* (The Tunisian Observatory for Democratic Transition). Accessed October 10, 2011, at: http://observatoiretunisien.org/upload/file/Rezgui%281%29.pdf.

Tassin, Etienne. 1991. "Espace public ou espace commun?" *Hermès*, No. 10, pp. 23–27.

Wolton, Dominique. 1997. *Penser la communication*. Paris: Flammarion.

# Hezbollah Communication Policy and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

*Olfa Lamloum*

## INTRODUCTION

On August 9, 2010, the Secretary-General of Hezbollah (Party of God), Sayyid[1] Hassan Nasrallah, held a video press conference transmitted live by al-Manar television, during which he presented data (in his words "elements") to support the argument that suggested Israeli involvement in the February 14, 2005, assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri. To support his case, Nasrallah broadcast a video of Israeli aerial reconnaissance images taken before February 14[2] showing the site where the attack took place. Hezbollah thereby revealed a "war secret," namely, its ability to intercept and decode the signals that Israeli reconnaissance aircraft had recorded in Lebanese airspace. Admittedly, the widespread reactions in Lebanon and elsewhere in the Arab world to the press conference did not all agree with the points made by the Hezbollah leader. For the most part, however, they acknowledged the ingenuity of the party's information and communication technology.

Regardless of the legal value of these recordings,[3] they confirm again, if confirmation were still needed, the strategic importance of communication and image, which had been elevated by Hezbollah to a means of warfare against Israel. In times of battle against the "Zionist enemy" as well as in times of "cold civil war,"[4] Hezbollah strives to demonstrate the legitimacy of its military strategy by a methodical use of visual and audio media in order to present and

valorize its actions while more or less directly involving the audience in its exploits (Tabet 2010; Maasri 2008). A Shi'ite party, claiming the legacy of the Iranian Revolution and the doctrine of *wilayat al-faqih* (the guardianship of the Islamic jurist ), Hezbollah has developed since the mid-1990s as an "Islamic Resistance" against Israel, which replaces the secular pan-Arab[5] nationalist mobilization led until the late 1970s by the PLO (Picard 2007). Denying all other Lebanese formations any possibility of monopolizing Lebanese military or strategic action vis-à-vis the Jewish state, it became the major Lebanese actor in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Despite the Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon, the party has not relinquished its weapons. Rejecting any normalization with Israel, it has transformed Lebanon into the centerpiece of a new "Rejectionist Front," combining its strategic allies, Iran and Syria. Hezbollah has continued to publicize and legitimize this role by building a central communication structure, which targets its own base as well as the Lebanese and Muslim populations in general.

In a book on Hezbollah, the political scientist Judith Palmer Harik defined it as a hegemonic political party with an armed wing (2004). For her part, the sociologist Saad-Ghorayeb believes that the party is more like an army that has a political, administrative, and social organization than a political and civil organization with an armed wing (2002). The consistent and unrelenting secrecy surrounding Hezbollah's military and security organizations may argue in favor of Saad-Ghorayeb's view. Yet, ultimately, it is clear that the real hierarchy that codifies the relationship between its two wings—the civilian and the military—escapes any formal classification. Hezbollah does not at all obey the classical distinction between the "conventional" and "nonconventional" form of political participation. Moreover, it seems to refute the various typologies that have been made in the political literature concerning "Arab parties."[6] Neither quite "loyalist" (El-Khazen 2003: 613), nor completely removed from the established political arena,[7] the party represents, without a doubt, a unique partisan phenomenon in the Arab region. It is an expression of power relations, both communitarian and transnational. Communitarian, because the growth of the party has allowed the Shi'ite community, for the first time, to fully participate in the state, from which it had been largely marginalized since the latter's creation in 1943. Transnational, since the party's development has resulted in the emergence of a political and military mobilization that challenges the imperial order in the region. These two dimensions are not without tension or contradictions requiring management. However, they are

constitutive of the identity of Hezbollah and are embodied in two key frames (Goffman 1991) that structure its cognitive universe, namely Shi'ite Islam and *al-muqawama* (resistance) (Qasim 2004; Mustafa 2003). It is our view that the organization of these two frames in a unified interpretive framework (Snow and Benford 1992), evolving under the influence of the national and regional contexts, defines the contours, limits and scope of Hezbollah's participation in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Researching the communication policy of the Party of God is a stimulating exercise in understanding the genesis and construction of such a framework, since it enables us first to pay attention to the symbolic, ideological and cultural dimensions assembled by the party, and because it makes us aware of a central device for the dramatization of its military action, which is clandestine in nature. The present contribution thus proposes to describe the participation of Hezbollah in the Arab-Israeli conflict as seen through the continuities, as well as the realignments, of its communication policy.

How did Hezbollah originally see the terms and stakes of the conflict with Israel at the Lebanese, Palestinian, and Arab levels? How did it defend and nuance its positions in the post-Taif[8] period? What connections and links developed between these different levels of conflict, in particular after the liberation of southern Lebanon in 2000? What mobilization repertoires and action registers has it called upon during the last 25 years of its existence in order to recruit, interpellate, or maintain support for its cause at the national and pan-Arab levels? How has it made people more sensitive and responsive to its military action and, in particular, to its possession of weapons, leading them to see that as necessary, normal, and legitimate?

Without claiming to be an exhaustive presentation, the objective of this paper is to outline the basic features of Hezbollah's framework of perception of the Israeli-Arab conflict through three sources: the weekly *al-'Ahd* (the Oath), the al-Manar (The Lighthouse) television network, and the speeches by Hassan Nasrallah. In this way we can try to provide some answers to our preliminary questions by placing ourselves at three distinct moments in the history of the party: its period of formation corresponding to the early years of the newspaper *al-'Ahd* (1984–1990), the only official Hezbollah journal in this period; the period of its gradual inclusion in the conventional game of Lebanese politics following the civil war, corresponding to the launching of the party's television network (1991–2000); and finally, the period following the liberation of South Lebanon (2000–2006) which saw the consecration of Hassan Nasrallah as the emblematic figure of Hezbollah's personalized leadership.

The corpus used in this chapter comes from ongoing research being conducted on Hezbollah. The materials collected and processed are primarily the party press, recordings and observation of the al-Manar television network, and a series of semi-structured interviews conducted with officials and employees of Hezbollah's major media and with journalists from the Lebanese media.[9]

## Al-ʿAhd or When "the Road to Lebanon Goes through Jerusalem"[10]

It is illuminating to see the birth and rise of Hezbollah as the violent emergence of a new political actor and a new social identity. In 1997, Hassan Nasrallah claimed that "if the enemy [Israel] had not taken this step [the invasion of Lebanon in the summer of 1982], I do not know if something called Hezbollah would have emerged. I doubt it."[11] This idea, repeated many times by the party's Secretary-General, suggests a consideration of the "political opportunity structure" (Tilly and Tarrow 2008) within which the party has emerged. Hezbollah emerged in the early 1980s in a very particular context of civil war and Israeli occupation, marked by the collapse of the Lebanese state (El-Khazen 2000) and the radicalization of a wing of the Shiʿa youth won over by the model of the Iranian revolution (Norton 1987, 2007) and appalled by the vast devastation caused by Israel in southern Lebanon.

Exploring the first issues of *al-ʿAhd*, the official organ of Hezbollah launched June 28, 1984, eight months before the party's public appearance, helps us assess the importance of this context (Lamloum 2009). The centrality of the register of "armed struggle" and of the anti-Israeli repertoire has marked Hezbollah's speeches and actions since its birth. In 1984, the new party, mobilizing young clergy and militants from a Shiʿa Islamist milieu undergoing a deep process of re-composition, asserted itself as "the party of *mustadʿafin* [the disinherited] whose mission is to defend all Muslims" and whose ultimate goal of struggle "is the rejection of Israel."[12] Sociologist Charara (2006) attributes this radicalism to the social and political history of the Shiʿites. Marginalized by the state, dismembered by successive involuntary population movements caused by the civil war[13] and Israeli occupation,[14] the Shiʿites have found political leadership in Hezbollah which was not only determined to do battle with Israel but also able to take charge of the reconstruction of their material and symbolic structures (Charara 2006: 219). Going through the first issues of *al-ʿAhd* underlines the singularity of this new political grouping in the Islamic

(and Arab) landscape of the period. The demand for national liberation from Israeli occupation, a unifying call of the entire Muslim *umma*, structured the discourse of the party and its manner of presentation. It denounced the confessional system and "political Maronitism"[15] and denied being the spokesman of the Shiʿites. Neither the Islamization of Lebanese society nor the establishment of an Islamic state was among its priorities. Thus, unlike the Sunni Islamist groups,[16] the party stated that it would ensure "that the sons of our people, together, will decide their destiny and freely choose the system of government they want, knowing that we do not hide our commitment to Muslim rule and that we invite everyone to choose an Islamic regime, which alone guarantees justice and dignity for all and which alone prohibits any possibility of a new colonization of our country."[17]

*Al-ʿAhd* presented the three principles that define the Hezbollah position vis-à-vis Israel: The party advocated an armed struggle against Israel—the slogan "arms are men's jewelry" has graced the newspaper since its first issue; it refused any negotiations and normalization with "the Jewish settlers and invaders";[18] and it joined the movement for the liberation of all of Palestine, calling for the destruction of the State of Israel as the only road to the restoration of the Palestinians' national rights. The liberation of Lebanon goes through the liberation of Jerusalem and therefore implies the end of the Jewish state.

In its first issue, *al-ʿAhd*[19] called for the commemoration of Jerusalem Day (advocated by Ayatollah Khomeini and fixed as the last Friday of Ramadan). It devoted its main article to the event and its meaning. Resistance to Israel was not only justified because of its occupation of Lebanese territories: the conflict with the "Zionist entity" was not a border dispute,[20] but was "civilizational and existential." It concerned the very nature of this state, qualified as "terrorist" and an "absolute evil."[21] Jerusalem, the third holiest site in Islam, symbolized the unity of all Muslims and all *mustadʿafin* in their fight against the *mustakbirun* (the arrogant).[22] In addition, Hezbollah joined its fight against Israel to a more global perspective of opposition to Western imperial policies in the Arab and Muslim world, led by the former colonial powers (France and Britain) and the United States, insofar as these have provided unconditional support to Israel and encouraged its development following the Palestinians' expulsion.[23]

While Hezbollah's position is hardly original and basically agrees with those of other Lebanese or Palestinian nationalist or leftist formations, nevertheless three features distinguish it. The first refers to

Hezbollah's proclamation of its support for the model of the Iranian revolution,[24] which not only places the party in a relation of rupture with Arab nationalist tradition, including its leftist version, but also links it to the regional ambitions of the Islamic Republic of Iran. This is reflected by its ideological adherence to the doctrine of *wilayat al-faqih* (guardianship of the Islamic jurist), defended as a supreme political and doctrinal reference. Politically, this affiliation is the basis of its strategic "anti-imperialist" position and, in addition, it gives Iran its first opportunity to engage, even if indirectly, in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The second difference relates to Hezbollah's conception of the link between irregular armed action and political and civil mass mobilization. *Al-'Ahd*,[25] published one of the first interviews with Amin al-Sayyid, spokesperson for Hezbollah from 1985 to 1989, in which he said, "We do not want an armed party, but a fighting *umma*." Despite its rhetorical form, this statement sums up Hezbollah's military strategy, presumably developed during its years of "clandestinity."[26] The armed wing that Hezbollah then established is a body that keeps some distance from—while at the same time being incorporated in—its environment. Professionalized, disciplined, compartmentalized, and secret, defending itself from various local and foreign indiscretions,[27] it is at the same time a popular guerrilla movement recruited from the Shi'ite youth in the south and the Bekaa and protected by what Hezbollah soon dubbed "*mujtama' al-muqawama*" (the "resistance society"). This refers to the whole dense network of organizations, institutions and multiple modes of political, social and cultural collective action, both local and national,[28] instigated and led by Hezbollah, developing a homogeneous universe of sense and sociability, with its own rituals, beliefs and representations, and participating in the protection, maintenance, and reproduction of the armed wing of the party.

The third difference is explained by Hezbollah's mobilization repertoire. Certainly in the 1980s, registering new political movements in an Islamic language was a rising phenomenon in the Arab world (Burgat 1995; Carré 1985). While the rise of both a Sunni form of political Islam and the (Shi'i) Iranian revolution have tapped into this referential reservoir, the novelty with Hezbollah is in the junction made between the tragedy of Karbala[29] and the fight against the state of Israel.[30] The party began the transformation of the slogans of contemporary Shi'ism symbolized by the slogans "'*Ashura*: *intisaru-l-dami 'ala-l-sayf*" ("the victory of blood over the sword"), and "*hayhat minna al-dhilla*" ("it is unthinkable that we should suffer humiliation") as symbols of its armed resistance against Israel.

In doing so, the martyrdom of Karbala, "the most emotive event in Shi'a history" (Shanahan 2005: 10), serves as the sacred foundation of its central mobilization repertoire[31] as well as the liturgical motivation calling on the power of conviction to counter the "forces of evil." One of the most significant examples of this phenomenon is *al-'Ahd*'s celebration of *'Ashura* in 1986, under the political slogan of the rejection of UN resolution 425[32] which at the time was supported by the Lebanese government and the rival Shi'ite movement Amal.[33]

By linking the sacrifice of Imam Husayn at the hands of the army of Yazid in Karbala to that of its militants in southern Lebanon[34] confronting the Israeli army, Hezbollah took up an original mobilization register targeting only its own basic community. Thus, it restored an emotional religious charge as a device for political mobilization embedding the present in the past and relying on the reinvention of a collective Shi'ite memory.

In 1987, the outbreak of the Palestinian Intifada provided Hezbollah with its first opportunity to intercede directly in the Palestinian question. The deep mobilization of Palestinians in the occupied territories was strongly reflected in the party's publications.[35] The pages of *al-'Ahd* welcomed (Sunni) Islamist Palestinians expelled by Israel, interviewed them, and presented their analyses and their slogans.[36] Some of the Islamists interviewed maintained that "the journal (of Hezbollah) is greeted inside (Palestine) as a weapon delivered to the Mujahideen."[37] Thereafter, *al-'Ahd* displayed a greater openness to Sunnism and its clergy[38] and developed an increasingly virulent criticism of the Arab regimes, particularly of Saudi Arabia.[39] Despite the conflict in which it confronted the Amal movement,[40] from 1988 to 1990, Hezbollah did not waver in its support for the Intifada. It continued its commemoration of Jerusalem Day,[41] of Land Day, and of the Day of Palestinian prisoners,[42] and demanded their return in its weekly paper.[43] Even more significantly, the importance given by *al-'Ahd* to the suicide operation, conducted October 19, 1988, in Bawwabat Fatima, a crossing point between Lebanon and Palestine, underlined its support for this option in Palestine. In his recorded message, before the operation, the martyr addressed his "brothers in Palestine and Lebanon," urging them to continue their armed struggle.

## Al-Manar

While *al-'Ahd* is an aid in analyzing the foundations of Hezbollah's position and influence in the Arab-Israeli conflict during its founding years, al-Manar, which was launched in June 1991, reflects the

party's more mature years following the end of the Lebanese civil war (1975–1990).[44] By the mid-1990s the television network had become the cornerstone of its communications strategy through the strength of its broadcasts and the wide range of its reception. The network acquired this status because of its introduction of a visual narration of its armed struggle against Israel: its production of a new narrative model built to speak out, to illustrate, and to mobilize in support of armed resistance. Close examination reveals how this model has been refined—and rendered more complex and sophisticated—throughout the two decades that bracket the turn of the twenty-first century, in and through three key factors.

The first is the cult of martyrdom (Chaïb 2007) and the veneration of the fighter. Following the newspaper *al-ʿAhd*, the al-Manar network presents the *shahid* (martyr) and *muqawim* (resistance fighter) as the central figures in the dramatization of the resistance. By skill-fully playing on a narrative linked to historical locations and memory, al-Manar attempts to connect the period of these exploits with that of its audience. Testimonies, biographies, memorials, poems, exaltation of the maternal figure, eye-witness accounts, and television spots have been produced and broadcast, giving dramatic force to the figures of the *shahid* and *muqawim* (resistance fighter), and locating their work in a space of familiarity. Whether killed on the frontlines or in a sui-cide operation, the *shahid* is the incarnation of the hero of the resis-tance, its "spectacular authority" (Balandier 2006: 36). His filmed testimony—a sign of his immortality—acts as a call to sacrifice, solic-iting courage and compassion. By drawing his legitimacy from the Shiʿite martyrology, the *shahid* in his act registers the resistance in an "ancestral allegory" (Albert 1998: 21). As to the *muqawim*, he is anonymous. Courageous and determined, he has mastered the art of combat, is ready to sacrifice himself, and is not afraid of dying. His faith in God is also his faith in victory. It is a symbol of dedication to the community. Clips presenting and refining his struggle do not look for "scientific knowledge nor even for an analysis, but rather for a eulogy able to directly produce faith, essential to emotion" (Tétu 2004), an emotional connection necessary to commitment.

The second constitutive factor of this model is communication developed and directed toward the "Zionist enemy." Al-Manar gives Hezbollah the possibility to address Israel and deploy forms of pro-paganda[45] targeting Israeli society, its political leaders, and its army. Messages and television spots in Hebrew, taken from Israeli television footage, images from the front, reviews of the Israeli press, inter-views with anti-Zionist Jews, and images of the bombing of Lebanese

civilians with commentary in Hebrew are the best examples. They are designed as a threat, in turn demonstrating the moral and military strength of Hezbollah, wielding the force of the faith of its fighters, passing coded signals to the Israeli general staff about Hezbollah's state of preparedness, displaying demoralized soldiers of the Tzahal (IDF, the Israeli Defense Forces) in the face of the determination of the resistance, and trying to convince Israeli society of the high cost of the occupation of Arab territory.

The third factor deals with the production, unprecedented in the history of military imagery, of narrative film from the front lines of guerrilla warfare against an occupying army. For the first time in the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict an Arabic medium has thus been directly committed to the objective of ending the myth of the invincibility of the Hebrew state. Thus, al-Manar shows assault operations on Israeli positions. Produced by the fighters of Hezbollah's War Information Unit, these programs are distributed exclusively by al-Manar and then re-broadcast by several other Lebanese channels. They call up various registers of identification, both pan-Arab and Islamic, in which pride is mixed with defiance and bravery in the face of the occupation, and faith in the force of Islam. Their goal is to arouse, if not admiration, at least the gratitude of the general public by putting it in a kind of direct experience with an actual instance of "heroic action."

This new narrative model—certainly inspired by the Iranian example (Chekowski and Dabashi 1999)—shaped a specific and socially constructed sentiment designed to move people in favor of the cause of the fight against Israel,[46] which in other places has influenced other Islamist actors.[47] In and through the iconography of martyrs, the celebration of the heroes of Shi'a history, poetry, the commemoration of tragic events, the use of sacred figures, the projection (or depiction) of stylized military action against the Israeli army, the arrangement of symbols (as in the use of the image of the al-Aqsa dome), and images of demoralized Tzahal soldiers, the al-Manar broadcasts have used dramatization as a factor of constant interpellation. The desired sentiments first appeal to the Shi'ites, the "reference group" for which Hezbollah claims to provide representation. They are relevant also for a Sunni or even trans-denominational audience, charmed by a political party that has made the fight against Israel its primary *raison d'être*.

One should note that the production of such a narrative model has been even more crucial since Hezbollah was recognized in the 1980s as the only participant in the armed resistance in Lebanon. In

1990, the conflict in which it opposed the Amal movement resulted in the exclusion of that rival Shi'ite organization from the southern front (Lamloum 2010; Goodarzi 2006).[48] The implementation of the Taif Agreement (1989) formally ending the civil war, endorsed—by rejecting the requirement of disarmament—the party's monopoly on armed action against Israel. However, this exemption was not accorded without some concessions being made in return. To accept and preserve this achievement, Hezbollah has let itself be contaminated by what the Lebanese historian Ahmad Beydoun has called the "syndrome of specialized communities" (2009).[49] In exchange for its monopoly of armed resistance, the party at that time abstained from strong involvement in internal Lebanese affairs especially those likely to disturb the Syrian guardian, which has always considered the land of the cedar as a centerpiece of its sphere of regional influence. In Lebanon itself, and despite its initial opposition to the Taif agreement, Hezbollah eventually subscribed to the rules of politics established by the Second Republic.[50] Thus, and after much deliberation, it participated in the first post-war parliamentary elections (1992) under conditions fixed by Syria (Harik 2004).[51]

Hezbollah was obliged to qualify its position concerning the Arab-Israeli conflict in order to comply with the "pax Syriana." Its loud opposition, voiced by al-Manar, to the Oslo process during 1992–1993, and its scathing critique of the PLO leadership, particularly of Yasser Arafat because of his acceptance of the principle of a state in part of historic Palestine, irritated the Assad regime that had begun a rapprochement with the United States in the wake of its participation in the first Gulf War (Lesch 2005). In September 1993, Hezbollah organized a demonstration to protest the Oslo accords that was fired upon by the Lebanese army, leaving 14 dead and 40 wounded. The party noted the event and licked its wounds. It understood the warning and endorsed the thesis of "conjoint trajectories" (*talazum al-masarayn*) between Beirut and Damascus,[52] which saw their fates and interests as intertwined in order to protect and keep the south Lebanon front active (Lamloum 2008). In 1994, the failure of talks between Syria and Israel on the Golan Heights seems certainly to have eased the Syrian pressure on Hezbollah enhancing, in the eyes of Damascus, the strategic importance of its "Islamic resistance." The fact remains that the party was still obligated to align its position to that of its Syrian big brother. Thus, as Saad-Ghorayeb has outlined, while Hezbollah kept unchanged its position on two key issues—the nature of the state of Israel and the military option against the occupation of south Lebanon—its approach

to the issue of negotiations marked a certain shift (Saad-Ghorayeb 2002: 153–154). Though it is not easy to identify a clear break in Hezbollah's position, its rejection of an Israeli-Arab agreement appeared less categorical at one point than it was in the 1980s,[53] thus making allowance for the Syrian maneuvers on this question. Also, without publicity, the party in the end muted its rejection of resolution 425.[54] Following the 1996 Grapes of Wrath campaign,[55] it supported the "April Understanding," sponsored by France and the United States which regulated "hostilities" between Israel and Lebanon (Picard 2007).

Given the context of the Israeli occupation, these shifts had almost no effect on the party's communication policy and did not alter the editorial framework of al-Manar television. The network did not renounce its mission. Moreover, its coverage of operations Accountability in 1993 and Grapes of Wrath in April 1996, conducted by Israel against Lebanon, reinforced its aura. The only noticeable difference compared to *al-'Ahd* in the 1980s was al-Manar's silence concerning the authoritarian ruling elites in the Arab world and its avoidance of any interference in their internal affairs.

In 1996, al-Manar received a license from the Lebanese Ministry of Information, still provisional at the time.[56] For the first time in the Arab world, a television network belonging to an Islamist grouping received legal recognition as a "television of the resistance."[57] From the southern front, al-Manar accomplished one of its "greatest achievements in May 2000,"[58] that is, to broadcast live through satellite (whose launching was timed for this purpose), the disorderly withdrawal of the Israeli army and the liberation of the prisoners of Khiyam, a symbol of the brutality of the occupation, by the civilian population. In doing so, the network provided the Arab world with the first images of the liberation of occupied territory recovered without negotiation or normalization or peace agreement.

The powerful symbolism of this, followed later that same year by the outbreak of the second Palestinian Intifada, assured Hezbollah's satellite channel strategic success in terms of transnational political communication. Led by the same management as the terrestrial channel and having a dozen foreign correspondents, its purpose can be seen as an attempt to conquer a new space of supranational legitimacy by exploiting the credit won during "Victory 2000." The network has shown itself to be very concerned about the heterogeneity of its new audience and the Sunni hegemony within its Arab environment. The Shi'ite identity of Hezbollah was muted. Al-Manar satellite reduced its broadcasts of the kind of commemorations of *'Ashura* and other

specifically Shi'ite rituals including the call to prayer. On the other hand, it displayed and highlighted its consensual Arab-Muslim identity on the doctrinal level, and in its strongly nationalist approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Emphasis has been made on unifying commemorations such as the International Day of Jerusalem, the Day in Support of the Intifada, and the Palestinian Prisoner's Day.

What was the line promoted by the network on the Arab-Israeli conflict? Without doubt, the primary mission of al-Manar satellite was to publicize and support all forms of political mobilization against Israeli colonial politics[59] and especially to support the military option, based not on guns and rockets but on martyrs in the occupied Palestinian territories.[60] In its rhetoric, the network introduced and promoted the liberation of southern Lebanon by the Islamic resistance as a model one should follow. Al-Manar satellite television also gained visibility in Palestine through its deep involvement in Gaza and the West Bank via local correspondents who covered the Intifada.[61] At the time, it benefited from the weakness of the Palestinian Authority's media and the delayed launching of the al-Aqsa network.[62]

Like *al-'Ahd* during the 1980s, al-Manar has also clearly sided with Islamist participants in Palestine, at the expense of Fatah and its allies in the Palestinian Authority. Nevertheless, some evolution should be noted. While in the 1990s the Hezbollah media had been significantly more favorable to Islamic Jihad, whose charismatic founder Fathi Shiqaqi (1951–1995) was influenced by the Iranian revolution and was expelled to Lebanon by Israel during the first Intifada,[63] al-Manar satellite television attested to the convergence of the party with Hamas as the latter grew and strengthened.[64]

Finally, al-Manar satellite refrained from any hint of interference in the agenda of these two Islamist groups and any claim of direct material support to their struggle. Apart from the imperative of secrecy that would explain its silence concerning any hypothetical logistic support, the underlying reason flows from the evolution of Hezbollah's position on the Palestinian issue. The party, which in 1985 claimed the duty to liberate Palestine, no longer claimed to take this mission on itself. The road to Lebanon no longer went through Jerusalem. And the liberation of the third holiest site in Islam was now the responsibility of a part of the *umma*, those who have the physical possession of the land,[65] the Palestinians.

Some three years after its launching, al-Manar satellite was subject to a major criminalization campaign leading to its ban in many Western countries and its classification by the Bush administration on the terrorist list (Koch 2008).[66] Accused of supporting terrorism and

promoting anti-Semitic theories, its alleged "nuisance power" reveals a persuasive force rarely matched by an Arab television network.

## "The Strength of al-Manar in the Charisma of Nasrallah"[67]

While it did not lead to an extension of Hezbollah's activities, the launching of al-Manar satellite to coincide with the "Victory 2000" at least made wider publicity for its transnational action possible. This mostly involved heavy investment in the personality of the party's Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah, who in this way participated in "manufacturing" his image as a pan-Arab hero in the cause of resistance to Israel.[68] Nasrallah's prominence in the Lebanese arena projects into pan-Arab space. He now appeared as the authorized party spokesperson on the Arab-Israeli conflict, presenting its strategies, revealing its secrets of war and negotiations, and defying the Israeli strike force. Such a development was linked to the change in the configuration of the Hezbollah leadership—it is partly explained by its adaptation to the Lebanese communitarian model of *za'im* (meaning "chief" or "leader"). Represented in public by a collective leadership comprised mainly of young men wearing turbans in the 1980s, following the civil war, the party chose a model of personalized leadership. At the 1995 congress, it amended its rules to allow Nasrallah to seek a third mandate following the end of his second and final term of office. The third Secretary-General became the omnipresent figure of the organization, synthesizing its values, its image, its codes, its legitimacy, and its authority at both national and transnational levels. Certainly, the hegemony of Hezbollah within the Shi'ite community was the necessary condition in building up such stature. The "victory" of the party over Israel was a sufficient condition in accomplishing this.

But beyond this, the stature of Nasrallah points to the relevance of two elements outlined by Bailey (1971) in his analysis of the construction of leaderships. The first relates to the political context that makes leadership particularly necessary and legitimate.[69] The second element relates to personal leadership qualities, which enable a leader to occupy a position of authority.

The social origins of Nasrallah and his political career illuminate the first element. According to an official biography,[70] he was born August 31, 1960, at Karantina, in the eastern suburbs of Beirut. Nasrallah represents, through his personal history, a whole generation that was radicalized in the wake of the "Shi'ite revival" initiated

by Imam Musa al-Sadr and his *Harakat al-Mahrumin* movement (Movement of the Deprived) (Norton 1987). He comes from a large Shi'ite family of landless peasants from the south, forced by poverty to migrate to the poverty belt of the capital in order to survive. In 1975, with the outbreak of civil war, the Nasrallah family chose, like thousands of poor Shi'ites, to flee Beirut and take refuge in their home village of Bazuriyya in southern Lebanon. The young Nasrallah soon joined the Amal movement and was named its local organizational leader. In 1976, Nasrallah went to Iraq to pursue his religious studies in Najaf. In the Shi'ite holy city, he met his mentor, and the future Secretary-General of Hezbollah, 'Abbas Musawi. In 1978, the Shi'ite Islamist movement in Iraq was persecuted and Nasrallah returned to Lebanon, following his introductory studies (*al-Muqaddima*[71]). He settled in the Bekaa and became the regional head of the Amal movement. During this period, Musa al-Sadr disappeared, the Iranian revolution triumphed, and Israel invaded Lebanon, encircling Beirut and forcing the evacuation of the PLO fighters.

Against this backdrop of violence, marked by the crisis of the Arab nationalist movement in general, and of Lebanon in particular, a new profile of the Islamic political leader emerged and crystallized, as analyzed by the sociologist Waddah Charara. The young Shaykh—no longer linked to the primary family and tribal solidarity—trained in urban circles[72] and was motivated primarily by the struggle against the Israeli occupation. Hassan Nasrallah is the emblematic figure. While the many gray areas surrounding the years of Hezbollah's clandestine existence (1982–1985) still cloud our view of his role, despite his youth, he does seem to have actively participated in the founding of Hezbollah, as demonstrated by the pages of the weekly *al-'Ahd*. Nasrallah appeared in 1984 as a keynote speaker and, therefore, leader of the "Islamic resistance."[73] He played the central role in the first major festival held by the party, at one of its first public commemorations of the anniversary of the birth of the Mahdi,[74] and [to mark] the first major *'Ashura* event organized in the southern suburbs of Beirut following the first Israeli withdrawal in 1985.[75] So, when in 1992, Nasrallah was elected head of Hezbollah twenty-four hours after the assassination of 'Abbas Musawi by Israel, he already had considerable experience behind him as a militant leader.

Nevertheless it was his new responsibilities which progressively led to his advancement to the rank of an uncontested leader. In September 1997, the martyrdom of his eldest son Hadi in an attack on an Israeli position in South Lebanon became part of his legitimacy as a "public figure" of the resistance. In 2000, the liberation of

the Israel-occupied "security zone" was marked by his now famous speech in the village of Bint Jbeil, consecrating him as the undisputed leader of the party. By himself, he summarizes the double identity of the party: Shi'ite (with his black turban) and pan-Arab (with his fierce anti-Israeli rhetoric)

Unlike his two predecessors, Subhi Tufayli and 'Abbas Musawi, Nasrallah has benefited from the full development of Hezbollah's visual and digital media: nationally through al-Manar terrestrial television and at the pan-Arab level through al-Manar satellite. It is also here that the second element selected by Frederick George Bailey becomes important, that is, the personal qualities of leadership. While it is difficult to say what qualities facilitated Nasrallah's 1992 rise to the party's organizational head, it is clear that his oratorical skills and his strength of conviction justified his pivotal role in the party's public communications. To our knowledge, there is almost no work addressing the analysis (linguistics, argumentation, and enunciation)[76] of his speeches, a research perspective, moreover, which may shed new light on Hezbollah's evolving identity. But in any case, a quick review of his television appearances reveals some salient features.[77] Both the principal leader for the party's integration in institutionalized politics and leader of a clandestine military organization, Nasrallah cultivates his image as an ascetic and reassuring religious man. With him "politics becomes a 'mystique,'"[78] simultaneously personifying myth, symbol, realpolitik, and strength. His speeches are built on a dynamic and dual mode, alternating threatening language with an affectionate tonality, the Lebanese dialect with standard Arabic, Shi'ite symbols with Koranic quotations, analysis with information, dramatization with sobriety, reprimands with denunciations. He speaks directly to his audience,[79] using digressions, self-deprecation, and humor, thus cultivating familiarity, trust and complicity. His sentences are simple and accessible, often using the collective "we," which, according to its context, can refer to Hezbollah and its armed resistance, the Lebanese, the Arabs, or the Muslims. His speeches are deliberately demonstrative and organized around themes announced in advance. Nasrallah speaks to refute claims or propound facts, develop a thesis, reveal data, support arguments, respond to opponents, and warn Israel.

Through its acquisition of digital technology, Hezbollah uses the oratorical skills of its Secretary-General in support of its transnational activities. Nasrallah's speeches emphasize the war waged by his party against Israel in the Lebanese context, and its ideological extension in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Also, following the outbreak of the

second Intifada, Hezbollah tried to multiply the signs of support for the Palestinian struggle as well as for Hamas and Islamic Jihad, all transmitted by al-Manar satellite television. These are reflected in the settings and mobilizations surrounding the leader's speeches, and other activities.[80]

From 2004, as the leader's public appearances were becoming increasingly rare due to Israeli assassination threats, al-Manar became the almost exclusive arena for his public appearances.[81] His virtual appearances on a giant screen placed in party-controlled areas, fed the myth of "the invincible Sayyid" and the extraordinary stories that surround the resistance.[82] He appeared both near and far, present and absent, accessible and elusive, as both protector and quarry.

The 2006 Israeli war in Lebanon gives us a better understanding of this multiple role. Nasrallah emerged as a harbinger of war, peace, and victory, commanding the real world through the word and the imagination (Balandier 2006: 22).[83] His speeches, broadcast live by al-Manar, marked the military and diplomatic developments throughout the 33 days of the conflict. They managed to open up a space of transnational broadcasting favoring Hezbollah's presentation of the reality of the conflict. An examination of their content reveals their unchanging structure and highlights the differential mobilization repertoires used by the Sayyid.[84] His messages had a dual purpose. In the first place, they were national: Nasrallah systematically called on the Islamic resistance fighters, the party base, the families of martyrs, the Shi'ite population, and displaced persons who had fled the Israeli bombardment. He sympathized with their suffering, hailed their sacrifice, and praised their resistance. He spoke directly to them, invoked the collective Shi'ite memory, referred to the battle of Karbala, the martyrdom of 'Abbas and quoted Zaynab.[85] Nasrallah then addressed the government and the Lebanese population in general to explain the reasons for this "aggression" planned by the United States and Israel, keeping them up to date with the "developments at the front"[86] and encouraging them to support his party's war effort. The defense of the national territory and preservation of the achievements of the liberation of 2000 are the main arguments advanced by the Secretary-General in defense of that struggle.

The second purpose of such speeches is external, mainly addressing Israelis and the Arab-Islamic world. In one now familiar mode combining challenges, threats, and demonstrations of force, all supported by visual and factual evidence, Nasrallah addressed the Israelis. The aim was both to weaken Israeli society's support for the war and to reach a pan-Arab audience responsive to demonstrations of defiance

to Israel. Here was the second external audience: the pan-Arab and Muslim world. The moderate tone of Nasrallah's speeches during the 33-day war should be noted. First addressing his remarks to the "rulers in (the) Arab and Islamic countries in this new Middle East," the Secretary-General limited himself to warning them about the risk of losing their position if they abandoned "their moral and national responsibility for the resistance."[87] He asked them to at least mobilize diplomatically to "stop" the aggression against Lebanon. However, there were no specific accusations of inaction or even complicity in the ongoing war.

More tellingly, in initially addressing the *umma*, Nasrallah said:

> I am not in the business either of appealing to anyone nor directing any request. From the very first moment of Operation *al-Wa'd al-Sadiq* (Operation Truthful Promise), and the confrontations which followed it, I took it upon myself and for my brothers, and we agreed on this matter, that in this confrontation we did not ask anything of anyone, and many have contacted us and offered their services and we said we do not ask anything either on the monetary level nor the political level nor the informational nor the popular nor the military. For certain we appeal and ask and plead with God almighty because we believe in him and in his power and in his promise of victory to the believers: we put our trust in God, there is no better guardian.[88]

The Secretary-General presented the war as "the struggle of the entire *umma*." In other speeches, he addressed himself directly to the *umma*, questioning it on its role in the struggle. Nevertheless, Nasrallah did not propose that the "Arab and Muslim peoples" join in the fighting, nor did he solicit any form of practical solidarity from them. More importantly, he said he did not need their support, since he relied only on the will of God. At first sight this posture seems paradoxical insofar as, while deploying a pan-Arab mobilization repertoire, Hezbollah seems passive or uninterested in the social forces that it is supposed to embody. But this apparent paradox in fact stems from a contradiction inherent in the nature of the party and highlights the tension that structures its two key frames: Shi'ism and the *muqawama*. A confessional actor by its social base and its integration into internal communitarian politics, Hezbollah has been built through endorsing the cause of the struggle against Israel. It is precisely its monopoly of weapons of the "resistance," maintained through its multifaceted alliance with Syria and Iran, which authorizes it to impose a new balance of communitarian power, giving Shi'ites the possibility of fully participating in the Lebanese state. This double disposition of its arms

(both internal and external), places the party in two conflicting logics of action: On the one hand, a communitarian institutional logic and thus exclusively in phase with two state actors (Iran and Syria) working to defend their interests in the Middle East; on the other hand, a logic of inclusive anti-imperialist mobilization which partially escapes conventional issues and transcends the party's communitarian identity.

During the 33-day war, these two logics marked all the appearances of Nasrallah. They have perhaps found their best illustration in his speech at the end of the war, when in front of hundreds of thousands of Lebanese assembled in a devastated square in the *dahiya* [in the southern suburbs of Beirut], the Sayyid distinguished his declaration by describing the Shi'ites massed before him as "a very honorable, pure and generous people."[89] At the same time, he declared a "divine victory" for the whole *umma*.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, it would seem appropriate to ask about the impact of Hezbollah's media activity in relation the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, within the pan-Arab arena, in terms of its reception, and its consequences for the forms of collective action and representation that the party embodies. It is clearly difficult to answer this question in the absence of anthropological studies of the modes of consumption, social appropriation, and identification with Hezbollah's mobilization repertoires, and with its cognitive universe.

This limited review, however, of Hezbollah's media action in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, through three distinct phases of its history, makes apparent the variable combinations of the two main pillars of its identity—Shi'ism and the Resistance.

The first phase—that of construction (1982–1990)—is marked by a large degree of harmony between these two elements. Positing itself at that time as an armed resistance radically challenging the prevailing confessional system, Hezbollah enlists Shi'ism purely as a key reference to legitimize armed struggle, advocated as a national and pan-Arab strategy of choice for the liberation of both South Lebanon and Palestine.

By contrast, the phase of Hezbollah's progressive involvement in conventional Lebanese politics (1991–2000) produces signs of tension between these two elements. The Taif accord and the *pax syriana*[90] obliged Hezbollah to moderate its rejection of the sectarian system, and to go along with the confessional allocation of power.

So Hezbollah's Shi'ism, while continuing as a referential reserve for a pan-Arab cause, now starts to appear as an exclusive identity serving a community keen to take part in running a state which had long excluded it.

The third phase, following the liberation of South Lebanon (2000–2006), confirms that trend. It shows Hezbollah's admitted inability to project a repertoire of struggle for non-Shi'ites, even at times of full conflict with Israel. In other words, while Hezbollah has indeed won sympathy beyond its confessional base, both in Lebanon and in the wider Arab world, it has been unable to mobilize and organize people outside of its confession through proposing collective slogans and forms of action to non-Shia.

## Notes

1. The title *Sayyid* is conferred on descendants of the Prophet. If they are clerics, as in the case of Hassan Nasrallah, they are entitled to wear a black turban.
2. See the complete text of his speech in Arabic published on Hezbollah's official site. http://www.moqawama.org/.
3. Nasrallah carefully avoided presenting the material as providing "conclusive evidence" but described it rather as "data" that may "help us discover the truth concerning the murder of the former prime minister." See his speech: http://www.moqawama.org/.
4. This phrase was already in use, at the beginning of the war, as the title of the work by Charara (1976).
5. On Hezbollah, see in particular: Jaber (1997); Qasim (2004); Hamzeh (2004); Harb (2005); Alagha (2006); Norton (2007); Mervin (2008).
6. For a critical review of this literature, see Catusse and Karam (2010).
7. Farid El-Khazen distinguishes between "loyalist," "authorized," and "prohibited" parties. The first are represented in Parliament and the government since the elections of 1992, the second have no representation within the political power structure, while the prohibited parties are systematically hunted down, directly or indirectly, by governmental authorities. See Catusse and Karam (2010).
8. The Taif accord, negotiated under Saudi mediation in the Saudi city of that name in 1989, brought an end to the civil war that broke out in Lebanon in 1975. It was initially opposed by Hezbollah because it entrenched the sectarian nature of the Lebanese political system, but the movement later modified its position as it became increasingly engaged in conventional Lebanese politics.
9. New TV (al-Jadeed), al-Mustaqbal, *al-Safir, al-Akhbar, al-Nahar.*
10. Extract of a speech by Hassan Nasrallah reported by the weekly *al-'Ahd.*

11. *Al-ʿAhd*, November 21, 1997.

12. *Al-ʿAhd*, Friday 29 Ramadan 1404 (June 28, 1984).

13. For example, in August 1976, militiamen of the right-wing Christian Lebanese Forces displaced 10,000 Shiʿites from the Beirut neighborhood of Nabʿa to the southern suburbs of Beirut.

14. In this connection, A. R. Norton argues that "In the South . . . Israel's policies as well as the very logic of an underground resistance . . . progressively radicalized the population" (1987: 100).

15. Political Maronitism was the name given to the phenomenon of Maronite political militancy, which was a major feature in the Lebanese civil war and that led, at one stage, to a quasi-partition of the country.

16. Particularly the Muslim Brotherhood and the radical current that split from it, *al-Jamaʿa al-Islamiyya*.

17. Extracts from the open letter of Hezbollah, presented on February 16, 1985, in Husayniyya in the southern suburbs of Beirut. It was published in *al-ʿAhd* no. 33 and up to December 2009 was the party's only programmatic document.

18. Number 21, Friday 23 Safar, 1405 (November 18, 1984).

19. Dated 29 Ramadan 1404 (June 28, 1984).

20. *Al-ʿAhd*, 18 Jumada al-'Ula 1410 (December 17, 1989).

21. "*Isra'il sharron mutlaq.*" Hezbollah took the expression from the Imam Sadr.

22. Number 102, Friday 28 Ramadan 1406 (June 6, 1986).

23. As an example, *al-ʿAhd* published in its no. 88 dated Friday, 5 Jumada al-Akhira 1406, a study on the strategic alliance between the United States and Israel (February 15, 1986).

24. Throughout its first two years, the weekly magazine published a regular column entitled: "Glossary of the revolution." In addition and up to 1992, a small inset of the portrait of Khomeini adorned the journal's front page, and was accompanied by quotations from The Guide.

25. See number 54, Friday 17 Shawal, 1405 (July 6, 1985).

26. See in this connection the debates in the years 1980–1985 that stirred the Shiʿites Islamist arena concerning the nature of the party to be built. Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah, considered at the time to be the spiritual leader of Hezbollah, took an active part in this debate through the Islamic cultural student review, *al-Muntalaq* (The Departure) defending the idea that "there should not be a separation between the political actor, and the *umma*," *al-Muntalaq*, July 29, 1985.

27. It is interesting to note in this connection that the combatants of Hezbollah, contrary to the prevailing practice in the 1970s and 1980s among *fedayeen* and other armed groups in Lebanon, never exhibited their weapons publicly outside the fields of battle.

28. See, for example, no. 71, dated Friday, 18 Safar 1406 (November 2, 1985) which reports on the organization of the first festival of poetry in favor of the "Islamic resistance."

29. The battle at Karbala in Iraq in 680 AD was the defining moment in the emergence of Shi'i Islam. The "martyrdom" there of Prophet Muhammad's grandson Husayn is commemorated on *'Ashura*, the tenth day of the mourning month of Muharram. Husayn, and 72 of his companions, including his brother 'Abbas, and other members of his family were attacked on the road to the city of Kufa, by the troops of the Umayyad caliph Yazid. Despite their weakness, al-Husayn and his companions refused to surrender, and decided to do battle. Husayn's sister Zaynab was captured and taken before their enemy Caliph Yazid to whom she made a defiant speech which has become a pillar of the Shi'ite heritage.

30. Charara (1968).

31. Amal and the *Mahrumin* movement (the Deprived) created in March 1974 by Musa al-Sadr have also politicized the *'Ashura* and made it a mobilization repertoire, but the aim was to build a mass pro-test movement directed against the state to force it to grant rights to Shi'ites. On the place of religious symbolism in the Amal movement at the time of Imam al-Sadr, see Nasr (1985: 87–116).

32. The United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 425 on March 19, 1978. It founded the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in charge of ensuring the withdrawal of the Israeli army from Lebanon and of helping the Lebanese government restore its authority in the south.

33. Number 116, Friday 8 Muharram 1407 (September 13, 1986).

34. Particularly in relation to an article devoted to the capacity of Islam to generate and mobilize the spirit of martyrdom, see *al-'Ahd* issue 120, Friday, 14 Safar 1407 (October 19, 1986).

35. See in particular the analyses of the different positions in Israel on the Intifada in *al-'Ahd* number 130, Friday 17 Rabi' al-Awwal 1407 (November 20, 1986).

36. Number 20, Friday 5 Ramadan 1408 (April 22, 1988).

37. Number 20, Friday 5 Ramadan 1408 (April 22, 1988).

38. See in this connection the long interview with Shaykh Ghazali in Issue 157 of Friday 29 Shawal 1407 (June 27, 1987).

39. Number 159, Friday 14 Dhu-l-Qa'da, 1407 (July 14, 1987).

40. On this conflict, see Lamloum (2010).

41. Number 204, 5 Shawal 1408 (May 22, 1988).

42. Land Day is a commemoration of the March 30, 1976 repression by the Israeli army of the general strike triggered by the Palestinians in response to the Israeli government's decision to confiscate Arab land in the Galilee. The Day of the Prisoner is commemorated on April 17.

43. Number 204, 5 Shawal 1408 (May 22, 1988).
44. In reality, a group of persons favorable to the "Islamic resistance" created al-Manar. Subsequently, Hezbollah moved into the station and took control. Lamloum (2009).
45. The term "propaganda" is here employed in the classical sense: "deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist" (Garth and O'Donnel 1999: 6).
46. On emotions in mobilization, a theme which has certainly been neglected by social sciences, refer in particular to Traïni (2009).
47. Including Sunni radical formations like al-Qaeda.
48. This conflict was definitively closed in November 1990 with the signing of an agreement between the Secretary-General of the party, Subhi Tufayli, and the President of the Amal movement, Nabih Berri, under the aegis of the Iranian and Syrian regimes. Lamloum (2010).
49. By this formula the author means the mode of power sharing installed by Lebanese communitarianism, which accorded the responsibility for liberation to the Shi'ite community, for development to the Sunnis, and for the defense of national sovereignty to the Maronites. Beydoun (2009: 88).
50. "We designate the political life and constitutional practice which was established in Lebanon following the amendment to the Constitution which took place on November 5, 1989 and immediately followed by the election of René Moawad as president of the Republic, as the II Republic." Corm (2003: 225).
51. On these elections, see in particular El-Khazen and Salem (1993).
52. Kassir (2000).
53. Nasrallah has stated, for example, that if Lebanon signed an agreement with Israel, his party would abstain from causing disturbances in the country. Cited by Saad-Ghorayeb.
54. See note 30 supra. This was a point of discord between Amal and Hezbollah. At the end of the 1980s, the party gave four reasons to justify its opposition to Resolution 425: its recognition of the State of Israel and its respect for the integrity of its territory; its legitimization of the presence of foreign forces not subject to national control on Lebanese territory; its objective of ending the situation of war with Israel and finally the fact that it was part of a process of negotiations. See the position of Hezbollah in *al-'Ahd*, no. 113, July 23, 1986.
55. The campaign launched by Israel under the title "Grapes of Wrath" saw a very heavy bombardment of south Lebanese towns and villages and coastal roads, causing a massive displacement of the population. It was brought to an end by intensive international diplomacy involving primarily Saudi Arabia, Syria, France, and the United States.
56. In 1997, the station obtained a full license.

57. The new status marks the institutional and trans-denominational consensus obtained by Hezbollah in support of its military action. It symbolically sealed the alliance between this party and Syria.

58. According to the remarks of one of its officials, interview with author, May 2009.

59. Particularly in Europe. In France, its correspondents would cover the events organized in defense of the rights of Palestinians.

60. In his liberation speech of 2000 in Bint Jbeil, Nasrallah explained: "you do not need tanks, strategic balance, rockets or cannons to liberate your land, all you need are the martyrs who shook and scared this angry Zionist entity." Translation, Nicholas Noe.

61. Opinion polls demonstrated this early in the years 2000. In addition, in 2007, the survey of the Palestinian organization Jerusalem Media and Communication Center (JMCC) shows that the Hezbollah station occupied fourth place in the classification of the more credible channels in the eyes of Palestinians. Survey number 61, March 2007.

62. http://www.aqsatv.ps/ar/?action=about.

63. He is the author of the book: *al-Khomeini: al-Hal al-Islami wa-l-Badil* (Khomeini: the Islamic and Alternative Solution).

64. This evolution also echoes the alliance between Hamas and Iran.

65. Saad-Ghorayeb.

66. In March 2006, al-Manar and radio al-Nur were classified as terrorist entities in the US Country Report on Terrorism.

67. Interview with a director of the network, Beirut, April 2009.

68. By heroes, we refer to the definition by Bryan (1998: 34–35). "The hero is an individual, real or mythical, the narration of whose actions and sacrifices have, over time, come to represent the values, ideals and aspirations of a social group as well as the defense and the legitimacy of its political and/or territorial position."

69. To resume an idea of Bailey.

70. See in this connection: http://www.moqawama.org/siteindex.php. August 18, 2010.

71. First level of Shi'ite religious studies.

72. Charara (2006: 93–98).

73. Number 11 dated 11 Dhu al-Hijja 1404 (September 7, 1984).

74. Number 47, Friday 26 Sha'ban 1405 (May 17, 1985). The Twelver Shi'ites believe in a hidden imam, the Mahdi, who will appear on the Day of Judgment to spread justice on the earth.

75. Number 66, Friday 12 Muharram 1406 (September 17, 1985).

76. With one exception, to our knowledge, that of Matar (2008).

77. For an overview on these speeches, see the Secretary-General on the site: http://www.moqawama.org/siteindex.php.

78. We refer here to a formula borrowed by G. Balandier from Péguy. See Balandier (2006: 184).

79. Particularly through the use of "*ayyuha*" ("O you").

80. Nasrallah also spoke to commemorate the anniversary of the foundation of Hamas (December 29, 2000); at the international festival of solidarity with the Palestinian people (October 4, 2000); at the congress in support of the Intifada (Tehran, April 24, 2001); to celebrate the International Day of Jerusalem (December 14, 2000); again to mark the first anniversary of the outbreak of the Intifada (September 28, 2001); at the congresses of salvation of Jerusalem and solidarity with the Palestinian people (January 9, 2002) and in support of the Intifada; for the resistance and the right of return (February 17, 2002); or finally to commemorate the assassination of the leader of the Islamic Jihad, Fathi al-Shiqaqi (November 1, 2002).

81. In May of 2004, the Lebanese security services dismantled a network headed by a Palestinian recruited and trained in Tunisia by the Mossad and accused of wanting to murder Nasrallah. In 2006, another cell was discovered and its members were arrested. Its leader had extensively monitored the offices of Nasrallah in the southern suburbs of Beirut. During the 2006 war, the Israeli air force dropped a 30-ton bomb on the building which was supposedly Nasrallah's home.

82. See, Kassatly (2008: 311–331).

83. The message of the fighters (the *mujahideen*) of the Islamic resistance to the Secretary-General of Hezbollah was made public in the midst of the war, July 28, 2006. By its very solemn tone, its contents and the identity of its recipient, it highlights one of the modes of the party's dramatization of the latter's power.

84. The complete set of these speeches has been compiled by al-Manar in two DVDs entitled "Qa'id al-Muqawama al-Sayyid Hasan Nasrullah Khilala 'Udwan Tammuz" ("The messages of the leader of the resistance, al-Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah during the July aggression"), 2006, Beirut, Dar al-Manar.

85. In particular by the use of the emblematic sentence "you will not erase our memory," by which Husayn's sister, Zaynab, finished her speech to Yazid near the end of her captivity in Damascus.

86. Nasrallah began virtually all of his speeches during these six weeks by talking about war conditions in the field. See his speeches of July 16, 21, 25, and 29 and also those of August 3 and 9. See note 81 above.

87. See the speech of August 3, 2006.

88. Speech of July 19, 2006, see http://www.moqawama.org/print.htm.

89. Hasan Nasrallah, speech of September 22, 2006.

90. The *pax syriana* is a phrase often applied to the period covering much of the post-Taif period of the 1990s and early 2000s when Lebanon enjoyed a large degree of civil peace underpinned by, and dependent on, a large degree of Syrian influence. It began coming to an end in 2004 as Syria's regional position and its posture in Lebanon were weakened following the US-led invasion of Iraq, a process which

culminated in the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon in April 2005 under Lebanese and international pressure following the murder of Lebanese former Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri on February 14 of that year.

## References

Alagha, Joseph. 2006. *The Shifts in Hizbullah's Ideology*. Amsterdam: University Press-ISIM.

Albert, Jean-Pierre. 1998. "Du martyr à la star. Les métamorphoses des héros nationaux," in P. Centlivres, D. Fabre, and F. Zonabend (eds.), *La fabrique des héros*. Paris: Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, pp. 11–32.

Bailey, Frederick George. 1971. *Les règles du jeu politique*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France.

Balandier, Georges. 2006. *Le pouvoir sur scènes*. Paris: Fayard.

Beydoun, Ahmad. 2009. *La dégénérescence du Liban ou la Réforme orpheline*. Arles: Actes Sud.

Bryan, Dominic. 1998. "In Remembrance of Guillaume," in Pierre Centlivres, Daniel Fabre, and Françoise Zonabend (eds.), *La fabrique des héros*. Paris: Editions de la maison des sciences de l'homme, pp. 34–47.

Burgat, Francois. 1995. *L'islamisme au Maghreb*. Paris: Petite Bibliothèque Payot.

Carré, Olivier. 1985. *Radicalismes islamiques*. Paris: L'Harmattan.

Catusse, M. and K. Karam (eds.). 2010. *Returning to Political Parties? Political Party Development in the Arab World*. Beirut: Lebanese Center for Policy Studies.

Chaïb, Kinda. 2007. "Le Hezbollah libanais à travers ses images. La représentation du martyr," in S. Mervin (ed.), *Les Mondes Chiites et l'Iran*. Paris and Beirut: Karthala-IFPO, pp. 113–131.

Charara, Waddah. 1968. *Transformations d'une manifestation religieuse dans un village du Liban Sud*. Beirut: Université libanaise, Institut des sciences sociales.

Charara, Waddah. 1976. *al-Silm al-Ahli al-Barid* (The Cold Civil Peace). Beirut: Centre d'études arabes.

Charara, Wadah. 2006. *Dawlat Hizb Allah, Lubnân Mujtamaʻan Islamiyyan* (The State of Hezbollah, Lebanon an Islamic Society). Beirut: Dar al-Nahar.

Chekowski, Peter and Hamid Dabashi. 1999. *Staging a Revolution: The Art of Persuasion in the Islamic Republic of Iran*. New York: New York University Press.

Corm, Georges. 2003. *Le Liban contemporain. Histoire et société*. Paris: La Découverte.

El-Khazen, Farid. 2000. *The Breakdown of the State in Lebanon: 1967–1976*. London and New York: I.B. Tauris.

El-Khazen, Farid. 2003. *Les partis politiques au Liban. Les limites de la démocratie dans l'expérience partisane*. Beirut: LCPS.

El-Khazen, Farid and Paul Salem. 1993. *Al-Intikhabat al-'Ula fi Lubnan ma ba'ad al-Harb* (The First Election in Lebanon after the war). Beirut: Dar al-Nahar/LCPS.

Garth, Jowett and Victoria O'Donnel. 1999. *Propaganda and Persuasion*. London: Sage.

Goffman, Erving. 1991. *Les cadres de l'expérience*. Paris: Minuit.

Goodarzi, Jubin M. 2006. *Syria and Iran: Diplomatic Alliance and Power Politics in the Middle East*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Hamzeh, Ahmad Nizar. 2004. *In the Path of Hizbullah*. New York: Syracuse University Press.

Harb, Mona. 2005. *Action publique et système politique pluricommunautaire: les mouvements politiques chiites dans le Liban de l'après-guerre, thèse de science politique*. Aix-en-Provence: IEP.

Harik, Judith P. 2004. *Hezbollah, the Changing Face of Terrorism*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Jaber, Hala. 1997. *Hezbollah: Born with a Vengeance*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Kassatly, Houda. 2008. "Des interventions surnaturelles à 'la victoire divine'," in S. Mervin (ed.), *Le Hezbollah, état des lieux*. Paris and Beirut: Actes Sud and IFPO, pp. 311–337.

Kassir, Samir. 2000. "Dix ans après, comment ne pas réconcilier une société divisée?" *Maghreb-Machrek*, 169: 6–22.

Koch, Olivier. 2008. "'L'affaire al-Manar' en France," in S. Mervin (ed.), *Le Hezbollah, état des lieux*. Paris and Beirut: Actes Sud and IFPO, pp. 47–64.

Lamloum, Olfa. 2008. "La Syrie et le Hezbollah: partenaires sous contrainte?" in S. Mervin (ed.), *Le Hezbollah, état des lieux*. Paris and Beirut: Actes Sud and IFPO, pp. 89–101.

Lamloum, Olfa. 2009. "L'histoire sociale de Hezbollah à travers ses médias. Système de représentation et inscription territoriale." *Politix*, 22 (87): 169–187.

Lamloum, Olfa. 2010. "Retour sur les traces d'un conflit: Amal vs Hezbollah (1988–1990)," in F. Mermier and C. Varin (eds.), *Mémoires de guerres au Liban (1975–1990)*. Paris and Beirut: Actes Sud and IFPO, pp. 205–225.

Lesch, David W. 2005. *The Lion of Damascus: Bashar al-Asad and Modern Syria*. New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press.

Maasri, Zeina. 2008. *Off the Wall: Political Posters of the Lebanese Civil War*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Matar, Dina. 2008. "The Power of Conviction: Nasrallah's Rhetoric and Mediated Charisma in the Context of the 2006 July War." *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* 1: 122–137.

Mervin, Sabrine. 2008. *Le Hezbollah. État des lieux*. Arles: Actes Sud.

Mustafa, Amin. 2003. *Al-Muqawama fî Lubnân 1948–2000* (The Resistance in Lebanon 1948–2000). Beirut: Dar al-Hadî.

Nasr, Salim. 1985. "La transition des chiites vers Beyrouth: mutations sociales et mobilisation communautaire à la veille de 1975," in Mona Zakaria and Bachchar Chbarou (eds.), *Mouvements communautaires et espaces urbains au Machreq*. Beirut: Cermoc, pp. 87–116.

Norton, Augustus R. 1987. *Amal and the Shi'a. Struggle for the Soul of Lebanon*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Norton, Augustus R. 2007. *Hezbollah: A Short History*. Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Picard, Elizabeth. 2007. "Le Hezbollah, milice islamiste et acteur communautaire pragmatique," in F. Mermier and E. Picard (eds.), *Liban, une guerre de 33 jours*. Paris: La Découverte.

Qasim, Na'im. 2004. *Hezbollah, al-Manhaj, al-Tajriba, al-Mustaqbal* (Hezbollah, the Methodology, the Experience, the Future). Beirut: Dar al-Hadi.

Saad-Ghorayeb, Amal. 2002. *Hizbu'llah: Politics and Religion*. London: Pluto Press.

Shanahan, Rodger. 2005. *The Shi'a of Lebanon: Clans, Parties and Clerics*. London and New York: Tauris Academic Studies.

Snow, David A. and Robert D. Benford. 1992. "Master Frames and Cycles of Protest," in Aldon D. Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller (eds.), *Frontiers in Social Movements Theory*. New Haven, CT: University of Yale Press, pp. 133–155.

Tabet, Michel. 2010. "Lan Tamhu Dhikrana, analyse d'un document vidéo du Hezbollah," in O. Lamloum (ed.), *Médias et islamisme*. Beirut: Presses de l'IFPO, pp. 63–78. http://ifpo.revues.org/1359.

Tétu, Jean-François. 2004. "L'émotion dans les médias: dispositifs, formes et figures." *Mots. Les langages du politique*, no. 75, juillet. Accessed April 25, 2008, at: http://mots.revues.org/index2843.html.

Tilly, Charles and Sydney Tarrow. 2008. *Politique(s) du conflit. De la grève à la révolution*. Paris: Sciences Po.

Traïni, Christophe (ed.). 2009. *Emotions…Mobilisations!* Paris: Sciences Po.

# Martyrs and Markets: Exploring the Palestinian Visual Public Sphere

*Toufic Haddad*

## INTRODUCTION

Visual imagery has increasingly played an important role in mediating popular opinion formation between the "Arab world" and the "West" in recent years, in particular with respect to what is commonly referred to as the "Israeli-Palestinian conflict." Considering the volume of digital imagery decontextualized, reproduced, and circulated across time and space, it is not a wonder that a two-way street of distorted impressions has emerged. Reinforced through linguistic and cultural divides, such distortions are hardly blind to existent power asymmetries. The visual imagery of Palestinians that selectively filter through the powerful mainstream Western media apparatuses have played an important role in justifying Western and Israeli government policies in Israel/Palestine and the region at large—policies that include protracted occupation, expansionist settler-colonialism, and military repression.[1]

Recent years have witnessed a small but expanding body of critical literature that seeks to deconstruct the inherent disjunctions and/or biases in the current structure of knowledge production about Palestinians in the Western media, including its visual dimension (Said 1997; Friel and Falk 2007; Philo and Berry 2004, 2011). This growing body of knowledge is however only beginning to find audiences, despite its important potential implications for Western public opinion. An even smaller area of study engages in critical readings and

assessments of visual productions *within* Palestinian society, including cinema studies (Shohat 2006; Dabashi 2006), and Palestinian art (Boullata 2009). Yet, the visual panorama of Palestinian cultural production extends to the visual landscape that surrounds Palestinians' daily lives. A visual public sphere surrounds and informs the local publics of Palestinian towns, cities, and refugee camps through various forms of visual projections and media. These include commercial advertisements, billboards, local, regional and international television, posters, graffiti, and even architecture and urban design.

This paper will investigate two particular media genres of this visual panoply: the phenomenon of martyr posters produced during the second Palestinian Intifada, and commercial advertisements in the form of billboards. Both media shape the visual public sphere of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, (hereafter referred to as the Occupied Palestinian Territories [OPT]), and are largely creations of the 1993 Oslo Accords—formed and informed by its distinct historical and material trajectories. They also consciously engage in expressing distinct subjectivities that are imagined, manufactured, projected, and recycled within Palestinian life and political organizing. Behind these images lie contestations over hearts and minds, power and leadership, history and economy. By looking at their genesis, aesthetic preferences, and the processes of production, distribution and consumption, contestations over power within Palestinian society may be traced in stark and revealing ways. This research will explore these dimensions in an effort to shed light on these unique theatres, where the visual artifacts of the dystopian reality Palestinians live in the OPT reveal stories beyond caricature and propaganda.

## Historical Geography and Signification in the OPT

Cultural artifacts such as martyr posters do not emerge from a vacuum. Neither do martyrs. Neither do the commercial advertisements of the streets of Ramallah or Hebron. All are produced by historical trajectories specific to the Palestinian experience.

The seminal moment of Palestinian history is of course, the *Nakba*, when two-thirds of the Palestinian people were expelled from their homeland and dispersed throughout the Arab world during the ethnic cleansing campaign that accompanied the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. While the Nakba thematically infuses popular consciousness and its visual productions in different ways, the legacy and reality of more than four decades of military occupation adds a

second and determinative layer to daily life. The Israeli occupation has stifled development in the OPT and suffocated the local population through countless waves of colonization and repression. Between 1967 and 1994, more than fifteen hundred military orders regulated the "do's" and "don'ts" of life under occupation. Public expressions of Palestinian nationalism were severely repressed by Israel through killings, beatings, imprisonment, torture, fines, and censorship.[2]

Things began changing with the signing of the 1993 Oslo Accords, when the occupying Israeli military force incrementally redeployed from the centers of the main Palestinian residential localities. In its place, the Palestinian Authority (PA)/Palestinian National Authority (PNA) was created and empowered with various degrees of control over Palestinian life. Without exaggerating the extent of powers allocated within the jurisdiction of this new self-governing authority, the limited autonomy it was entrusted with created a margin of political breathing space that had been inexistent in the pre-Oslo period. Political organization and activity cautiously emerged from its underground status, and began operating in the open. The Fatah movement was accepted as a legal political entity by Israel, while other factions began operating in a semi-public manner, usually through various organizations that ran specific social, educational, and health platforms. Economic regeneration of the OPT was also initiated due to sustained foreign aid and the establishment of a new Palestinian legal and governance regime. Collectively these processes allowed, among other things, for the widening of the visual public sphere and its aesthetic and political boundaries.

The Israeli army redeployments from the centers of Palestinian towns were however a far cry from fulfilling the national aspirations of the Palestinian people and leadership. At best, they provided a margin of autonomy and self-governance to a people deprived of minimal aspects of self-determination for their entire modern history. At worst, the new reality masked a crueler more dangerous predicament that deepened colonial relations. In most cases, the Israeli military simply withdrew a few kilometers to the periphery of Palestinian residential concentrations, while maintaining a firm grip over the land, water, airspace, natural resources, electromagnetic spheres, and access routes of the new "autonomous" Palestinian enclaves.[3] In this sense, the creation of the PA "freed" Israel from its obligations toward the population while not fulfilling any aspects of the Palestinian demands for genuine sovereignty, self-determination, and return of the refugees—the main demands of the national movement. The reality, crystallizing more deeply over time, was a combination of military

occupation, settler colonialism, and apartheid (Middle East Project of the Democracy and Governance Program 2009). Moreover, this reality was consistent with Israel's long-standing operational plan dating from 1967, known as the Allon Plan (Achcar 2004: 205–222), which articulated Israel's vision of, and approach to, the future of the newly "conquered" territories.

The inherent instability of this arrangement and the contradictions it embodied in terms of interests, aspirations and power imbalances between colonizer and colonized, occupier and occupied, eventually resulted in the breakdown of political negotiations between Israel and the PLO, and the erupting of the al-Aqsa Intifada in September 2000, often referred to as the "second Intifada."

For the next five years, two simultaneous battles would be fought. Angered by the failure, humiliation and perceived obsolescence of negotiations, Palestinians across the OPT rose up in protest, almost as though they were continuing the first Intifada. Palestinians were equally inspired at the time by the success of the Lebanese resistance movement Hezbollah and its guerilla tactics, which successfully liberated the Israeli-occupied parts of south Lebanon, without negotiations. On the other hand, Israel used the collapse of negotiations and the eruption of popular protests to launch a campaign that could fulfill its larger strategic objectives through means not possible with the semblance of a negotiated process still maintained. As Israel saw it, if Palestinians did not wish to acquiesce politically in negotiations to the unhindered advance of its settler-colonial ambitions, they could, as the weaker party, be forced to submit to indefinite rule through military force. Ariel Sharon's provocation at the al-Aqsa mosque compound, which ignited the second Intifada, and the Israeli army's series of provocations (particularly assassinations) and military incursions throughout the uprising, enabled Israel's superior military forces to greatly weaken the Palestinian national project, both PA and popular social fabric alike. More than six thousand Palestinians were killed throughout the years of instability that began with the eruption of the second Intifada (at least 850 during assassination operations), and 31,000 were wounded (Palestinian Center for Human Rights 2011). Billions of dollars' worth of damage was also inflicted on Palestinian property, infrastructure, and livelihood. Most importantly, Israel used its repression of the uprising to restructure and consolidate its grip over Palestinian land through the construction of more settlements and the 700 km wall that snakes around the West Bank, while implementing a declared policy of *Hafrada* (Hebrew for "separation") from Palestinians.

The failure of negotiations, and Israel's policies of enforced pacification contributed to the splintering of the OPT geographically and politically. Internal Palestinian power struggles regarding how best to respond to the crisis of Palestinian life during the second Intifada emerged and culminated in the division of the Palestinian political sphere in 2007 between a Hamas-administered Gaza Strip, and a Fatah-administered West Bank. Each wing came to represent a different branch of Palestinian national expression and their differing views toward strategies for liberation, resistance to occupation, economic development and the attainment of the full range of Palestinian rights.[4]

It is this basic political, geographical, and historical background that forms the basis for understanding the visual artifacts addressed in this study. Martyr posters and commercial billboards have come to act as the most prominent visual canvasses that illustrate the competing political tendencies within the Palestinian post-Oslo political reality—a competition that revolves around interrogating the most suitable tactics, strategies, and subjectivities to achieve Palestinian rights. As shall be illustrated, the second Palestinian intifada created the conditions for the rise of what shall be referred to as *tayyar al-muqawama* (the current of resistance) within Palestinian society, openly positing itself as an alternative to *tayyar oslo*, or *tayyar al-mufawadat* (the Oslo current, or the negotiations current). With neither political tendency specifically affiliated to any one political party, the visual artifacts both tendencies produced provide sharply contrasting visions and notions of Palestinian agency and political practice.

## Tayyar al-Muqawama

### Resistance and the Iconography of Martyrdom

Martyr posters have been important communicative and discursive objects in the history of Palestinian struggle, including its armed activity (The Palestine Poster Project). The notion of "resistance" is inseparable from the *raison d'etre* of the martyr poster genre itself, informing Palestinian approaches toward Israel and the Zionist movement—the perceived enemies of the Palestinian people, and the cause of their dispersal and suffering in modern times. Here resistance is broadly defined in terms of a fundamental rejection of the status quo (the Palestinian state of dispersion, occupation, and repression) that entails taking up organized action—armed or peaceful, individual or

collective, intellectual, organizational, economical, and moral—that strengthens the Palestinian people's resolve to remain steadfast in the face of Israeli oppression and to counter and defeat their oppressors. Death on the path of this pursuit is almost unanimously described by Palestinian society as an act of martyrdom, borrowing a religious terminological category for a largely political/national end.

*Tayyar al-Muqawama* is informed by the rich history of Palestinian popular struggle that includes military, political, and artistic contributions from the launching of the modern Palestinian national movement to today. Armed struggle in particular has played an important role throughout the history of the Palestinian struggle in its search for voice, mobilization, and identity (Sayigh 1997). Support for armed struggle remains resilient within the Palestinian movement, finding continuous justification for expression in the context of Israel's iron-fisted settler-colonial policies. All Palestinian national factions still uphold the principle of the right to armed resistance of the Palestinian people, though parties and factions differ when it comes to using this tactic within their overall strategies. All factions nonetheless—including Fatah—have significant if not majority support within their ranks for the principle of armed struggle, even though party discipline usually enforces what the leadership calls for.

Hamas leads the most advanced and organized political expression of *tayyar al-muqawama* in the post-Oslo period. It strategizes the struggle with Israel in terms of attempting to achieve a balance of power (or at least deterrence) with Israel, which includes a substantial role for armed guerilla warfare. Inspired by the Hezbollah victory in southern Lebanon, and the deeper legacy of Palestinian armed struggle in Jordan and Lebanon, Hamas believes military struggle can at the very least create semi-liberated zones, which act as the operational base for the movement to continue struggling. Israel's September 2005 redeployment from the Gaza Strip was hailed by the movement as a vindication of this strategy, even though Gaza remained thoroughly dominated by Israel, albeit from greater distance.

In sum, the ascent of *tayyar al-muqawama* during the second Intifada, and its continued resilience within the Palestinian political theatre, is a testament to the distinct political circumstances that emerged in the wake of the collapse of negotiations, and Israel's subsequent waves of repression against the Palestinian people (Honig-Parnass and Haddad 2007; see also the *Israeli Occupation Archive*). As a historical trajectory, it engaged in cultural production in an attempt to consolidate forms of political and organizational

hegemony over Palestinian political praxis that distinguished itself from those of the PLO/PA leadership engaged in negotiations. Martyr posters became one of the most common canvasses for portraying the vision and imagination of a resistant Palestinian subjectivity—a subjectivity that captures the attributes of commemorating the irreversible sacrifices of its adherents; recruiting new adherents to the cause, while propagating normative social and political practices for wider audiences.

The martyr poster itself represents a specific genre of martyr commemoration in the OPT—a genre that also includes murals, banner, stencils, necklaces, key chains, videos, postcards, and calendars. In times of upheaval, such posters are found concentrated along the most traveled throughways of Palestinian cities, towns, and refugee camps, and pasted to public and private property including lampposts, homes, car hoods, and restaurant walls. They come in many sizes and colors displaying a diversity that ranges from simple black and white photocopies, to elaborate multi-colored computer generated graphic designs (figure 4.1). Perhaps the cheapest form of martyr commemoration are stenciled spray-paints on walls. Artists produce these stencils by recycling old X-rays, onto which they trace, then cut out, their designs.



**Figure 4.1**    A typical alleyway in Balata refugee camp.
*Source*:  Toufic Haddad.

While the typical impression among Western audiences of "Arab martyrs" is associated with the "jihad-promoting suicide bomber," the overwhelming majority of those featured on martyr posters belie this fallacy. In fact, there are many kinds of martyr posters because there are many kind of martyrs. "Martyrdom" is a malleable category, informed by nationalistic, religious epistemologies. Analysis of actual martyr posters can be used to disprove the traditional Western stereotypical impressions of martyrdom in Palestinian/Arab/Muslim society, while shedding light on entirely new scapes of signification.

Generally speaking, the majority of martyr posters depict "average" Palestinian civilians who were killed by the Israeli army during demonstrations or military incursions into Palestinian cities. Typical is the poster of Sharif al-'Umari, a father of five killed in April of 2002 in the Ramallah neighborhood of Umm al-Sharayet. His poster shows a man in his early fifties wearing a business suit and a quirky smile, his baldhead placed adjacent to a central image of the Dome of the Rock. The poster notes, "He was martyred while buying bread for his family," and calls for "glory and eternity for all innocent martyrs." The highlighting of innocence as a repeated theme in many martyr posters serves to establish one pole of a moral binary that will be balanced, as shall be seen, by the resistant subject.

Another kind of martyr poster commemorates figures who were not killed in the struggle with Israel, but whose death nonetheless provides an opportunity to honor those who dedicated their lives to the struggle for Palestinian rights. Faisal al-Husayni, a leading Palestinian nationalist from Jerusalem, died of a heart attack while on a diplomatic mission for the PLO in Kuwait. Though his death was entirely attributed to natural causes, the poster Fatah had printed described him as a "martyr, hero and great fighter" (figure 4.2). Dressed in a business suit, al-Husayni waves to his viewers, his image set against the skyline of the Old City of Jerusalem. Even though al-Husayni was Muslim, the poster designer chose a section of the skyline that features the basilica of a Catholic convent more prominently than several Muslim holy sites in the background.[5] The juxtaposition of Christian and Islamic symbols emphasizes both al-Husayni's and Fatah's pluralistic religious approach to the national cause. His veneration as a martyr acknowledges his life of dedication and his perceived role as a protector of Palestinian rights, particularly in Jerusalem.

The martyr poster of 'Issa al-'Ali highlights the nationalist dimension of martyrdom over an exclusively Islamic one. Al-'Ali, a Christian from Bethlehem, was killed in one of several Israeli incursions into
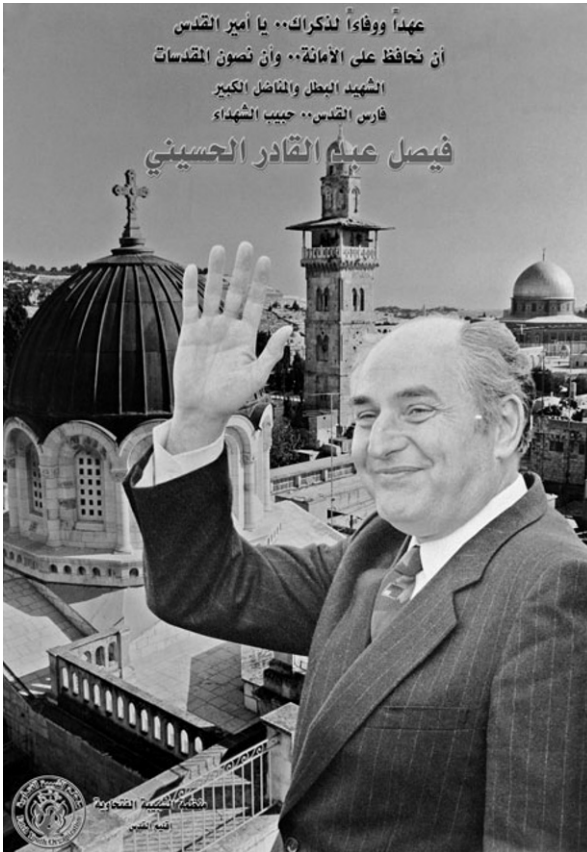
**Figure 4.2** Martyr poster of Palestinian political leader Faisal al-Husayni issued by Fatah Shabiba.

*Source*: Author's collection.

the city in 2002. His commemorative poster, typical of those printed of other Christian martyrs, is almost identical to those of Palestinian Muslims, except that it includes the Church of the Nativity in the background, which others typically do not.

Palestinian martyr posters are not even limited to Palestinians. Raffaele Ciriello, a veteran Italian war photographer for *Corriere della Sera*, was shot and killed by rounds from an Israeli tank in March 2002 while covering the first Israeli reoccupation of Ramallah. His martyr poster, sponsored by a local Palestinian media center, features Ciriello with his camera, set against a background of solid black

(figure 4.3). Arabic, English, and Italian script describes him as "the martyr of truth and freedom" and promises, "Palestine remembers you always." Other foreigners killed by the Israeli army during the second Intifada, have been similarly memorialized.

The politics of the martyrdom category allows for fluidity in application that even extends beyond the Palestinian context. In 2005, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad group published a large poster featuring 14 Arab and international journalists killed covering the conflicts in Palestine and Iraq. Their faces frame a central image of journalists killed and injured in the line of duty, positioned under the headline: "With our blood we write for Palestine." The Israeli and American flags are interlaced in the upper right hand corner, with a caption that reads "partners in crime." Across the bottom is a quotation from Fathi Shiqaqi, Islamic Jihad's former secretary general, who was assassinated in Malta in 1995: "The intellectual is the first who resists and the last who breaks."

There are plenty of posters of Palestinian militants as well. The political factions who commission the posters often design templates with preset frames, words, symbols, and factional insignias. Only the martyr's picture is left for insertion. Templates are seen as helpful because in moments where there are many martyrs, designers do not have time to produce an individual design for each.[6] Representatives



**Figure 4.3**  Martyr poster of Italian photojournalist Raffaele Ciriello, issued by the Palestine Media Center.

*Source*: Author's collection.

from Palestinian political factions together with family members, approach commercial print shops with the picture of their martyrs in hand, wanting posters printed as fast as possible, usually within the 24 hours within which the body is traditionally buried.

In February 2008, Hamas printed three almost identical posters to commemorate the deaths of three militants killed in a failed attack on an Israeli position on the border of the Gaza Strip. The posters feature a large portrait of each man, and below that, images of each in a kind of military posture, brandishing Kalashnikov machine guns, and rocket propelled grenade (RPG) launchers. A Qur'anic verse venerating bravery and the willingness to become a martyr appears at the top along with a flag bearing the Islamic creed that "there is no god but God [Allah]." Notably absent is a Palestinian flag, a means by which Hamas increasingly distinguished itself at the time from the strictly nationalist factions of the PLO.[7] The color green, a signifier for Islam, is the poster's primary color, as opposed to red, favored by the leftist factions, or the yellow and black of Fatah.

The aesthetic choices made for martyr posters emphasize the social and political mores of Palestinian political factions, which they expect to impress upon local society. Martyr posters of children, for example, occasionally feature the child brandishing his father's weapon. Teenage boys are often depicted throwing rocks or "molotov cocktails," symbolizing their participation in protests against Israeli forces, and reproducing the iconic imagery of the first Intifada. For young men old enough to participate actively in militant activity, the gun becomes a common prop symbolizing their willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice for their national cause. The expectations for a Palestinian youth to engage in the national cause along the path to adulthood are thus reinforced.

In cases where the family of a given martyr does not have an image of the deceased brandishing a weapon, the poster designer may take the liberty of "photo-shopping" the martyr's face onto the body of a weapon-carrying militant. This is the case with two martyr posters printed up for Hassan al-Qadi, a militant from Fatah killed in 2001 alongside two children, in a mysterious explosion at his house in Ramallah. Fatah printed the first poster using the generic Fatah template of the regional branch of the party. It features al-Qadi dressed in a white pressed shirt and a red tie with the Dome of the Rock in the background. A few days after the first poster appeared, a second poster of al-Qadi appeared. This one featured him brandishing an automatic rifle and standing in front of a portrait of Khalil al-Wazir,

or Abu Jihad, a Fatah leader assassinated by the Israeli Mossad in 1988 at his home in Tunis. Careful inspection of the two posters reveals that the face of al-Qadi is exactly the same on both, except that in the second version, his image was flipped along a vertical axis, as if viewed in a mirror. A difference in image quality between the cropped out martyr's head and shirt in the second rendering, makes the transposition even more apparent.

## Aesthetics, Mores, Iconography

The aesthetic composition of any martyr poster tends to reflect the dominant worldview of the group that commissions it. In this regard, posters of female martyrs tend to emphasize the most important attributes of Palestinian women in the service of the national cause: motherhood, modesty, patriotism, and deference to patriarchy.

The poster of 'Aisha Abu 'Odeh, who was 39 and a mother of 8, features her seated, holding her infant daughter in her lap against a backdrop that recalls an English rose garden. Shrapnel from an Israeli tank killed her while she was visiting her mother at the 'Aida refugee camp near Bethlehem. A white hijab covers her hair. Arabic letters describes her as "the mother martyr," and at the bottom of the poster, these words, as if from the baby to her mother: "Mother . . . It is not foreign to the terrorist Sharon and his soldiers, that the killer of children and women, would kill you in cold blood." The pained, even melodramatic nature of the poster's wording clearly aim to appeal to the protective instincts of a patriarchal society, who see the safeguarding of women as part of social responsibility and male honor.

Women however can equally engage in militant subjectivity. Wafa' Idris, 27, from al-Am'ari refugee camp in Ramallah, was the first Palestinian woman to blow herself up in an explosion in Jerusalem, killing an 81-year-old Israeli man in January 2002. The poster template used for many male martyrs in the Ramallah district is the one used for Idris. It features her dressed in a shirt and headband printed in the kufiyya pattern (figure 4.4). Her brown, wavy shoulder-length hair is showing, making her image less palatable to the more religious elements in Palestinian society. Yet wearing the pattern of the national headdress somehow mitigates the indiscretion—that and the story of how she sacrificed her own life, which is widely known.

Some of the most audacious and creative martyrdom posters in the West Bank emerge from Nablus. With its three refugee camps and
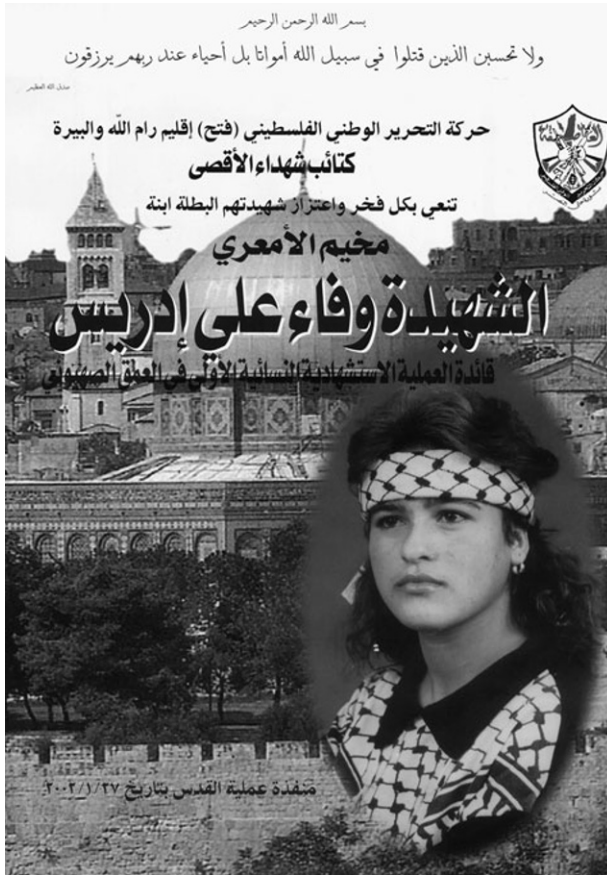
**Figure 4.4**　Martyr poster of Wafa' Idris, the first Palestinian female suicide bomber, issued by Fatah.
*Source*: Author's collection.

its dense old city Kasbah, Nablus is very much the center of political activity in the West Bank, particularly the region's militant wings. Almost 600 Palestinians were killed in Nablus since the beginning of the second Intifada,[8] with thousands more injured or jailed. The galleries of martyr posters, which bedeck Palestinian streets in towns like Nablus, act as a constant public reminder of those who have died in the struggle with Israel, helping sustain the Palestinian self-perception of a people engaged in a struggle for their rights. The posters themselves help perpetuate these notions. The martyr poster of

Ahmad Abu Tabuk, a militant leader of the al-Aqsa Martyr Brigades, features Tabuk posing with an M16 assault rifle, military accouterments on his chest, a kufiyya around his neck, and perched on his left shoulder, a hawk. To his left, a panther looks out menacingly, fangs pronounced "You lived a leader, and remain a voracious panther, a high flying hawk and a brilliant leader," reads the legend. Across the bottom are more accolades, referencing a poem from the pre-Islamic era extolling bravery, sacrifice, and love of homeland.

The animals featured in Abu Tabuk's poster are direct references to his militant activity in some of the earlier armed cells of Fatah which existed during the first Intifada, namely the Black Panthers and the Fatah Hawks—both deactivated by 1993 and replaced by the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades at the beginning of the second Intifada. However, other poster compositions sometimes feature clip-art versions of wild animals, such as leopards, tigers, panthers, lions, hawks, eagles, and other birds of prey, downloaded from the internet. In Arab tribal tradition, these animals symbolize masculine qualities of strength, agility, ferocity, and hunter's acumen—values transmitted across generations through Arab poetry and literature.

Many militant groups use an imaginative set of *noms de guerre* to describe their martyrs. A poster by the Nablus al-Aqsa Martyr Brigades features 12 different militants on one poster, each featured within a circular cropped image atop the al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem. Beneath ten of the images are the respective *noms de guerre* of each martyr, including "the general," the "panther," "the tiger," the "lion," the "maker of earthquakes," the "hawk," and "the bearer of difficult tasks." Images of two senior martyred al-Aqsa Brigade leaders are set a little larger and just above the ten junior martyrs featured below them. Many martyr posters use the technique of inserting the image of a senior martyr on the same poster of a younger, more junior martyr, as a way to emphasize that the latter represents the continuity in a given lineage of resistance. The martyr poster of Ayman Makhluf of Nablus features not only a lineage of resistance but also a hierarchy of resistant figures, somewhat akin to how some Orthodox Christian icons depict the hierarchy of religious figures, angels, and saints. In the case of Makhluf, the hierarchy and lineage begins with PLO leader Yasser Arafat and deposed Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, followed by Na'el Abu Sharkh and Ahmad Abu Tabuk (senior Fatah militants killed), followed by images of Makhluf himself.

Weapons are also a staple prop in the militant poster genre. The poster of Husayn 'Ubayyat of Bethlehem, the first Palestinian assassinated by Israel in the second Intifada, features him superimposed

against the iconic setting of the Dome of the Rock, wearing sun glasses, dressed in military fatigues, and carrying a large machine gun—the kind usually mounted on military vehicles. Belts of bullets drape his shoulder and gun (figure 4.5). Size, quantity and quality seem to matter when it comes to weapons depiction, with M16s and
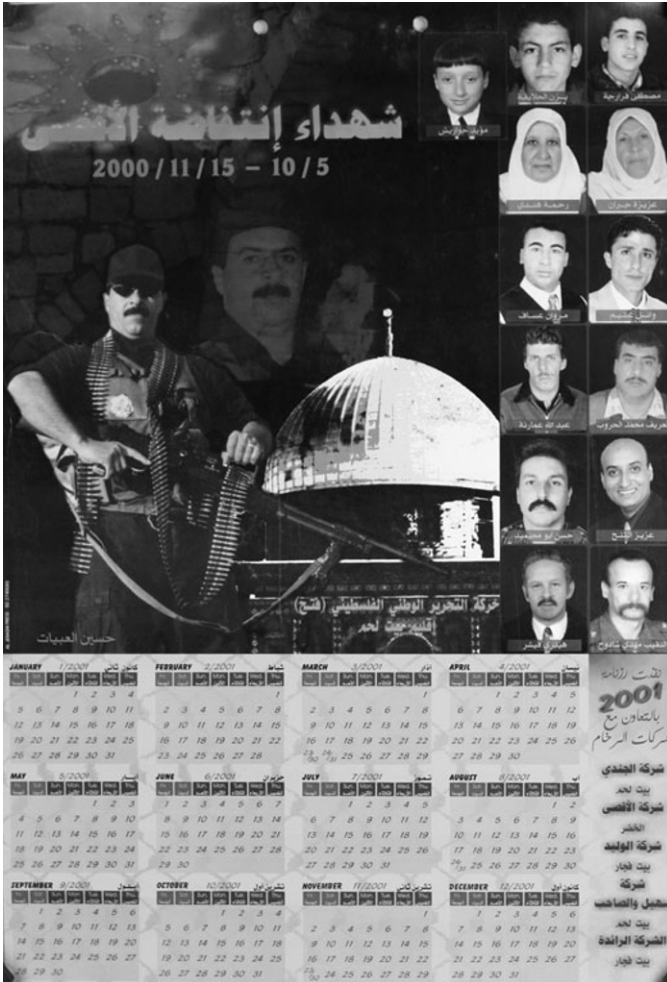


**Figure 4.5** Year 2001 calendar featuring the martyrs of Bethlehem, prominently featuring Husayn 'Ubayyat, the first Palestinian assassinated during the al-Aqsa Intifada.

*Source*: Author's collection.

less common arms such as the German MB5 not only emphasizing the martyr's nationalist credentials, but also, seemingly, his masculinity. Because these weapons are only accessible to Palestinians on the black market, usually acquired through Israeli organized crime networks, their inclusion in posters implies the martyr's affiliation with the underground world of the *muqawama*, or resistance. The only "legal" weapon Palestinians are able to carry (restricted to PA security personnel) is the Kalashnikov/AK-47. In this respect, there is an inversion of the historical role of the Kalashnikov rifle, which used to be the idolized weapon of choice of "third world" militants. In Palestine, it is the M16 that now shows a man's mettle.

The defiance and machismo so often depicted in militant martyr posters appears to have more behind it than mere bravado. Take for example the martyr poster of Haytham Salih, which shows him in three different poses, each equally scripted and composed: one shows him looking to the left with his trusted M16, a second looking to the right behind a pair of sunglasses, his cheek resting on his hand, and a third central and larger picture showing him looking directly at the viewer pointing the muzzle of his rifle so close to the camera lens it has begun to blur. The central image brings to mind a Hollywood movie poster, or the cover of a hip-hop album. Irrespective of the aesthetic influences behind the poster, Salih, like other militants, clearly took his photographs in anticipation of his future potential death, attempting to control his image once it ultimately took place through assassination. The anticipation of death by militants—and their attempt to control the final image they will ultimately be remembered by—communicate a powerful set of moral assumptions to the martyr's post-mortem audiences. This includes the complete absence of fear in choosing to confront oppression, and the inversion in the classical conceptualizations of death whereby, rather than signifying finality, it projects a sense of life, and the continuous lineage of resistance among those who will follow. Fearlessness of one's own death after all imparts a sense of vitality, and freedom of the will, despite the lack of freedom of the body under occupation.

Thus, martyr posters encode a rich variety of aesthetics and significations that have almost entirely been ignored by academic scholarship, and which this section has only barely begun to scratch in breadth and depth (see Abou Hashhash 2006). The premium placed on defiance by Palestinian political factions and illustrated in their martyrdom posters cannot be understood if disembodied from the context that created it. At the end of the day, martyr posters are a product of a dialectic within the Palestinian public sphere where

intricate social and political dynamics play themselves out, primarily on two fronts: between the Israeli occupation and Palestinian society, and within Palestinian society itself.

On the one hand, there is the occupation, where Israeli repression of the Palestinian national movement and the attempt to enforce individual and collective subjugation, has always involved psychological pressure against Palestinians to extract personal and collective concessions and surrender. The conceptualization of the martyr, and the very act of commemorating him/her through producing a martyr poster emerged as a way for national movement actors to defy the Israeli psychological and practical attempt at eliciting Palestinian submission, while physically claiming and incorporating public and private spaces into a nationalist project scape.

On the other hand, Palestinian martyr posters engage in a preexistent internal Palestinian dialog over strategy, tactics, and the relevant subjective, moral molding that inevitably accompanies political praxis. The outbreak of the second Intifada that created the context within which the profusion of the martyr poster phenomenon evolved and flourished, was an implicit testament to the popular disappointment with the path of political negotiations chosen by the PLO leadership as a means to achieve Palestinian rights. By encapsulating particular political, social, and moral articulations organized around resistant themes, martyr posters became a visual medium that implicitly promoted discursive and ethical parameters for Palestinian political practice, which diverged distinctly from those of the negotiations strategy. As we shall see next, *tayyar Oslo*, which advocated negotiations, equally articulated its own set of moral, political and social understandings that, in turn, produced their own forms of visual imagery and subjectivity. We shall now turn to analyzing these productions in the form of commercial billboards as perhaps the most prominent medium for expressing this latter worldview, and which was intimately tied to the political economy of the Palestinian political leadership itself.

## Tayyar Oslo

*Tayyar Oslo* emerges from an entirely different worldview to that of *tayyar al-muqawama*. It is led politically by Fatah, together with a few small liberal/leftist groups, (mainly FIDA [The Palestinian Democratic Union], and the Palestine People's Party—the former Communist Party), who can more accurately be described as neoliberal in orientation ever since the demise of the Soviet bloc in the early

1990s. Central to its strategy is the notion that a negotiated settlement between Israel and the Palestinian people is the strategic and most desirable path to achieving Palestinian rights.

Informed by the historical experience of the PLO, which at an earlier period had engaged in armed struggle, this current came to believe this tactic is counterproductive within the context of the asymmetrical power relationship between the Palestinians and Israel. Its adherents maintain that historical developments, contradictions in the regional order, clever diplomacy, international support, and steadfast, practical leadership, can allow at the very least for the establishment of a state in the OPT as a first step toward attaining all Palestinian rights. *Tayyar Oslo* affirms that Palestinians must concentrate on their "strengths," including the moral and legal obligations of the international community (as upheld in countless UN resolutions) to find a just resolution to the plight of the Palestinian people. It also asserts that if this is to become a reality, Palestinians need to focus their efforts on building their own base of strength on a community level and internationally. This includes making Palestinian communities prosperous and attractive to investment both local and international, with the private sector acting as the primary engine for communal improvement and development. The common, international "currency" of capitalism is believed to grease the wheels of state-building, incorporating Palestinian national capital into the regional order, while satisfying a local bourgeois order that will stabilize the situation domestically.

This current was able to take full prominence within Fatah and the PA after the death of Arafat in November 2004, and particularly after the internecine fighting of 2007. Led by PA president Mahmoud Abbas, and his prime minister delegate Salam Fayyad, this wing believed the second Intifada and its experiments in armed struggle were disastrous for the Palestinian cause, necessitating strategic shifts. They embarked on a joint course of institutional and economic restructuring, combined with the recruitment of a new security force trained by the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Together with a steady stream of international aid, it also empowered the local Palestinian bourgeoisie to have a free hand in determining the captive economic markets of the OPT's areas A and B, where most of the Palestinian population resides. Financial aid and technical expertise of Western governments and international finance institutions (IFIs) flowed to the West Bank, while Israel facilitated this "economic pacification" by taking a series of measures on the ground—opening up checkpoints to facilitate the movement of

people and goods, and allowing for the transfer of funds to the PA. Major Palestinian capital formations from the private sector, incubated in the earlier period of the peace process, and linked to international and especially Arabian Gulf capital, rose to prominence under the Fayyad government, dominating the Palestinian economy and reconstruction efforts (Hanieh 2011). Public-private formations like the Palestine Investment Fund (PIF) and powerful private sector conglomerates (PADICO) and banks (the Arab Bank, Cairo Amman Bank, Bank of Palestine) which in turn are linked with powerful Palestinian families, came to invest in or control strategic corners of the Palestinian economy, from food production, import and service provision, to real estate and natural gas extraction.

Their ability to secure lucrative contracts for the privatization of electricity and telephone networks, among others sectors of the Palestinian economy (*pre*-state privatization), earned them and their investors enormous profits. Israel would also extract economic rents from this process, as its financial and supply networks formed the conduit through which international aid was channeled (Taghdisi-Rad 2011; Hever 2010). The Fayyad government's 2008 Palestinian Reform and Development Plan (PRDP) developed in collaboration with the World Bank and the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) represented the culminating synthesis of neoliberal developmental agendas shared by the endogenous and exogenous wings of the Palestinian state-building trajectory (Hanieh 2008). The World Bank would increase its activity in the West Bank after the death of Arafat, with 40 projects launched over the course of the next six years. In total the World Bank has engaged in at least 74 projects in the OPT investing US$ 2.86 billion, between 1994 and the 2012 (World Bank Projects and Operations 2013).

In sum, *tayyar Oslo* charted a course where it believed adherence to the dictates of neoliberal developmental policy, together with the wishes and desires of a coddled new bourgeoisie, could create the conditions for realizing Palestinian rights. Economic and security reformation, together with institutional and "good governance" reforms could be used to stabilize the situation locally, gain approval from the international community, build diplomatic pressure on Israel to fulfill UN resolutions, and create a snowball effect of Palestinian achievements and prosperity that would eventually lead to statehood.

In this context, the cultural and image-related productions of *tayyar Oslo*—in this case, commercial billboards—illustrated a worldview that was naturally more attuned to the practices of commercial advertising in more developed commercial markets beyond Palestine.

They nonetheless operated in a particular context where the entirely unnatural state of occupation and repression under which Palestinians lived could not be ignored. The governmental institutions, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and nouveau riche classes profiting from the aid flows and economic rents created by *tayyar Oslo* and the Fayyadist reforms, hence navigated a delicate path to gain acceptance for their actions and strategy. Their public discourse and subsequent image production stressed the noncontradiction between free-market principles of consumerism and individualism on the one hand, and the impetus toward national liberation on the other.

### *Image Production under Neo–Liberalization*

Commercial billboards are the most prominent intervention of *tayyar Oslo* in the visual public sphere in the OPT today. While the majority of these billboards are indeed advertising commercial products and services, they frequently also feature civic education agendas promoted by the PA, and local and international governmental and nongovernmental organizations.

Commercial advertisements can be found in a myriad of localities throughout the OPT. Large billboards can be seen on roads, intersections, houses, bus stops, commercial properties, and public spaces. They come in various forms, from horizontally stretched banners as long as a residential neighborhood block, to vertical draping on the sides of ten story-high buildings. Demarcation barriers in the middle of roads will also have smaller poster-like adverts spaced roughly 50 meters a part, while large two-sided banners also hang on special bridge-like structures erected for both oncoming and forward moving traffic to see. "T- Poles" up to 20 meters high and "Tri-vision" structures have also become an increasing part of the skyline, once dominated by low-lying buildings, homes, and mosque minarets (figure 4.6).

As would be expected, advertisers target the most traveled routes for their placement, which, in the context of Israel's closure policies, not only includes the centers of towns and markets, but also the tributary routes leading to Israeli occupation checkpoints and terminals, where long lines of cars and people tend to get locked in gridlock traffic.

Advertising spaces are traditionally rented by advert producers with money going to property owners be they private or municipal. While property rents vary, municipal fees on adverts in a major commercial center like Ramallah are remarkably cheap, costing 30 Jordanian dinars (about US$42) per square meter, per year. With

**Figure 4.6** A "T-Pole" in Ramallah, simultaneously advertising for XL Energy Drink while commemorating the completion of eight years in prison by Fatah Secretary General for the West Bank, Marwan Barghouti.
*Source*: Toufic Haddad.

rates like these, it comes as no surprise that billboards proliferate across the Palestinian landscape. As of yet, there are no commercial advertising laws, which prevent the erecting of advertisements in certain areas, or constrain what they advertise. The visual public sphere throughout the OPT has hence become increasingly cluttered with unorganized and unregulated adverts catering to advertiser needs. Advertisers have also moved beyond the boundaries of areas A and B where the PA is permitted to operate under the Oslo Accords, erecting billboards in area C beneath Israel control, with the Israeli army rarely interfering.

The quantitative and qualitative proliferation of commercial billboards would not have been possible were it not for advances in promotional technologies worldwide, combined with a locally conducive political and economic environment. The latter was ushered in by the 1993 Oslo Accords and the subsequent Protocol on Economic Relations signed in 1994 ("the Paris Protocol"), which essentially established a form of customs union between the parties. By late 1995, the PA Ministry of Economy and Trade issued circulars, informing all international companies that they may operate in the OPT only through a direct importer, agent or distributor "registered in the Companies Register of the Palestinian Authority which is separate from the Israeli register" (Wertheim 1997: 24–25). This subsequently led to the PA setting up its own agencies or monopolies

to import goods from Israel, as well as from third countries. The PA areas became a captive market dominated by the agencies and middlemen able to secure the agency contracts for trade import—an arrangement that was well known to the international community and of course Israel.[9]

The economic rents distributed under the aegis of the PA were tolerated by the international community because they were seen as ways that the newly established authority could attract international and domestic Palestinian capital for the purpose of consolidating a financial and political powerbase (Amundsen, Giacaman, and Khan 2004). With the onset of calls for financial and governance reforms that emerged in 2002 and 2003 after the outbreak of the second Palestinian Intifada, leading to the emergence of the dominance of the Fayyad/Abbas political economic trajectory dominating the West Bank today, the monopoly and agency structure of the Arafat era was restructured and forced to operate beneath stricter financial auditing and transparency regulations, as demanded by the Western donor governments. Their intention was to monitor "who controlled what," for the purpose of preventing elements of this order financing potentially destabilizing political and economic activity (read: Financing Palestinian resistance formations). However, the oligarchic-like structure was permitted to remain and was even encouraged beneath the notion of promoting private sector-led growth.

The OPTs political economy hence found visual expression in billboards created and paid for by the new elites who were both sponsoring particular products, but also a political agenda that was opposed to armed resistance, and depended on financial and security "stability" to succeed. Perhaps the best expression of this collusion of interests can be seen in the case of Sky Advertising Company and the forces behind it.

While there are various dimensions to the chain of activities that result in billboard production—from design, to print, to distribution—only a handful of large advertising companies offer the start-to-finish services from concept creation and development to final advert production and placement. Sky dominates the advertising industry in the OPT, with a repertoire of services that include graphic design and printing, public relations, event management, promotion (direct marketing), media planning, and hanging (indoor and outdoor). Its website proudly describes itself as "a pioneer advertising and public relations company in Palestine."[10]

Sky is a private company, which, up until 2009, was managed by Tariq Abbas, son of PA President Mahmoud Abbas.[11] It is also an

exclusive affiliate of a regional network of public relations firms linked to a prominent PR firm known as ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller, self-described as "the region's premier public relations consultancy, with a growing portfolio of blue-chip corporate and government clients" (Asda'a Burson-Marsteller n.d.). ASDA'A conducts an annual "Arab Youth Survey," which allows Sky to benefit from information on the attitudes and activities of Arab youth, who in a place like the OPT, compose 41 percent of the population below the age of 14. ASDA'A is part of what is known as the MENACOM Group, "the region's leading communications network" and is majority owned by WPP, one of the world's leading communications services networks, employing 135,000 people working in over 2,000 offices in 107 countries (Asda'a Burson-Marsteller n.d)

The broad resources and connections at Sky's disposal prove useful for its membership in the Arab Palestinian Investment Company (APIC), a local holding company that owns or holds dominant shares in a range of the manufacturing, distribution and service sectors. Its website describes its investments as "enabling local consumers to choose quality products and services that were previously unavailable or imported at a high cost" (Arab Palestinian Investment Company 2009b). APIC essentially functions as a conglomerate of those who have been able to secure the agency contracts for particular businesses and services in the OPT. Its portfolio includes an array of products and services ranging from food to aluminum, with APIC subsidiaries forging strategic partnerships with multi-national companies including Philip Morris Tobacco, Procter & Gamble, Abbott International, Beiersdorf (Nivea), Eli Lilly, B. Braun, Hyundai Motors, GlaxoSmithKline, and Aventis. In 2009, APIC's capital investment portfolio stood at US$48 million, while enjoying US$274 million in sales. APIC products imported and advertised through Sky on the local market include Kraft foods, Nivea creams, Hugo Boss perfumes, Pringles crisps, Tide washing powder, Always sanitary products, Crest toothpaste, and Wella hair and beauty products. These products, which flooded the market after the Paris economic protocol, naturally competed with various similar local products, weakening the OPT's already weak productive base in favor of the interests of the trading sector.

In addition to linkages with global commercial enterprises, Sky's advertising has also been contracted to engage in promotional campaigns for the United States Agency for International Development, both directly and through subcontracts (Entous 2009). (Reuters) Sky has also accepted contracts to advertise for Israeli products, such as Strauss and Tnuva dairy products.

In sum, the pronounced and deepening neoliberal turn of the PLO/PA, served to deepen the link between the local captive market conditions of the OPT and global circuits of capital, with its varying political and economic interests. In doing so, a political-economic order came into existence that was nepotistic, self-promotional, and predatory, and which, consistent with neoliberalism elsewhere, eroded productive capacities, while fragmenting the social fabric. It relied on promoting imagery that expressed values and norms that advanced a consumerist, individualistic worldview, at the expense of values that promoted confronting the occupation.

### Refashioning the Palestinian Subject?

The basic orientation of commercial advertisements in the OPT does not markedly differ from the commercial orientation of advertisements found in any capitalist theatre throughout the world. That is, they focus on marketing their products and services to the widest audience possible, for the purpose of meeting (and sometimes creating) consumer demand, and controlling the largest stake possible of their markets. Where they differ is that they operate within the entirely unnatural regime of military occupation and co-exist with the national liberation modality that all Palestinians are forced to relate to because of the continuing existence of the occupation. *Tayyar Oslo* was hence forced to relate to, justify and normalize its commercial interests such that they were seen as legitimate, natural and even a form of resistance themselves.

Such a task however was not so simple. If commercial advertisements in independent western capitalist societies operate upon the presumption of the existence of "free," individualistic, self-maximizing subjects as the essential condition of the consumer, such presumptions do not particularly hold true when speaking of an oppressed, colonized society engaged in a struggle for national self-determination: Palestinians are certainly not free; "Western" liberal values of individualistic, consumerist lifestyles are hardly prevalent or even possible on a wide scale (with the exception of narrow urban pockets) while familial, tribal, village and religious denominational affinities continue to yield powerful social, political and economic weight, even within Palestinian urban centers. Navigating the contours of this incongruence hence becomes the creative space within which advertisers can experiment to get their message across and bend the material circumstances to their commercial, profit-bearing interests.

One approach adopted by advertisers is to ignore outright any contradiction between the advertisements they portray and the audience to which they market. It is hence not uncommon to find ready-made commercial advertisements that could be featured anywhere else in the "free" world. For instance, advertisements for the locally produced Hirbawi home furniture company frequently feature healthy western European looking families comfortably enjoying the privacy of their family spaces (and furniture) with their handsome offspring. Images of urban youth breakdancing in an advert for "XL power drink" reflect the total detachment of advertisers from the social reality of most Palestinians, be it with regard to their traditional drink preferences, clothing style, or dance. A billboard for Veet hair removal products for women featuring a seductive and smooth-armed woman, gets away with not looking or acting the way women tend to look and act in the OPT's public domain, partially because the product itself (ready-made hair removal strips), did not previously exist in the market, and hence must compete with more traditional sugar-based hair removal solutions common in Arab societies (figure 4.7). In such cases, the Western derivation of the products and the depiction of Western models is not merely insensitive to the local audience, but a deliberate intervention on behalf of advertisers



**Figure 4.7** A billboard bridging the main road in Bethlehem advertising women's hair removal strips.

*Source*: Toufic Haddad.

to promote Western beauty aesthetics, as well as the alleged superiority of Western-originating products and lifestyles at the expense of local ones. This is a particularly prominent feature of advertisements for health and beauty products, which hardly ever feature men or women who "look" Palestinian or Arab. Remaining indifferent to local customs, or even emphasizing the foreign nature of the product in advertisements equally plays on the tension domestic constituencies, particularly youth, experience, caught between domestic obligations of family, tribe, tradition, and religion versus the pleasures and freedom of activity and expression promoted in the adverts.

A different set of advertisements do attempt to modify adverts to local aesthetic conditions using "Arab looking" models. Blond hair is absent; hair for women is often hidden behind a headscarf and men sport more swarthy features, often in the form of tightly cropped beards. They nonetheless engage in the same activities as would be seen in a Western advertising context, whether it be drinking Coca Cola at a family dinner table or enjoying a steamy plate of Uncle Ben's rice. Many of these advertisements are in fact taken directly from large multinational corporations, which have subsidiaries in larger Arab states, usually Egypt or the Gulf region. Though marketed to the public at large, their aesthetic mores reflect additional class dimensions. For instance, the above Coca-Cola advert features families sitting around a dining room table, with the accouterments of a middle class lifestyle surrounding them. In contrast, poor Palestinian families quite often sit or kneel on the floor, or low-lying tables when they eat, often seated around a collective large platter between them.

### Redefining Resistance

Ethnic signification in advertisements, however, goes beyond portraying generic "Arabs" to the targeting of a more specific Palestinian-centric subject. The major Palestinian mobile telephone service provider, Jawwal, is part of the Paltel Group, the largest private sector company grouping in the OPT (in terms of numbers of employees and net worth). It is also one of the largest, if not *the* largest advertiser spending the equivalent of 15.7 million dollars on advertising in 2010 (Paltel 2010: 68), with multiple full-page adverts in local newspapers, dozens of billboards up on any given day of the week, and radio and telephone commercials in the local audio-visual media.[12] Previous to 2009, Jawwal enjoyed a monopoly position as the only Palestinian mobile phone operator, with its only competition being Israeli mobile phone companies.

Although Jawwal has gone through many phases of advertising since its establishment, many of its earlier adverts tended to reproduce the detached, classist composition previously described. Hence, for example, one 2008 advert shows a "handsome" well-dressed Western-looking businessman, receiving his text messages while seated in an international airport. The advertisement not only consciously markets itself to the mobile and financially well-off elements of Palestinian society, but also boasts its interconnectivity with international telecom groupings, enabling subscribers to receive their text messages when in foreign lands. It is worth noting that this advertisement appeared at a time when the siege of Gaza was at its height, and the possibility of movement for the great majority of Gaza Strip residents was restricted to an extremely limited few of the population.

A second advertisement from this period features the back of a well-dressed man seated on a pristine, empty beachfront, with the slogan "Call freely." The advertisement implies one of two possibilities: for those able to travel to virgin beaches around the world, Jawwal users can always make their calls; equally, those stuck on the beaches of Gaza (the OPT's only coastal geography, which happens to be far more crowded and littered than the image featured in the advert), who are not free enough to travel, can still experience the freedom to call.

Jawwal advertisements appeared to more consciously develop specifically Palestinian-centric subjects that related to the occupation's repressive conditions, after the 2009 liberalization of the mobile phone market in the OPT. The introduction of competition resulted in the entrance of Wataniyya mobile into the mobile telephone operators market—a majority Qatari-owned company, with a significant stake held by the PA investment arm, the Palestine Investment Fund (PIF). Jawwal launched a series of four adverts with the slogan "Your ambitions cannot be challenged by restrictions" featuring an elderly Palestinian farmer, head wrapped in the traditional kufiyya, hoeing his land; a young bearded male painter, putting the final touches on a large portrait; a woman in a hijab admiringly smiling over the shoulder of her daughter combing the hair of a doll; and a child doing his homework, beneath the light of a kerosene-fueled lamp. The latter image consciously emulated an iconic image of Yasser Arafat seated in his headquarters during the Israeli siege of Ramallah in 2003, patiently doing his work beneath the dim lighting of a battery-powered lamp, and yet another iconic UNRWA image of a Palestinian refugee child (from the 1950s) doing his homework under the light of a street lamp.

Similar to martyr posters, Jawwal adverts utilize archetypes of "typical" Palestinians, in this case peasants, artists, mothers, and students. They also assume the known restrictions and oppression of life in the OPT, but utilize them in the service of a subjectivity that advocates concepts of connectivity to the land, artistic expression, parental love, and studious perseverance. The adverts serve to reframe these attributes as alternative forms of resistance, as the pursuit of such ambitions are framed as courageous pursuits under occupation and its "restrictions." After all, in the upside-down world of the OPT, daily tasks which by all accounts would be deemed "normal" in a free context (studying, childrearing, etc.), are tinged by restrictions so serious that normalcy itself acquires premium value, and the act of striving for it, can be cast as a form of resistance. Unlike martyr posters however, whose subjectivities promote and reproduce a resistant personae that physically confronts the occupation, these adverts aim to frame daily individual life practices as heroic, while transforming their audiences into loyal subscribers of a private, commercial profit-oriented service. It is further implied that such subscription facilitates the resistant subject, by keeping the dreams and connections of an occupied people alive. If Palestinian students and mothers use Jawwal telephone services to exercise their ambitions to succeed academically and rear competent children, then Jawwal has contributed and facilitated the acts of resistance students and mothers engage in daily.

This theme is developed further in a December 2011 campaign titled "Jawwal—Guiding the Professionals" featuring a series of images of male and female Palestinian athletes dressed in national athletic uniforms, with the Jawwal logo as the team sponsor. The billboards are part of an accompanying radio and television campaign featuring the same athletes training, slam-dunking basketballs, and kicking footballs in a darkly lit warehouse-type setting, with spotlights on the athletes to induce dramatic effect. Each athlete in the television commercial repeats a pithy slogan that forms one of the slogans on each of the billboard series. They read (in the order read out on the television commercial):

> Winning isn't the entire goal;
> Failure is not the end of the goal;
> The goal is originally a dream,
> and the dream starts with a step (x2)
> and gets bigger with a step.
> Drawn with focus and precision;
> determined over time;

Perseverance, determination, and practice bring achievements
That will be remembered over time
And can overcome that which is difficult (x2)
And we can challenge the impossible.
The goal is not necessarily to reach the goal;
The path to the goal is the goal
Jawwal—Guiding the Professionals

The various slogans of this campaign bring to mind Zen Buddhist-like philosophical notions of emphasis on everyday practices and perseverance (mindfulness), as opposed to lofty expectations of the future. While these notions stand in and of themselves as potential worldviews regarding how to achieve one's dreams and ambitions, their specific appearance in the context of the OPT is particularly telling in the context of the long struggle of the national movement. The "guiding the professionals" campaign appeared less than two months after the failed attempt of the PA leadership to gain recognition for its statehood bid at the United Nations in September 2011. It also resonated with the institutional reforms promoted by the Salam Fayyad government, which emphasized providing efficient governmental and economic services to Palestinians in the West Bank. The latter acted as the main thrust of what Thomas Friedman has called "Fayyadism": a strategy oriented around the belief that "the more we build our state with quality institutions—finance, police, social services—the sooner we will secure our right to independence." Friedman contrasted this to "Arafatism," which "focused on Palestinian rights first, state institutions later," and which "produced neither" (Friedman 2009).

Fayyadist reforms were meant to reduce Palestinian discontent at the performance of the PA, while taking away the excuse sometimes voiced by elements of the international community that the Palestinians are "not ready for statehood" due to institutional under-capacity, corruption, and lack of transparency. However, by choosing an advertising slogan that focused on framing daily life and its facilitation as an accomplishment, while equally de-emphasizing one's long-term goals and vision, Jawwal was implicitly mirroring PA political practice and justifying its failures. Moreover it was a subtle way to say that (especially armed) resistance oriented approaches act as obstacles to achieving Palestinian goals, as Israel's ensuing acts of repression make daily life more difficult. Here Jawwal's advertising participates in transforming the liminal cognitive understanding of how Palestinians approach their efforts to achieve their rights, while reaping commercial profits.

It is worth mentioning that this Jawwal campaign entered the billboard circuit at a time when the PA rented out billboards of its own, featuring Abbas at the UN General Assembly podium, holding up his government's statehood bid, with the slogan "The time has come for Palestine's meeting with freedom." The juxtaposition of the PA's "time has come" slogan with the Jawwal notion that "winning isn't everything," demonstrates how a commercial entity, closely linked to the PA itself, engages in a form of political and moralistic "kick-back" to the very political project—the PA—that created the space for Jawwal's own profit-making. By branding slogans suggesting, that "the goal is not necessarily to reach the goal," because "the path to the goal is the goal," the PA's political project is cushioned, excused for its failures, and bought more time.

### *Reframing Nationalism*

Jawwal undertakes other explicitly nationalist-themed advertisements, such as its "*Aman*" (Security) promotional campaign, targeting PA security personnel. One such advertisement features the back of a soldier dressed in camouflage uniform saluting a Palestinian flag, and offers subscribers reduced rates beneath the slogan "Full appreciation from us to you." With a conservatively estimated 50,000 security service personnel in the OPT—many no doubt stationed with long hours on guard duty—this constituency is hardly one any commercially "responsible" company can afford to ignore. Here, a sense of appreciation for the steadfast sacrifices of Palestinian security force personnel is equated with national duty.

The reality however is far more complicated. The security forces praised in the Jawwal advertisements have come under fierce criticism from Palestinian society and political factions, accused of acting as a tool of the Israeli army. The Abbas/Fayyad reforms of 2003 witnessed the complete restructuring of the PA security services under international pressure, with eight brigades trained by the CIA and US Lieutenant General Keith Dayton, in Jordan. The PA security services regularly share information with the Israeli army, and in 2009, engaged in 1,297 coordinated activities with them, including arrests of alleged resistance figures (Aisling 2011). The training of Palestinian security force personnel continued throughout the period when Hamas won the democratic elections of 2006, in contravention of the new government's policies to break coordination with the United States and Israel. It is telling to relate remarks made by Dayton

at the influential Washington Institute for Near East Policy, about the functioning and role of the security services Jawwal praises:

> I take to heart the much-repeated words of my friend, a very senior, tough, pragmatic leader in the Israel Defense Forces. He was formerly a severe critic. Not anymore. Now he says—and I'm quoting him here directly from a newspaper article—"The USSC [United States Security Coordinators Team training Palestinian security service personnel] is doing a great job, and as the Palestinians do more, we [the Israelis] will do less." Now, as far as I'm concerned, those are words to live by and to make a reality. (The Washington Institute for Near East Policy 2009)

Needless to say, the withdrawal of Israeli troops is not the same as ending the occupation. Rather, it is consistent with the Oslo process's framework of empowering a local agent to do the work on behalf of the Israeli army, while the broader structure of the occupation remains firmly in place. Through advertisements like the Aman campaign, Jawwal is able to reframe a nationalist ethos in favor of supporting an undemocratic and repressive political and security arrangement, facilitated by the international community and Israel. It does so while reaping enormous profits and when its own nationalist credentials can be questioned as well: Paltel's annual revenues stood at US$479 million in 2010 (8.5% of annual GDP of the entire OPT), and recorded a net profit of US$121 million (PADICO Annual Report 2010: 45). Paltel is majority owned (29.67%) by the PADICO holding group, with annual revenues in the range of US$103 million, and the total profit for 2010 standing at US$37.4 million, registering an increase in profits of 91 percent over the previous year (PADICO Annual Report 2010: 44). PADICO was incorporated in 1993 under the Liberian Off Shore Business Corporation Act in Monrovia, and was only registered in the OPT in 2009, even then, as a foreign company (PADICO Annual Report 2010: 57). In 2010 it paid 1.343 million in taxes—3.3 percent of its net profits (PADICO Annual Report 2010: 53).

### Reshaping the Palestinian Community and Communal Space

Housing developments and banks are another major powerhouse on the billboard circuit. The housing and construction sector is the largest economic sector in the OPT comprising 50–60 percent of total investment, employing 11 percent of the workforce, and contributing

close to 15 percent of GDP. The high number of housing developments in the OPT derives from a combination of factors related to high annual population growth rates, high numbers of new families, and the historical retardation of this sector due to Israeli occupation policies, which made building complicated, expensive and bureaucratic. Moreover, housing development is seen as a quick return for investors who can build, sell, and reap returns on their investment, as opposed to investment in a productive sector such as industry or agriculture. The political and economic realities created by the Oslo Accords also facilitated the speculative rise of this sector, considering the available land to build upon in areas A and B was fixed, leading to annual increases in value.

Concomitant with the rise of a robust housing sector has been the rise of local and regional banks to facilitate the purchasing of these homes. Before the Oslo process, only two Palestinian/Arab banks existed in the OPT, and neither offered long-term loans to facilitate mortgage lending. After Oslo, the banking sector swelled to 22 banks, with more than one hundred branches and subsidiaries. Legal and economic reforms have also facilitated the provision of loans with up to 25-year mortgages.

Similar to the trade and import sector, housing and banking have been dominated by powerful economic actors associated with the PA and investment capital, be they international, regional, or domestic. PADICO for example, which majority owns the Paltel Group described above, consolidated 16 different local real estate companies in 2011. Its main construction arm (a subsidiary named PRICO) has won lucrative contracts for governmental, touristic, and housing projects that enabled the company to register 445 percent net profit growth between 2009 and 2010 (PADICO Annual report 2010: 45). Another major player in housing development is the Palestine Investment Fund, (PIF), a public private partnership formed in the wake of the Abbas/Fayyad reforms and created upon the specific demand of donors for the purposes of exposing and scrutinizing PLO investments. PIF managed net assets worth 802 million in 2009 and aims to build 30,000 housing units over 10 years, investing more than US$1.5 billion. PIF operates through Amaar Real Estate Group as a wholly owned subsidiary established to oversee its diverse real estate portfolio. In turn, Amaar manages smaller companies that it establishes to develop specific housing projects.

One such project is the al-Reehan neighborhood located on a 250,000 m$^2$ plot of land a few kilometers north of Ramallah. Al-Reehan is slated to have 2,000 units, ranging from 100–250 m$^2$,

**Figure 4.8**   Advertisement for the new housing development of al-Reehan asking viewers "What if this were your children's playground?"
*Source*:   Toufic Haddad.

accommodating 10,000 residents, and has an estimated project value of US$200 million.

Starting in 2009, al-Reehan began producing and hanging a set of commercial advertisements to get investors and buyers interested (figure 4.8). One featured a stunning mountainous view as seen from a balcony, with a detached arm entering left, holding a cup of coffee in front of a breakfast table. The advert's slogan read, "What if this were how you enjoyed your morning coffee?" A second billboard features a road sign with arrows pointing travelers in different directions to "school," a "women's center," "clinic," and "gym." The slogan reads, "What if these services were close to your house?" A third advert features a child being swung around in a playground, and is shot from the perspective of the adult looking into the beaming child's face. Its slogan reads, "What if this were your children's playground?"

Al-Reehan's billboard campaign directs audiences to their website, which offers more details about the project. The project's descriptive wording tellingly reveals the kind of community al-Reehan is designed to be:

> Hold the key of your dream house in harmony with your need for comfort, and refined living. [ . . . ] The neighborhood [al-Reehan] offers families everything they could need, from retail stores, to fine

> dining, coffee shops, supermarkets, mosque, clinic, pharmacy, commercial offices and even a delightful bakery. Moreover, a gym at your service equipped with all the ideal sports machines you are looking for. [ . . . ] It is not just about sharing space, but sharing life.[ . . . ]
>
> Al-Reehan is your address for a self-contained community. (Aisling 2011)

Al-Reehan's advertising campaign is telling for how it plays upon the frustrations of daily life in the increasingly crowded Palestinian towns and cities. Problems of potholed roads, lack of public spaces, lack of town planning/zoning, and unorganized and dense residential construction add to the preexisting anxieties that life under occupation necessarily brings with it. Al-Reehan offers a solution. Investors and homeowners are given the opportunity to detach themselves from such complications and be ensconced in a "self-contained community."

Ironically, this is marketed as a form of "sharing space" and "sharing life," which raises its own puzzling question: what are Palestinians who live outside al-Reehan doing, if not "sharing space and life" as well? If life is "not just about sharing space, but sharing life," the implication is that, in the pre-al-Reehan world, Palestinians, or rather some Palestinians "shared space" but *didn't* "share life." In a word, it is a subtle way to create a firm distinction between the need to residentially segregate communities according to the commonality of their lifestyles. Al-Reehan can collect those who share a certain kind of lifestyle that is different from the life of merely "shared space." It hence functions as a form of gated community for those financially able to use their economic position for the purposes of escaping many of the complications life under occupation entails. It aims to create a market by appealing to the financially privileged and inviting them to abandon any common lot with those with whom they previously shared the exacerbating deteriorating conditions of life.

## Concluding Remarks

As with martyrdom posters, exploring the aesthetics and messaging of commercial advertisements in the OPT is an enormous undertaking. Only a small set of billboards have been explored in this study. Left unstudied are a wide range of other advertisements by commercial enterprises, not to mention those of the PA, which promote "law and order"; those of NGOs emphasizing various civic and governance issues; or for that matter, those of the international donor

community, which equally attempt to use billboards as sites for pro-
motion of their political and cultural interventions in Palestinian life.
If anything, the Palestinian visual public sphere has become a site for
diverse interests to have their say in getting their message across and
interests served. The Palestinian audience is captive to these interests,
deluged with visual representations that anyone with the money to
purchase can impose.

Clearly, the playing field is sloped to favor those with the most
money, and who can produce the largest and longest lasting visual
productions, in comparison with their competitors. This applies just
as much to the internal competition among those advertising on
commercial billboard spaces, as it does to the overall "competition"
between the visual productions of billboards and the far more mod-
est medium of martyr posters. While billboards are printed on plastic
canvasses that resist sunlight and keep colors bright, martyr posters
are printed on paper and quickly fade in Palestine's harsh summer and
wet winter climate.

Today's Palestinian visual public sphere reflects a kind of schizo-
phrenia, which in one way or another reflects the competing ten-
dencies and worldviews of its participants. The coexistence of
commercial advertising overlaid on an anticolonial struggle has nec-
essarily produced contradictory visual messaging. But they are not
entirely disconnected as the implicit subtext of each are formed in
communication with the other. Moreover, perplexing and intrigu-
ing hybrids are equally produced by each genre, where the cross-
fertilization of ideological, political, and commercial themes melds
with technical knowhow. Resistant subjects exuding the semblance
of "modern" commercial lifestyles can be contrasted with "con-
sumerist" subjectivities playing to a nationalist/resistance choir.
Decoding the dynamics at play requires a sensitive command of his-
torical, political, ideological, and cultural factors, while the tools
of political economic analysis prove useful in revealing what lies
behind the power politics and representations of the Palestinian
visual public sphere.

As primary source objects produced by a fluid, political environ-
ment, these objects capture a unique space-time relationship between
producer and consumer. These artifacts reflect the contexts that pro-
duced them just as much as any legal document, journalistic article,
or artistic cultural creation. Moreover, as productions of particular
trajectories and imaginings, their attempt to penetrate, imbue, and
influence popular sentiment in a given direction also charts the inten-
tions, praxis, and collective consciousness of the national movement.

Through them, Western stereotypes of the Palestinian movement are subverted, and an entire domain that is of investigative relevance is projected and revealed. This brief study is intended to provide an illustrative, non-comprehensive model for what can be done in this field. It is hence fitting to end by calling for the need to preserve, document, and explore these artifacts, before the dimming, generalizing, and flattening tendencies of time and caricature wash away their specificities and truths.

## Notes

1. As the clear weaker party, Palestinian distortions in representation of Western governments, policies, or people cannot be said to be remotely comparable in destruction or negative fallout.
2. One anecdote capturing the extent of this repression is found in a popular recollection of the first Palestinian Intifada, where it is said that Israeli army soldiers forced Palestinians to take down their laundry if its colors displayed the red, white, green and black of the Palestinian flag.
3. The majority of West Bank land (60%, areas known as "Area C") remained beneath the full control of the Israeli military. Only 20 percent of West Bank land fell beneath "full" PA "civil and security" control (Area A), with these areas further divided into 11 discontinuous islands.
4. This political division however should not be confused with sovereignty or the retention of physical control over these areas, as the Israeli military clearly maintains ultimate control over the land, air, sea, natural resources and access routes to the entire OPT.
5. The Ecce Homo convent located off of Via Dolorosa.
6. Interview with author, Jerashi print shop, Bethlehem, July 7, 2008.
7. Plenty of Hamas posters do feature the Palestinian flag, and indeed the Hamas insignia features two of them draped on either side of the Dome of the Rock. Nonetheless, the mentioned posters originate from Gaza, and were printed at a time when the Hamas-Fatah tensions were particularly high.
8. Statistics cover the period of September 29, 2000 to June 30, 2008. The figure represented more than a quarter (27.7%) of all those killed in the West Bank during the same time period. 5,512 Palestinians were killed overall. See the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics webpage for full details (www.pcbs.gov.ps/default.aspx).
9. As described by one Israeli scholar testifying before the US Congressional Joint Economic Committee in 1997: "The Customs Union between Israel and the Palestinian Authority: A Critical Analysis Presented by Dr. Talia Einhorn before the Joint Economic Committee," October 21, 1997.

10. See website of Sky's parent company, the Arab Palestinian Investment Company (APIC). Sky Advertising is a subsidiary of APIC (APIC 2009a).
11. As of June 2013, Tariq Abbas was listed as Vice President of Business Development for the Arab Palestinian Investment Company (APIC), Sky Advertising parent company (APIC 2009b).
12. Despite attempts to secure permission to reprint the advertisements mentioned in this chapter, we were not able to include those images.

## References

Abou Hashhash, Mahmoud. 2006. "On the Visual Representation of Martyrdom in Palestine." *Third Text*, 20 (3): 391–403.

Achcar, Gilbert. 2004. *Eastern Cauldron: Islam, Afghanistan, Palestine and Iraq in a Marxist Mirror*. London: Pluto.

Aisling, Byrne. 2011. "Building a Police State in Palestine." *Foreign Policy*, January 18.

Amundsen, Inge, George Giacaman, and Mushtaq Khan (eds.). 2004. *State Formation in Palestine: Viability and Governance During a Social Transformation*. London: Routledge Curzon.

Arab Palestinian Investment Company (APIC). 2009a. "SKY for Advertising, Event Management & PR Company." Accessed September 20, 2013, at: www.apic-pal.com/earticlepage.php?artid=43.

Arab Palestinian Investment Company (APIC). 2009b. "About the Arab Palestinian Investment Company (APIC)." Accessed September 20, 2013, at: www.apic-pal.com/earticlepage.php?artid=78.

Asda'a Burson-Marsteller. n.d. "Asda'a Burson-Marsteller." Accessed September 20, 2013, at: www.asdaabm.com/content.php?menu=about.

Boullata, Kamal. 2009. *Palestinian Art 1850–2005* (Preface by John Berger). London and San Francisco: Saqi.

Dabashi, Hamid (ed.). 2006. *Dreams of a Nation* (Preface by Edward Said). London and New York: Verso.

Entous, Adam. 2009. "Firms Run by President Abbas's Sons Get U.S. Contract, Reuters, April 22." Accessed September 9, 2009, at: http://uk.reuters.com/article/2009/04/22/uk-palestinians-aid-abbas-exclusive-sb-idUKTRE53L2R020090422?sp=true.

Friedman, Thomas. 2009. "Green Shoots in Palestine." *New York Times*, 4.

Friel, Howard and Richard Falk. 2007. *Israel-Palestine on Record: How the New York Times Misreports Conflict in the Middle East*. London: Verso.

Hanieh, Adam. 2008. "Palestine in the Middle East: Opposing Neoliberalism and US Power, Parts 1 & 2." *MR Zine*. Accessed September 9, 2009, at: http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2008/hanieh190708a.html.

Hanieh, Adam. 2011. "The Internationalisation of Gulf Capital and Palestinian Class Formation." *Capital & Class*, 35: 81–106.

Hever, Shir. 2010. *The Political Economy of Israel's Occupation: Repression beyond Exploitation*. London: Pluto Press.

Honig-Parnass, Tikva and Toufic Haddad. 2007. *Between the Lines: Israel, the Palestinians, and the U.S. War on Terror.* Chicago: Haymarkets Books.

Israeli Occupation Archive. Accessed December 7, 2014, at: http://www.israeli-occupation.org/.

Middle East Project of the Democracy and Governance Program, Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa. 2009. "Occupation, Colonialism, Apartheid? A Re-assessment of Israel's Practices in the Occupied Palestinian Territories under International Law." Cape Town, South Africa.

PADICO Annual Report. 2010. Accessed December 5, 2014, at: http://www.padico.com/library/634473384751562500.pdf.

Palestinian Center for Human Rights. 2011. "Statistics Related to the Al Aqsa (Second) Intifada. October 2010 Update." Accessed September 20, 2013, at: www.pchrgaza.org/portal/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3044:statistics-related-to-the-al-aqsa-second-intifada-&catid=55:statistics&Itemid=29.

Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. Accessed September 20, 2013 at: www.pcbs.gov.ps/default.aspx.

The Palestine Poster Project. Accessed December 5, 2014, at: at: www.liberationgraphics.com.

Paltel Group Annual Report. 2010. Accessed December 5, 2014, at: http://www.paltelgroup.ps/downloads/reports/20120604143748.pdf.

Philo, Greg and Mike Berry. 2004. *Bad News from Israel.* London: Pluto Press.

Philo, Greg and Mike Berry. 2011. *More Bad News from Israel.* London: Pluto.

Said, Edward. 1997. *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World.* London: Vintage.

Sayigh, Yezid. 1997. *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement 1949–1993.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Shohat, Ella. 2006. *Taboo Memories, Diasporic Voices.* Durham, NC: Duke University Poress.

Taghdisi-Rad, Sahar. 2011. *The Political Economy of Aid in Palestine: Relief from Conflict or Development Delayed?* London: Routledge.

The Washington Institute for Near East Policy. 2009. "Lieutenant General Keith Dayton, U.S. Security Coordinator, Israel and the Palestinian Authority," Thursday, May 7.Accessed September 20, 2013, at: www.washingtoninstitute.org/html/pdf/DaytonKeynote.pdf.

Wertheim, Moshe. 1997. "Can the Law Survive a Change in Political Sentiments?" *Justice*, No. 12, March:22–26.

World Bank Projects and Operations—WBGS. 2013. Accessed September 2013, at: http://web.worldbank.org/external/projects/main?pagePK=217672&piPK=95916&theSitePK=40941&menuPK=223661&category=regcountries&regioncode=6&countrycode=GZ.

# Revolutionary Manoeuvrings: Palestinian Activism between Cybercide, and Cyber Intifada*

*Miriyam Aouragh*

## INTRODUCTION

Since the second Intifada (2000–2005), it has become clear that the internet has influenced Palestinian political mediation and grass-roots activism. It serves to spread textual, visual, and audio narratives beyond the confines of (self-) censorship, caused by certain commercial or political interests in the mainstream media that in themselves come to function as gatekeepers by determining what stories are publicized or properly contextualized. While having alternative news blogs is in itself important for activists, the political impact of digital media tools for "citizen journalists" is substantial when mainstream media refer to such alternative (online) sources. Such cooperation occurred during the Arab uprisings of 2011, when al-Jazeera channel, bloggers, and tweeps jointly choreographed the news into millions of living rooms as part of a *media synchronization* (Alexander and Aouragh 2011).

Where the Arab region has attracted attention, before the explosive peak in interest after 2011,[1] the focus has been on cyber-terrorism (e.g., Burkhart and Older 2003; Weimann 2006) rather than legitimate political activism. Moreover, a considerable amount of the studies about the internet in the Middle East concerned Islam (Roy 2004; Bunt 2003) or were motivated by the assumed implications of online radicalization (Khatib 2003).

Nevertheless, user-generated content and social networking is part of the everyday political arena; mobile internet tools such as Bambuser or specific projects heavily relying on the internet, such as Activestills and Shooting Back, are all examples of the proliferation of technological empowerment.[2] These big and small revolutionary events inspired various redefinitions of online politics and resistance. Earlier contributions about the politics of the internet mostly addressed top-down examples (the role of the internet during election campaigns) and, unsurprisingly, much of the literature centered on the "developed" world (Europe/North America). This chapter aims to contribute to the existing literature about activist internet use (Hands 2010; O'Neil 2009) though it addresses these issues from an Arab/Palestinian political point of view. Studies about (new) media that did address the region and helped shape academic literature started in the mid-1990s by offering theoretical debates regarding the public sphere (Eickelman and Anderson 2003) and blogging (e.g., Sreberny and Khiabany 2010). Initially, the impact of a new field of "internet studies" accommodated much more analyses on textual narratives and discourses, and generally prioritized debates about online aesthetics or related methodological challenges. Nevertheless, critical ethnographic work (often by media anthropologists) has maintained a segment in the overlapping fields of media, society and politics (Miller and Slater 2000; Armbrust 2000) that helped construct a framework to understand the advent of digital/online media as a different stage in media development.

I studied the implications of internet usage in everyday life during fieldwork between 2001 and 2005 in Palestine, Jordan, and Lebanon, at the height of the second Intifada. Upon my return between 2009 and 2010, I encountered a diverse assemblage of groups—single issue campaigns, revolutionary socialists, former cadres of nation-wide political parties, and ad-hoc activists—all using the internet one way or another, but the (political and technical) local context had changed between both fieldwork stages. Palestinian activism was a new phenomenon (as opposed to mass popular uprisings or military resistance) yet also the logical continuation of a much longer history manifested by the previous Intifadas. The decline of the second Intifada, the appearance of deep political splits and, at the same time, a much more active and user-generated internet, meant that the political-media ecology was being reshaped in conjunction.[3] While this work sheds light on Palestinian activism the main argument here is that many of the new technologies are also adopted by state forces.

In fact, the internet had become increasingly incorporated into Israeli military strategies—prohibiting, removing, and destroying Palestinian internet. This is regarded as the latent (online) face of the manifest (offline) policies, a destructive condition that I refer to as *cybercide;* operating in liaison with Israeli *politicide* (Kimmerling 2003). This cybercide is intimately embedded in military procedures: employing the internet is not a random move since the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector itself is part of the military-industrial-complex. The urge to control the politics of mediation and cyber warfare was visible in the Israeli response during the July 2006 war on Lebanon. Subsequently, Israel pulled out all the stops during the military invasion of Gaza (Operation Cast Lead) of December 2008, and took further preemptive measures when it stormed the Mavi Marmara (one of the Flotilla ships sailing toward Gaza carrying tons of aid) on May 31, 2010 (Kuntsman and Stein 2011). As soon as Israeli paratroopers were dropped on the ship from their helicopters, they confiscated laptops and mobile phones from activists aboard the ship. Israel had already tried to block cellular and radio communication. It was expected and therefore imperative to limit the political outcry over the killing of unarmed civilians in international waters, and so the Israeli version of the incident dominated the media. However, one of the passengers had managed to smuggle out a digital tape of the first moments of the attack. Once out of the country, the footage was uploaded online, and a different version of what had happened appeared, one that helped refute the "self-defense" rationale underlining Israel's versions.[4] Besides functioning as a reminder of the already close alliance between Israeli propaganda and mainstream news framings, this singular example also showed the paradoxical implications of ICTs in political conflicts.

Indeed, Palestinian internet activism is rooted in the longer attempt to counter structural media biases. During the second Intifada (2000–2005) online activism amounted to a fierce struggle *of* and *over* words. To really grasp how this shift took place in the midst of a changed media ecology it is important to understand the political economy and infrastructure of Palestinian ICT. The first section therefore gives a chronological exposé of the digital evolutions and moves on to discuss how its mergence with political uprisings (hence *cyber intifada*) set the stage for later ICT developments. The chapter then illustrates how the new Israeli appliance of cybercide attempts to (and often succeeds in) limiting Palestinian activism. Supported by Israel's high-tech prominence and state incubations that increase its capacities, it has among the world's most sophisticated means for

online surveillance and cyber warfare ability. This, in due course, creates multi-layered practical consequences that mount to the combined impact of internet prevention and destruction, which is paraphrased as "control–alter–delete" in the final section.

## Digital (R-)evolutions

Arab media has been through several important stages since the mid-1990s. The introduction of satellite TV followed by the emergence of internet-communication have structured a specific convergent style of communication. The availability of cheaper computers, laptops, and smart phones reshape individual and collective experience and action. Debates about new forms of contentious politics in response to changing media ecologies particularly address the reconfiguration of the public sphere. Notwithstanding the groundbreaking emergence of satellite television, the most important infrastructure diversifying existing political public discourses has been the internet, which has been fostered most prominently in the Arab world by the outbreak of the second Intifada. Palestinian figures are substantially higher than the average statistics for the Arab world. The Palestinian Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) shows a systematic increase of computer ownership (from 26.4% in 2004 to 49.2% in 2009) and internet access (from 9.2% in 2004 to 28.5% in 2009) since the height of the second Intifada. Moreover, Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) (for 2011) and Internet World Stats (for 2012) marked the continuity of internet access at 36.6 and 57.7 percent respectively.[5] But Palestinian internet cannot be reduced to statistical algorithms only: these numbers are conservative estimates since there are many unregistered users (e.g., unofficial Internet Cafes and a high incidence of illegal cable-tapping) who are often invisible to these figures (Aouragh 2011a: 61).

The fast increase of internet penetration suggests why Hadara, Palestine's main internet provider, decided to limit the internet quota to 20GB in 2009. Its official explanation was that internet lines were being split, resold, or illegally redistributed, thus jamming the system. But the decision led to protests and counter-claims that Hadara misused its monopoly position in the market (see figure 5.1). What is more, Israel's de-facto occupation of any infrastructure in the occupied Palestinian territories (henceforth OPT) will also mean it can monitor, jam or abort Palestinian network systems as it pleases. For instance, the main Internet Service Provider (ISP) is a sub-contractor of the mother telecom corporation Itisalat, although Hadara had many ISP

subcontractors who in turn have (illegal) sub-subcontractors. But one unspoken reason why Hadara cannot provide unlimited and quality-based internet services is that it has no real autonomy to do so because Itisalat is itself effectively speaking a subcontractor of Israeli telecom frequencies. Despite the limited territories allocated to the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) under the Oslo agreements, bandwidth or frequency capacity still relies on Israel and its practical hegemony over communication infrastructures (a crucial element of colonial subordination) was even agreed upon in the negotiations, despite the official rhetoric about PNA autonomy. This clearly reflects the development of Palestinian internet as a space and target for Israeli subjugation (Stein 2012a; Stein 2012b; Tawil-Souri 2011)

Palestinian internet users are, however, not only constrained by imposed Israeli policies, The Palestinian internet sector is not obliged to practice a neoliberal policy or to enthusiastically promote a free-market. Yet, with international development regimes and financial incentives plastering themselves all over the territories, right up until the road out to Jordan via Allenby (see figure 5.2–5.5), it is



**Figure 5.1** Doubelnaha! (We doubled it!) Protest campaign against fake doubling of Internet quota.

*Courtesy*: Maysara Abdulhaq, used under the terms of CC-BY-SA License: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/.
Images illustrating the contradictions of everyday life.

**Figure 5.2** Leaving Ramallah via the notorious Qalandia checkpoint closed off by the "separation wall."



**Figure 5.3** Endless empty roads parallel to settler-only roads Jericho.

**Figure 5.4**   Coming across many USAID posters on way to border.



**Figure 5.5**   Allenby Crossing Mahmoud Abbas and Yasser Arafat bid us farewell just before the ordeal at the Israeli controlled border begins.

*Source*: All photos by author 2010.

no surprise the neoliberal myths are internalized by Palestinian IT producers. Encouraged by foreign donors and the omnipresence of public diplomacy capitalism, there are plenty of Palestinian capitalist entrepreneurs who are willing to lend their own voice (indigenous credibility) to such projects. One ICT executive explained to me in his office (its door covered with USAID stickers) during an interview in 2009, that being occupied by Israel was not only negative but also posed advantages. I was told that close proximity (in other words settler-colonialism) meant that Palestinian IT entrepreneurs built a special relationship to Israel, which means "Palestine has a better chance than its neighbors." I was rather surprised and asked how this is possible considering the extreme limitations imposed on Palestinian political economy and Israel's unlikeliness to appreciate competition. "Because the communication is more natural between us."[6] Following similar interviews and listening to business elite discourses, I began to understand that this meant "We know their [Israel] culture" as I was told. The Palestinian capitalists' approach concerning Israel is not about protesting human *losses* nor about *mobiliz*ing solidarity, but about becoming Israel's human *capital* and, in the meantime, *privat*izing the Palestinian economy.[7] This is very much the contrary of what most of the activists I had come to know thought.

This capitalist impetus, applauded by international NGOs, exemplifies a series of neoliberal myths. During many fieldwork encounters with young graduates, I learned of their dreams to be the new successful entrepreneurs. These fantasies are kept alive because Palestine has a growing number of tech companies investing in smartphone apps, web design, and web-development. Often, an invitation to explore business opportunities brings the IT fairytales to a close as, in the reality of the occupation, it appears that these (big or small) entrepreneurs can't even travel out of the territories to attend conferences or meet potential investors (Spinner 2012). In truth, the Palestinian ICT sector cannot live up to its own free market promise even if it wanted to.

Though largely banished from academic discourse, "colonialism" is a dominant paradigm in the Palestinian context (Gregory 2004). Most of the Palestinians I interviewed about the surge of local online productions described the urge to counter the stigmatization of their cause and to overcome the everyday limitations caused by curfews and closures as part of their overall political incentive.[8] Hence the intersection of political mobilization and political representation clearly shaped the history of Palestine's young online political realm and in turn helped prime internet activism. Politics is therefore not only

revealed in the nation's digital evolution but are found at the center of media productions and in discussions *about* the media. Digital (online) media is a particularly important medium that sets the stage for political contestation.

## Cyber Intifada: Setting the Stage

Technology was an integral part of political activism, especially from the outset of the second Intifada.[9] When access to subversive online material coalesced with political activism, without any official permission (as with the fax or telephone during the first Intifada in the 1980s), Palestinians found a way to disseminate, connect with supporters, and share their views. This, then new, form of political and cultural representation was practiced by global and local initiatives such as *Electronic Intifada*, *Palestine Monitor*, *Indymedia Palestine*, and *Palestine Chronicle* (Aouragh 2008). They share a strong oppositional opinion about the occupation, or their forced exile. Most of the practices and (racist or colonial) ideologies that maintain or contribute to their oppression are operated and expressed freely by the Israeli state. Besides, there is no need for police brutality to be disclosed via secret video recordings to provoke outrage, such as in Egypt (see Chapter One in this volume). In Palestine, violence usually occurs out in the open, at checkpoints, and during highly publicized military incursions or extra-judiciary assassinations, and is communicated in Twitter announcements. Palestinians do not feel the necessity to keep their political opinions to themselves either. Indeed, Israeli soldiers unabashedly post pictures of torture or humiliating practices on their Facebook or Instagram (Faulkner 2013). Whereas these veracities are clear and out in the open on a domestic level, this does not apply to the occasional international scope.[10] Dramatic and highly publicized events, such as the 2008 war on Gaza (Cast Lead) and the 2010 attack on the aid flotilla (Mavi Marmara) do become subject to heated debate. The political implications of the internet are most visible at *intermediate* levels.

For a long time (and still largely) the Israeli military and state could rely on the national and international (Western) mainstream media to act as its mouthpiece (Beinin 2003). The penetration of (pro-)Palestinian news framings (or failed Israeli public relations) therefore does play a political role at the international level, in the long run. Over the years Israeli PR fiascos slowly pushed Israel out of its comfort zone. This shift is the combined result of a changing media-landscape and a less complicit audience. The morphing of the image of Israel

from David into the militarily superior bully Goliath that began with the 1982 invasion of Beirut and the Sabra-Shatila massacres materialized during the first Intifada (1987–1991) when stone-throwing youths who faced fully armed soldiers directly evoked the David & Goliath legend (Bishara 2008). Israel's image was further tarnished at the outbreak of the second Intifada in 2000 with the Muhammad al-Durra tragedy and the reinvasion of the OPT. Dahan called the new juxtaposition produced by the internet *Interfada* (2001). The internet has therefore enabled competing framings to shift perceptions of Israel, which in turn influenced public opinion.[11] Important websites (e.g., Electronic Intifada, Palestine Monitor) starting to offer alternative sources and explanations to journalists have helped give the internet a positive reputation. The way this politics of the media (and the existing alignment with foreign policy) was challenged illustrates how the internet facilitates a counter-hegemonic space for activists.

In their groundbreaking 2004 study of the media about the second Intifada, Philo and Berry deconstruct how British media created a particular framework that results in disadvantaging Palestinians. The viewer is mostly left with a representation of day-to-day events without basic content about the origins of the uprisings or the historical context of "the conflict" in general while consuming news mediations about the Intifada. In such a script, it appears that the "normal" world is "disrupted" by Palestinian violence. Philo and Berry's 2011 study considered media dynamics surrounding the Cast Lead and the Flotilla attacks and demonstrates that Israel's violation of an important (five month) ceasefire agreement with Hamas or the Gaza blockade which among others causes a serious drop in living conditions, were rarely mentioned (341). News reports at best suggest that "both sides" perpetrated violence in a "cycle" of killing. Particularly when Israeli spokespersons are structurally given greater advantage (much more time and a considerably friendlier approach), eventually Israel comes to be regarded as the party that "has to respond." Lack of information really does amount to disinformation.

Meanwhile there has been considerable growth in grassroots online counter-sources to fill the gaps. Journalists can (if willing to) refer to these alternative sources. This is an important difference between the first and second Intifada: the latter has its own medium. Despite cyberspace being an important mediator, this new dynamic is not only a virtual or discursive matter. Journalists have had their press offices closed and permits withdrawn; their movement systematically prevented by Israeli soldiers; their devices destroyed; and soldiers opening fire on them. The (international) press is deliberately subjected

to violent attacks, with fatal outcomes. The competition over *representation* is a war waged *physically*.[12] Even as the consequences of the international blockade are censored-out, Israel was increasingly viewed as irrational or aggressive,—its actions occasionally provoke massive protests around the world.

During fieldwork in 2009–2010, I observed a change in the appreciation of the role of the media compared to 2001–2005. It seemed as if a general, positive view was making way for increasing irritation. When I asked an activist about the political use of the internet to impact public opinion, he was agitated: "But this public opinion is not a 'friend's' opinion…it's one that has to be resisted rather than desperately recruited."[13] The generously applied double standards in much of mainstream (western) media are an additional reason for this anger. For instance, following the classic imperial rule of thumb, international political-economic interests determine whether an uprising is worthy of support in the mass media or not. It sheds light on the reason Activestills and Shooting Back, very clearly innovative techno means for political goals in the interest of justice, do not receive the same praise as similar grassroots acts or groups in the Ukraine or Iran.

However, there is another reason that helps explain the occasional failure of Israeli diplomacy. It is precisely because of the extreme discrepancy in military power that other forms of mediation are required. To come to terms with media partiality in mainstream media, on top of the Israeli military response to the outbreak of the Intifada, Palestinians were forced to engage in a critical rethinking about political strategy and tactics.

Barely recovering from the Muhammad al-Durra (2000) and Jenin (2002) fiascos, the image of Israel had reached an all-time low again during its 2006 July attack on Lebanon. Israeli leaders therefore, also went through a phase of critical rethinking and worked overtime to contain the public relations damage that occurred to Israel's image during the war on Gaza in December 2008. The trouble Israel faced was revealed by several policy reports and handbooks (e.g., Collings and Rohozinski 2009) with recommendations to adapt to a reality in which war occurs at a time when the changing regional media-ecology allows digital live streaming and instant coordination. One of the general lessons, based on Lebanon and Cast Lead, was to avoid blocking out all media as this means that rival (read, Palestinian or Lebanese) narratives would be difficult to challenge.[14] The internet became a defense matter, and Israeli decision makers were extremely keen to invert the shifting media landscape and thus appropriated the advantages of Web 2.0. With its superior ICT sector, Israel already

has easy access to the best material options and first-hand insight to new innovations. In this uneven reality, activists are forced to balance between the blessings of *Cyber Intifada* (media activism) mentioned so far, and deal with the curse of the internet, cybercide.

## Cybercide

If Israel was to be what the ideological father of modern Zionism Theodor Herzl described as *an outpost of civilization as opposed to barbarism*, it certainly needed more than a few pamphlets and proclamations. Indeed, Palestine became a "colonial outpost" through massive and violent force during the establishment of the new settler colony Israel. Colonial practices are sustained at multiple levels: an external military force rifting and confiscating the land; an internal (armed) settler presence; and, perhaps most unsettling, a Palestinian national body that exercises a form of self-policing on behalf of its occupier. While the printing press and photography helped document a great deal of Zionist propaganda and the Palestinian tragedy in the twentieth century, in the twenty-first century, the internet renders it even more difficult to hide the wrongs of colonialism.

The Israeli geographic, military, and political policies of colonial domination and the corresponding suppression of dissent are captured by Kimmerling (2003) in "Politicide." While this framework explains contemporary Palestinian political experience, "Urbicide" (Graham 2003) refers to violent urban erasures; this was later elaborated upon, with a focus on Palestinian physical space and place in the term "Spaciocide" (Hanafi 2009). All are drawing on Agamben's (2005) ideas behind the dehumanization and repression of people for whom the law is temporarily suspended, the "state of exception." I wish to stretch these frameworks a little further so as to include the prevention, surveillance, and destruction of Palestinians on the internet and therefore propose the concept of "cybercide." Given that the internet is critical to the contemporary public-private political sphere and is a practical coordination tool, this should be considered as a sub-specie of *politicide*. At the same time, it is extensively used for intelligence (surveillance) purposes and cyber warfare. During Israel's war on Lebanon in 2006, it managed to plant spy devices that the UN discovered in 2009. The Israeli company Check Point bugged communication data and possibly intercepted messages (Doron 2011: 313). Cybercide was clearly being committed in Palestine during Operation Defensive Shield (2002) and Operation Cast Lead (2008); both moments offered crucial interventions for trial and readjustment opportunities.

Military developments (and their outsourced investments in ICTs) are additional forms of technological warfare that mainly rest on two related and much older approaches. First, is the objective to destroy a viable Palestinian cyberspace because of its international mobilization potential, since the prevention of the emergence of successful grass-roots (solidarity) movements is crucial to maintaining the legitimacy of the Zionist project. Second, and at the heart of the debate about possibilities for Palestinian activism, lies the idea of Palestine functioning under a permanent panoptic gaze and surveillance regime. A clear illustration is the implementation of panoptical surveillance technologies during warfare in the Gaza Strip (Dahan 2013). In his critical study, Dahan situates these within the larger framework of control of the Palestinian population under Israeli occupation, while subsequently also connecting surveillance technologies in Gaza with the international arena. To better understand these fairly new methods, it is imperative to regard Israel's internet surveillance as intimately connected to (and nurtured by) existing surveillance systems.

Electronic systems of and for surveillance have seen important changes in the last two decades and have continued to morph with the move to social media (Lyon 2003; Trottier 2012). The shift in policing by means of the internet, geared toward "preemptive" approaches post-9/11, is in breach of numerous privacy laws. This tendency, seen worldwide, extended the definition of crime and breaking the law to target those only indirectly connected e.g. when "apologizing" for terrorists (Brown and Korf 2009) which could potentially include anyone historicizing certain political events or defending the right of self-determination. These new formulations particularly harm minorities, political activists, marginal communities, and, of course, communities of colonized people. And yet, Israeli-led reconnaissance of Palestinians far exceeds what has been discussed so far in conventional literature regarding privacy implications of the internet.

## Online Surveillance

Many Palestinian ISPs and nearly all activists interviewed during fieldwork shared the notion that Palestinian internet data is under a permanent Israeli panoptical gaze and many consider this a logical effect of the fact that all Palestinian bandwidth runs via Israel. Another broadly accepted fact is that this is largely with the PNA's knowledge. Interviewees in 2009 gave the impression that political activists calculate online surveillance into the overall risks to be taken. Activists at Stop the Wall headquarters in Ramallah assume

that everything they do and disseminate online is being monitored anyway. The exemption one interviewee gave me was in regards to international solidarity activists because of their vulnerability in terms of entering the OPT and crossing checkpoints. The reason that this does not bother Palestinians too much is as much a consequence of the extreme lack of mobility experienced through the combined system of borders, checkpoints and ID regulated zone regimes (Aouragh 2011b). However, borders and checkpoints have always been very distinctive sites of contestation as these are the nodes where intensive information gathering takes place. During the second half of the twentieth century, face-to-face surveillance with informants and collaborators was perfected through the deployment of checkpoints and dazzlingly complex surveillance regimes (Lyon 2008). Palestinians are monitored through a combination of old and new mechanisms: Israeli military (industrial) surveillance, the private sector (ISPs), CCTV, computer profiling at checkpoint crossings, and so on—all part of the "matrix of control" (Halper 2008).

The most sophisticated inclusive biometric database containing digital fingerprints and facial photographs linked to ID cards with microchips originates from Israel in 2012.

Century-old methods (spies, undercover agents, collaborators) are conjoined with internet surveillance and cyber-warfare practices. In fact, current panoptic surveillance practices are embedded in practices that date back to the British colonial Mandate, reminding us that the "*suspension of the law*" is actually not an *exception* but the *norm* in Palestine. An emerging field of research looking specifically into the important nexus of occupation, spatial control, territorial sovereignty, and "biopolitical" practices of social sorting offers valuable data (Abu-Laban, Lyon, and Zureik 2011).[15] A personal experience at the Jordanian-Palestinian border in the fall of 2010 turned out instructive for my analysis.

The crossing via Allenby Bridge (East Bank, Jordan) into the occupied West Bank was exhausting. While traveling alone, I was subjected to three different interrogations that took seven hours. Between these meetings, I was escorted to a waiting room for foreign passport holders; this small space had a fancy (flat-screen) computer with fast internet connection. Too anxious to read a book, I decided to use the computer while waiting. Half an hour later, another traveler (who later told me he crosses the border every two months) walked in and, as he turned toward me, said in a low voice, "They see *everything*, my dear". Half disregarding the comment, I smiled and thanked him, but it dawned on me that with a remotely-manned

keyboard and mouse, the desktop could indeed very easily be controlled. Why didn't I think of this myself? Whoever controls this equipment can fish for passwords or copy email contacts. It wasn't *that* difficult to imagine that my online data could be scrutinized—that was, after all, why I had not brought my laptop in the first place. Paradoxically, while crossing the border during these ordeals—and rather performative confrontations—one other observation I could make was actually not an example of the techno-sophistication of the Shin Bet, but of its almost crude and basic simplicity. Considerably different from the iconic imaginary or mythological belief in Israel's omniscient online intelligence capacities (e.g. through globally connected databanks and allied secret services), the interrogation relied on information assembled via google search, on the spot. This is not to say that Israeli intelligence is not as developed, but that both levels of intelligence gathering are performed simultaneously. When the intelligence officer confronted me with "evidence" that contradicted my claims, I saw a list of Google search results, including the (at the time) typical yellow highlight and underlining font of a web-search cache. It was not so much that what could be collected and traced *through me* about my academic and political networks while I was browsing via their equipment – or what my national intelligence services (Moroccan, Dutch, British) possibly share with the Israeli colleagues- is unimportant, but also that the mundane "photoshop" images or anti-leftist or Islamophobic slander that others would have posted about me on the internet in the past years could just as easily be accessed by these agents that eventually bothered me more. But above all, the hypothetical scene that, while I was in my online world in the waiting room, someone else was looking over my shoulders or straight into my face intrigued me most. The invisibility thereof agitated me because it is a different kind of disempowerment compared to the face-to-face encounters during the interrogations.

Noting the experience crossing into Palestine in my dairy two days later, I was reminded of a passage by Elia Zureik in which he discussed the Jordanian-Palestinian border control—the same place where I crossed into the West Bank. The methods exercised by Israel, yet concealed after the Oslo agreements, show who is in power at Allenby Bridge:

> After receiving the travel documents from Palestinians crossing the border, and instead of carrying out the usual inspection before returning the documents to their bearers, the Palestinian police pass on the passports to be processed by Israeli border inspectors who operate

incognito behind one-way mirrors. It is the Israelis who have the ulti-
mate decision in allowing or not allowing Palestinians to cross the
border (2001: 225).

The computer screen I used in the room evokes the virtual char-
acter of the one-way mirror or the glass wall. This innovation is the
surveillance equivalent of the panoptic (war) tools such as distant
manning of military equipment, on which Israel has been building its
economy (Senor and Singer 2009). The echoes of Foucault are evident
here, most prominently, the notion of the panoptic system relying on
anonymity of power through the symbol of the mirrored wall and the
distant joystick, as in Bentham's prison tower in which the prisoners
are visible to the guards but the guards are not visible to the prison-
ers. The aim is that people internalize this disciplining force, but here
it also coincides with a political economy of information gathering.
After all, Palestine is more than the proverbial wall or tower, it is not
"just" a prison, and that is where the Foucauldian analogy weakens
this assessment. Palestine is a far more complex space and place; it
is a colonized place, but the indigenous people are still present and
they perpetually exercise their agency through their own networks
of resistance. The constant threat of an uprising disrupts the colonial
wish and aim for hegemony hence, the recurring potential of resis-
tance disrupts Israel's control. Unsurprisingly, Hamas discovered just
how deep Israeli surveillance runs and its extent of this during the
2006 takeover in Gaza.[16] Israel's ability to track mobile phones has
been a notorious way to carry out targeted killings. Social network-
ing on smart phones that have location apps or GPS software further
increase this vulnerability. All the techno-investments notwithstand-
ing, human intelligence via collaboration remains an essential access
point for Israel and is still part of the surveillance puzzle.

And, therefore, whilst reflecting on the role of the Palestinian
police acceding to Israeli command described by Zureik above, this
becomes important in the discussion of Palestinian internet activism.
Internal collaboration seriously complicates the already challenging
conditions of political activism under occupation. Zureik's descrip-
tion of the border policy is very telling:

> Conscious of the need to maintain a modicum of dignity for the
> Palestinian personnel at the border crossing, the Israelis concede to the
> Palestinians a symbolic role of authority by removing themselves from
> public view. It must be pointed out, however, that in discussing the
> matter with Palestinians who routinely cross the Allenby Bridge, it was
> pointed out to me that travelers were fully aware of the "apparition"

practiced on them. It was pointed out that the silhouette of the Israeli border police behind the one-way mirror is transparent to the traveler during the evening and late hours of the day. One can argue that in the long run, the so-called concern for maintaining the dignity of the Palestinian police, through the use of a Goffmanesque form of front- and back-stage management, might, in the long run, exacerbate the situation by deepening the disrespect and cynicism held by the Palestinian population toward the PA (Zureik 2001: 226).

The PNA in the post-Arafat years has had a high level of cooperation with Israeli occupation forces in policing its own citizens. General Dayton, former US Security Coordinator in the West Bank, even complimented the PNA for assisting in security offensives throughout the West Bank (al-Amin 2011). While critics refer to this as "indigenous collaboration,"[17] numerous activists interviewed during fieldwork in 2009 and 2010, called the co-optation through security interests "Daytonization."[18] With forces deployed against protesters and political organizers, the "subcontractor of occupation" became another harsh label reserved for the authority. Many activists told stories about PA security forces preventing them from organizing against the Israeli occupation, even to express support for fellow Palestinians in Gaza. At the time of the Gaza war in 2008–2009, rumors circulated that Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas, and others in the leadership of Fatah and the PNA, had been aware of the planned Cast Lead invasion of Gaza that led to approximately 1,400 deaths. There were even suggestions that the PNA had a wish list of Hamas officials they would like to see removed in the course of events. The rumors reached their peak in what became known as the "Goldstone Affair," following the publication of the Goldstone report that implicated Israel in potential war crimes and crimes against humanity—and the PNA's unexpected move to postpone the vote on the Report in the UN Human Rights Council. The rumors were vehemently denied but, a year later, the leaked documents known as the Palestine Papers, showed just how far the extent of co-operation went, including relieving the Israeli army of their duties in the West Bank and protecting Israeli settlers.[19]

## "Indigenous Collaboration"

A vivid example of this new development was described to me in detail by one of my interlocutors. His long-time goal and commitment was to contribute to "building a free state" starting with a nation-wide news database and news aggregator for journalists. He

had gone through many obstacles as a refugee in Syria and had finally made his way to Palestine via Europe. Meanwhile, he wrote critical articles disclosing sensitive information regarding the handling of the Goldstone report, such as on the widely read (Haifa-based) website *Arab48*. Two days later, he was met by security men outside his house in Ramallah, beaten up, and severely injured. I could not reach him for days and our second meeting had to be postponed, with me still unaware of what had happened. When I met him again in a café in downtown Ramallah, he had a thick neck bandage and bruises on his face but, more worryingly, his state of mind had changed: from hope to cynicism and from pride to disappointment.

The combined effect of tighter external control with stronger internal repression directly concerned activists and lead to despair if not temporary apathy. Some of the interviewees questioned whether it was worth committing oneself to the cause. Besides readjusting to political expectations, a changing security context means that the techno-political implications—and thus the possibility or the expectations of online activism—change too. For instance, when I asked a number of respondents during earlier fieldwork in 2001 and 2002/2003 about state control of the internet, it was considered fairly irrelevant. Control of the internet and censorship then was technically difficult and the PNA was not considered capable of doing so, as webmasters could easily bypass PNA restrictions. Moreover, the suppression of resistance by one's internal administration—a community with a long history of revolt and high political consciousness—was unheard of then. I was told at the time that the Palestinian authority was excessively overwhelmed by Israel's reoccupation and a president (Arafat) under house arrest to even consider oppressing its own.

So initially the online dynamic of information warfare *inside* the Palestinian political context was not a major issue. In this context of relative freedom the dynamic political reality undermined the authority's ability to exercise full control on its civil society or critics, whether offline or online. As Sam Bahour explained to me during fieldwork in 2002:

> The PNA doesn't have the technological competence to censor the internet. The ICT community is so vocal and well organized, the will and ability to prohibit censorship is stronger than the will of the government. [ . . . ] Although we have a lot of complaints, this [relative freedom] is a star to Arafat and the PNA.

However, this dynamic changed in the years that followed, and this process became obvious at the time of my second research visits in

2009 and 2010. Commitment to a US brokered politics of appease-
ment turned the PNA into a repressive organ against its own people
and it increasingly centralized into a body that systematically margin-
alized its opposition and, especially, critics who have other political
approaches with regards to its negotiations with Israel, sometimes in
coordination with Israel.

Palestinian internet depends on Israeli-owned infrastructures and,
by default, is under the control of military occupation authorities,
but the internal policing makes this much easier. Recruiting local
spy networks has been practiced for decades (Zureik 2001), though
doing this via the internet is a recent phenomenon about which not
much is as yet known. The growing importance continues because,
since the outbreak of the second Intifada, Israel withdrew hundreds
of thousands of Palestinian workers' permits for Palestinians from
the OPT. Meanwhile, the numbers of potential informants decreased
dramatically so Israel attempted to maintain a network of informants
through the use of social media. This was the reason Ihab al-Husayn
(Hamas, interior Ministry, Gaza) warned people in Gaza against using
Facebook. Israeli intelligence expert Ronen Bergman (in Donnison
2010), confirmed this and explained that Facebook helps identify
who to pressure or blackmail into becoming informants. A famil-
iar way to intimidate someone into compliance is to gather pictures
from Facebook in order to blackmail, or at least give the impression
that the Israeli *Shabak* knows everything about everyone. Several of
my interlocutors explained that on numerous occasions, they were
approached at Allenby Bridge in their difficult attempt to travel, the
offer made was for them to inform on people in return for a smooth
crossing. Many visitors to Palestine, particularly those of Arab descent
or suspected of being activists, are forced to open their Gmail and
Facebook accounts, enabling software to extract information about
their networks or activities.[20]

During fieldwork in 2009, there were rumors that Facebook was
deployed to arrest Palestinians on the new charge of them offering
online assistance to Hezbollah. Facebook arrests have indeed occurred
on a number of occasions: when Shimon Peres was due to give a speech
at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem a group of Palestinian students
called on the college's Facebook page for a boycott of the meeting—
these activists (with Israeli and Jerusalem IDs) were placed under
house arrest and not allowed to contact their comrades and friends.
Interestingly, the ability to identify and trace subjects through social
media has also been used against Israel. Turkey's intelligence services
managed to track dozens of names of Israeli commandos who were

involved in the Mavi Marmara attack. The Turkish paper *Sabah* published the names and photographs, but much of the footage came from screening the videos the IDF used for its propaganda campaign. Here the irony is that some of the sophisticated social network tools used to find and visually recognize and map people (face-recognition programs) are often Israeli-made. This is an organic result of Israel's military capacity, something it boasts about as the world's leading high-tech nation and enthusiastically employs in its national public diplomacy (hasbara) projects. In other words, the Israeli army is the incubator for new inventions.

## Israel as a High-Tech State

Israel's superior position in techno-chemical development goes back a long way. For instance, it was already exchanging technological secrets with Apartheid South Africa.[21] When the new post-apartheid South African government was asked not to publicize this uncomfortable fact, the answer was unambiguous "The ANC government is not so worried about protecting the dirty laundry of the Apartheid regime's old allies" (McGreal 2010). Around the same time (1970s), its own unmanned combat machine was tried and tested in Southern Lebanon. Two decades later, Israeli company G-Nius developed armored robot cars used for patrols on the Lebanese border, long before today's notorious drone-warfare. The OPT is an important testing grounds for superior cyber war inventions, and this coincided with the use of Israeli expertise for the United States during its "war on terror" (Hajjar 2006). Operation Defensive Shield, the siege of Jenin and later Cast Lead in Gaza, enabled high-tech expertise to be applied in actual urban warfare (Graham 2003). An important explanatory factor is that these are places where Israel can easily ignore international law (Li 2006).

Many of the current experts in Israel are founders of ICT companies or served in special intelligence and R&D units. The objective (context) condition and material incentives that allows Israel to develop expertise and, in due course, extract extra profit is directly offered by the army (the fourth biggest in the world) and its R&D spin-offs. Facebook bought the Israeli startup face.com, which developed software with which to automatically tag people in photos (or entire albums at once). It can "guess" age, gender, and mood. Combined with the mobile app KLIK, it can automatically tag people from phone cameras. Another product is the remotely controlled machine gun *Sentry Tech* (known as Spot and Shoot),[22] applied to

watchtowers around the borders of Gaza and connected to distantly-manned monitors (Cook 2010). It has been claimed that since it was not an option for Israel to outnumber the armed forces of neighboring Arab states (Egypt or Syria), it was forced to overcome its numerical weakness through technological strength, and thus set up special research units to develop this (Menn 2011). Israel's high-tech economy is indeed spectacular. Despite a global economic crisis, foreign industrial investments have increased at a steady pace in Israel, mostly thanks to military corporations. According to Erel Margalit, founder of one of the most successful high-tech incubators, JVP (Jerusalem Venture Partners), no less than 40 percent of the national export is ICT related (in Buck 2011). Where capitalism and militarism coincide, Israeli start-ups are also bought and sold by consumer centered (social media) companies who are interested precisely because of the human elements of those surveillance-related tools. Its commercial benefit (targeting consumers and finding new ones) is clear, but it does not require much to guess what it can mean for government intelligence.

Internet and technology businesses originate from the defense industry both in the US and Israel, and cyber security or cyber warfare are its niche products. For example, Maryland, Washington, is the location of the second biggest IT hub and, near the HQ of the National Security Agency and US Cyber Command, one can also find many Israeli IT entrepreneurs being hosted (Menn 2011). This close proximity also helps explain how Israeli IT companies grew to become an important component of the private sector labor force, and of the R&D facilities of many multinationals (IBM, Cisco, Intel, Microsoft). With the Israeli army's huge supply of funds, this inter-twining of capitalism with defense has transformed Israel's national economy. In his excellent research, Neve Gordon explicates how the expansion of the market is an outcome of this intimate intersection between hyper-militarism, neoliberalism, and democracy (2011). Its boom, especially after 9/11, is basically a political economy of security. The obsession with warfare and Israel's small size population produces a bloated "old boys network"—the tight connection between people from the military, *Shabak*, Mossad, police, and government-owned industries—that embodies the most important ingredient of its "success": a monopoly on "experience." This "experience economy" benefits from the fact that the development of cyber warfare is not through an alienated mode of production but out in the open through real-life trial-and-error (Gordon 2011).

Unlike other competitors, their testing ground is not a secluded site or a clean laboratory operating from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., but the daily

life conditions of a living and breathing people. This is a crucial part of our contextualization, because it helps outline that Palestinians are not faced with just "any" state force. In fact, Palestinian activists and a number of international activists in Palestine *have* been killed and injured by these robotic drones and joystick-manned machine guns (Cook 2010). The covert technological practices together with their scientific and corporate roots discussed here are crucial to the conceptualization of cybercide, but they also amplify a more *overt* suppression, as detailed in the next and last section.

## Control–Alter–Delete

The Israeli army have attacked internet providers and cut peoples' connections on numerous occasions. This was even directly experienced by major Palestinian internet suppliers (PalNet, later Hadara) during Operation Defensive Shield at the time of my first fieldwork. During a conversation at the peak of the Intifada in 2003, Ma'n Bsaiso, initiator of PalNet described the ordeals they underwent:

> At 2.30 in the morning, the IDF invaded our building. The soldiers came inside, searched the building, blew up doors. They found the main power source room and shut down the connection. This resulted in all PalNet lines being cut for 24 hours. The soldiers stayed in the building. I was wondering why only our company office in this building was attacked. I think they came for us; they wanted to turn us [ISP connection] off. They don't like what we're doing.

The last part of the quote is significant, "what we're doing" refers to the basic provision of internet access. I had heard similar stories from internet café owners and media or journalism websites (e.g., Palestine Monitor). This silencing and marginalizing of Palestinian political culture and resistance refers to the *control* and *alter* programming, and is part of the general destruction of everyday life—of *delete*. This specific deleting and controlling practice by way of the internet taking place outside any serious legal or international accountability is an important feature of what I have termed cybercide.

Military capacity and superiority is an important signal of Israel's ability to literally "delete" with impunity, the ultimate twenty-first century method of colonial coercion (Weizman 2002). The occasional destruction of the Palestinian telecommunication sector is part and parcel of the overall control mechanism over Palestinian

society. It is not about targeting the internet only- this politics of erasure was an integral part of the military actions applied across the media spectrum and includes occupying radio and television stations (i.e., taking over their space and camping in it) as well as plundering and damaging equipment (Aouragh 2008). These actions go far beyond the loss of hardware capital and have been succinctly termed "Operation Destroy Data" by Israeli journalist Amira Hass. The army was destroying not just the hardware, but was also *deleting* Palestinian content such as the important information built from and into Palestinian knowledge networks (data banks of human rights organizations, banks, infirmaries). Yet, "This was not a whim or crazed vengeance," rather, what we saw was a "decision made to vandalize the cultural infrastructure of Palestinian society" (Hass 2002). This destruction of communication, movement, and knowledge occurs both offline and online, and is mostly aimed at Palestine's activists and civil society institutions. Several military operations in recent years, accompanied by raids and thefts from the offices of civil society organizations and NGO activists, and the confiscation of their computers, hard disks, and memory cards confirms these earlier predictions and reminds us once again that there is no Palestinian sovereignty over telecommunications.

A telling image that brings together the offline and online dynamics and the targeting of grassroots resistance against the wall, in particular, is the political graffiti between Bethlehem and Ramallah at the time of fieldwork which says, simply: "Ctrl–Alt–Delete" (figure 5.6). This was more than political representation during



**Figure 5.6** CTRL+ALT+DELETE, 2007. Public intervention, Filippo Minelli–Qalandiya Checkpoint, West Bank (the "separation" wall between Bethlehem and Ramallah).
*Courtesy*: Filippo Minelli.

research in 2009, because I interviewed (and witnessed) several Stop the Wall activists who relayed how this activism was met with beatings, bullets, and arrests.[23] The message on the wall can therefore be interpreted in two different ways: it expresses the Palestinian will that "*we want to delete this wall*" as well as the Israeli capacity that "*they can delete us at will*." If taken further, this dual message reflects two sides of the colonial coin and suggests a dialectical relationship between oppression and resistance. Whereas the apartheid wall has become a symbol of immobility and destruction, erasing orchards and houses in its way, preventing freedom of movement and conjoining with the immobility produced through cybercide, it has also become the site and symbol of some of the fiercest grassroots resistance. However, although Israel has the ultimate ability to block and cut Palestinian telecom services it often chooses *not* do so. This can be explained by existing commercial interests and surveillance. Whereas Israel makes sure Palestinian IT cannot develop, and forces unlicensed Israeli ICT upon the Palestinian market,[24] having direct access to Palestinian infrastructure offers Israel an easy way to monitor the population it colonizes.

In addition to the diverse levels of cybercide implemented by Israeli institutions, global companies are also complicit. Microsoft's blunt support for the Israeli army on huge billboards (see Aouragh 2012: 152) is one example. Powerful conglomerates such as Facebook and Google are more interesting since they show how dominant virtual estate agents and architects of cyberspace act; they also have the power to delete Palestinian cyberspace. Their marginalization of Palestine in cyberspace takes place in varying degrees: from ignoring Palestinian geography on maps to denying cultural references -thereby contributing to the normalization of Israeli territorial claims – to diverting Palestinian requests to Israeli sources, which renders Palestinian existence invisible according to these algorithms.

## Conclusion

This chapter draws heavily on research in Palestine during two very tense periods. It demonstrates a perilous context that affects people's lives, confronts anthropologists in different ways and most clearly increases the contrast between the venerated ethos of "objectivity" and the epistemological position that intellectual responsibility requires commitment: it requires critical academic scrutiny and a methodological orientation that aims to make a difference and avoids complicity (Brook and Darlington 2013: 234). My aim was to illustrate a reality

in which the activists must constantly maneuver, avoiding the curse of cybercide and adopting the blessings of cyber intifada (at once dangerous and exhilarating) both tactically and strategically.

Innovative usages of the internet widen the space for subversive practices. Grassroots campaigns such as Stop the Wall demonstrate that the internet has empowering characteristics and is significant for grassroots activism. However, this is precisely why they are also violently targeted and their equipment destroyed during raids. In other words, the disempowering materiality of technology shapes that very activism. These ethnographic examples show how far from reality many of the debates were, but there are several points to be made with regards to dominant theoretical trends about online activism where Palestine is concerned. Earlier scholarly (euro-centric) approaches praised online politics and motivated horizontal networks, thus intentionally or unintentionally implying that "traditional" political organizing is too archaically centralized and internet engagements increase peaceful change. In situations where activists must be willing to take risks (arrest and abuse), anticolonial politics cannot be horizontal and is mostly geared toward "useful" results. To be relevant for Palestinian activism, online politics must facilitate offline mobilization and long-term strategies. Revolutionary change cannot rely on spontaneous or horizontal (nonhierarchical) approaches because, due to the tyrannical reality of colonial oppression, the last thing those resisting can afford is structurelessness, to paraphrase Jo Freeman's important feminist critique of early anarchist movements. It needs organizers, discipline, accountability, and, above all, a structure that enables activists to generalize from uneven realities.

Like many parts of the world, in Palestine, the internet is used at one's own risk due to a combined impact of surveillance and intimidation Activists should use social media to mobilize and inform wider audiences, but that also means extra vulnerability such as the possibility of being monitored, traced, and arrested. It is like a Damocles Sword that constantly hangs above the computer screens of the activists. Although used efficiently for international mobilization, we have also seen that the internet is not the primary tool for persuasion—other spheres and mediums: satellite television, mosque announcements, university campus gatherings, posters are often much more important to fulfil this need. Though in fact impressive, internet penetration rates are not the major access points for activists. If the goal is to recruit activists into structural commitment, which, in Palestine, entails personal risks, then face-to-face dynamics (commitment or trust) are crucial. The difference between the internet as a

space to mobilize solidarity and as a tool to organize protest is starker than anywhere else, predominantly because the infrastructures are so clearly compromised.

Cybercide is implemented through a double-layered mechanism involving overt and covert control, and combines latent and manifest methods, symbolized by a politics of controlling, altering, and deleting. The overall conclusion of this chapter is that the implication of the internet should always be addressed by what it means *offline*. Within the Palestinian realm marked by *multiple* impediments— colonialism on the one hand and an increasingly oppressive PNA on the other—the internet is very often as much tool of the oppressor as of the oppressed.

## Notes

*This chapter is based on ethnographic research conducted between 2001–2005 and 2009–2010 and presented at WOCMES 2010 in Barcelona. I thank all panelists who engaged with my work and particularly Lena Jayyusi for inviting me to join this book project and Anne-Sofie Roald for editing the final stage. In addition, I am indebted to Mike Dahan for his valuable comments on an earlier draft. The piece was finished for publication in 2011, but due to the delayed process, it does not include recent developments (e.g., the enormous output of work about the role of media in the "Arab spring" and especially the cyber warfare implications of the war on Gaza in 2014). Where possible I updated sources and removed outdated references or now-redundant anecdotes.

1. See for instance Gerboudo, Herrera, Armbrust, Iskander & Haddad, Castells, and my own work.
2. Bambuser, see http://bambuser.com/ (last accessed December 10, 2014) allows live streaming and instant sharing of video footage even with low latency; it enables web-to-mobile chat and integrates with social network sites. The Activestills collective started in 2005, it shows events that are absent from public discourse and considers photography mediated online a vehicle to shape public attitude, see http://activestills.org (last accessed December 10, 2014). Shooting Back is a project that gave Palestinian families video cameras to document how they are treated. The online videos depict extraordinary examples of abuse by settlers commonly censored out by Israeli media, some of the videos broadcast online caused debate, see http://www.btselem.org/english/video/ (last accessed December 10, 2014).
3. Web 2.0 has become part of the mainstream jargon characterized by many-to-many producing and consuming at once (produsage), unlimited data storage and standardized web syndication.

4. The revealed footage that corroborates the activist accounts can be found at: http://www.culturesofresistance.org (last accessed December 10, 2014) and was extensively discussed on Democracy Now, at http://www.democracynow.org/2010/6/9/framing_the_narrative_israelI_commandos_seizes (last accessed December 10, 2014).

5. For these and more ICT related data, see http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Portals/_Rainbow/Documents/ICT2_E.htm and http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats5.htm (last accessed December 10, 2014).

6. Interview, Ramallah, November 2009.

7. Many of the Palestinian IT start-ups rely on Venture Capital Fund Sadara for investments, but like the sector itself, Sadara works in cooperation with Israeli venture capital partners.

8. Palestinian internet was further compromised after the devastating international boycott following the 2006 Hamas election victory. The political-economical split between Gaza and the West Bank created a situation whereby Palestinian internet has two telecom ministries.

9. I understand internet activism as pertaining to two different yet related engagements: political engagement organized with the help of internet and political engagement mediated through the internet.

10. Israeli projects like Breaking the Silence and Checkpoint Watch have offered important evidence but do not have much domestic impact yet have become relevant to European and American audiences.

11. A prominent BBC World Service poll across 27 countries conducted after the most violent suppression of the al-Aqsa Intifada between 2002 and 2004 showed that a majority consider Israel to have a negative impact on world peace. The report is found here http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/mar07/BBC_ViewsCountries_Mar07_pr.pdf (last accessed December 10, 2014). And according to another international poll, criticism of Israel increased after the 2009 Cast Lead war and the 2010 attack on the Flotilla. The results of the latter are found here: http://www.middleeastmonitor.org.uk/news/press-release/2136-press-release-new-britisheuropean-poll-reveals-massive-disillusionment-with-israel (last accessed December 10, 2014). In a crucial study of the British liberal daily *The Guardian* Daphna Baram (2004) demonstrates how the paper shifted from "philo-semitism" to "disenchantment" during the 1982 invasion of Lebanon and the Sabra and Shatilla massacres.

12. According to the fourth Geneva Convention, killing journalists is a direct war crime. The reports of the renowned Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) offer valuable data regarding attacks on journalists in the Occupied Territories, see http://www.cpj.org/regions_07/mideast_07/mideast_07.html#israel. For Palestinian sources see the Al Mezan Center for Human Rights at http://www.mezan.org/ (last accessed December 10, 2014).

13. Interview Ramallah, October 2009.

14. At times, the US and Israel intimacy has received criticism from within its own ranks, for instance Berman (who served in the IDF in Gaza and works at the American Enterprise) argues the US army devoted much of its sources to study Israel's methods and strategies during the 2006 war on Lebanon and Cast lead, but did not put as much effort in learning about their failures.

15. See the important project *The New Transparency: Surveillance and Social Sorting* by David Lyon and Elia Zureik. The conference *States of Exception, Surveillance and Population Management: The Case of Israel/Palestine* took place in Cyprus December 2008, see http://www.sscqueens.org/node/197 (last accessed December 10, 2014).

16. The discovered files and bugs suggested there had been close cooperation between Fatah and the CIA. For one of the reports see this piece by Eli Lake for the New York Sun (June 15, 2007) at http://www.nysun.com/foreign/hamas-takes-over-gaza-security-services/56622/ (last accessed December 10, 2014).

17. The concepts Self-Policing and Indigenous Collaboration was discussed by Mouin Rabbani during the SOAS seventh Annual Conference "Past is Present: Settler Colonialism in Palestine" March 5–6, 2011, London.

18. Named after the US Security Coordinator for Israel and the Palestinian Authority, US General Keith Dayton. In the "Dayton Mission" the PA's security forces were trained by US specialists in coordination with Israeli security and effectively became an extension of Israeli population control.

19. Several illuminating analyses of the *Palestine Papers* have been provided, see for instance: http://english.aljazeera.net/palestinepapers/2011/01/2011125145732219555.html (last accessed December 10, 2014) by Mark Perry and http://english.aljazeera.net/palestinepapers/2011/01/2011126132936232554.html (last accessed December 10, 2014) by Ali Abunimah.

20. There are many testimonies that can be found. See, for instance, http://mondoweiss.net/2012/06/do-you-feel-more-arab-or-more-american-two-arab-american-womens-story-of-being-detained-and-interrogated-at-ben-gurion.html (last accessed December 10, 2014).

21. The stage of cooperation and keen developments were a national secret until revealed by Mordechai Vanunu in 1986; its intimate collaboration with the Iranian Shah was revealed when students occupied the US embassy and found documents during the Iranian revolution.

22. It is developed by the firm Rafael, also a research division of the army, which was sold for 100 million USD.

23. A report of such attacks, repression, and confiscation of IT equipment is found here http://stopthewall.org/downloads/pdf/rep-fact-sheet.pdf (last accessed December 10, 2014).

24. In fact, Israel makes sure the Palestinian internet can't be further improved, as unlicensed Israeli ICT is forced upon the Palestinian market (Bahour 2004).

## References

Abu-Laban, Yasmeen, David Lyon, and Elia Zureik (eds.). 2011. *Surveillance and Control in Israel/Palestine: Population, Territory and Power*. New York: Routledge.

Agamben, Giorgio. 2005. *State of Exception*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

al-Amin, Esam. 2009. "CIA-Trained Security Chiefs Elected to the Palestinian Leadership: What Actually Happened in Fatah's Elections?" *Counterpunch*, August 14–16. Accessed December 7, 2014, at: http://www.counterpunch.org/amin08142009.html.

Alexander, Anne and Miriyam Aouragh. 2011. "The Egyptian Experience: Sense and Nonsense of Facebook Revolutions." *International Journal of Communication*, 5: 1344–1358.

Aouragh, Miriyam. 2008. "Virtual Intifada: Online Activism and Everyday Resistance." *Journal of Arab and Muslim Media Research* 1 (2): 109–130.

Aouragh, Miriyam. 2011a. *Palestine Online: Transnationalism, the Internet and the Reconstruction of Identity*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Aouragh, Miriyam. 2011b. "Confined Offline, Traversing Online: Palestinian Mobility through the Prism of the Internet." *Mobilities*, 6 (3): 375–397.

Aouragh, Miriyam. 2012. "Framing the Internet in the Arab Revolutions: Myth Meets Modernity." *Cinema Journal*, 52 (1): 148–156.

Armbrust, Walter. 2000. *Mass Mediations: New Approaches to Popular Culture in the Middle East and Beyond*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Bahour, Sam. 2004. "De-Development Israeli Style." *Miftah*, August 9. Accessed December 7, 2014, at: http://66.241.209.237/Display.cfm?DocId=4477&CategoryId=5.

Beinin, Joel. 2003. "The Israelization of American Middle East Policy Discourse." *Social Text*, 21 (2): 125–139.

Bishara, Azmi. 2008. "David, Goliath and Saul: Repercussions on Israel of the 2006 War." *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, 1 (2): 211–236.

Brook, Paul and Ralph Darlington. 2013. "Partisan, Scholarly and Active: For an Organic Public Sociology of Work." *Work, Employment and Society*, 27 (2): 232–243.

Brown, Ian and Douwe Korff. 2009. "Terrorism and the Proportionality of Internet Surveillance." *European Journal of Criminology*, 6 (2): 119–134.

Buck, Tobias. 2011. "Israel: Invention Tension." *Financial Times*, September 1, 2011, p. 9.

Bunt, Gary. 2003. *Islam in the Digital Age*. New York: Pluto Press.

Burkhart, Grey E. and Susan Older. 2003. *The Information Revolution in the Middle East and North Africa*. Santa Monica, CA, Arlington, VA, and Pittsburgh: National Defense Research Institute.

Collings, Deirdre and Rafal Rohozinski. 2009. *Bullets and Blogs: New Media and the Warfighter*. Analytical synthesis and workshop report available online from: http://www.carlisle.army.mil/DIME/documents/Bullets__ Blogs_new_Media__warfighter-Web%2820%20Oct%2009%29.pdf.

Cook, Jonathan. 2010. "Israel's Video Game Killing Technology." *The Electronic Intifada*, July 13. Accessed December 7, 2014, at: http://electronicintifada.net/content/israels-video-game-killing-technology/8919.

Dahan, Michael. January 2001. "The New 'Inter-Fada'," in symposium on *Battle of the Servers, Battle of the Hearts: New Media and Cyberwars*. Israel: Ben Gurion University and Burda Center for Innovative Communications.

Dahan, Michael. 2013. "The Gaza Strip as Panopticon and Panspectron: The Disciplining and Punishing of a Society." *International Journal of Electronic Politics*, 4 (3) Fall: 44–56.

Donnison, Jon. 2010. "Israel Using Facebook to Recruit Gaza Collaborators." *BBC*, April 5. Accessed December 7, 2014, at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/ hi/8585775.stm.

Doron, Gideon. 2011. "High-Tech Nation: The Future of the Israeli Polity." *Israel Affairs*, 7 (3): 313–326.

Eickelman, Dale and John Anderson (eds.). 2003. N*ew Media in the Muslim World: The Emerging Public Sphere*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Faulkner, Simon. 2013. *Now You Get a Picture, You Can Put It in Your Facebook*. Accessed December 7, 2014, at: http://simonsteachingblog. wordpress.com/2013/07/18/now-you-get-a-picture-you-can-put-it-in- your-facebook/.

Graham, Stephen. 2003. "Lessons in Urbicide." *New Left Review*, 19, January– February. Also available at: http://www.newleftreview.org/?view=2432.

Gregory, Derek. 2004. *The Colonial Present: Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Gordon, Neve. 2011. "Israel's Emergence as a Homeland Security Capital," in Y. Abu-Laban, D. Lyon, and E. Zureik (eds.), *Surveillance and Control in Israel/Palestine: Population, Territory and Power*. London: Routledge, pp. 153–170.

Hajjar, Lisa. 2006. "International Humanitarian Law and 'Wars on Terror': A Comparative Analysis of Israeli and American Doctrines and Policies." *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 36 (1): 21–42.

Halper, Jeff. 2008. *An Israeli in Palestine: Resisting Dispossession, Redeeming Israel*. London: Pluto Press.

Hanafi, Sari. 2009. "Spacio-cide: Colonial Politics, Invisibility and Rezoning in Palestinian Territory." *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, 2 (1): 106–121.

Hands, Joss. 2010. @ *Is for Activism: Dissent, Resistance and Rebellion in a Digital Culture*. London: Pluto Press.

Hass, Amira. 2002. "Operation Destroy the Data." *Ha'aretz*, April 24. Accessed December 7, 2014, at: http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/ opinion/operation-destroy-the-data-1.47023.

Khatib, Lina. 2003. "Communicating Islamic Fundamentalism as Global Citizenship." *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 27 (4): 389–409.

Kimmerling, B. 2003. *Politicide: Ariel Sharon's War against the Palestinians*. London: Verso.

Kuntsman, Adi and Rebecca Stein. 2011. "Digital Suspicion, Politics and the Middle East." *Critical Inquiry*. Accessed December 7, 2014, at: http://criticalinquiry.uchicago.edu/digital_suspicion_politics_and_the_middle_east/.

Li, Darryl. 2006. "The Gaza Strip as Laboratory: Notes in the Wake of Disengagement." *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 35 (2, Winter): 38–55. Accessed December 7, 2014, at: http://www.pchrgaza.org/Library/darryl.pdf.

Lyon, David (ed.). 2003. *Surveillance as Social Sorting: Privacy, Risk and Digital Discrimination*. London: Routledge.

Lyon, David. 1998. "The World Wide Web of Surveillance: The Internet and Off-World Power-Flows." *Information, Communication & Society*, 1 (1): 91–105.

McGreal, Chris. 2010. "Revealed: How Israel Offered to Sell South Africa Nuclear Weapons." *The Guardian*, Monday, May 24. Accessed December 7, 2014, at: http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/may/23/israel-south-africa-nuclear-weapons.

Menn, Joseph. 2011. "Defence Groups Turn to Cybersecurity." *Financial Times*, October 10, 2011.

Miller, Daniel and Slater, Don. 2000. *The Internet: An Ethnographic Approach*. Oxford: Berg.

O'Neil, Mathieu. 2009. *Cyberchiefs: Autonomy and Authority in Online Tribes*. London: Pluto Press.

Philo, Greg and Mark Berry. 2004. *Bad News from Israel*. London: Pluto Press.

Philo, Greg and Mark Berry. 2011. *More Bad News from Israel*. London: Pluto Press.

Roy, Olivier. 2004. *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Senor, Dan and Saul Singer. 2009. *Start-Up Nation: The Story of Israel's Economic Miracle*. New York: McClelland & Stewart.

Spinner, Jackie. 2012. "The Cool New Palestinians: Geeks." *The Christian Science Monitor*, February 18.

Sreberny, Annabelle, & Khiabany, Gholam. 2010. *Blogistan: The Internet and Politics in Iran*. London, England: I.B. Tauris.

Stein, Rebecca. 2012a. "Inside Israel's Twitter War Room: History of a Social Media Arsenal." *Middle East Report*, November 24. Accessed December 7, 2014, at: http://www.merip.org/mero/mero112412.

Stein, Rebecca. 2012b. "State Tube: Anthropological Reflections on Social Media and the Israeli State." *Anthropological Quarterly*, 85 (3): 893–916.

Tawil-Souri, Helga. 2011. "Hacking Palestine: A Digital Occupation." *Al-Jazeera English Online*, November 9.

Trottier, Daniel. 2012. *Social Media as Surveillance: Rethinking Visibility in a Converging World*. Surrey: Ashgate.

Weimann, Gabriel. 2006. *Terror on the Internet: The New Arena, the New Challenges*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press.

Weizman, Eyal. 2002. "The Politics of Verticality." *Open Democracy*, April 23. Accessed December 7, 2014, at: https://www.opendemocracy.net/ecology-politicsverticality/article_801.jsp.

Zureik, Elia. 2001. "Constructing Palestine through Surveillance Practices." *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 28 (2): 205–227.

# The Geopolitics of Press Freedoms in the Israeli-Palestinian Context

*Amahl Bishara*

## Introduction

Over the last two decades, theorists and activists alike have greeted with optimism new technologies as used in journalism, like satellite television and blogs. In the Arab world, especially, these technologies have carried great expectations of allowing media-makers to circumvent repressive governments. In response to this optimistic perspective, others have noted that despite the potential offered by these new technologies, they are still shaped by political and economic structures. These scholars have shown that rather than undermining repressive states, new technologies have often been at least partially co-opted by these states (e.g., Karam 2007; Sakr 2007; Kuntsman and Stein 2011). For example, before the Arab revolts of 2011, Naomi Sakr argued that new media did not, in themselves, change the alignments of power in the Middle East; instead, "it is change caused by divisions and realignments among ruling elites that surfaces via the Arab media landscape, rather than media content that triggers political change" (Sakr 2007: 6). Indeed, even though in some contexts new media have led to an increasingly lively public sphere, "media are not primarily social actors and . . . they are no substitute for a vibrant political opposition" (Hafez 2008: 336). Even during and after the revolts of 2011, while media have certainly been tools in mobilization, prescribing a causal role to media would oversimplify the narrative. The many restrictions and attacks on journalists in Syria and Egypt in recent years attest to the devastating staying power of old forms of press repression, alongside the use of any kinds of "new" media.

This story is not new, nor is it specific to the Arab world. New technologies are always framed by their social and political contexts; as Raymond Williams set forth, "all questions about cause and effect, as between a technology and a society, are intensely practical" (1975: 4). Building on this important insight, I want to add an on-the-ground and practical perspective on news production that highlights another way in which journalism continues to be vulnerable to state control even as it is transformed by new technologies. Media freedoms are still tied to geographic boundaries and freedom of movement.

A bit of historical perspective on media, political authorities, and territoriality is helpful. Benedict Anderson's classic work illuminates the ways in which media, especially the newspaper, helped people to imagine the nation as a shared community (1991). Yet, authorities' uses of media have, of course, not only cultivated horizontal senses of identity and belonging. In the era of colonialism and wired technologies like the telegraph, the power ruling authorities had over media was obvious and incontrovertible, and it was tied to their control over space as well as their often-exclusive access to certain technologies. Larkin even writes of the "colonial sublime"—the sense of awe (albeit a fleeting one) that Nigerians under British rule experienced in encountering new technologies brought by the British, like electricity and wired radios (2008). At the height of the era of national broadcasting of television and radio, there were few alternatives to state-produced mass media, giving state authorities the power to produce pro-government propaganda (Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi 1994) or promote state agendas (Abu-Lughod 2005). These technologies were fundamentally tied to territory: to wires connecting city streets or unwinding across the expanse of a countryside, to regularly spaced broadcasting transmitters. This territoriality did not inevitably suggest a correspondence between media and the state, as broadcast signals in border areas could cross into other states; however, it does mean that territory has been of overriding importance with these older technologies.

Satellite television, the internet, and other wireless technologies seem to have cut more definitively the strings that tie people to state media, proliferating the number of media outlets available to people and in some important ways multiplying the potential number of media producers. Yet, as I argue here, even in an era of Facebook and cell phone cameras, control of journalistic media continues to hinge on the control of territory, in part because journalism relies on reporters' ability to go somewhere to see something happen. While new technologies have allowed information and ideas[1] to circulate more

widely, hard facts of geography—the boundaries of states and other political entities—continue to enable state agents to restrict press freedoms, often under the banner of national security, and sometimes without even having to explicitly address the topic of the press. If, at one point, it seemed that technological and political trends pointed toward "deterritorialization," a process in which "money, commodities, and persons are involved in ceaselessly chasing each other around the world" (Appadurai 1990: 12), this is hardly the case today, especially for people in sites of conflict. Press freedoms are deeply influenced by the continued territoriality of people and media.

The Palestinian case elucidates this so clearly in part because space is so regimented in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Israeli control over the territories that make up Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip hinges on divisions of space and people, such that democracy and freedom of expression are generally preserved for some people in some places (inside Israel, especially for Israeli Jews), while for those in the occupied territories—especially Palestinians—rights to freedom of expression are more constrained. However, it is not only a stark division between two places that is important. Instead, we find what postcolonial scholar Achille Mbembe has characterized as a "*splintering occupation*," in which "the occupied territories are . . . divided into a web of intricate internal borders and various isolated cells" (Mbembe 2003: 28). Just as these cells and internal borders affect the movement of people and goods, they also affect the movement of information and ideas. Corresponding with what Mbembe characterizes as "territorial fragmentation," there is also a fragmentation of categories of people, of different kinds of Israelis, Palestinians, and internationals who are allowed distinct privileges as they pass through this fragmented territory. Critically, it is not necessarily that these divisions of space and people are primarily designed to limit free expression. Instead, limitations on movement and the creation of zones of endangerment—whatever the multiple purposes behind these policies may be—have the effect of constricting journalists' abilities to work.

Seeing freedom of the press through this lens of territoriality changes our view of the conditions necessary for freedom of the press. Especially in liberal thought, the right to freedom of expression has often been conceived of as a foundation upon which other rights are built. A "frequently asked questions" page of the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalism (CPJ) expresses this argument: "Without a free press, few other human rights are attainable. A strong press freedom environment encourages the growth of a robust civil

society, which leads to stable, sustainable democracies and healthy social, political, and economic development" (CPJ: n.d.). The right to freedom of expression cannot be secured in the absence of other rights, notably in this case the right to life and security of person, the right to freedom of movement, and the right to equal protection under the law. The Johannesburg Principles on National Security, Freedom of Expression and Access to Information confirm these important interconnections among rights. They state clearly that freedom of movement is integral to the sustenance of a healthy press:

> [G]overnments may not prevent journalists or representatives of inter-governmental or nongovernmental organizations with a mandate to monitor adherence to human rights or humanitarian standards from entering areas where there are reasonable grounds to believe that violations of human rights or humanitarian law are being, or have been, committed. Governments may not exclude journalists or representatives of such organizations from areas that are experiencing violence or armed conflict except where their presence would pose a clear risk to the safety of others. (Article 19 1996: 12)

Israel's restrictions on movement—which especially affect Palestinian journalists, but do still impede foreign journalists—clearly violate this ideal.

In that freedom of the press is tied up with so many other rights, we might see it as ultimately connected to the concept of sovereignty. Using the simplest definition of this complex term as something like the ability of a culture to reproduce itself on its own terms, and drawing on Arendt's observation that, in practice, rights are tied to the nation-state (Arendt 1976), we might suggest that a robust freedom of the press is impossible in the absence of Palestinian sovereignty, that is, under military occupation. Alternatively, we might turn to Mbembe's very different use of the term, as "the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die" (Mbembe 2003: 11). Drawing on Foucault, Mbembe views contemporary sovereignty especially in circumstances like the Palestinian case as encompassing multiple techniques, including the disciplinary (roughly, ways in which we are made to police ourselves), the biopolitical (ways in which the state is productive of life), and the necropolitical (ways in which the state has power over death), all of which can compromise the ability of people to live as full subjects. Techniques of sovereignty include means of controlling populations by fostering conditions in which they internalize authority, by using bureaucratic measures, and by using violence. We will see here that restrictions on freedom of

the press indeed mix together such techniques, especially the bureaucratic and military. As Mbembe puts it, "Invisible killing is added to outright executions" (2003: 30). Free expression is necessarily compromised—in multiple ways—in a circumstance where such tactics of sovereignty are in force.

Moreover, the Palestinian case demonstrates that today, restrictions of the right to freedom of expression in one location have global implications. This is in part because of the ways in which new technologies have increased forms of global interdependence with regards to information produced and shared on short time scales. The constraints placed on Palestinians' participation in journalistic production affect access to information about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict around the world because Palestinian journalists play integral roles in the production of news consumed around the world. They work for (1) foreign news organizations, (2) wire service agencies with global scope, and (3) Palestinian news production companies that contract with foreign news organizations. Palestinian journalists are the fixers, reporters, videographers, and photographers who are most likely to be on the scene of breaking news in the occupied territories. While military occupation functions by dividing people into different categories, the concept and networked institutions of journalism as a profession ideally establish some kind of parity among members of the profession. According to these professional ideals, journalists of different nationalities working in the same organization function similarly because of similar values, training, and institutional structures. This professional parity—which ultimately benefits news institutions as a whole—stands in contrast with Israeli authorities' attempts to divide Palestinians, internationals, and Israelis from each other.

Palestinian journalism has a long history of a steadfast existence in the fissures of state control. From 1967 to 1994, Palestinian media in the West Bank and Gaza existed under a regime of prior censorship, in which Israeli censors had to approve every article and every paragraph before its publication. While Hebrew language-Israeli publications also officially operated under the watch of military censors, Israeli restrictions on media did not operate equally across all of the territory under Israeli control. Under the tightest constraints were media in the West Bank and Gaza, followed by Palestinian media based in Jerusalem. English-language Palestinian publications had somewhat more leeway, followed by the Arabic language Israeli communist party paper, and then the non-Arab press inside Israel (CPJ 1988). The regime of prior censorship melted away with the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (PA) in 1994. Indeed, one of the

apparent fruits of the Oslo period was a thriving media landscape. Not only did the PA establish its own television and radio stations, but it also allowed for the establishment of dozens of private radio and television stations in the occupied territories. At the same time, internet technologies brought new channels for expression in outlets like Amin and Ma'an, even if these initiatives were often supported by a growing pool of money from international donors with their own agendas (Stanley 2007).

However, as I show here, important constraints on Palestinian media persisted, and not only because of the repressiveness of the PA itself. Even if Israel does not methodically and directly limit Palestinian expression, its control of other aspects of daily life means that Palestinians do not enjoy freedom of expression. In this article, I investigate how the right to freedom of expression is inextricable from other rights. To this end, I consider some of the material conditions of freedom of expression. Specifically, I examine how different divisions of space and people affect the production of news about Palestinians, starting with the question of Israeli denial of press passes to Palestinian journalists, then examining how checkpoints limit the production of news, and finally turning to coverage of the 2008–2009 and 2014 wars in Gaza. I seek to emphasize here how Israel's approach to the media in the occupied Palestinian territories is inextricable from its military policies.

Methodologically, I draw upon interviews conducted with Palestinian journalists between 2003 and 2010 and ethnographic research with journalists at the sites of news production, as well as human rights reports on journalism and conflict in the Israeli-Palestinian context and journalists' public reflections on their work in the West Bank and Gaza. The bulk of this research focused on the roles that Palestinian journalists play in producing US news, and so this paper also focuses more on Palestinians involved with foreign media organizations, as opposed to those working for Palestinian news organizations. To protect the confidentiality of my sources, I generally do not use the real names of journalists I have interviewed, given the sensitive nature of some of the subject matter.[2]

### New Technologies, Old Imperatives

New technologies have enabled new routes of circulation, but—embedded as they are in the neoliberal news industry (Boyer 2013)—they have also endangered the ideal of eyewitness reporting in Palestine and beyond. New technologies have transformed modes

of circulation for "new" and "old" media alike. Terrestrial television stations and paper publications have internet presence, making their material available the world over. New technologies, along with media conglomeration, have led to new responsibilities for journalists to produce content across multiple platforms. For example, a news organization that used to focus on the publication of a daily newspaper might now produce a website that includes not only print stories but also a high volume of images and stories in video, all of which are constantly updated. Tighter production schedules have turned "news cycles" into "news cyclones," with constant deadlines and a rush to beat competitors to the story, not only for the next day's front page, but for the next hour's "breaking news" headline (Klinenberg 2005: 56). These new time pressures change reporting patterns, and media critics have noted alarming changes in how journalists work under these new pressures. As Klinenberg explains, "In their most extreme forms concerns about efficiency can push journalists to forgo traditional kinds of reporting and to rely, instead, on the most easily accessible information: news that is available online." Using this material is "faster and easier than work in the streets" (Klinenberg 2005: 56). Olivier Baisnée and Dominique Marchetti have dubbed this new kind of reporting—relying on press releases and other information that can be gathered from one's desk—"sedentary journalism" (Baisnée and Marchetti 2006). Palestinian news organizations are part of this trend. According to a study by MIFTAH, "The percentage of the news and translated materials from international, Arabic- and Hebrew-language journals on average comprise 55% of the editorial copy" (MIFTAH 2005: 3).

Critically, though, telephone reporting and "sedentary journalism" do demand that *someone* be on the ground to report events. In the occupied territories, these people are often Palestinian photojournalists, videographers, or reporters. While certain kinds of stories can be reported adequately from a desk—for example, investigation of a budget, or other complex document—coverage of conflict demands eyewitness reporting: either a journalists' first-hand account of what happened at a scene of violence or a careful, multiple sourced investigation of an event. Good reporting can make the difference between categorizing a shooting as an incident of someone being "caught in the crossfire," a soldier's negligence, or a case of willful extrajudicial assassination. This may seem an obvious point, but it is especially pivotal in the case of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, in which Israeli military authorities maintain a press machine that is vastly superior in its basic ability to promulgate facts than that of the Palestinian side.

Basic reporting can challenge official statements from both sides—
and it relies on being on the scene of events.

## Accreditation and Limits on Reporting

Israel's Government Press Office (GPO) issues cards to journalists
working in Israel and the occupied territories. An examination of
the logic of these GPO cards illuminates how Israeli rule operates
by meting out rights differentially across the territory under its con-
trol, even though there may be a guise of similarity suggested by the
cards themselves. The GPO card is an essential tool for all working
journalists since, as the GPO website accurately notes, "The press
card facilitates entrance to Government buildings, press conferences,
and access across IDF checkpoints and Police lines" (GPO 2010).
However, the cards function differently within Israel than in the
occupied territories. Within Israel, GPO cards serve as government-
authorized passes, similar to those that might be offered by other
large institutions anywhere, ranging from a government office to
a sports team. They certify journalists' identities and grant them
expeditious access to semi-public events like press conferences. Yet,
within the West Bank, GPO cards have a different purpose. They
do not grant access to discrete institutions, but rather, they facili-
tate movement on the road, wherever journalists are attempting to
go. They help journalists to enter certain restricted regions of the
occupied territories and to negotiate passage through the vast web
of checkpoints that "regulat[e] the flow of Palestinian passengers
under Israel's volatile regime of security" (Weizman 2007: 144).
Here, I will examine how GPO cards functioned for Palestinians
when they did function at all, and also explain what happened when
Palestinian journalists lost virtually all access to the GPO cards in
the early 2000s.

    The ability to cross through checkpoints was absolutely critical dur-
ing the second Intifada, when checkpoints were especially restrictive
(and rampant, as I discuss further below). Journalists with GPO cards
could afford to regard many of these checkpoints as inconveniences
rather than outright barriers. For example, during much of my field-
work in 2004, neither Palestinians who were from places other than
Nablus nor internationals with only tourist visas (but with no press
passes) could enter Nablus, the largest city in the West Bank, or the
entire Gaza Strip, but GPO card-holding foreign journalists could
generally enter both. GPO cards could sometimes also win journal-
ists access behind military cordons, as around construction sites for

the separation barrier. GPO cards give an individual a legitimate reason for being somewhere, and can preclude or cut short questioning by the military.

Additionally, GPO cards have different purposes for different kinds of people. When they had them, Palestinians benefited more from GPO cards than Israelis or internationals because their movement is more likely to be impeded. For example, during the second Intifada some checkpoints within the West Bank were impassable for some categories of Palestinians, often for men under the age of 35, unless they had a special permit. Those carrying a GPO card might have passed through a checkpoint on the basis of being a journalist when otherwise they would not be able to. Internationals were less likely to be questioned, and thus, in a sense, had less need for the press passes than did Palestinians. Israelis, too, could move much more easily than Palestinians. On the occasions during the second Intifada when Israelis were prevented from entering the occupied territories, a GPO card sometimes secured them passage. Perhaps most fundamentally, GPO cards allowed Palestinian journalists from the occupied territories to enter Israel. Israelis and internationals obviously do not need passes to enter Israel from the occupied territories. We can see, then, a tiered system in which GPO cards would make the most difference for Palestinian journalists in the occupied territories. GPO cards can trump many of the other restrictions on movement that Palestinians face.

To take this a step further, GPO cards were potentially even more instrumental in certain parts of the occupied territories than in other parts, because journalists are treated differently across different parts of the occupied territories. During the second Intifada, the Israeli military's denial of professional recognition was especially pronounced when it became clear that a Palestinian journalist was from a "hot" area known for its resistance, like Nablus or Gaza. Palestinian journalist Laila El-Haddad recalled an Israeli military spokesperson telling her, "As a Palestinian from Gaza, you are considered a security threat first, a journalist second" (El-Haddad 2005). Likewise, Reuters photographer ʿAbed Qusini told the US radio and television program *Democracy Now!* what it meant to be from Nablus:

> In the last two years we have had bad experiences with the Israeli army. They are dealing with us as Palestinians. In the curfew[s] and in the bad situations, they stop us, and they don't stop the foreigners. They say: "You are Palestinians before you are journalists." And when I give them my Reuters ID [they ask] me for a Palestinian ID. [A soldier]

said: "You are a Nablus guy, you are under curfew. You are Palestinian before [you are a] journalist." They say always: "No immunity for Palestinian journalists." (Goodman 2003)

Agency identification cards, like the one from Reuters that Qusini presented, were not recognized by soldiers, nor were International Federation of Journalists' press cards—only GPO cards could give a journalist professional recognition in the eyes of the army. Journalists, like other people in Israel and the occupied territories, were divided not only by their nationality or citizenship status, but also by the specific cities from which they came. This is an important element of the "splintering occupation" Mbembe describes.

Crucially, even before 2001, Palestinian journalists never enjoyed equality of access to GPO cards. For foreign correspondents, applying for a GPO card is a simple bureaucratic task. However, for Palestinian journalists, the GPO card had always been harder to obtain. Because Palestinians are not allowed into Israel without permits, even gaining access to the GPO office in downtown Jerusalem was difficult. When Palestinian journalists did not already have the permits required to enter Jerusalem, they could ask their employers to help them apply for a pass. They also waited longer for a response from the GPO, because the GPO investigated the applicant's history of political involvement. In this sense, Palestinian journalists' appeals for credentials blended into a broad category of military permits for which Palestinians apply, including medical permits and work permits that similarly allow Palestinians entrance into Israel. Like these other permits, GPO cards, too, hinge in part on what Israel deems security concerns. According to the CPJ, Israel generally granted GPO cards to Palestinian journalists "sparingly" (Campagna 2000: 384) and "arbitrarily" (Campagna 2001: 261).

Denial of GPO cards has rendered Palestinian journalists' visits to their own bureaus in Jerusalem extremely difficult, if not impossible, which in turn limits the professional advancement of Palestinian journalists. They could not attend organizational meetings or go to Jerusalem-based trainings. Reuters cameraman Mazen Dana of Hebron described the movement restrictions related to never having had a GPO card:

For nine years, I am asking permission to go to my office in Jerusalem. I am not allowed. Really, I am going in an illegal way, smuggling [myself] and going. Two times, they [Israeli authorities] caught me in Jerusalem and they arrested me. And 18 days I spent in jail, just because I entered Jerusalem illegally, without permission. (Bishara 2002)

In the early 2000s, a Palestinian field producer who lived in Bethlehem and had been offered a higher-level position as a producer in Jerusalem applied repeatedly for a GPO card and was denied each time. Eventually, the press organization hired a Palestinian who had a Jerusalem identification card that carried with it the same movement privileges within Israel and the occupied territories as Israeli citizens enjoy.

Thus, GPO cards have always been a technology of segregation, even as they are purportedly a tool of professional accreditation. During the second Intifada, the use of GPO cards as a means to distinguish among different kinds of journalists became even starker. In November 2000, less than two months after the second Intifada began, the Israeli Ministry of Defense ordered that Palestinians working for Western news organizations should not carry GPO cards because they were biased (Campagna 2001: 262). From this time on, Palestinian journalists started to lose their credentials. At the beginning of 2002, just months before Israel began its large-scale invasion of Palestinian cities, Israeli authorities began systematically refusing to renew the GPO cards of Palestinian journalists from the occupied territories, including those working for international organizations.

The new restrictions on Palestinian journalists affected individuals trying to work, the international media institutions that relied on their work and, finally and crucially, the substantive coverage of an ongoing international conflict. In 2001, Tami Allen-Frost, the deputy chairperson of the Jerusalem-based Foreign Press Association (FPA) and an ITN reporter, critiqued the policy of revoking Palestinian GPO cards, commenting, "There are many jobs Israelis simply could not do. For instance, no ITN producer would take the risk of sending an Israeli cameraman into an area controlled by the Palestinian Authority" (Leith 2001). Indeed, CPJ, the New York-based free press organization, confirmed that during the Intifada, Israeli journalists avoided the occupied territories: "Only a few Israeli journalists venture into the territories because of army restrictions barring them and due to threats from Palestinian militants. The few who go must sign a waiver absolving the army of responsibility for their safety" (CPJ 2003). A letter signed by dozens of European, American, and Arab bureau chiefs of foreign media organizations and issued as an FPA statement in January 2002 urgently called for a reversal of the GPO's policy stating that it "[had] already resulted in significant difficulties for us in covering the important story of the Israeli Palestinian conflict in a fair and balanced manner" (FPA 2002). Even

though Reuters won a 2004 case in Israel's high court, Palestinian journalists have not regained access to GPO cards, because they have become explicitly tied to the arbitrary permit system and to nationality (see Bishara 2013:92 for more information). More recently, some Palestinian journalists have asked instead that Israeli authorities recognize the International Press Card issued by the International Federation of Journalists, as in an Avaaz petition from 2013 entitled "Freedom of Movement for Palestinian Journalists" (+*972 Magazine* and Activestills 2013). The fundamental point remains: for information to be produced, journalists must be able to move freely.

## The Imperative for Emplacement: Journalists Working Under Closure

In January 2004, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) counted 763 barriers to movement in the West Bank, an area slightly smaller than the state of Delaware. These barriers included 59 checkpoints, staffed by Israeli soldiers, 10 partial checkpoints that operated sporadically, and 40 road gates, long metal gates that the Israeli army could open or close. Other obstacles restricted vehicle movement without Israeli soldiers present: 479 earth mounds, 75 trenches, and 100 roadblocks made of one-meter concrete blocks too massive to move without heavy machinery. The separation wall, curfews, and the blockade on Gaza are all part of this system of closure, as well.

Importantly, no one would argue that the main goal of this system is to limit press freedoms. Yet, it does effectively limit journalists' abilities to work. Especially during times of crisis when journalists' work is most urgent, closure has increased travel times to the sites of news, and it has discouraged travel in the West Bank. The closure system can especially make it difficult to reach the villages far from urban centers, even as these villages have become hubs of new movements of popular resistance, as against the separation wall. One often encounters debates over whether Israel is concerned with its media image or impervious to world opinion as long as it is able to continue its expansionist programs on the ground. One thing that these debates overlook is that by the very acts of implementing its system of military control, Israel constrains the production of critical news. These constraints are effective even though they are not always easily recognizable as constraints. Israel does not necessarily have to enact harsh new restrictions to limit press coverage. Its practices of military rule impede coverage, especially during times of

intense military aggression. The same explanations that are used to justify military assaults—generally that national security is at stake—are likewise employed if questions arise regarding Israel's treatment of journalists.

Just as Israeli restrictions on journalists in the West Bank are a matter of on-the-ground tactics, so are Palestinian journalists' skilled attempts to evade these restrictions. As Israeli closures have intensified in recent years and as Palestinian journalists have been stripped of their journalistic accreditation, they have become experts in emplacement. In New York in 2001 before conducting my fieldwork in the West Bank, I interviewed the Hebron-based journalist Mazen Dana about movement restrictions that hindered his work. He told me that he sometimes traversed the Old City by leaping from rooftop to rooftop. At the time, I thought this was an extravagant claim, but when I went to Hebron years later—and after Mazen's tragic death in Iraq at the hands of US soldiers—I saw that the Old City's Ottoman era buildings were densely packed. During a tour, a middle-aged woman told my group of American visitors that during curfews she traveled by rooftop to bring her grandchildren home from a nearby youth center. Palestinian journalists draw upon some of the same skills as non-journalist Palestinians to cope with the checkpoints.

Dana's trip to work was also difficult. He explained that his home in Hebron was in an area under full Israeli control, while most of his work was in downtown Hebron, parts of which were under Palestinian control and parts of which were under Israeli control. His commute to work was always a challenge:

> Many, many times soldiers stop me when I am trying to go back to my home [from work in downtown Hebron] because it is in Area C, which means it is under Israeli authority. It [the detention] takes half an hour, one hour, and sometimes they ask me to go back. They do not let me, one way or another, to go home, to my home. (Bishara 2002)

Again, it is important to note that closure and its effects have been widespread in Palestinian society, especially during the second Intifada, and they do not only affect journalists. For example, a Palestinian teacher I knew commuted daily from Bethlehem to Abu Dis, but during the Intifada, I would often find her home early because she simply had not been able to make it to work. Perseverance could do only so much.

The ingenuity of Palestinian journalists to work around restrictions often had limited success. In the winter of 2004, a journalist I call

Rana organized a trip for a group of journalists to a press confer-
ence and protest in the village of Bayt Surik, located in the Jerusalem
governorate in the West Bank. According to Israeli plans, the separa-
tion barrier would surround Bayt Surik on three sides. Palestinian
advocates stressed that this would destroy some homes and leave the
village without adequate water resources.[3] As part of the growing
popular resistance against the separation barrier, village leaders were
planning a protest that would bring residents of six nearby villages
together to march to the site where the wall would be built.

Rana was a fast-talking, tri-lingual field producer, as dynamic in
English as she was in Arabic and Hebrew, and she had been hard at
work arranging for a group of journalists to attend this protest for
two weeks, drumming up the interest of European and American
journalists working for radio and newspaper outlets. She was tak-
ing some of the same journalists to Abu Dis later in the week, but
there, the wall was already built. She considered the trip to Bayt
Surik to be an opportunity for journalists to see what Palestinians
were losing because of the barrier, losses too often hidden at the sites
where the wall was a fact on the ground. She said that the group
would meet a family who had been served confiscation orders for
their land, a Palestinian member of the Israeli Knesset, a member of
the Palestinian parliament, and a well-respected priest. We met at the
American Colony, a hotel and restaurant that served as the elegant
hub of many foreign correspondents and wealthy Palestinians' social
lives in East Jerusalem.

Israeli soldiers stopped the first part of our four-car caravan at a
roadblock outside of Bayt Iksa, one village away from Bayt Surik. The
soldiers asked to see our identity cards and our press passes. They ten-
tatively let us pass, even though we did not all have press passes, but
as we were waiting for the remainder of the cars to arrive, a police car
swung around in front of us, and the soldiers announced that we could
not pass—we were heading into a closed military area. Soon, there were
at least seven cars being detained. Rana moved into action, both to
try to secure passage but also to illuminate what closure meant for the
foreign correspondents. Rana summarized what was happening, offer-
ing her own analysis of journalism and counter-insurgency. She called
Israeli military authorities, and encouraged other journalists to do the
same. They replied that they were working on the situation. Rana
asked a soldier to see the military order that designated the area as a
closed military area, and we took pictures of the order. She even took
the order in her own hands and examined it for a while. It mapped out
a region around Bayt Iksa and said that the closure was in effect from

nine in the morning until eight at night. The closures meant that Beit Sureik was inaccessible. Some of the foreign correspondents snapped pictures of the order, realizing that this might be the only story they reported on that day. A British journalist asked Rana if the soldiers had given a reason for the closure, and she reported that they had not. The Orthodox priest who was also headed to the protest arrived, and joined the impromptu event, giving a few small interviews about the injustice of the wall and the need to protect human rights.

The yield of the day was mixed. We heard that of the people who had planned to speak at the protest, only the Palestinian parliamentarian had made it there from outside the village. Rana said that the Palestinian radio reporter and a reporter from a major Palestinian newspaper had also been prohibited from entering. Still, while the army did effectively prohibit journalists from covering an important press conference and protest, Rana had managed to deliver an event of some sort. One foreign journalist commented that Israeli authorities were "so stupid" for closing down the area. After all, he said, just a day earlier, Israel had organized its own tour of the wall for journalists, so shutting down this protest seemed heavy-handed. However, it seemed like their tactics had worked fairly well for them. As this popular movement against the wall expanded over the next several years, the Israeli army has continued to use closure to block protesters and others from attending these protests.

We waited around for a bit, hoping to get through, and then someone gave word of another route to the demonstration. We piled back into the cars. There was, it seems, always another event nearby to cover, always someone else to tell a story. On the way, the taxi driver told us the history of the area through which we were driving. One of the foreign correspondents spotted her next story in his words. When we arrived at the next village, though, we were told the demonstration was a twenty-five minute walk through the mountains. Most of the journalists decided the walk was too far, and they did not want to risk leaving any heavy, expensive equipment in the car. They went home. Perhaps some kind of a story was produced that day, a story of restriction and closure—but the crucial story of the wall and its effect on Palestinian agriculture was not covered. Moreover, if this series of events repeated itself, journalists would not continue to regard closure as a viable "substitute" story. Journalists would be more likely to just stay home rather than waste their time attempting to do reporting. While GPO cards functioned during the second Intifada to divide journalists into different groups—accredited, nonaccredited; Palestinian, Israeli, and international—Palestinian

journalists did have some tactics for contesting Israeli control, but they tended to produce half-victories.

## War in Gaza: The Blockade on Information

During the 2008–2009 war in Gaza, the importance of geographic movement for the production of news was even more obvious. Once again, Israeli limitations on freedom of the press were inextricable from its limitations on movement in general. Movement of people in and out of Gaza has been increasingly restricted over the last decades, starting with Israeli restrictions on Palestinians' abilities to move between the West Bank and Gaza during the Oslo period from 1994 to 2000, and then intensifying to increasingly harsher constraints on internationals' abilities to enter Gaza during the second Intifada and its aftermath, and even more severe restrictions on Palestinians. Following Hamas' victory in legislative elections in early 2006, Israel declared the Gaza Strip "hostile territory" and instituted a blockade on Gaza, closing border crossings to people and goods and intermittently cutting off the provision of fuel and electricity. Israeli journalists were banned from entering Gaza, and foreign journalists were sporadically prevented from entering, as well.

In practice, few foreign correspondents are stationed in Gaza. Instead, they go there occasionally to cover stories, working closely with Palestinian translators and fixers. They rely on Palestinian reporters for everyday reporting. Major wire services like Reuters, the Associated Press, and Agence France Presse all have bureaus in Gaza, staffed by Palestinian reporters, photojournalists, and videographers. Other major news organizations acquire video footage from Palestinian production companies. Still other news organizations, like the *New York Times*, have had Palestinian staff in Gaza. In short, Palestinian journalists are at the heart of global coverage of the Gaza Strip. Still, robust coverage certainly depends on the ability of foreign correspondents stationed in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv to enter Gaza, because media institutions prefer to have their foreign correspondents do reporting for feature articles and the most important news.

Restrictions on journalists' access intensified in the months leading up to the 2008–2009 war. On November 5, 2008, Israeli military authorities ceased allowing foreign journalists into the Gaza Strip (FPA 2008). The FPA regarded this as a severe constriction on their ability to work, noting that humanitarian passage into Gaza was

continuing. The Board of the FPA issued a statement on November 10, 2008, declaring, "It is absolutely essential that international journalists be allowed to enter the territory and deliver their news reports to Israel and the rest of the world" (FPA 2008). The closure was also legally challenged by the FPA, which petitioned Israel's High Court on November 24, asking it to rule on the legality of the ban (Weill and Azarov 2009). Over the next several weeks, military authorities opened and closed the border sporadically, without prior announcement. These occasional openings allowed Israeli authorities to maintain that they were not limiting journalists' access wholesale, while at the same time journalists did not find it easy to take advantage of the openings because of their fleeting and unannounced nature.

On December 27, the Israeli attack on Gaza began under the name Operation Cast Lead, and for the duration of the military operations, foreign journalists were prevented from entering Gaza—with the exception of a few journalists who were permitted to "embed" with Israeli forces after January 7. Although on December 31, 2008, the Israeli High Court ruled that the government should allow 12 journalists entry into Gaza as a pool each time the Erez crossing was opened, the government did not comply with this ruling (RSF 2009: 3). Only once a ceasefire was in place did Israel lift the restrictions it had imposed in early November. Instead, the hundreds of foreign journalists (including between 800 and 1,000 permanently accredited journalists and another 500 who were accredited to cover the war as visitors) were directed to a press center in the Israeli town of Sderot, which had been hit by Hamas rockets. This captive audience was not allowed within 2 kilometers of Gaza, and was given tours that included a visit to an exhibit documenting the impact of Hamas' Qassam rockets, dubbed the "Qassam museum" (RSF 2009: 4).

Israeli authorities offered a number of different explanations for why journalists were prohibited from entering Gaza. In November, Peter Lerner, an Israeli government spokesperson, asserted that there were no restrictions on the press specifically; instead, restrictions on journalists were merely a part of the other elements of the blockade, which, of course, Israel explains through an expansive logic of security (CPJ 2009). In other instances, Israeli authorities allowed that restrictions on journalists were intended to limit negative coverage of Israel. Israeli authorities even suggested that foreign journalists were a tool of Hamas. Said Daniel Seaman, director of the Israeli Government Press Office, "Any journalist who enters Gaza becomes a fig leaf and front for the Hamas terror organization, and I see no reason why we should help that" (Bronner 2009). In other instances, government officials asserted

that journalists were being prevented from entering Gaza for their own safety or for the safety of the Israeli staff at Erez Crossing (CPJ 2009). Just as the sporadic physical opening and closure of the border made it difficult for journalists to take advantage of the moments when it was open, so too did the rhetorical opening and closure of different arguments render it more difficult to contest Israeli logics.[4]

Analysts suggest that the restriction on journalists' entry into Gaza was a reaction to the negative press coverage of the 2006 Lebanon War. *New York Times* correspondent Ethan Bronner argues that Israeli authorities were especially concerned with the Israeli media's negative coverage of the war:

> In 2006 in the war against Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Israeli and foreign media had sort of the run of the place. People were constantly talking to soldiers about their lack of good guns and decent food and enough water. There were mid-level commanders going live on radio talking about what they thought ought to happen.
>
> And the commission that was set up by the government at the end of that war to examine what had gone wrong devoted some attention to the media policy of the army and decided that it was not good at all for the strategic objectives of the army. So they revamped their information policy. (Garfield 2009)

His argument has merit, but Israeli restrictions on foreign correspondents' movement predate 2006. As noted above, during its 2002 invasions into Palestinian cities, Israeli authorities prohibited entry of foreign journalists into Jenin and Nablus, and the military frequently used the designation of certain spaces as closed military areas to limit journalists' movements within smaller spaces during the second Intifada as well. Similar control of the foreign press in Lebanon would have been impossible because Israel does not control who enters and leaves Lebanon, as they do the West Bank and Gaza.

Perhaps the unintended consequence of Israeli restrictions on the foreign press was that Palestinian journalists conducted all first-hand reporting of the war. To a certain extent, this may have signaled a failure of Israel's attempts at restricting coverage, as the presence of Palestinian journalists ensured that the world had access to information about the conflict. However, foreign correspondents insisted that coverage would have been richer had they been allowed to enter. Commented Bronner of the *New York Times*:

> If we could get in to Gaza, believe me, the coverage would be bigger, better, and stronger. We know that. Of course, it's a dangerous

situation on the ground as well. There are places one would not be able to go instantly, but it would certainly be a much more comprehensive look, and not necessarily all to the ill of the Israel defense forces. (Garfield 2009)

As Reporters Without Borders observed, "The fact that the only images of the conflict in Gaza were made by Palestinian media prompted the international media to use them cautiously" (RSF 2009: 12). Especially early in the conflict, foreign broadcasters noted that images had been produced by Palestinian journalists and could not be independently verified.

Surely, a desire to restrict coverage was part of the Israeli authorities' intentions in limiting journalists' access to Gaza. However, it is also possible that Israel restricted foreign journalists' presence not only in order to constrain coverage, but also in order to make it easier for the Israeli military to carry out operations without killing non-Palestinian civilians and thereby provoking international outcry. During the Gaza War, longstanding Israeli intimations that all Palestinians were threats took the shape of open Israeli accusations that Hamas militants fought from within civilian neighborhoods, and thus that it was impossible for the Israeli military to avoid hurting Palestinian civilians in its campaign against Hamas. More than 1,300 Palestinians were killed in Gaza during the three-week offensive, more than half of whom were civilians (B'Tselem 2009). The UN Human Rights Commission's Goldstone Report concluded that several incidents indicated "a low threshold for the use of lethal fire against the civilian population" and that Israeli attacks included "direct targeting and arbitrary killing of Palestinian civilians" (Goldstone, et al. 2009: 16). The report found that the military was operating on the basis of the "Dahiya doctrine," as dubbed by key Israeli generals. The Dahiya doctrine is a plan of action effective in the Lebanon War of 2006, which stipulates that Israel will use disproportionate force in areas from which it has been fired upon, because these places—whether cities, refugee camps, or villages—are to be regarded as military bases (Goldstone, et al. 2009: 229). Similarly, in the wake of the 2008–2009 Gaza War, an Israeli soldier stated in a pre-military training session at Oranim Academic College in Kiryat Tivon that different informal rules of engagement existed in Gaza: "That's what is so nice, supposedly, about Gaza: You see a person on a road, walking along a path. He doesn't have to be with a weapon, you don't have to identify him with anything and you can just shoot him. With us it was an old woman, on whom I didn't see

any weapon. The order was to take the person out, that woman, the moment you see her" (Harel 2009). Obviously, these policies—or at the very least attitudes—would put any people in the area, including foreign journalists, at risk of injury or death. It is thus difficult to separate the pure military goal of limiting non-Palestinian civilians' presence in Gaza from the public relations goal of limiting foreign journalists' access to information in Gaza. The military imperative had a key public relations dimension.

In these circumstances, another barrier to journalists' gathering of information was that their movement *within* Gaza was also severely limited because their lives were under threat, just as all people's lives were. An RSF investigation found that two Palestinian journalists were killed while they were working, and four other journalists were killed during the war but not while they were working. This underscores the extent to which it is difficult to separate dangers posed to journalists from those posed to the rest of the civilian population. The two journalists killed while working were Basel Faraj, a cameraman who was working with Palestine Media Production Company, and ʿAlaaʾ Murtaja, a radio correspondent for al-Buraq Radio. On December 27, Faraj was traveling in a vehicle marked "TV" in red. The vehicle was hit with shell fragments when a nearby building was targeted. He was severely injured that day, and he died on January 6 in a Cairo hospital. Murtaja was killed immediately on January 9, when his home was hit while he was reporting live on air. He was one of several journalists whose homes the Israeli army hit, not because they were targeted as homes of journalists, but because the Israeli army hit many homes during the war. Both of these instances demonstrate that press freedom cannot thrive when there are such wholesale threats to civilians' lives. Similarly, one Italian journalist who had managed to enter Gaza via Egypt recounted being under Israeli fire for hours on January 16 despite the fact that he had announced his presence to the Israeli army. Military authorities told him it would be worthless to mark his car with the word "media." He concluded, "I have often come under military fire, but it's the first time I have been confronted with an army whose rules of engagement allow it to fire continuously on civilians" (RSF 2009: 5). These instances suggest that military policy and press policy were hardly distinguishable from each other. The Israeli military closure allowed for anyone in Gaza to be regarded as a threat, journalists or not, internationals or Palestinians.

This pattern has continued during Israel's subsequent wars on Gaza. During the 2014 war, the Committee to Protect Journalists found that at least seven journalists and media workers were killed as they worked:

> On July 9, a driver for the local agency Media 24, Hamid Shihab, was killed when his car marked as press was hit by an Israeli strike. On July 20, Khaled Hamad, a cameraman for the local Continue Production Films, was killed by Israeli shelling in Shijaiyah neighborhood. Ten days later, a cameraman for the Hamas-run al-Aqsa TV, Sameh al-Aryan, and two staff working for the Palestine Network for Press and Media, Rami Rayan and Mohammed al-Deiri, died in the Israeli bombardment of the same neighborhood. And Associated Press video journalist Simone Camilli and freelance translator Ali Abu Afash were killed when unexploded ordnance blew up on August 13. (Stern 2014)

Importantly, CPJ found that at least eight other journalists were killed during the war while they were not working (Stern 2014). This underscores the basic fact that freedom of expression cannot be achieved in absence of other rights, in this case the right to life and security of person. The basic danger was that of being in Gaza during these wars; being a journalist only intensified this.

It is not surprising that this was not an atmosphere in which in-depth reporting thrived. Many reporters were doing their reporting simply by calling hospitals for information on casualties or relying on videographers and photojournalists—who were by necessity located in the field—for their reports. One Palestinian journalist working for a foreign news organization explained in an interview I conducted that many reporters stayed in their homes or offices during the 2008–2009 war, rather than venturing out into the field:

> They refused to go on the ground, because it was scary! I did it because I felt responsible. I cannot believe [something] until I see it. I cannot trust [the person] who's telling me news on the phone. I was on the ground, and then I'm seeing only the cameramen and the photographers. Where are the journalists [i.e. reporters]? I could not see any journalists. It was very shocking.

She was troubled to realize that the videographers were essentially doing the reporting for the Palestinian reporters by phone. This deadly field environment not only makes investigative reporting impossible, but also makes for information that editors will consider

less reliable, for example in comparison to official Israeli government statements. Especially because Hamas statements are not likely to be taken as authoritative relative to Israeli press releases, on-the-ground reporting is absolutely essential. While Palestinian journalists inevitably put themselves in danger to cover the story—after all, being in Gaza during the war was in itself dangerous—the circumstances made it nearly impossible to consistently excel at reporting. While in the case of GPO cards and checkpoints, it was bureaucratic and legal restrictions that limited press freedoms, during the 2008–2009 and 2014 Gaza Wars, it was actual violence and the pervasive threat thereof. Yet, in all cases, Israeli logics of occupation—which divide people and territory into different categories—limited press freedoms almost incidentally as they were carrying out other policies, especially policies that were ostensibly geared toward achieving or maintaining "national security."

## Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that issues of space play a pivotal role in shaping the production of news, even in a media environment transformed by new technologies like satellite television, internet news, and social media that seem to know few geographic boundaries. The basic imperative to be at the places where events occur does not change. As a result, the party that controls territory still ultimately controls press freedom, because it controls access to events. The Palestinian case is an excellent example of this. While Israel no longer directly censors Palestinian media, its control over space effectively limits Palestinian journalists' abilities to work—and also limits the vitality of information about the conflict that is available around the globe, because of the critical role that Palestinian journalists play in international press organizations. Control over space has bureaucratic dimensions, as in the cases of the GPO cards and the checkpoints, but it always also involves at least the threat of violence, and, often, also the actual use of violence.

Israeli constraints on media also function by dividing people and territory into different groups. Though GPO cards for a European journalist and for a Palestinian journalist may have looked identical in form when such cards were being issued to Palestinians, in fact, they were produced by different processes and had different modes of operation. One was essentially a military pass, granted or rescinded on the basis of purported security concerns, while the other is a professional accreditation. However, as a European journalist moves from Israel into occupied territory, her GPO card also becomes something closer to a military pass, as she, too, is moving at the pleasure of the

Israeli military authorities. Importantly, these divisions of people and space shift over time, again at the will of Israeli authorities. Gaza can be sealed to foreign journalists for days, weeks, or months, and then opened again with little explanation, and Palestinian journalists can be refused not only the GPO card but also having other press accreditations recognized. This view of press freedoms underscores the extent to which press freedom is inextricable from other kinds of rights, especially the right to movement. Even as we continue to celebrate the potential of new media to bring people together across geographic distances and barriers, we must continue to attend to the ways in which journalism is still about movement and physical presence. There is still no substitute for on the ground reporting, especially for such matters as military occupation and conflict.

## Notes

1. I do not wish to reify the distinction between ideas and information. Even as information can seem to exist in independent bits, actually information is always constituted in relationship to a narrative, an argument, or set of ideas (Poovey 1998). However, it is important to recognize that reporting—the production of knowledge—does depend on access to the world, just as it depends on a social and historical context.
2. One exception to this is when I draw upon a documentary I produced about Mazen Dana in 2002, two years before his death in Iraq. I use his name both because he agreed to be interviewed on camera regarding these issues and also as a way of honoring his memory and the impressive legacy of his work.
3. As a press release issued by the Popular Committee Against the Wall in Northwest Jerusalem and the International Solidarity Movement stated, "90 percent of Bayt Surik's land will be isolated from the village and de-facto annexed into Israel by the construction of the Apartheid Wall; old houses will be destroyed and the villagers will be stripped of three major water resources, which will leave them no choice but to leave their village."
4. I draw here on the argument of Carol Greenhouse on "discursive fracture" as a rhetorical tactic of leaders (Greenhouse 2008).

## References

+972 Magazine and Activestills Collective. 2013. "Editorial: Demanding Freedom of Movement and Access for Palestinian Journalists." *+972* August 5. Accessed August 24, 2015 at: http://972mag.com/editorial-demanding-freedom-of-movement-and-access-for-palestinian-journalists/76997/.

Abu-Lughod, Lila. 2005. *Dramas of Nationhood: The Politics of Television in Egypt.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Anderson, Benedict. 1991 [1983]. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.* New York: Verso.

Appadurai, Arjun. 1990. "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy." *Public Culture*, 2 (2): 1–24.

Arendt, Hannah. 1976 [1948]. *The Origins of Totalitarianism.* New York: Harcourt.

Article 19. 1996. "The Johannesburg Principles on National Security, Freedom of Expression, and Access to Information." *Article 19.* London. Accessed October 4, 2015, at: http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4653fa1f2.pdf.

B'Tselem. 2009. "One Year since Operation Cast Lead, Still No Accountability." Electronic document. Accessed December 27, 2010, at: https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/IsraelPalestine533a-2.pdf.

Baisnée, Olivier and Dominique Marchetti. 2006. "The Economy of Just-In-Time Television News Casting: Journalist Production and Professional Excellence at Euronews." *Ethnography*, 7 (2): 99–123.

Bishara, Amahl. 2013. *Back Stories: US News Production and Palestinian Politics.* Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Boyer, Dominic. 2013. *The Life Informatic: Newsmaking in the Digital Era.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Campagna, Joel. 2000. "The Middle East and North Africa," in R. Murphy (ed.), *Attacks on the Press in 1999.* New York: Committee to Protect Journalists, pp. 366–418.

Campagna, Joel. 2001. "The Middle East and North Africa," in R. Murphy (ed.), *Attacks on the Press 2000.* New York City: Committee to Protect Journalists, pp. 248–276.

CPJ (Committee to Protect Journalists). 1988. *Journalism Under Occupation: Israel's Regulation of the Palestinian Press.* New York: Committee to Protect Journalists.

CPJ (Committee to Protect Journalists). 2003. "Israel and the Occupied Territories." Accessed November 18, 2005, at: http://www.cpj.org/attacks03/mideast03/israel.html.

CPJ (Committee to Protect Journalists). 2009. "CPJ Urges Israel to Examine Gaza Limits, Military Strikes." Accessed November 18, 2010, at: http://cpj.org/2009/04/cpj-urges-israel-to-examine-gaza-limits-military-s.php.

CPJ (Committee to Protect Journalists). n.d. "About CPJ." Accessed December, 31, 2010, at: http://www.cpj.org/about/#one.

FPA (Foreign Press Association). 2002. FPA Statement, January 15, 2002. Foreign Press Association website. Accessed August 15, 2012, at: http://www.fpa.org.il/?categoryId=74731.

FPA (Foreign Press Association). 2008. FPA Statement, November 10, 2008. Foreign Press Association website. Accessed August 15, 2012, at: http://www.fpa.org.il/?categoryId=74725.

Goldstone, Richard, Christine Chinkin, Hina Jilani, and Desmond Travers. 2009. "Report of the United Nations Fact Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict." Human Rights Council. Accessed December 10, 2014, at: http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/12session/A-HRC-12-48.pdf.

Goodman, Amy. 2003. "Darwazeh: No Immunity for Palestinian Journalists." April 21. Accessed March 19, 2006, at: http://www.democracynow.org/transcripts/qusini.shtml.

GPO (Government Press Office). 2010. The Government Press Office. Accessed December 26, 2010, at: http://www.pmo.gov.il/PMO/Templates/General.aspx?NRMODE=Published&NRNODEGUID={5D40882A-0DD3-4F7D-9CA5-C1A829ACF9F2}&NRORIGINALURL=%2fPMOEng%2fPM%2bOffice%2fDepartments%2fGPO.htm&NRCACHEHINT=Guest#two.

Greenhouse, Carol. 2008. "Fractured Discourse: Rethinking the Discursivity of States," in J. Paley (ed.), *Democracy: Anthropological Approaches*. Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, pp. 193–218.

Hafez, Kai. 2008. "The Role of Media in the Arab World's Transformation Process," in C. Hanelt and A. Möller (eds.), *Bound to Cooperate: Europe and the Middle East II*. Gütersloh and Washington, DC: Bertelsmann Stiftung, pp. 321–339.

Harel, Amos. 2009. "Shooting and Crying." *Haaretz*. March 19. Accessed March 21, 2010, at: http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1072475.html.

Karam, Imad. 2007. "Satellite Television: A Breathing Room for Arab Youth?" in N. Sakr (ed.), *Arab Media and Political Renewal: Community, Legitimacy, and Public Life*. London: I.B. Tauris, pp. 80–95.

Klinenberg, Eric. 2005. "Convergence: News Production in a Digital Age." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 597 (1): 48–64.

Kuntsman, Adi and Rebecca Stein. 2011. "Digital Suspicion, Politics, and the Middle East." *Critical Inquiry*. Available at: http://criticalinquiry.uchicago.edu/digital_suspicion_politics_and_the_middle_east

Larkin, Brian. 2008. *Signal and Noise*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Mbembe, Achille. 2003. "Necropolitics." *Public Culture*, 15 (1): 11–40.

MIFTAH, Media Monitoring Unit. 2005. *Public Discourse and Perceptions: Palestinian Media Coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict*. MIFTAH. Accessed December 10, 2014, at: http://www.miftah.org/.%5CDoc%5CReports%5CMKReports%5Cfinal_monitoring_report_4_3_2005%282%29.pdf2.

Poovey, Mary. 1998. *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago.

RSF (Reporters Without Borders). 2009. *Operation "Cast Lead": News Control as Military Objective*. Reporters Without Borders.

Sakr, Naomi. 2007. "Approaches to Exploring Media-Politics Connections in the Arab World," in N. Sakr (ed.), *Arab Media and Political Renewal: Community, Legitimacy, and Public Life*. New York: I.B. Tauris, pp. 1–12.

Sreberny-Mohammadi, Annabelle and Ali Mohammadi. 1994. *Small Media, Big Revolution: Communication, Culture, and the Iranian Revolution*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Stanley, Bruce. 2007. "Crafting the Arab Media for Peace-Building: Donors, Dialogue, and Disaster," in N. Sakr (ed.), *Arab Media and Political Renewal: Community, Legitimacy, and Public Life*. New York: I.B. Tauris, pp. 118–134.

Stern, Jason. 2014. "After Journalist Killings, Potential Violations in Gaza Must be Investigated." *Committee to Protect Journalists Blog*. August 28. Accessed August 24, 2014, at: https://cpj.org/blog/2014/08/after-journalist-killings-potential-violations-in-.php.

Weill, Sharon and Valentina Azarov. 2009. "Israel's Authoritarian Transformation." *Electronic Intifada*. February 25. Accessed October 4, 2015 at: https://electronicintifada.net/content/israels-authoritarian-transformation/8082.

Weizman, Eyal. 2007. *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation*. London and New York: Verso.

Williams, Raymond. 1975. *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*. New York: Schocken Books.

### Newspapers and Documentaries

Bishara, Amahl (documentary) 2002. *Across Oceans, Among Colleagues*. New York: Films Media Group.

Bronner, Ethan. 2009. "Israel Puts Media Clamp on Gaza." *New York Times*, January 7.

El-Haddad, Laila. 2005. "Disengagement from Justice." *Washington Post*, July 28, 2005: A25.

Garfield, Bob. 2009. "The New Israeli Barrier. On the Media." *United States of America*, January 9.

Leith, Sam. 2001. "Palestinian Journalists Told It's No-Go." *The Daily Telegraph*, August 29: 20.

# The Politics/Popular Culture Nexus in the Arab World: A Preliminary Comparison of Reality Television and Music Video

*Marwan M. Kraidy*

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the politicization of transnationally mass-mediated popular culture in the Arab world. Focusing on two genres that have been particularly popular and controversial during the last decade—(1) reality television and (2) music video—it examines the politics-entertainment nexus. In this chapter, I draw on a completed study of reality television and Arab politics (Kraidy 2010) and an ongoing project about the political and socio-cultural controversies surrounding music videos. Located at the juncture of two major projects, the chapter aims to offer a preliminary comparative framework of the politicization of the two genres mentioned above—notably, the section on music videos will be more exploratory than my discussion of reality television. In both cases, my approach is to combine a study of the primary texts themselves with an analysis of the discourses that they have generated in the pan-Arab public sphere.

In *Reality Television and Arab Politics: Contention in Public Life* (2010), I proposed understanding polemics triggered by popular culture in the Arab world as contests over the definition of modernity. The reality television scandals that rocked the Arab world in the past decade enable an understanding of changes in the media's historical connection with modernity in the Arab world, showcase the role

of media conglomerates as mediators of modernity, and offer an in-depth case-study of the rising importance of programming locally resonant subjects and themes on Arab television.

Another genre of Arab television that has fueled pan-Arab culture wars is the music video, widely known in Arabic as the "video clip." Mostly produced in Egypt and Lebanon, Arab music videos feature pop stars singing mainly love ballads while dancing in skimpy cloth-ing. These commercial music videos have had their critics and their supporters. The first have spoken mostly from religious motivation, high-culture positions, or nationalist perspectives, some going as far as calling the subject of their scorn "porno clips"; the second have usually invoked the freedom to create, the need to be "in tune with the age," and what they regard as widespread sexual repres-sion in the Arab world. Like reality television, music videos and the polemics surrounding them demonstrate the politicization of Arab popular culture.

However, as I hope to show toward the end of this chapter, there are differences in the dynamics of social communication between reality television and music videos. Ongoing work about music vid-eos expands my inquiry into the role of the media in the elabora-tion of Arab modernity at the intersection of nationalism, Islamism, and cultural globalization. In *Reality Television and Arab Politics*, I shifted attention away from a narrow focus on al-Jazeera and toward a broader media sphere that compels popular engagement and conten-tious political performance. That book analyzed heated polemics sur-rounding Arab reality television as a public trial in which rival aspects of modernity competed for legitimacy.

## Historical Antecedents

The ways in which contemporary genres of commercial television entertainment have been politicized and have drawn people into poli-tics on a large scale has antecedents of interaction between commerce, politics, and public expression in the history of the Middle East. The late Ottoman Empire is a case in point, when the enactment of wide-ranging administrative reforms known as the *tanzimat* had a direct impact on public discourse:

> The domain of formal politics expanded…an increasing number of inhabitants of the empire, mobilized by the state or its opponents, began to contend over a growing number of public issues…[enabled by] the proliferation of new media outlets—from newspapers to

coffeehouses—the efficacy of which was ensured by enlarged urban concentrations, the restructuring of urban space and the introduction of modern technologies for transportation and communication. (Gelvin 1999: 75)

Enabled by growing economic integration and administrative reform within the empire, new communication practices contributed to the restructuring of power relations between rulers and masses. Twin processes of cultural standardization and differentiation spawned disparate social groups with divergent responses to change. Soon thereafter, the media had become instrumental to people's experience of modernity. To middle-classes in Ottoman Mediterranean cities in the early twentieth century, according to Watenpaugh, "being modern had to be observable and reproducible, something that bisected the public and the private, often requiring the use of venues...[like] newspapers [and] Western consumer goods...in which or with which to perform one's modernity" (2006: 16). One century later, Arab satellite television forged new bonds between individuals and society by exposing a large number of viewers to consumer lifestyles exhibited in reality television and music videos in addition to other programs.

Then and now, developments like media proliferation, public contestation, changing social relations, and the emergence of middle-classes connected to the Western metropolis shaped the contemporary Arab experience with modernity. Then and now, there were fluid relations between transnational and national spheres. However, these took dissimilar directions between the late nineteenth and early twenty-first centuries. In the late Ottoman period, local elites adopted Western values and ideologies, including various forms of nationalism that aimed to reshape societies, as Gelvin described it, in "a manner compatible with the dictates of progress and modernity" (1999: 76). Whereas the Ottoman *tanzimat* enabled the growth of *national* groups, the economic, political, and technological changes of the late twentieth century have fostered the development of *transnational* links: Nowadays, rival discourses of progress, modernity, and identity have a pan-Arab resonance, even when they take on specific national forms. The new pan-Arab scale of public discourse overshadows the mostly national or local reach of contestation through newspapers, civic associations, or coffeehouses (see Kirli 2004) in late Ottoman culture.

It is toward the middle of the twentieth century that the politicization of popular culture became a recognizable phenomenon, in the Arab world and elsewhere. During the 1950s and 1960s, the singer

'Abd al-Halim Hafiz was a spokesperson for Jamal 'Abd al-Nasser's Egyptian revolution and the diva Umm Kulthum raised funds for Arab war efforts against Israel. With the explosive growth of satellite television since the early 1990s, and with the continuing violence, injustice, and instability that continue to bedevil the Arab world politics – entertainment overlaps have become more controversial. Culture wars over television often articulate broader geopolitical shifts and socio-cultural tensions. In such a context, political resentments and aspirations are reflected in popular culture performances, often in oblique ways that straddle the national and transnational. Examples abound throughout the Arab world: The Egyptian singer Sha'ban 'Abd al-Rahim is known in Egypt and the wider Arab world, for his polemical songs, the most famous of which is "I Hate Israel." Formerly a *mekwaji*, a man who irons clothes by hand for a living, Sha'bula's high status in Egyptian popular culture is met by classist resentments from Egypt's elite. In recent years, upheaval in Lebanon has spawned a new genre of patriotic songs, ranging from multicast elegies to Rafiq al-Hariri to *Ahibba'i* [My Loved Ones], in which Christian-Lebanese singer Julia Boutros sang lyrics put together from speeches by Hezbollah secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah during the Israeli war in Lebanon in 2006. Throughout the Arab world, a performative kind of politics has emerged, which can be seen in the one-word slogans of political campaigns and movements (Kefaya [Enough] in Egypt, the campaign against the Mubarak regime; *al-An*, [Now] the slogan of campaigns for women's political rights in Kuwait), the development of a vibrant Palestinian rap scene, or Palestinian activists protesting the Israeli separation wall in Bi'lin painting their bodies in blue, like Na'vi from the movie *Avatar*, to draw the world's attention to their plight. The popular uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, and Syria witnessed an explosion of performative activism including street theater, political satire, and puppet-theater, all disseminated via several media platforms ranging from the human body to online video.

In the socially conservative Gulf monarchies, popular culture is at the forefront of culture wars over Westernization, gender relations, and social change. Though indigenous academic investigations of these dynamics are rare, the Arab press reflects a growing awareness of the phenomenon. Under the headline "Stars Return to Politics…a Job or a Search for the Audience?" an article in *al-Sharq al-Awsat* [The Middle East] posed a series of questions:

> What is the relation between entertainment and politics? And is it necessary for the entertainer to have a well-defined political stand or to

belong to a political party? And do entertainers accept roles with political themes that are not compatible with their tendencies and desires and political orientation? ("Stars Return" 2005, August 14)

Several Arab entertainers then declared that political engagement comes "naturally" to public figures, suggesting that patriotism was good for show business. Other headlines like "Fifi 'Abdo Confronts Corruption and Smuggling of Antiquities" (Yassin 2005, September 16) or "Because of their Political Activities, Israel Considers [pop stars] Nancy and Maria and Haifa to Pose a Danger" ("Because Of" 2005) reflect active links between entertainment and Arab politics. The vocal involvement of many Arab stars in the popular uprisings that began in December 2010—El General in Tunisia, 'Adel Imam in Egypt, Asala in Syria, demonstrate the continued salience of the phenomenon.

## Reality Television and Politics

The reality TV polemics placed the entertainment-politics nexus at the center of Arab public life. Taking the Arab world by storm at a time of war, terrorism, and the Bush administration's attempt to remake the Middle East, programs like *al-Ra'is* (Arabic version of Big Brother, on Saudi-owned, Dubai-based MBC), *Star Academy* (Arabic version of *Fame Academy*, on Lebanon-based LBC), and *Superstar* (Arabic version of *Pop Idol*, on Beirut-based Future TV) became political arenas *par excellence* because they echoed the big questions that Arabs were debating at the time: *Is there a Western conspiracy to control the Arab world? Are imported reality TV formats a Trojan horse in that conspiracy, serving to weaken putative Arab values to facilitate Western hegemony? Or do reality TV programs depict a model of meritocracy, equality and participation that may be Western in inspiration but from which Arab societies can glean social and political lessons?* The ensuing controversies articulated an explosive combination of forces that continue to rock the Middle East: radical Islamism, the geopolitics of oil, US-Iran tensions, political and military conflict in Lebanon, and occupation and violence in Iraq and Palestine. It is against that dreadful backdrop that the reality TV polemics constitute an utmost convergence of entertainment and politics (on this phenomenon in the West, see, e.g., Street 2004).

One can find examples of open doors between popular culture and politics worldwide. Entertainers have crossed over into politics in Italy, India, Latin America, and especially in the United States,

which the non-fiction writer Neil Gabler called the "Republic of Mass Entertainment" (Gabler 1998).[1] Van Zoonen sees three similarities between communities formed around politics and those created around entertainment television (2004). Both kinds of community are created by emotionally invested members through performance, participation, discussion, and mobilization. Van Zoonen rightfully argues that activities like "discussion, participation...intervention, judging and voting" among *Pop Idol* and *Big Brother* fans "would qualify as civic competences if they were performed in the domain of politics" (2004: 42). Coleman argues that *Big Brother* enables the playing out of ideas and behaviors excluded from democratic politics. Like reality TV contestants, he wrote, politicians must be "extraordinary enough to represent others, but ordinary enough to be representative of others" (Coleman 2006: 468).

The growing visibility of ordinary persons on television does not mean that reality TV is "democratic." Rather, Turner describes the widening gamut of popular representation and the broadening access as "demotic," a term that refers to the use of average people as raw material for media content, and not to increased civic participation. Turner's argument that the democratic aspect of "democratainment" is episodic and unreliable (Turner 2006) underscores one of the key questions perplexing scholars of the entertainment-politics nexus: *To what extent does the broadening of public space fostered by the reality TV controversies impede or enable sustainable civic engagement?* Turner sees a new kind of cultural power in a global media system that is able to breed new collective identities *ex nihilo*. This "demotic turn," as Turner characterizes it, has implications beyond the question of popular culture and political participation.

This is illustrated in the pan-Arab reality television controversies. Reality TV touched a constellation of raw nerves in Arab societies. Whether articulating inter-Arab rivalries, nurturing local nationalism, provoking socioeconomic discussions, igniting hostile media campaigns, questioning what constituted reality, or ushering new ways for self-fashioning, reality TV was intensely politicized, and invested with rival arguments that competed for the public's attention. As ratings sensations that received heavy and sustained news coverage, reality TV shows became a public preoccupation from workplaces to ruling palaces. They attracted widespread participation in public disputes over a wide range of political, economic, social, and religious issues. Proponents of Wahhabiyya in Saudi Arabia, advocates of commercial media autonomy in Lebanon, women's rights activists in Kuwait, business communities in Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, and Syria,

and ruling parties and families throughout the region, were drawn into these controversies. Some entered the fray eagerly, others grudgingly: Arab regimes were compelled to join the debate when their opponents used the issue to score political points. When Algeria's president 'Abd al-Aziz Boutefliqa faced active legislative opposition to a bill, he ordered the state television service to cease *Star Academy* broadcasts relayed from LBC, softening Islamist opposition to his policies in parliament.[2] The highest judicial-religious body in Saudi Arabia was compelled to issue a fatwa about *Star Academy* because the show became a popular obsession in the kingdom. The Islamist bloc in Kuwait's legislature used the upheaval *Superstar* caused in the small Gulf emirate to force the resignation of an Information Minister it deemed overly liberal. In Arab politics, reality TV is at once lightening rod, political bludgeon, and bargaining chip.

Storming the Arab world during a time of crisis, reality TV expanded the notion of the political, as the Belgian political scientists Cantelli and Paye put it, because it "circulates in all social spaces and not only in a social area that presents itself as specially or essentially political" (2004: 79). The debates analyzed in my study of Arab reality television move across realms (political, economic, cultural, and religious) and scales (local, national, regional, and global) of public life, illuminating complicated and indirect struggles—what García-Canclini (1994) calls "oblique power." By compelling social and political actors to intervene in public debate, the reality TV controversies brought to the surface latent tensions and hidden interests whose openness to multiple interpretations opened up new spaces of expression. In this, reality television reflects a changing transnational media system ushering new—if only in intensity rather than in kind—social and political dynamics.

Indeed, the growth of a dynamic, multi-media, transnational Arab media landscape is the harbinger of a new private-public relationship attributable to what Thompson (1994) called the "transformation of visibility." Historically, *publicness* was concerned with the exaltation rather than the exercise of power. According to the old doctrine of *arcana imperi*, power was invisible because important decisions were made in secret. This resonates with Arab authoritarian politics today: until his death in 2000, Hafiz-al-Assad's iron rule of Syria for three decades was predicated on the exaltation of the leader and his conflation with the nation itself. State media, first radio and later television, played a crucial role in creating the leader's cult. A deft use of the private-public dynamic is central to dictatorial power. In the case of Syria, Assad's cult, through the ubiquity of his image and

state-orchestrated political spectacles with massive popular participation, operated, according to Wedeen, to "personify the state…identify the mortal body of the leader with the immortal body of the realm" while at the same time narrowing "the gap between ruler and ruled" because "Assad represents…(both) the extraordinary individual…[and] the average Syrian" (1999: 17). A media-savvier version of his late father, Bashar al-Assad has maintained the core of the personality cult while softening its style. The situation is equivalent in Saudi Arabia, where the clerico-political regime uses Wahhabiyya, a puritanical version of Sunni Islam, to sanctify the regency—what Saudi journalist al-Bishr calls "worldly power through religious power" (2007: 13). State television plays a crucial role in Saudi governance: the system reproduces itself through constantly repeated rituals of worship broadcast on television: the pilgrimage to Mecca, Friday sermons, religious guidance shows, widely publicized *fatwas* proscribing or allowing specific activities and behaviors (al-Rasheed 2007). In both Syria and Saudi Arabia, citizens and subjects regularly pledge allegiance to the rulers by participating in officially sanctioned rituals that reaffirm prevailing social and political relations. They reflect the importance of rhetoric, symbols, and ritual in Arab politics (see Barnett 1998). New modes of social and political communication that connect various media and mix popular culture with politics, subvert regime mastery of symbolic space and threaten prevalent power structures in many Arab countries.

## The Media and Modernity

The media have historically played a crucial role in Arab experiences with modernity. A recurrent story in Hourani's classic *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age: 1798–1939* is the importance of newspapers as platforms for nineteenth century Arab and Muslim reformers, advocating selective adoptions from Western modernity, focused on the question, "how to become part of the modern world while remaining Muslim?" (1983: 95). This trend carried over into the early twentieth century, when newspapers in Ottoman cities like Aleppo featured intense debates about what it meant to be modern (Watenpaugh 2006). In his book *Fractured Modernity*, the Moroccan poet Muhammad Bennis considers the Arab press to be the midwife of modernity, spreading the "alphabet of light" (2004: 121) to the Arab population. Indeed, Arab modernizers found in the press an effective platform for their ideas, especially with the development of the newspaper column. Writing about his country,

the Saudi literary and social critic 'Abdullah al-Ghadhami argues that the appearance of the newspaper column in the 1950s constituted a radical development that enabled individual voices to gain relative autonomy from religious and political power as well as social visibility at one and the same time. "The column," he concluded, "[is] a foundation for the constitution of an independent, individual opinion" (al-Ghadhami 2005: 126).

Indeed, the Saudi modernity wars that lasted from 1985 to 1995, like the polemic over the LBC reality program *Star Academy*, were waged primarily in op-ed columns in the Saudi press. Likewise, in Egypt, Lebanon, and Morocco, media institutions played a crucial role in elaborating local versions of modernity (Abu-Lughod, 2005; Armbrust 1996; Hirschkind 2006; Kraidy 1999; Sabry 2005). In Egypt, as Armbrust has shown, television drama since the 1970s has presented "modern" characters that are "educated, sophisticated, worldly, and at the same time clearly tied with *asala* (authenticity)," underscoring an Egyptian modernity that seeks national renewal and at the same time emphasizes continuity with the past (Armbrust 1996: 22). In a similar vein, Abu-Lughod (2005) showed that since the beginning of Egypt's *infitah* (open door economic policies), television has promoted consumption while simultaneously warning against the dangers of consumerism. Following Brook's assertion in *The Melodramatic Imagination* that melodrama was "the central fact of the modern sensibility" (Brooks 1976). Abu-Lughod argues that television drama is one of several "technologies of modern self-making" in Egypt because it foments a distinct kind of individual emotionality (2005: 113). As a result, she argues, Egyptian television serials contribute to a modernist project by shaping national political and social debates and by promoting a "distinctive configuration of narrative and emotionality" (Abu-Lughod 2005: 113). By carrying conversations about the nation's relation to the world and heightening viewers' subjectivity, television hosts a national debate over modernity and authenticity.

From the preceding, we can conclude that the recent pan-Arab reality TV polemics continue historical trends; they also constitute a qualitative leap. As we shall see, however, Arab newspaper columnists played a crucial role in connecting the reality TV battles to wider themes of political participation, social justice, and individual emancipation, Arab media today are not merely *carriers* of debate. By virtue of the disputable entertainment it broadcasts, television is an important *catalyst* for broad-ranging, increasingly public, and often heated discussions of modernity. Arab reality TV has *sparked* debates

on vital social and political issues, and as a result, it was *appropriated* by various actors as a language of contestation. Further, unlike Saudi modernity wars or Egyptian concerns about authenticity, both local debates restricted to Saudi Arabia or Egypt, the reality television polemics were pan-Arab, involving the traffic of ideas and controversies within and between 22 Arabic-speaking countries.

The polemics are best understood as a process of taming modernity, a "modernity academy" actor's bargain over the meaning of modernity. From this perspective, the heated polemic over *Star Academy* and others is an episode of modernity's "endless trial," in which the Arab public is at once defendant, plaintiff, prosecutor, defender, and judge. As the trial proceeds in mitigating the unwelcomed facets of Western modernity, Arab reality TV is less debasing and more didactic than are its Western counterparts. The absence of humiliation rituals familiar to viewers of US and UK reality shows, and MBC's naming the Arabic version of *The Biggest Loser al-Rabeh al-Akbar* [The Biggest Winner] reflect a cultural compromise, a bargain struck by institutions who act as mediators of modernity. Shifting patterns of Arab reality TV production reflect the struggle to figure out how to be Arab and modern. Whereas in 2004 most Arab reality TV shows were formats licensed from European or American companies and adapted to the Arab market, by 2008, a majority (15 out of 26) of Arab reality TV shows were original local creations (Snobar 2008). This shift involved experimentation by television companies and their staff with imported ideas and practices prior to the creation of their own shows. Once a badge of modernity, outright mimicry of the West has grown less enticing after the polemics over *Star Academy* and *al-Ra'is* and the attendant critiques of cultural imitation of the West, a sore and recurrent point of contention in Arab public discourse. The substitution of adapted Western formats with locally created shows reflects a maturation in the process of absorbing modernity, and echoes broader processes of cultural translation.

Media institutions play an important role in the elaboration of Arab modernity because they set the parameters for localizing modernity. Commercial media companies like LBC and MBC are arbitrators of relations between markets, politics, religion, and sexuality. Through their production and programming strategies, they manage the pan-Arab economy of visibility. A comparison between these two corporations, both of them implicated in the Saudi-Lebanese connection, illustrates the different roles that media institutions can play as they domesticate elements of Western modernity. From its early days, LBC chose to court controversy with its "conspicuous liberalism,"

offering Lebanese and—after going on satellite—Arab viewers a life-style of hedonistic play and conspicuous consumption mixed with Lebanese nationalism; in other words, a skin-deep version of modernity where local culture shines through a Western patina. Because of its Lebanese location, LBC could afford airing titillating shows that command loyal audiences as they stir controversies in the Gulf countries, a highly profitable strategy since it provided free advertising in Arab countries with wealthy viewers who not only spent considerably on consumption in their own countries, but whose visits to Lebanon sustained entire towns that lived off the summer spending of Gulf tourists.

In sharp contrast, MBC's Saudi cultural anchoring puts constraints on programming choices. Mindful that *al-Ra'is* lasted for one week before it shut down in a storm of controversy, while LBC's *Star Academy* is still going strong after ten seasons, in spite of or maybe due to, the polemics. MBC has put out a rich but generally noncontroversial programming grid. Nonetheless, the fact that the most popular programs tend to combine local relevance with Western elements has driven even MBC into the land of controversy. The wildfire success of the Turkish television drama broadcast under the Arabic name *Nour* [Light], dubbed in Arabic and aired by MBC, has triggered controversy throughout the Arab world, especially among women, its most numerous viewers. Accused of causing divorces and leading women to abandon work and family to follow the adventures of a loving and modern yet Middle-Eastern couple who share decision-making, and treat each other respectfully and romantically, *Nour* has elicited the usual newspaper columns, media coverage, and fatwas in Saudi Arabia and its neighbors. Controversy awaits programs that showcase a viable bargain with modernity by coupling local resonance and global longings (Kraidy and al-Ghazzi 2013).

## Poetry and Prayer: Reality Television beyond Neoliberalism

Key in taming modernity is a reconfiguration of the relationship between the personal and the social, the private and the public. The Arab reality TV wars scrambled this relationship by boosting the ongoing transformation of visibility. Indeed, reality TV supplies fresh, though contrived, templates for self-fashioning. Reality TV's underlying premises center on individuals—the exacerbation of desire and emotional conflict, the exaltation of individualism, and the promotion of self-revealing behavior (Le Guay 2005). Unscripted and

often broadcast live, daily, and for hours at a time, reality shows like *Star Academy* create intimate bonds with viewers who constantly await one of the contestants to say or do something outrageous, sensational, or subversive. By luring large audiences for long periods of time and predicating the outcome of each episode on voting, reality TV turns viewers not only into participants in controversial public events, but also into witnesses to rituals that validate alternative social and political visions (for an excellent discussion of the notion of witnessing, see Peters 2001).Within this changing social context, young people recycle reality TV's participatory rituals to communicate outside of the heavily policed familial or social space, or alternatively, for leisure, consumption, and sometimes activism. Because these developments clash with established power structures, reality TV touches on the most sensitive social, political, and even economic issues in the Arab world.

In the United States and Europe, reality TV programs compel participants to unveil their most intimate personal details, thus aiding in the creation of ideal consumers for niche marketing (see Andrejevic 2004; Couldry 2003). Likewise, Arab reality TV contributes to the creation of modern composite citizen-consumers. This refashioning is manifest in *Star Academy*, *Superstar*, and *Big Brother*, but also in other, less controversial shows, where primitive survivalism (*Survivor* Arabia), luddite self-sufficiency (*al-Wadi/*Celebrity Farm), and plastic surgery (*Beauty Clinic*, the Arab *Extreme Makeover*), transform Arab bodies literally, taking the makeover to its extreme, almost farcical, manifestation. In some recent reality shows—original creations and not format adaptations—European and North American inspiration is discernible in the makeover-theme based on personal metamorphosis. Reality TV's promise of individual transformation has some resonance in the Arab world.

However, in contrast with American and British shows, Arab reality TV provides a platform to reclaim things social and political. My book about the Arab reality television controversies showcased contentious debates over *liberal* values and practices—individual liberties, gender equality, political pluralism—that were triggered by Arab reality TV, in stark contrast with the focus on *neoliberal* values and practices—survival-of-the-fittest social behavior, willing submission to surveillance, individual assumption of the state's role- that characterizes scholarship on reality TV in Western countries (Kraidy 2010). Though neoliberal practices are present, they are trumped by the contest over liberal values, themselves often transcended by social traditions. Indeed, several Arab reality shows reaffirm social norms,

but with a twist: *Sha'er al-Malyoun* (Million's Poet) reenacts traditional oral poetry contests in Arabian Gulf countries and in *Green Light* contestants perform good deeds according to religious customs ("Green Light" June 1, 2005). *Star Academy* has been reappropriated as a competition in Qur'anic recitation. This mutual pilfering between reality TV and social and religious customs re-enchants modernity by imbuing it with local resonance.

Increasingly, Arab reality TV affirms tradition, but within a modern frame. Poetry competition shows on Abu Dhabi TV, *Amir al-Shu'ara'* (Prince of Poets) and *Sha'er al-Malyoun* have met considerable success. They promote individual prowess and self-fulfillment in a socially resonant venture. Poetry has a unique status in Arab public life, at once art form and political idiom, a meeting place of literati and the masses. Poets have given voice to taboo desires, scorned the venality of leaders (or sung their praises), and captured the Arab malaise like no other chroniclers of Arab life. Not only is poetry a quintessentially Arabic tradition, but it combines aesthetic transcendence with political instrumentality, individual creativity, and social relevance. Historically a kiln where Arab modernity was forged, poetry claims as its own some of the most influential Arab modernists in the twentieth century, including the Syrian-Lebanese Adonis, the Moroccan Muhammad Bennis, and the Saudi Ghazi al-Qusaybi (see also al-Ghadhami 2005). The Syrian poet Muhammad al-Maghout's famous lament that "there is only one perfect crime, to be born an Arab" captured the depth of Arab feelings of powerlessness and victimhood. The death of the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish led to a national funeral, a popular outpouring of grief, numerous op-ed columns, and front page coverage—the broad resonance that poetry enjoys in Arab culture is to my knowledge unparalleled elsewhere. The Moroccan modernist poet Muhammad Bennis wrote that in the Arab world more poetry than fiction is published (Bennis 2004).

By garnering what a market study described as "massive audiences" (Snobar 2008), Abu Dhabi's poetry reality shows demonstrated the continued resonance of poetry in Arab culture. Televised reality style, these poetry competitions connected past and present, re-packaging a local tradition in a modern form and passing the taste for poetry to the hypermedia generation. *Amir al-Shu'ara'* and *Sha'er al-Malyoun* result from a bargain with modernity, through which media institutions and government bridge the gap between reality and image.

Poetry-themed reality TV indicates that in the era of the new visibility, the personal and the social are mutually complementary rather than antagonistic. Shows premised on outwardly combative and

selfish behavior, such as *Survivor Arabia*, enjoyed relatively low ratings and did not enter public debates. Reality programs that focused excessively on tradition and community, like *Green Light* and *al-Wadi*, received lukewarm responses as well.[3] In contrast, shows that explored active links between the personal and the social, between individual ambition and social norms, were the most popular. Whether on *Star Academy* or *The Biggest Winner*, individual transformations echo desire for social or political change. As Taylor argues, what he calls "acultural" theories of modernity (those believing in a single Western-centered modernity) over-emphasize individualism, which he sees as the flipside of "new modes of social imaginary" (1999: 172). A meaningful relationship between the individual and society is, according to Taylor, "the essence of a cultural theory of modernity," (1999: 174) a statement that finds support in the dynamics of the Arab reality television polemics.

## Music Videos and Arab Public Life

How do individual-social dynamics play out in the Arab music video culture wars, and what do these videos add to our understanding of the role of media in the formation and contestation of Arab modernity? These videos circulate throughout the Arab world on satellite television, the Internet, and mobile phones, beaming into homes, coffeehouses, and nightclubs from Morocco to Iraq. As captivating audio-visual blurbs, music videos attract attention; they are interesting, not only because of their provocative aesthetics, but because they spotlight controversial issues and elicit impassioned reactions from public figures and ordinary people alike. Videos also reflect fraught cultural encounters: local versions of a global, mostly American form, they bespeak enmities and affinities between Arab and US cultures. Tracing current polemics about music videos in historical debates about modernity, authenticity, and Arab-Western relations, contributes to a deeper and broader understanding of the role of popular culture in Arab politics.

Music videos are ubiquitous in contemporary Arab public life. They are a lucrative staple for a 500-channel strong pan-Arab commercial television industry. The shared Arabic language and cultural heritage opened regional markets, especially oil-rich Gulf countries, to traditional centers of cultural production like Cairo and Beirut, fueling the rise of Egyptian, Saudi, and Lebanese music television channels. With subsidies from music labels, corporate sponsors, and Saudi princes, non-specialized channels play music videos at all times

between programs, which gives the videos wide dissemination. Fans access various kinds of video—commercial, but also patriotic, religious, institutional, martial, and cosmopolitan—on mobile phones, singers' websites, ITunes, YouTube, and countless blogs and Facebook pages. It seems that there is a music video that speaks to every conceivable Arab group identity.

To understand the resonance of music videos in Arab public life, theories of the public sphere that emphasize affect and style are more helpful than Habermas' notion of critical-rational dialog (Habermas 1989). So is Nussbaum's argument in *Upheavals of Thought* that emotions are judgments of value that influence public life (Nussbaum 2001), and Berlant's notion of "affective publics" (1991). Finally, Warner's contention in *Publics and Counterpublics* (2002) that the circulation of discourse creates publics is a central theme in my ongoing study of Arab music videos.

With Arab societies in the throes of intense political, cultural, and ideological clashes, rival camps strive to recruit the publics—especially young people—to their causes. If, as Warner wrote, the "differential deployment of style is essential" to the making of publics (2002: 108), music videos are potent tools of mobilization at a time when Arab public discourse suffers from media saturation and attention scarcity. Teeming with stylistic devices, some music videos cut through the larger chatter, and display what Hariman (1995) called the "artistry of power." The critical study of these music videos thus elucidates how perception and persuasion affect social power in the Arab world today.

Music videos attract and hold people's attention. Three insights from the music video canon developed in the 1980s buttress this project's focus on music videos as tools of visibility and mobilization: first, a music video is a promotional form, "always…wall-to-wall commercials for something" (Aufderheide 1986: 62); second, music videos are "billboards" of identity in ideological struggles (Grossberg 1988). Third, music videos brim with semiotic excess, opening them to multiple, often antagonistic, interpretations. "Publics," argued Warner, "commence with the moment of attention" (2002: 61). As magnets for controversy, music videos induce what Warner calls "stranger sociability," rallying viewers to coalesce into rival publics, however temporary, mobilized by pressing issues, cultural, social, or political, that animate contemporary Arab public life.

Sensory complexity and symbolic richness make music videos considerably open to interpretation and appropriation. Some videos objectify women's bodies and affirm conservative social norms, but

many others are socially progressive: several depict positive gay and lesbian characters; many feature strong women challenging men in public spaces. Women's bodies are omnipresent, in commercial videos that feature sexy starlets, in patriotic videos where women are symbols of nations, or in Islamist videos where women symbolically mark social boundaries. Martial videos, aired by Hezbollah during the 2006 war with Israel or by Iraqi insurgents, link nationalism and religion through the sounds and imagery of armed struggle; companies self-promote through institutional music videos with social or political themes; cosmopolitan English-language videos link politics and sexuality in unpredictable ways, reflecting the twin desire to broaden the music video market beyond the Arab world and to challenge Western audiences' assumed stereotypes of Arabs.

For example, one video, "'Arqoub's Promise," epitomizes the combination of features—sensory exuberance, symbolic richness, affective potency, social or political resonance, openness to interpretation, and heavy circulation in public discourse—that make music videos so consequential in Arab public life. Invoking 'Arqoub, a legendary character infamous for his unfulfilled promises, the Iraqi singer Shadha Hassoun bemoans both her affair with a US soldier and the US invasion of her war torn country. Double-entendre lyrics about love and betrayal combine with images of the singer crossing wind and sand-swept streets to end up in a poignant post-lovemaking confrontation with her lover in the back of a US military truck, with a large screen playing images of military hardware, explosions, and torn bodies. As the US soldier walks away, the video concludes in black and white, with a street strewn with dozens of shoes—and homage to Muntadhar al-Zaidi, the journalist who threw his shoes at Bush —and a haunting close-up of a fright-stricken baby face encircled with barbed wire. The release of the video in mid-January 2010 set the Iraqi and Arab press ablaze, with some newspapers accusing Hassoun of glorifying the American occupation of Iraq while others praising her for expelling the occupiers in the video (Kraidy 2013).

The notion of circulation captures how reactions to music videos like "'Arqoub's Promise" proliferate in Arab public discourse. In the polemic spawned by the video, fans and critics opined and rebutted each other in mosque sermons, political speeches, op-ed pages, and social media, fueled by rival campaigns in the March 2010 Iraqi elections, against the backdrop of the ongoing Arab trauma over Iraq's tragedy. Eight weeks after the video's release, an Arabic Google search

yielded more than 4,000 hits, ranging from adulation on fan blogs to invective by Iraqi insurgents, showing that various publics—young and old, secular and religious, pro and anti-US—pivoted around a video that compelled into public discourse competing visions of Iraqi womanhood, patriotism, identity, and authenticity.

"America" is a recurring motif in various types of Arab music videos, some criticizing its policies in the Middle East, other celebrating its way of life or paying homage to its icons. Featuring local themes grafted on a global, American-developed format, music videos constitute a cross-cultural encounter, a hybrid cultural entity emblematic of globalization (see Kraidy 2005). Music videos reflect tensions and aspirations emerging from Arab-Islamic experiences with globalization and modernity. As Arab directors borrow this initially Western form, they constitute an "interocular field" (Appadurai 1995: 12) linking different places in a process of cultural translation that combines visual, auditory, and narrative elements.

The popularity of music videos among Arab Muslims, the prominence of Christian-Lebanese video makers, and the fact that Islamists from Egypt to Iraq have become major producers of music videos, complicate commonplace assumptions about Islam's iconophobia. As the historian Marshall Hodgson wrote in a seminal 1964 essay, "Islam and Image," Islam's "reluctance to images" varied historically and is not inherent to Islamic theology or culture (1964). Iconoclasm (anxiety about images) rather than iconophobia (fear of images), best characterizes Islamism in the contemporary Middle East. Islamic popular culture thus reflects an attempt to regulate, rather than repress, modern social relations. This explains the stunning growth of Islamic music video in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and even London, home to the British-Azeri singer Sami Yusuf. Yusuf's videos, which enjoy great popularity among young Arab Muslims, combine piety and pleasure (see e.g., Pond 2006). They appeal to youth by mixing religious identification with the secular, bodily pleasure of the music, and with the visual depiction of an Islam at ease with modernity.

Other, secular videos provide youths targeted at once by radicalism, authoritarianism, nationalism, and consumerism, with a language of ambivalence, precarity, and hope. These videos offer rich material for the creation of what Taylor calls "new social imaginaries" (2007). Music video consumption via mobile devices that defy social and family surveillance helps young people navigate the tensions that arise between their private lives and the public sphere, and negotiate

multiple and shifting identities at the intersection of global and local forces. On Facebook, for example, fans and critics use music videos to build community, posting and commenting on them, soliciting reactions, and addressing social and political problems—strangers and semi-strangers as transient members of publics.

## Conclusion

This chapter explored reality television and music videos as two genres of entertainment television that have generated public discourse about social and political norms and values. A combination of appealing content, affective power, and social resonance enables some popular culture texts to mobilize publics around important social and political issues. The amenability to politicization that is exhibited by Arab popular culture underscores the importance of popular culture as an arena for social and political analysis, to be taken seriously by students of Arab societies and politics.

A comparative analysis of reality television and music videos briefly conducted in this chapter enables us to discern differences between the ways in which these two genres have a social and political impact. Reality television shows are massive productions that involve significant investment and risk-taking by large media corporations like LBC or MBC, whether production is outsourced or done in-house. In contrast, music videos require a relatively minor commitment of resources. Whereas reality television shows typically attract audiences for four months of the year, and typically for several years in a row— that is *Star Academy*—music videos are brief audio-visual blurbs that circulate across multiple media.

Perhaps the most important difference between reality television and music video resides in the way both genres enter the symbolic economy of attention in the Arab world, which, due to the satellite infrastructure and the common Arabic language, has a regional, pan-Arab scope. From the preceding, it appears that reality television's main appeal is *ritual* while music video's is *visual*. Clearly, viewing activities like watching, requesting, voting, debating, and so on, of both reality television and music videos have both ritual and visual aspects. However, whereas in the case of reality television, the affective ritual engagement with the routines of the genre—watching, nominating, mobilizing support behind your nominee, voting— have consequential implications for authoritarian regimes that rely on rituals of power affirmation, whether religious, as is the case of

Saudi Arabia, or more secular, as with Syria (see Kraidy 2010), the visual aspects of the genre contribute to its impact without being central to it. In contrast, in the case of music videos, their briefness and wide circulation depend to a large degree on visual impact—as opposed to the music, which, by most journalistic accounts, appears to be at best secondary to the visuals—a visual impact that occurs without the elaborate rituals of reality television. Whereas reality television shows like *Star Academy* have served as an arena for sustained debates about gender interactions, cultural authenticity, and national identity, undergirding such debate for at least several months per year, and over a period of several years, music videos attract immediate and relatively short-term attention, occasionally creating publics and counter-publics who engage a political or social issue for a relatively brief period of time (as the case of *Wa'd 'Arqoub*, suggests) (Kraidy 2013).

The implications of the ritual-visual nexus are manifold, and will have to be explored fully elsewhere. Two concluding observations may help initiate a research agenda in this direction. The first concerns the kinds of technology involved in the production, distribution, and consumption of reality television and music videos. Whereas in the case of the former, mobile phones and internet capacities are drawn into "interactive" viewer engagement with reality shows, in the case of music videos newer, smaller, and more portable digital technologies—a variety of devices including the I-Pod, smart phones, and others—and social networking sites—Facebook and MySpace, the latter being mostly the province of musicians and the music industry—assume a central role in the ways that Arabs view and listen to music videos. The social and political implications of these differences ought to be explored. Second, after initial opposition to popular culture forms that were widely perceived to be Western in origin and ethos, it is now clear that the Islamic revival in its manifold manifestations has appropriated both reality television and music videos for religious content. This is especially the case of music videos, because, as Göle argued, in "Islamic morality...[R]ather than abstract citizenship rights, it is the visual, audible, corporeal presence of women that determines the limits of freedom and democracy" (2000: 112). Music videos, which rely heavily on visual and audible elements, in addition to the visibility of women's bodies, promise to remain both a source of controversy and an efficient tool of mobilization in the ongoing struggle to define how to be, at once, Arab, Muslim, and modern.

## Notes

1. In Italy, the porn star Cicciolina was elected to parliament. In India, the televised versions of the Hindu epics, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* had active links with the changing political landscape; see Rajagopal (2001). In Latin America, sensitive socioeconomic themes are often politicized in the context of *telenovelas* and other forms of public culture. See García-Canclini (2001); Martín-Barbero (1993).

2. Algerian television was forced to shut down Star Academy after widespread criticism in mosques (2006, February 4) (Senoussi 2006).

3. Another possible reason for the relative unpopularity of *Survivor Arabia* and *al-Wadi* [Celebrity Farm] is that, by featuring life in a rural or survival setting, they lacked glitziness, glamour, and "lure of the West"—powers that one finds in *Star Academy*.

## References

Abu-Lughod, Lila. 2005. *Dramas of Nationhood.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Andrejevic, Mark. 2004. *Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Appadurai, Carol Breckenridge. 1995. *Consuming Modernity.* Public Culture in a South Asian World, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Armbrust, Walter. 1996. *Mass Culture and Modernism in Egypt.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Aufderheide, Pat. 1986. "Music Videos: The Look of the Sound." *Journal of Communication*, 36 (1): 57–78.

Barnett, Michael N. (1998). *Dialogues in Arab Politics.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Berlant, Laurent. 1991. *The Anatomy of National Fantasy.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Brooks, Peter. 1976. *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Cantelli, Fabrizio and Olivier Paye. 2004. "Star Academy: un objet pour la science politique?" in Yves Cartuyvels (ed.), *Star Academy: Un objet pour les sciences sociales?* Bruxelles, Belgique: Publications des Facultés universitaires Saint-Louis, pp. 65–89.

Coleman, Stephen. 2006. "How the Other Half Votes: Big Brother Viewers and the 2005 British General Election Campaign." *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 9 (4): 457–479.

Couldry, Nick. 2003. *Media Rituals: A Critical Approach.* London: Routledge.

Gabler, Neil. 1998. *Life the Movie: How Entertainment Conquered Reality.* New York: Knopf.

García-Canclini, Nestor. 1994. *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

García-Canclini, Nestor. 2001. *Consumers and Citizens: Globalization and Multicultural Conflicts.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.

Gelvin, James. 1999. "Modernity and Its Discontents: On the Durability of Nationalism in the Arab Middle East." *Nations and Nationalisms*, 5 (1): 71–89.

al-Ghadhami, Abdullah. 2005. *Hikayat al-Hadatha fi al-Mamlaka al-'Arabiyya al-Su'udiyya.* (The Story of Modernity in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia) [Arabic]. Casablanca and Beirut: Arab Cultural Center.

Göle, Nilüfer. 2000. "Snapshots of Islamic Modernities." *Daedelus*, 129 (1): 91–117.

Grossberg, Lawrence. 1988. "'You [Still] Have to Fight for Your Right to Party': Music Television as Billboards of Post-Modern Difference." *Popular Music*, 7 (3): 315–332.

Habermas, Jürgen. 1989. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society.* Cambridge: Polity.

Hariman, Robert. (1995). *Political Style: The Artistry of Power.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hirschkind, Charles. 2006. *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Hodgson, Marshall G. S. 1964. "Islam and Image." *History of Religions*, 3 (2): 220–260.

Hourani, Albert. 1983. *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age: 1798–1939.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kirli, Cengiz. 2004. "Coffeehouses: Public Opinion in the Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Empire," in A. Salvatore and D. F. Eickelman (eds.), *Public Islam and the Common Good.* Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, pp. 75–97.

Kraidy, Marwan M. 1999. "The Global, the Local, and the Hybrid: A Native Ethnography of Glocalization." *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 16 (4): 458–478.

Kraidy, Marwan M. 2005. *Hybridity, or the Cultural Logic of Globalization.* Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Kraidy, Marwan M. 2010. *Reality Television and Arab Politics: Contention in Public Life.* Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.

Kraidy, Marwan M. 2013. "Contention and Circulation in the Digital Middle East: Music Video as Catalyst." *Television and New Media*, 14 (1): 1–15.

Kraidy, Marwan M. and Omar Alghazzi. 2013. "Neo-Ottoman Cool: Turkish Popular Culture in Arab Public Discourse." *Popular Communication: International Journal of Media and Culture*, 11 (1): 17–29.

Le Guay, Damien. 2005. *L'empire de la télé-réalité: ou comment accroitre le "temps de cerveau humain disponible.* Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

Martín-Barbero, Martin. 1993. *From the Media to Mediations: Communication, Culture and Hegemony*. London: SAGE Publications.

Nussbaum, Martha C. 2001. *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Peters, John Durham. 2001. "Witnessing." *Media, Culture & Society*, 23 (6): 707–723.

Pond, Christian. 2006. "The Appeal of Sami Yusuf and the Search for Islamic Authenticity." *Transnational Broadcasting Studies*, 16. Retrieved December 1, 2007 from http://www.tbsjournal.com

Rajagopal, Arvind. 2001. *Politics after Television: Hindu Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Public in India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

al-Rasheed, Madawi. 2007. *Contesting the Saudi State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sabry, Tarik. 2005. "The Day Moroccans Gave Up Couscous for Satellites: Global TV, Structures of Feeling, and Mental Emigration." *Transnational Broadcasting Studies*, 14. Also available at: http://www.tbsjournal.com/Archives/Spring05/sabry.html

Street, John. 2004. *Politics and Popular Culture*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Taylor, Charles. 1999. "Two Theories of Modernity." *Public Culture*, 11 (9): 153–174.

Taylor, Charles. 2007. *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Thompson, John. 1994. *The Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.

Turner, Graeme. 2006. "The Mass Production of Celebrity: 'Celetoids', Reality TV and the 'Demotic Turn'." *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 9 (2): 153–165.

Van Zoonen, Liesbet. 2004. "Imagining the Fan Democracy." *European Journal of Communication*, 19 (1): 39–52.

Warner, Michael. 2002. *Publics and Counterpublics*. New York: Zone Books.

Watenpaugh, Keith D. 2006. *Being Modern in the Middle East: Revolution, Nationalism, Colonialism, and the Arab Middle Class*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Wedeen, Lisa. 1999. *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric and Symbols in Contemporary Syria*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

### Arabic Pages

al-Bishr, Badriyya. 2007. *The "Tash Ma Tash" Battles: A Reading of the Prohibition Mentality in Saudi Society*. Casablanca and Beirut: Arab Cultural Centre [Arabic].

"Because of their Political Activities, Israel Considers Nancy and Maria and Haifa to Pose a Danger". 2005. *Alarabiya.net* [Arabic]. September 14,

Bennis, Muhammad. 2004. *Fractured Modernity* [Arabic]. Casablanca: Toubqal Press.

"Green Light: A Reality Show of Another Kind." 2005. *Al-Riyadh* [Arabic]. June 1

Senoussi, 'Ayyash. 2006. "Algerian Television Director to al-Hayat: *Star Academy* Violated the Contract and Threatens Are Our Daily Bread." *Al-Hayat* [Arabic]. April 14.

Snobar, Andrawes. 2008. *Arab Reality TV Shows.* Amman, Jordan: Arab Advisors Group. May

"Stars Return to Politics…a Job or a Search for the Audience?" 2005. *Al- Sharq al-Awsat* [Arabic]. August 14

Yassin, Sa 'id. 2005. "Fifi 'Abdo Confronts Corruption and Smuggling of Antiquities." *Al-Hayat* [Arabic]. September 16

# Female Islamic Interpretations on the Air: Fatwas and Religious Guidance by Women Scholars on Arab Satellite Channels*

*Anne Sofie Roald*

## INTRODUCTION

Religious programs on various Arab satellite channels have been on the increase during the last decade, a time also of increasing political and social contestation. National as well as satellite television, including al-Jazeera, feature daily or weekly religious programs. Additionally there are also dedicated "religious channels" with a variety of religiously oriented programming. One such channel is the Egyptian *Maria* Channel, where women wear face-veils, launched in 2012. This channel—and some of the religious programs on other channels featuring women—deals particularly with "religious" matters (*'ibadat*): how women should pray and fast or how women should educate children, and so on. However, in some religious programs, male and female scholars participate together, and jointly discuss various issues and issue fatwas on the air. This chapter will investigate some religious programs that have female presenters. It will look at which issues have become "women's issues" in this new dissemination of religious knowledge, and whether and how "female" fatwas tend to differ from those of male scholars, and some of the implications of this for the nature of the contemporary public sphere in the Arab world.

The main arguments are firstly that the entry of women into the religious public sphere in the Arab world is facilitated by the new communications technology: the satellite channels and Internet. Secondly, this entrance of women into "public religion" creates a modernizing shift within contemporary Muslim discourses.

Female Islamic scholars, shari'a Ph.D-holders and Islamic personalities, such as former famous actresses who have turned more "Islamic" by donning the headscarf, have been more visible during the last few years, in both political debates as well as religious programs on Arab satellite channels. The two Egyptian female shari'a scholars, Dr. Su'ad al-Salih and Dr. 'Abla al-Kahlawi were pioneers and started to participate in both national and satellite television debates in the late twentieth century. Both have had their own television program on satellite channels since the late 1990s, enabling them to reach a broader audience. Other female shari'a scholars have entered the satellite scene in the first decade of the twenty-first century, such as, for instance, the Syrian Islamic scholar Lina al-Homsi, who also has a homepage where she discusses Muslim women's issues.

Former actresses who have turned Islamic during the last decades, such as Sabreen and Muna 'Abd al-Ghani, host talk shows and call-in programs on the Islamic channel al-Risala in which religious issues, particularly pertaining to gender relations in Islam, are discussed. Religion has also become a topic in educational programs with female pedagogical scholars advising parents on how to raise their children in an "authentic" Islamic atmosphere, that is, children's pedagogy becomes a means to educate both parents and children in the "correct" Islamic manner.

A new phenomenon is sex on the air, as the Egyptian female sexologist, Heba Kotb started to discuss sexual matters in her program *Very Big Talk*, (*kalam kabir jiddan*) on Mehwar satellite television, running from 2006 to 2008. Kotb follows the tracks of Malaka Zerar, a scholar of shari'a and positive law, who has been quite outspoken on matters in which the prevailing code of Islamic modesty has prevented open discussions.

In 2009 and 2010, I conducted a media survey in Syria, Jordan, and the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The target group was university students at three faculties: Humanities (*adab*), Engineering (*handasa*), and Islamic Studies (shari'a). The questionnaire addressed television viewing preference (news, religious programs, films, series, and music), as well as opinions of how television might or might not influence social change. I also interviewed students in the three countries as well as in Egypt in April 2010. In Egypt, I further interviewed

Suʿad al-Salih about her role as a religious scholar on the air, and I also interviewed Lina al-Homsi during her visit to Norway in 2009.

Many of the respondents in the survey stated that they watch religious programs; the Egyptian-Qatari Islamic scholar Yusuf al-Qaradawi's program *Shariʿa and Life* (*al-shariʿa wa-l-hayat*) on al-Jazeera was one of the most popular in the survey. Even religious programs in general, such as programs on Qur'anic interpretations (*tafsir*) and fatwas (scholarly judgments on religiously acceptable and non-acceptable practices) were viewed by the respondents. Some of the students, men and women, reported that they watched religious programs featuring female scholars. Of those, the Syrian students tended mainly to watch programs featuring Lina al-Homsi, whereas Jordanian and Palestinian students mainly watched female Islamic scholars from Jordan but to a certain extent, also al-Homsi and the two Egyptians, al-Salih and al-Kahlawi. In interviews with Egyptian students, those who watched female Islamic scholars preferred al-Salih and al-Kahlawi to non-Egyptians. According to the result of the survey, it is obvious that al-Qaradawi has a broad pan-Arab audience, whereas the female Islamic scholars tend to be most popular in their own geographical regions, despite the fact that their programs are aired on satellite channels that have regional reach. That students in Palestine and Jordan watched female scholars from outside their region might be explained by the fact that female Islamic scholars from these two countries are less famous than the Syrian and the Egyptian. It is notable that very few stated that they watched Heba Kotb's program either on TV or on the Internet. It might be that her program does not count as a religious program. However, Kotb's programs were rarely mentioned, even under the category of "other programs." It seems however that her program has a wide audience on the Internet as many of her programs are frequently watched on Youtube. This became obvious in my discussions with some of the students. As I pressed the issue, some acknowledged that they had followed her program on Youtube, but not on television. The response from the respondents confirmed that open sex talk is still a taboo in Arab society.

The present study will look into three categories of religious programs featuring female scholars: spiritual guidance (*hidaya*), jurisprudence (*fiqh*), and sexology (*al-tarbiya al-jinsiyya*). The main issue under investigation is which issues have become "women's issues" in this new dissemination of religious knowledge and, second, whether and how "female" fatwas tend to differ from those of male scholars, and some of the implications of this for the nature of the contemporary public sphere in the Arab world.

## Feminism and Muslims

As in other religious traditions, Islamic theology has been dominated by male scholars, and a main argument promoted by Muslim and Islamic feminists[1] is that, as the Islamic sources have mainly been interpreted by men, male rights and privileges are accentuated, whereas women's rights have been neglected and repressed (Mernissi 1991; Hassan 1990; Wadud 1999). The underlying supposition to such a view is that if women had the chance to participate in the interpretation process and, thus, to influence the scholarly theological community, women's rights would be strengthened and women would be empowered religiously and socially in Muslim societies. A similar supposition that feminization of theology necessarily will empower women is, for instance, common in Christian feminist thought (Schüssler Fiorenza1994; King 1995).

In the Islamic sphere, as to a greater and lesser extent in other religious traditions, women have a much lesser role to play in forming religious ideas and constructing social roles based on religious conceptions than do men. This is even true for Islamic organizations in Europe, where few women have leadership positions. For instance, the European Council for Fatwa and Research has scholars from all over the world, but does not include any women among its 33 members. As most Islamist politicians are men, for instance in Egypt, Palestine, and Jordan, women tend to organize themselves in welfare organizations, where the main activities are to educate women in handcraft, children's education and upbringing, and religious family issues, such as how to be good mothers and good wives. Indeed these latter organizations have male members, particularly as leaders and main managers, but they have above all attracted female Islamist activists (Kjøstvedt 2010).

## The Womanization of Arab Islamic Television

Satellite channels have a wide audience in the Arab world; in Jordan, for instance, a satellite dish is found on nearly every house, however poor, and when walking the streets of Cairo and Damascus, a similar landscape is apparent. Kai Hafez is critical of the idea that satellite television in general will lead to profound social changes globally. One of his main arguments is that language draws people to local television programming, with the main exception of the big TV channels such as CNN and BBC (Hafez 2007). However, Arab-medium

satellite television is another matter, due to Standard Arabic being the written language in 22 countries. The exchange between the countries through their national satellite televisions, and the influence of independent satellite channels on the population in the various countries, have an obvious effect on both political processes and on the development of attitudes and social ideas.

Islamic television programs started to feature women in the late twentieth century. In the early 1990s I visited the fatwa-room at al-Azhar in Egypt and was told by the person in charge that a woman's voice is '*awra*, that which according to traditional Islamic jurisprudence (e.g. jurisprudence in the Islamic law schools) should not be exposed.[2] From that time onward, an enormous development has taken place, both within Arab society in general and in its media. The Arab-medium satellite television channels, having mushroomed from the late 1990s, have been agents for a stronger visibility of women in public space, and even the Grand Mufti of Eqypt, Ali Juma'a, is a frequent guest on for instance al-Risala, an Islamic television channel in which many women host their own programs. There has thus recently been an implicit acceptance of women's religious programs from the religious authorities in Egypt, a rather quick development in a short span of time.

Al-Jazeera was one of the first channels to launch a special program on women, *li-l-Nisa' Faqat* (Only for Women), where women's rights issues in general were discussed with both female secular and Islamic-oriented participants. Even family issues pertaining to religion were frequently raised in the program. In this initial attempt to involve women, it is obvious that particular matters, such as that of family and gender relations, were singled out as particularly "women's issues." Another example of religious women participating on the air is programs on the London-based MBC (Middle East Broadcasting Center), launched in 1991. Malaka Zerar condemned, for instance, the common practice of *misyar* marriages[3] in Saudi Arabia, an act that forced her to return from Saudi Arabia to Egypt (El-Hennawy 2005). Even the private satellite channel of the Lebanese Shi'i Islamist organization, Hezbollah, used female hosts with headscarves, both in their political debate programs and as newscasters, from its early start as a satellite channel in 2000. It is interesting to note that when I interviewed the then managing director of al-Jazeera in 2000, Jasim al-'Ali, he stated that he had tried to find a woman newscaster with a headscarf without success. When Khadija Bin Qinna who had been a newscaster on al-Jazeera from the end of the 1990s, donned the headscarf, she became the first of her kind at this secular TV channel.

The channel Iqra' was the first established Islamic satellite channel. This channel was part of the Arab Radio and Television satellite service (ART) and it was launched in 1998. This channel, as well as ART in general, aimed at reaching Arabic speakers both in the Arab world and in western countries. The socio-religious discussion programs where both the panel and the audience lived in western countries handled issues of importance for Muslims in the west. Many of these programs had female panelists, and the issues discussed were frequently family matters and women's rights, in Islam as well as in western society.

Thus, it was in the lead up to the twenty-first century that Islamic-oriented women entered the screen in a visible way. The broadcasting of highly popular Islamic shows featuring male televangelists, such as the Egyptian 'Amr Khaled and Mo'az Mas'ud (possible spelling: Mo'ez Mas'oud), a former accountant and an advertising producer respectively, has been followed by corresponding programs with female hosts. It is interesting to note that the Islamic satellite channel al-Risala, launched in 2006, had decided to focus on women (and youth), as the channel's audience consists of approximately 70 percent women (Conte 2008).

The introduction of female scholars on the air is part of a general trend of fragmentation of Islamic thought. The breakdown of the Islamic orthodoxy, that is, the Islamic law school system, has opened up for a continuous flow of new interpretations of Islam. I have discussed elsewhere how the disintegration of the Islamic revival movement, which started in the eighteenth century, has caused a process of relativization of faith particularly from the 1990s onward (Roald 2008). This relativization of faith is however rarely discussed within Islamic circles. It seems though that the need for alternative interpretations to *salafism*, whether *jihadist* or *quietist*, has set other concerns, such as the unification of the *Umma* aside in the recent Islamic debate. Al-Risala was launched as such an endeavor, both to safeguard "the sound (*sahih*) moderate (*wasat*) Islamic thought" and to confront secular ideas "that undermine family values" (Lindsey 2006). Al-Risala's focus on female shows is thus an attempt to "educate"[4] their female audience in Islamic values compatible with both modern ideas, such as democracy, tolerance, and moderation, as well as traditional family values promoted by orthodox law school Islam. It remains to be seen whether this attempt by al-Risala, and some of the other Arab and Islamic satellite channels, can cause the establishment of a "new" Islamic orthodoxy or whether the relativization of faith might lead to a pluralization and a general secularization of Islamic

ideas as was the result of many Christian European reform movements in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries (see Ödman 1995; Utvik 2006; Roald 2008).

## ʿAbla al-Kahlawi: The Spiritual Guide

ʿAmr Khaled's popularity is to a great extent built on his "familiarity"; his colloquial speeches capture an audience from all layers of society. Moreover, his "spiritual" approach focused on the idea of divine love attracts the youth, in a society where extra-marital carnal love, to a great extent, is still taboo. The increased visibility of love themes provided by American films and sit-coms on the satellite channels might get its outlet in such spirituality as Khaled offers on the air. Khaled's approach differs fundamentally from the formalism of Islamic scholars in their television programs that focus on the *halal* (acceptable) and the *haram* (forbidden), where scholars tend to keep to the classical language (*al-lugha al-fusha*) of written Arabic. Ahmad Abu Haiba, a former head of the Cairo office of al-Risala, which was one of the main promoters of Khaled's religious shows, declares his religiosity and at the same time refutes the traditional "sheikh-ly" way of presenting Islam on television. "I do not like the way they're [the shaykhs] speaking. I'm bored" he exclaimed in an interview (Wise 2005). The popular way of the new "televangelists" is thus part of a new modern approach to "Islam" pervasive in many of the religious satellite channels.

ʿAbla al-Kahlawi's 29 lectures about the Prophet Muhammad, *On the love of the chosen one* (*Fi hubb al-mustafa* – Mustapha is one of the names given to the Prophet Muhammad) on al-Risala has a similar style as that of Khaled. Al-Kahlawi is soft-spoken, her speeches are to a great extent in colloquial Arabic, and she seems at times on the verge of tears, a common method of Islamic preachers to touch the hearts of the audience.[5] She also tends to change the tonal quality of her voice according to the content of her talks. As she speaks of the love of the Prophet, she becomes more intense in her manners and stresses the word *hubb* (love), the main message in this particular serial, as she repeats it again and again. As Charles Hirschkind has noted, the style of a preacher has often been more appreciated among the Arab audience than the content. He argues that his informants tended to judge the Islamic speeches (on cassettes) "on the bases of the quality of the sincerity, humility, and pious fear given vocal embodiment by the speaker," rather than

its content (Hirschkind 2006:12). Al-Kahlawi's television perfor-
mances fit well into such a pattern of "Islamic rhetoric."

Al-Kahlawi's serial on the love of the Prophet reflects the aim of al-
Risala to be a promoter of the "sound" (*sahih*) and "middle"(*wasat*)
understanding of Islam and to actively change the "wrong princi-
ples" in thought (*fikr*), identity (*hawiyya*), persuasion (*qana'a*), and
logic (*mantiq*). Islam is thus about love; love for God, for the Prophet
and for other human beings. She claims that if one follows the pro-
phetic method of love, one will keep oneself and one's family out of
problems, stating for instance that "if you love your children in God
(*fi-llah*), it is impossible that anything *haram* will happen to them"
(al-Kahlawi program 2: 7,40.). Moreover, it seems obvious that this
stress on love and tolerance, (key words in modern discourses), in
the Islamic sermons, particularly on al-Risala, goes beyond the love
of Muslims only. On her homepage, al-Kahlawi writes of how toler-
ance also extends to non-Muslims. She states: "Of course, to insult
the Prophet is to insult mankind, that is, to insult every American,
Indian, Australian, and Danish citizen, as the Prophet was sent to all
people" (al-Kahlawi n.d.). This talk about tolerance fits well into a
modern moderate form of Islam, in contrast to the literal understand-
ing of Islam promoted by both *jihadist* and *quietist salafism*. Thus,
al-Kahlawi's programs tend to have a more far-reaching aim within
the Arab public sphere than only a spirituality affecting the private
life of the individuals.

Al-Kahlawi's (and Khaled's) speeches on love on al-Risala parallel
the Christian televangelist emphasis on the love of Jesus and of God.
The love theme in Christianity reflects a modern form of Christianity
in contrast to the preaching of doom and hell more prevalent in ear-
lier Christian traditions. Some researchers claim that the new "reli-
gious" TV personalities on Arab satellite channels are more or less
blueprints of western Christian televangelists (Haenni and Tamman
2003), whereas others moderate this view, seeing the TV sermons as
a continuation of an Islamic rhetorical tradition of mediating reli-
gious ideas, with the aim of moving the audience toward a more
religiously inclined lifestyle (Echchaibi 2009). Whatever the case,
there seems to be a strong emphasis on love, an emphasis which has
been less stressed in previous Islamic preaching in, for instance, the
Islamic audiocassettes popular up to the 1990, and later on Islamic
formalistic TV programs with shari'a scholars giving lectures on
Islamic jurisprudence.

Al-Kahlawi's spiritual approach does involve a political dimension,
such as the emphasis on the ideas of tolerance and peace as indicated

above, and in this sense, her influence on the Arab public sphere might be one of bridging the cleavages between religious groups both locally and globally. However, in her sermons, she tends—to a great degree—to focus on family issues and traditional female roles, such as the upbringing of children. It would therefore be pertinent to see her main contribution to religious preaching mostly in terms of the family values that might have a less immediate impact on Arab society, than the promoting of more large-scale political ideas would have.

## Suʿad al-Salih: The faqiha

The formalistic style of the male shariʿa scholars, mentioned by Abu Haiba above, is not only a matter for male scholars. A similar approach to Islam is also adapted in some programs of female shariʿa scholars. Al-Kahlawi is indeed a scholar of shariʿa (here: Islamic Studies), but her main approach is the spirituality in Islam, and she deals particularly with the study of the life of the Prophet (*sira*). Her colleague, Suʿad al-Salih has, on the other hand, chosen the juridical approach in her Islamic TV programs, due to her being a *faqiha*, a female legalist scholar. Her stress on Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) makes her approach oriented toward looking for solutions to contemporary social problems. One example is her stress on the issue of gender relations, such as, for instance, marriage and divorce, and female covering. Her television performances are therefore mainly in social debate programs. During my interview with al-Salih in April 2010, she stated that she had recently decided to mainly participate in television programs with only one presenter and herself, as she felt it was a waste of time to perform in programs with many participants, where she believes the main focus is to create tension and antagonism between the participants. Her aim with her television performances was, she stated, to inform Muslims of what is right (*sahih*) and what is wrong (*ghalat*) according to Islam.

When I asked al-Salih whether her approach to Islam tends to differ from that of male scholars in general, she replied in the affirmative. The example she drew attention to was the fatwa she had issued on television where she regarded it as not proper, indeed close to prohibited (*haram*), for the husbands to leave wives and children for long periods of time to work abroad, particularly in the Gulf States and Jordan. According to her, this fatwa relates to a shariʿa rule that men should not be away from their family more than 4 months. She claims that she judges according to shariʿa, whereas the male scholars tend to overlook this shariʿa rule in their fatwas. Al-Salih claims

that many Egyptian families suffer when the husband is away for a year at a time. In these circumstances, women have to take the men's responsibility as the head of the family; at the same time, according to Egyptian law, women cannot perform official acts, such as, for instance, registration of family members, which is needed for children getting into governmental schools. Thus, according to al-Salih, children suffer from the lack of male authority and guidance in their upbringing. The latter statement reflects al-Salih's view of the father's central position as the head of the family, as well as the need for the element of male "rationality" in contrast to female "emotionality," as will be discussed below.

In a program on al-Safwa satellite channel, *'Ala al-Hawa'* in 2008, al-Salih and a former head of department of shari'a and law, Muhammad Ra'fat 'Uthman, discussed whether marriage between an old man and a much younger woman is acceptable according to shari'a. The program presenter stated in the introduction that Islamic scholars have different views about such a marriage. Of the two participants, al-Salih was the one against such marriages, whereas 'Uthman supported them. Al-Salih declared that she had Islamic legal evidence (*dalil*) for regarding this marriage form as being *haram* (forbidden) or at least *makruh* (not recommendable). According to her the five legal categories in Islamic legislation, *wajib* (obligatory), *mandub* (recommended), *mubah* (permitted, but not necessarily recommended), *makruh* (disapproved of), and *haram* (forbidden) should also be applied to marriages. Based on the Islamic meaning of marriage, marriages are only acceptable, she suggested, according to shari'a, when various conditions are fulfilled: (1) the intention behind the marriage is that of living a valuable and complete life, (2) procreation, and (3) sexual satisfaction; and all three of these conditions are void in a marriage between an old man and a young woman. 'Uthman, on the other hand, takes his starting point in women's right to get a divorce if she is dissatisfied in her marriage. It seems obvious that the recent introduction of women's right to obtain a divorce against the will of her husband in Egyptian courts (the *khul'* divorce) made 'Uthman refer to women's option to divorce. However, he does not take into consideration the fact that divorce is a class issue, as women without the economical means to support themselves have few possibilities to use this new legal right (Roald 2009). It is of interest that al-Salih even refers to this kind of marriage in terms of women being deprived of their human rights.

It is obvious that al-Salih and 'Uthman discuss the matter on different levels. Whereas al-Salih continuously refers to the young

females in these marriages as "girls," 'Uthman refers to them as "women." Moreover, al-Salih tends to regard the girls as being forced, directly or indirectly, to marry the old men, due mainly to poverty, while 'Uthman sees these marriages as being a result of women's voluntary consent to marry. It is interesting that some of the people "on the street" interviewed in the program, mainly young Egyptian men and women, strongly rejected this type of marriage, whereas one old man supported it. This matter might therefore not only be a matter of male versus female, but rather a matter of generations. In Egyptian society, particularly in the big towns, it is difficult for young men to marry due to economical and housing problems. Apart from the issue of economic need, one of the reasons parents may accept to marry their young daughters to elderly men might therefore be out of a fear their daughters could remain unmarried if they wait too long.

In another program *al-Bayt Baytuki,* al-Salih discussed the issue of covering. She voiced both a strong rejection of face-veil and the tradition that small girls wear head-cover. She claimed that at the time she was a young student at al-Azhar, the "hijab" was a symbol for a strong commitment to Islamic belief and practice as well as a symbol of a woman having reached puberty. She further stated that the head-cover has recently become tradition for many, and even sometimes a fashion. She concluded that women with head-covers are not necessarily practicing Muslims, in the sense of practicing the tenets of Islam.

In yet another edition of the program *'Ala al-Hawa',* al-Salih, together with two other women, the engineer Kamilya Hilmi, and the journalist and writer Farida Shushaishi, discussed whether a new law on punishment for men's verbal abuse against their wives should be introduced in Egypt. Hilmi, whose wide and long head-cover indicated an affiliation to *salafi* thought, claimed that husbands' verbal abuse is often the result of their wives' provocation, a common idea in salafism. She stated that for her the family was much more important than were individuals in the family (read: women), and such a law would destabilize the whole structure of family in Egyptian society. Hilmi's view resembles that of the Islamist judge of the Supreme Court in Sudan, Rababa Abu Ghazayza. She claimed that, in divorce cases, she always looked at the children's interest, which, in her view, meant that the family should not be broken up.[6] Both these women did not take into consideration in their discussion that men's unconditional right to divorce and polygynous marriages are strong destabilizing factors for marriages.

Al-Salih and Shushaishi, on the other hand, were both encouraging of such a law: Shushaishi from a secular point of view and al-Salih from a shariʿa point of view. Al-Salih claimed that according to shariʿa, men have to treat their wives gently, with compassion and respect. When the presenter asked whether there are differences between men and women, a disagreement between al-Salih and Shushaishi arose. Shushaishi claimed that men and women are completely equal in all matters, whereas al-Salih believed that there are differences between men and women. Due to these differences, men had to treat their wives gently, with compassion and respect, she said. She went on to say that, according to shariʿa, men are custodians (*qawwamun ʿala*) of their wives, because they have a preference (*tafdil*) over women (jf. the Qurʾan 4:34). This preference, she claimed, using the common reductionist argument in Islamic discourse, is because men are more rational, whereas women are more emotional. As Shushaishi, from her feminist perspective, tried to protest against this view, al-Salih continued vigorously, claiming that due to this preference men are required to be more in control and endure (*yatahammal*) women's bad behavior. The woman, she carried on, will always be overwhelmed by her emotions (*tataghallab ʿalayha al-ʿatifa*), and as men are rational they are obliged to accept women's emotional outbreaks. What al-Salih does is to turn up side down the perception of Muslim women's obligation to remain patient (*sabir*) and accept their husbands' behavior, however bad—a common idea in Islamic discourses. Al-Salih's claim resembles al-Turabi's notion of the concept *qawwamun,* to mean to stand up and serve their wives—a very particular understanding among Islamists and Islamic scholars in general (Roald 2001). It is interesting that Shushashi does not contest al-Salih's argument in this matter. Although she might disagree with her in principle, their common conclusion on rejecting bad male behavior toward women seems to unite them, despite their differences in ideology. Shushaishi does not object until al-Salih starts to discuss men's and women's official role in terms of "male rationality" and "women's emotionality." Shushaishi then refers to leading women leaders such as Margaret Thatcher and Benazir Bhutto, showing that women are not only created for recreation and children's upbringing. However, the relative agreement between the Islamic scholar al-Salih and the secular feminist Shushaishi, and their common front against the more socially conservative Hilmi is interesting in view of gender construction in the moderate Arab Islamist discourse. It is furthermore obvious that al-Salih has internalized female-instigated divorce as Islamic as she states in the end of the program that it is the woman's choice to

divorce if she does not accept verbal abuse from her husband. The legislation on female-instigated divorce (*khul'*) introduced into Egyptian law in 2000, seems therefore to have become compatible with Islamic legislation, in contrast to, for instance, the opposition to this law among Islamists in Jordan (Roald 2009).

Similarly, like al-Kahlawi, al-Salih focuses on family and gender issues. However, her perspective is more problem-solution oriented than is al-Kahlawi's. Although al-Salih does not deal specifically with politics and economics on a state level, her relative empowerment of women in terms of strengthening women's rights in family issues might have an impact on women's role in the wider society in the long run. It seems also that al-Salih tends to differ with many male Islamic scholars on matters that have implications for the empowerment of women, as the idea of the introduction of a law on verbal abuse indicates. Al-Salih's understanding of human rights might not necessarily be the same as in a liberal secular context. However, by using the concept "human rights" as an Islamic scholar, she establishes it and promotes it in the Islamic gender discourse.

## Heba Kotb: The Female Sexologist

In the end of the 1990s, I attended a lecture for women given by a female salafi *da'iya* (a woman who calls to Islam; from *da'wa*: call to Islam) in Jordan. Her main message was that hadiths (the Prophet Muhammad's sayings, actions, and preferences) should be understood in a literary way and she illustrated this by referring to a hadith on whether a man should perform the ritual ablution after touching his penis. The audience looked apprehensive and shy during the lesson and the whole atmosphere was tense and uncomfortable. The woman lecturer stated at the end of the lesson that the reason she had chosen this hadith was to show how sexuality (within married life, she added) and everything connected with sex in Islam is a "natural" matter that should be treated in a normal way like all other aspects of human life. It seems that she did not get her idea through, as most women did not pose questions and they left the lecture as soon as it was over. This was in contrast to previous lectures, when many women remained for an hour or two afterward for a chat. Yet, these same women were not shy to talk about sex with each other in other settings. In company with other *married* women, many would raise the issue although in a humorous and joking way. After having attended Heba Kotb's television shows on TV, and read about some of the public reactions to her programs, I asked myself whether it

was the mixture of sex and religion that was hard to reconcile. Heba Kotb has, besides her PhD in medicine, a degree in Sexology from the United States. She has her own clinic and her own homepage where she answers questions and promotes articles on various topics. What is particular about Kotb is her firm stand on Islamic issues. She always starts with the *basmala* (recitation of the phrase "in the name of God the Merciful and Compassionate") and she frequently refers to the Qur'an and the hadiths in her talks. Her stand on sexuality in general is mainly based on the Islamic rulings, although in some matters she interprets the Islamic sources in a more liberal way than many Islamic scholars normally would. She argues that the outspokenness on sexual matters is nothing but Islamic. In this matter Kotb resembles the *salafi da'iya's* claim mentioned above. Her *Islamic* approach is most apparent in her statement on the blessings of sexuality within marriage, which she is careful to emphasize in various programs as well as in her writings (Kotb 2004). On websites and in the western press, Kotb tends to be regarded as a conservative Muslim (Brownlee 2006; Abou al-Magd 2007). It is, however, obvious that she stands within a tradition of new interpretations of the Islamic sources rather than within a traditionalist law school orientation. In her dissertation, she links herself to an Islamic project working toward "frameworks for progressive Islam" (Kotb 2004). Her stand on female circumcision for instance, is that this practice is not an Islamic requirement. At the same time, she claims that it is possible for a circumcised woman to achieve sexual pleasure and orgasm, as this mainly depends on psycho-hormonal factors and not on the clitoris alone. If husband and wife have an open conversation about sex, it is possible for the wife to inform her husband about her sexual preferences and get satisfaction despite her being circumcised, Kotb states (Kotb 2004). It is obvious that the type of circumcision she refers to is clitoridectomy, which is commonly practiced in Egypt—in contrast to infibulations, which is more common in countries such as Sudan and Somalia.[7]

From 2006 until 2008, Kotb had her own TV show *Big Talk* and, besides talking about various selected topics, she answered questions from the audience. Some wrote in questions and some rang in. The questions were about the size of the male sexual organ, sexual desire, how to reach an orgasm, masturbation, oral sex, and anal sex, and so on. One of Kotb's programs handled, for instance, the issue of masturbation (*al-ʿada al-sirriya*). According to the traditional law school jurisprudence, masturbation is regarded as either prohibited (*haram*) or undesirable (*makruh*) both for men and women. However, some Islamist women following the late Lebanese shiʿi scholar, Muhammad

Husayn Fadlallah (1935–2010), refer to the fact that he has declared that as the initiative of marriage is a male responsibility and therefore not in the hands of women, masturbation for unmarried women is acceptable.[8] One woman wrote in to Kotb's program to ask whether her husband caressing her clitoris is regarded as masturbation or not. Kotb's answer was that this is a normal practice which, when performed within married life, is permitted in Islam. Another woman wrote to Kotb that her husband masturbates rather than having sexual intercourse with her. Kotb's answer to this was that he is seriously doing wrong according to Islam and has to change his behavior. A third woman wrote in and asked whether she could continue to masturbate after her marriage. Kotb advised her to emotionally link herself more to her husband, as it is not acceptable to masturbate if she is married. Thus, in contrast to many Islamic scholars, Kotb accepts masturbation for women, and even in contrast to Fadlallah, also for non-married men, as she sees this as a way to prevent non-married persons with a strong sexual desire from committing fornication, an act prohibited in Islamic legislation (Kotb 2004).

In a program dealing specifically with anal sex, Kotb starts with saying that she has recently received forty to fifty letters with women complaining about their husbands wanting to perform anal sex. Kotb ascribes this phenomenon to the bad influence from the Internet and she strongly condemns it. She says that by looking at "bad" programs, the tendency is to not be satisfied with what God has permitted for sexual behavior. She continues saying that God has permitted everything except for two things, namely anal penetration and penetration during women's monthly period. Kotb asserts that it is not an excuse that the husband is forcing his wife to accept anal sex by, for instance, threatening to deny her food or household money: "You cannot come to the Hereafter and claim that you were forced and that your husband ordered you to do it. It is not the husband who feeds you," she said, "It is God's responsibility." Here Kotb refers to a general notion in Islam that every human being's *rizq* (material ration) is from God alone and not from any human being. After dealing with the religious stance on anal sex, Kotb takes a medical scientific approach, explaining thoroughly the various harms of anal penetration for women's bodies.

It is interesting that in the aftermath of the new openness on speaking about sexuality in an Islamic framework, a previous taboo in the Arab public space, an Emirati woman Widad Naser Lutah (also spelled Wedad Nasser Lootah) wrote a book on sexuality in 2009 called: *Sirri li-l-Ghaya: al-Mu'ashara al-Zawjiyya, Usul wa Adab*

(Top Secret: Marital Cohabitation, Basics and Principles). Lutah, who wears a *niqab* (face-veil), was interviewed by a male presenter on *Akhbar al-Aan TV,* a Dubai based satellite television channel. Lutah works as a family and marriage counselor at the Dubai court. Her book was officially sanctioned and she was supported both by her government superiors in the court system as well as by governmental officials in the UAE.

Although Lutah's approach resembles Kotb's stress on sexual issues, Lutah goes further in her discussion of marital health and a properly functioning family life. However, like Kutb she discusses the necessity to speak openly about sexual matters and, also like Kotb, she firmly rejected anal sex. One reason for Lutah to write her book was that she discovered that many women who had been married for ages had never had pleasure from sexual intercourse. In the interview, she tells of one of her female friends who had grown-up children before she got to know that it was possible for women to be sexually satisfied. In her book, Lutah asserts that if sexual education becomes pervasive in schools and centers around the Muslim world, many of the divorces that have increased immensely lately would have been avoided. Moreover, she links sex education in schools to the importance of teaching children how to avoid sexual abuse and molestation.

There is a difference in approach between how Lutah and Kotb talk about sex and how the salafi scholars, who frequently answer the audience's questions on the Islamic TV channel al-Rahma, do so. These scholars answer mainly in terms of *halal* and *haram*, and in a program on masturbation for instance this was strongly condemned as *haram*. Thus, Kotb and Lutah's choice of topic is within an Islamic framework, although not within an Arab cultural framework, where sexuality as a public topic often has been taboo. However, the women's way of treating this topic is different from that of the male *salafi* scholars.

In the interviews with some of the students in the survey, I discovered that some of them tended to watch Kotb's programs on the Internet rather than on television. They explained that it would be impossible for them to watch her program together with the family. As the students were not married, their parents would be afraid that they should be influenced in a "negative" way. It is interesting to note that the two most frequent programs by Kotb shown on Youtube are the ones on masturbation and anal sex. This indicates the interest in these two themes within a society where sex has been, and still is to a great extent, a taboo topic in the public sphere.

## Reflections

It would be difficult to evaluate how the new relative openness on sexual matters in general and Kotb's programs in particular have influenced or will influence the Arab public sphere in the future. In western countries, the "sexual revolution" has often walked hand in hand with the empowerment of women and the achievement of rights. However, the stress on sex within marriage in Kotb's, as well as in Lutah's approach, indicates a different perspective on sexual liberation than that in western countries. The same can be said about al-Salih's view of human rights. Although she enters into the modern human rights discourse, her collectivistic perspective, as well as her understanding of the concept of "human rights," differs from that of the individualistic understanding of human rights among many westerners. On the other hand, all concepts and perceptions tend to change in time and space. It would therefore be pertinent to suggest that as the new generation who has been exposed to the Internet and satellite television from an early age rise to adulthood, these perspectives and understandings might become more individualistic. As Anna Swank remarks on Kotb's show, it cannot "'change the culture' overnight," but "it has at least presented an opportunity for change" (Swank 2007: 18). Swank concludes: "one cannot help but believe that a domino has been pushed" (Swank 2007: 18).

Parallel with a more liberal attitude toward women's role in Arab societies, women during the last decades have increasingly entered into higher education in the Arab World, including into Islamic Studies. Thus, there has been an increase in the presence of women in the religious public sphere. It is inevitable that the new strong presence of women in the Arab public sphere will change Arab society in one way or another. This is particularly true for Islamic thought, as women have previously not taken part in the interpretation of Islamic sources on an equal footing with men. As the case of al-Salih shows, interpretations might change from a male to a female perspective as women enter the religious scene. The al-Azhar's official change of perspective from the early 1990s, when a woman's voice was regarded as *awra*, to today, when female Islamic scholars run their own television programs, is also noteworthy. It seems that there is a modernizing force in Islamic discourses, particularly as it comes to gender issues, promoted by and within many of the Arab satellite channels.

Whether this modernizing shift, with emphasis on women's rights, in the Islamic discourse in the Arab world, marks a new practice which potentially can lead to a more individualistic "Arab

culture" is still to be seen, although there are indications, such as al-Kahlawi's stress on love and tolerance instead of collective social ideas, al-Salih's human rights discourse, and Kotb's emphasis on women's sexual pleasure instead of presenting sexuality as a female duty to her husband. It is even noteworthy that the efforts to activate women's rights, albeit within an Islamic paradigm, are supported from above; al-Salih has support from her religious institution al-Azhar and Lutah in the UAE is backed both by religious authorities within the court system as well as by governmental authorities. This indicates that modernizing forces come both from below and from above. The collectivistic trend within the entire Arab world is deeply rooted religiously as well as culturally, but with the recent increase of women in higher education, in higher positions, and—last but not least—women's visibility in media, collectivistic discourses might be in the process of change.

## Notes

1. "Muslim feminist" refers to any Muslim who has a feminist orientation, whereas "Islamic feminist" refers to a person with both an Islamic and a feminist orientation.

2. In traditional Islamic jurisprudence, there is a notion that certain parts of the male and the female body should not be exposed. These parts are referred to as *'awra*. The "small" *'awra*, are the parts of the body that should not even be exposed to other persons of the same gender, such as the genitals, whereas the "big" *'awra* relates to those parts of a person's body that should not be exposed to people of the opposite gender, outside of those who stand in a particular relationship to the woman: the husband, father and father in law, uncles, and brothers. Whether a woman's face is *'awra* or not has been an ongoing discussion between conservative Islamic scholars (see Roald 2001: 273).

3. *Misyar* marriage is an Islamic contractual marriage, but without the rights and obligations of an Islamic marriage. For instance, the couple does not have to live together and the husband has no obligation to support the wife, nor to provide her with a house.

4. The terms "educate/education" is frequently used in the Muslim Brotherhood circles, a heritage from its founder Hasan al-Banna (Roald 1994). This together with the term "moderate" (*wasat*) indicates a link to the Muslim Brotherhood. The channel was, however, funded by Prince Walid al-Talal from Saudi Arabia.

5. In mosque sermons, particularly where the imam belongs to the salafi movement, crying while reading the Qur'an is highly regarded. The idea is that a strong religiosity is reflected in a person's ability to cry while reciting or hearing the "words of God" (*kalamullah*); thus, crying indicates a strong attachment to the divine.

6. Interview with Rababa Abu Ghazayza, in Khartoum in February, 2007.

7. It is important to note that female circumcision is practiced only in a few countries with a majority Muslim population. Female circumcision is mostly practiced by Christians, Muslims, and followers of traditional African religions in African countries.

8. Discussion in September 2002 with a Lebanese woman, a follower of Fadlallah (who had selected Fadlallah as her *marjiʿ taqlidi* [religious reference]).

## References

### *Literature*

Abou al-Magd, Nadia. January 23 2007. "Heba Kotb: On sex and Muslims." Accessed December 14, 2014, at: http://wasalaam.wordpress.com/2007/01/23/heba-kotb-on-sex-and-muslims/.

Brownlee, John. December 6 2006. "Heba Kotb, Conservative Muslim Sexologist." Accessed December 14, 2014, at: http://archive.wired.com/table_of_malcontents/2006/12/heba_kotb_conse/.

Conte, Daniela. 2008. "Islamic and Yet Modern Television. Tareq Al-Suwaidan, Producer of Al-Risala, Interviewed by Daniela Conte," at: Reset.com. Accessed December 14, 2014, at: http://www.resetdoc.org/story/00000000728.

Echchaibi, Nabil. 2009. "From Audiotapes to Videoblogs: The Delocalization of Authority in Islam." Paper to the Media Anthropology Network (EASA) e-seminar, April 28–May 12. Accessed December 14, 2014, at: http://www.media-anthropology.net/echchaibI_audiotapes_videoblogs.pdf.

Haenni, Patrick and Husam Tammam. 2003. "Egypt's Air-Conditioned Islam." *Le Monde Diplomatique*, September. Accessed December 14, 2014, at: http://mondediplo.com/2003/09/03egyptislam.

Hafez, Kai. 2007. *The Myth of Media Globalization*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.

Hassan, Riffat. 1990. "An Islamic Perspective," in J. Becher (red), *Women, Religion and Sexuality*. Geneva: World Council of Churches Publication.

El-Hennawy, Noha. 2005. "Women Preachers Join Religious Debate on Satellite TV." *Transnational Broadcasting Studies*, no. 14, Spring. Accessed December 14, 2014, at: http://tbsjournal.arabmediasociety.com/Archives/Spring05/hennawi.html.

Hirschkind, Charles. 2006. *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics*. New York: Columbia University Press.

al-Kahlawi, 'Abla. n.d. "Hadha Nabiyyuna, Hadha Muhammad" (That Is Our Prophet: That Is Muhammad.) Accessed June 21, 2010, at: http://www.ablaalkahlawy.com/home.htm.

King, Ursula (ed.). 1995. *Religion and Gender.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Kjøstvedt, Hilde. 2010. "Palestinian Women in Islamist Organisations." Conference paper delivered at The Eighth Nordic Middle East Conference for Middle East Studies, September 24–26, 2010.

Kotb, Heba. 2004. *Sexuality in Islam.* Florida: Dissertation at Maimonides University.

Lindsey, Ursula. 2006. "The New Muslim TV: Media-Savvy. Modern, and Moderate." *The Christian Science Monitor*, May 2. Accessed December 14, 2014 at: http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/0502/p01s04-wome.html.

Lutah, Widad Naser. 2009. *Sirri li-l-Ghaya: al-Mu'ashara al-Zawjiyya, Usul wa Adab* (Top Secret: Marital Cohabitation, Basics and Principles). UAE.

Mernissi, Fatima. 1991 (1987). *Women and Islam, an Historical and Theological Enquiry.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Ödman, Per-Johan. 1995. *Kontrasternas spel: En svensk mentalitets- och pedagogikhistoria.* Stockholm: Norstedt.

Roald, Anne Sofie. 2001. *Women in Islam: The Western Experience.* London: Routledge.

Roald, Anne Sofie. 2008. "From Theocracy to Democracy? Towards Secularisation and Invidualisation in the Policy of the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan." *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 8: 85–107.

Roald, Anne Sofie. May 2009. "Islamists in Jordan: Promoters of or Obstacles to Female Empowerment and Gender Equality?" *Religion and Human Rights*, 4 (1): 41–63.

Schüssler Fiorenza, Elisabeth. 1994 (1983). *In Memory of Her. A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins.* New York: Crossroad Publishing Co.

Swank, Anna. 2007. "Sexual Healing: How Big Is Kalaam Kibeer?" *Arab Media & Society*, May. Accessed December 14, 2014, at: http://www.arabmediasociety.com/articles/downloads/20070514233620_AMS2_Anna_Swank.pdf.

Utvik, Bjørn Olav. 2006. "Religious Revivalism in Eighteenth Century Norway and Twentieth-Century Egypt: A Critique of Fundamentalism Studies." *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 17 (2): 143–157.

Wadud, Amina. 1999 (1992). *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wise, Lindsay. 2005. "Whose Reality Is Real? Ethical Reality TV Trend Offers 'Culturally Authentic' Alternative to Western Formats." *Transnational Broadcasting Studies*, no. 15. Accessed December 14, 2014, at: http://tbsjournal.arabmediasociety.com/Archives/Fall05/Wise.html.

### *TV Sermons*

al-Kahlawi, ʿAbla. *Fi hubb al-Mustafa* (For the Love of the Chosen One), programs 1–29. Al-Risala.

*ʿAla al-Hawa'* on al-Safwa TV Channel September 29 2008, with Suʿad al-Salih Islamic Scholar of Jurisprudence at al-Azhar University, and Muhammad Rʿafat ʿUthman Former Dean of Department of Shariʿa and Law. Topic: Marriage between Older Men and Young Women. Also on Youtube, at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iKlSdR98RMY&list=P L3B6C3F67F524CB75&index=7&feature=plpp_video&noredirect=1.

*ʿAla al-Hawa'* on al-Safwa TV Channel May 21, 2009 with Suʿad al-Salih, Islamic Scholar of Jurisprudence at al-Azhar University, Farida al-Shushaishi, Journalist and Writer, and Kamilya Hilmi, Engineer. Topic: Discussion on a Law against Men's Disrespectful Talk to Women.

*Al-Bayt Baytuki* on Egypt's National Television, Channel 2, October 8, 2009 with Suʿad al-Salih, Islamic Scholar of Jurisprudence at al-Azhar University. Topic: The Hijab and Veil.

*Kalam Kabir*. Al-Mehwar Satellite Television 2006–2008.

Akhbar al-Aan TV. December 2008. News Program. at: http://akhbar. alaantv/.

### *Interviews*

Interview with Suʿad al-Salih, Cairo, in Cairo April 18, 2010.

Discussion with Lina al-Homsi, Islamic Scholar from Syria, in Oslo October 26–28, 2009. She Is a General Secretary of the Webpage for Islamic Issues for Muslim Women: http://www.muslimatonline.com/arz-web/.

Interview with Rababa Abu Ghazayza, Judge of the Supreme Court and Member of the Islamic Jurisprudence Council (Head of the Legal Group) in Khartoum in February 2007.

Interview with Jasim al-ʿAli, the then Managing Director of al-Jazeera, in Qatar in February 2000.

# Presence and Visibility: Women in Arab Satellite Television, 1996–2006

*Hayat Howayyek Atiyya*

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter addresses the presence of women on Arab satellite television, a new broadcasting modus that emerged as a major development after 1990, and articulated the new world order of the time, based on market policies and the model of a communications-based society. Focusing on news channels, and on the decade bracketing the turn of the twenty-first century, we inquire into two related questions: woman's presence as image (a study of broadcast content) and as agent (her position within the media organization)—a set of issues that have generated much contestation in the Arab public sphere.

The choice of channels for this study (al-Jazeera, Abu Dhabi, al-Manar, and al-Arabiya) was based on their engagement with public issues, specifically, politics and economy, two spheres in which women were not historically present. Here, women in media face a problem and enjoy an advantage. On the one hand, while work in the news channels is considered to be of a serious nature, women's historical marginalization in politics means that the woman entering work in the media has often lacked political experience and knowledge. On the other hand, given that social constraints on women's appearance in this field are tied to the system of dominant values in the Arab world, and to the gender specificity of women, (their attire, appearance, and behavior), there is an assumption that women who choose the news media are serious, and/or socially committed,

since the opportunities for work in the entertainment media are more ample and more highly paid.

The study is grounded in a historical and archival reading of the records of the four channels during the 10-year span between 1996 and 2006, as well as of the Arab and foreign media, numerous personal interviews with those in positions of responsibility and with the women working in these channels, statistical quantitative data produced by research scholars in different Arab countries, and sociological and cultural analyses.

## The Problematic

What is the proportion of women in these channels and what is their role? The question is both quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative assessment is based on the records of the channels themselves, indicating the number of women in decision-making positions and the distribution of broadcasters by gender. The qualitative assessment consists in an analysis of the role women have in decision making, and of their power to produce content.

Are women in financial, administrative, or editorial decision-making positions? In what media domains have they been successful achievers, and where are they marginalized? Does the woman broadcaster have control over her own program, its preparation, and the selection of participants in it? Do women field reporters (especially war correspondents) represent a distinct model, and why? Are the constraints inherent in the media institutions, or in the attitudes and behavior patterns of the women themselves? To what extent does the social milieu contribute to activating women's right to contribute effectively in media work?

## The Channels

Al-Jazeera is the flagship channel of Qatar, a society with a Wahhabi majority, belonging to the most conservative Sunni orientation, where the traditional female attire is a specific mode of the *niqab*. Photographic images were forbidden even for women candidates in the local elections of 2000 (in which only three women dared to uncover their faces).[1] The channel's headquarters are in the capital, Doha, where it connects directly with government. It is noteworthy however that the Qatari regime does not base its legitimacy on religion or creed.

Abu Dhabi TV is located in a conservative emirate of the UAE striving to remain distinct from Dubai, which is considered too socially open. Again, the government there does not claim its legitimacy on religious or confessional grounds. Indeed during Shaykh Zayed's rule it strove to maintain an Arab national ethos, due both to conviction as well as the geopolitics of the conflict with Iran, and the importance of remaining distinct from its regional neighbors—both Iran and Saudi Arabia. Thus Shaykh Zayed maintained a balance between Arabism, liberalism, and traditional values, and was the first Gulf ruler to raise the issue of women and give a public role to his wife. However, after the occupation of Iraq and then the death of Shaykh Zayed, the station became a variety channel like many other Arab satellite channels.

Al-Manar is Hezbollah's station, with a conservative Shi'ite line. The Shi'ite creed, however, even in its most conservative forms, allows women a greater role, and justifies their practice of certain freedoms on the basis of *fiqh*. This is rhetorically grounded in collective cultural memory: the Shi'ite creed affirms its relations to the prophet via a woman character (Fatima), and has constructed its narrative of martyrdom around a mythologized influential female character, (Zainab). At the same time, al-Manar is the station of a party that has been struggling against a powerful occupying power, needing to mobilize all segments of its public, including its female half. The station's headquarters is Beirut, the most open Arab capital politically, socially, and culturally. No Lebanese political party can meet the challenges of the public arena without practicing a certain measure of modernity and freedom.

Al-Arabiya belongs to Saudi Arabia, a Wahhabi Muslim country. Wahhabism is the most conservative creed in the Islamic world, and the strictest in matters related to women. Yet, while the Saudi Royal family constructs its legitimacy on the grounds of religion and creed, al-Arabiya adopts a liberal strategy in political and social affairs, and is able to do so due to its location outside the country, in Dubai's free zone. Its liberalism is demonstrated by the professional, political, and social backgrounds of the administrative and editorial staff of the channel.[2]

## A Quantitative Assessment

What presence, quantitatively, did women have in administrative and editorial positions in the channels, compared with their presence in the academy?

*Administrative positions:* During the decade in question, no women sat on the editorial boards of al-Arabiya and Abu Dhabi. Al-Jazeera's editorial board included two women, Ilham Badr al-Sada, and Maryam al-Khatir who did not remain there long. Badr al-Sada is a Qatari with a DLit, who teamed up with Jamal Rayyan to make the first broadcast on al-Jazeera. Prior to al-Jazeera, al-Sada presented the *Voice of the Gulf Cooperation Council* with another colleague on Qatar TV (1984–1986). Her success with both the audience and the station's administration was, however, not sufficient to calm the outcry in some Qatari circles over the appearance of a Qatari woman on the screen. Both Shaykh Hamad and Shaykha Moaza were reformists, but their need for the support of the tribes and all the constituencies of Qatari society imposed gradualism, and limited their ability to mount a reformist challenge. Al-Sada was removed from the screen, but remained in the station and within the editorial board, only to be removed from the latter shortly afterward.

The woman who served on the editorial board of al-Manar during this period prefers to remain anonymous: a party activist, former political prisoner and mother of a martyr, she has participated in numerous documentaries about the resistance.

*Editorial positions:* There are no women in editorial management or in the major editorial positions. "Women have achieved their position on screen, but editorial positions in the news and editorial rooms, for example as 'executive editor', is still restricted to men"[3] says Layla al-Shaykhli, the Iraqi journalist-broadcaster with al-Jazeera. Her views are shared by Muntaha al-Ramahi, Khadija bin-Qinna, and Layla al-Shayeb.[4] This agrees with a study, whose findings were summed up: "the media landscape is male in number, male in decision making, male in publication, and becomes female only when it comes to image and the salary to be paid" (Kawthar Center for Studies 2008).

### Media Women between Education and Employment

When it comes to women broadcasters, the screens and the numbers give an impression of major progress in women's participation, an impression affirmed by researchers: "women's presence in the media and communications spaces has risen gradually since the 1980s, due to a rise in the numbers of women graduates" (Bin Shaykh 2008: 33). However, the figures show that progress in the academies outruns progress in the media professions. According to Taghrid 'Abdo al-Hijli, women at the turn of the twenty first century outnumbered men in the academies by roughly 2/3 to 1/3 in Bahrain, Tunisia, and

**Table 9.1** The percentages of male and female professionals employed in the four channels in 2000

| Gender/Channel | Al-Jazeera (%) | Al-Arabiya (%) | Abu Dhabi (%) | Al-Manar (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Male | 69 | 60 | 75.5 | 64 |
| Female | 31 | 40 | 24.5 | 36 |

Sudan, while it was about 3.6 to one in Iraq, 2.8 to one in Syria, 6.5 to 1 in Jordan, and 28.4 to 1 in Qatar (96.6% women to 3.4% men). In Egypt alone the ratios were much closer, with women only 10 percent more than men.[5]

Compare the above figures with table 9.1, prepared by the researcher from information received from al-Manar administration and the archives of the three other channels. The table shows the percentage of women in the four news channels (in 2000).

The disparity persisted during the first decade of the twenty-first century. According to Bin Shaykh (2008), the number of females exceeded that of males in the communication/media academy in five Arab countries: Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, Lebanon, and Egypt. In Egypt and Morocco, women make up 60 percent of the students; in Tunisia according to the records of the Institute for Journalism and Communication Sciences, women constitute 75 percent of students in the Freshman year, 77 percent in the MA in technology, and more than 77 percent in the MA for environmental media. Those who pass their exams are 90 percent of the total (al-Mahmudi 2008: 37).

Discussing the high percentage of women students in the media academies, Sabah al-Mahmudi casts a dual question: "to what extent is this percentage practically transacted in the field of satellite media work? What position do women enjoy inside the organization, what content do they produce, and what areas are they marginalized in?" (al-Mahmudi 2008: 37).

## A Qualitative Reading I: The Women Professionals

### Program Broadcasters and Anchors

If we were to trace the career of most of the women broadcasters, through the archives of the four networks, we will find that they all possess impressive educational records, academic degrees, and professional experience. Yet, the distribution of roles in the newsroom

demonstrates the gender imbalance. Both al-Jazeera and Abu Dhabi rely on the team format: a male and female anchor. Al-Manar uses the single anchor format (male or female) in a pattern in which female broadcasters are the majority, while al-Arabiya moves between the two formats. None of these anchors participate in the editing of the newscast, or in setting the questions for the interviews, or in choosing the guests.

This absence is deeper in the current affairs programs. Not one woman has her own program on al-Jazeera; the only program that was prepared and presented by women was *For Women Only*, and when the program started to touch on political, legal, and social subject matters, beyond the traditional women's themes, it was terminated in 2004.[6] One justification given claimed that the program had been established to attract advertisers. Yet Mohammad Jasim al-'Ali, the former director, who had originally developed the idea and supported the program disagrees: "if we had wanted advertising we would have established consumerist programs dedicated to women, not a program of serious debate . . . Our goal was to provide a serious space for Arab women, and to offer female models that can activate women's development through providing incentives for young girls, persuading families, and pushing those in positions of responsibility."[7]

Al-Jazeera's signature programs were all, until 2004, restricted to male broadcasters. Other programs were prepared and edited by men, and women had to make do with simply presenting them. *Behind the News*, established in 2003, was a 15 minute evening program at the end of the main news broadcast dedicated to analyzing an item of news with an invited specialist. This has been presented by a roster of broadcasters of whom five were women: Layla al-Shaykhli, Khadija bin Qinna, Jumana Nammur, Iman 'Ayyad, and Layla al-Shayeb. The five are reputed, and enjoy high professional credentials and track records. Yet, at the end of each broadcast, a phrase recurred: "Under the direction of Nizar Dhaw Na'im." When Na'im was asked about the margin of autonomy in formulating questions and discussing them that he allows his presenters, he replied, "You know, the nature of the program does not allow such a margin."[8] He acknowledged that the questions are predefined and communicated through a wireless aid. The same is applied to male anchors in this program. Yet of the reporters who do have their own programs, none are women.

In Abu Dhabi, until 2004, Layla al-Shaykhli had enjoyed autonomy and directed several programs in a variety of genres: political programs, panoramas, interviews, and dialogs. The channel's main program, *Confrontation,* a political debate similar to al-Jazeera's *In*

*the Opposite Direction*, had been allocated to al-Shaykhli after Jasim al-'Izzawi. Another woman anchor who presented the cultural program was Fadhila al-Suwaisi, who then moved to a program of political debates that was the first for the channel.

Despite, 17 years of media experience and a postgraduate degree, Layla al-Shaykhli at Al-Jazeera, was not given her own program. She was, however, sent to Palestine and, despite difficulties, succeeded in her task of conducting interviews with Yasser Arafat and with Shimon Peres. Demonstrating considerable professional skill in the latter led the Israeli press to describe her as "a fierce cat" (Mu'tazz 2007).

On al-Arabiya, women broadcasters enjoy greater opportunities, as many of them possess their own programs: Najwa Qasim, Muntaha al-Ramahi, Giselle Khouri, Rima Salha, Nadine Hani, and Rima Maktabi. The term "possess" needs precise definition here, however, as their autonomy is very limited: the channel's policy, and the directives of the administrators, leave only a very small margin of freedom for everyone.[9] This suggests that the appearance of freedom on screen is merely that: confined to form (the image) rather than substance.

The other programs that are given entirely to women broadcasters on the screens of the Gulf satellite channels, which are the subject of this study, range from "fashion," to "cosmetic surgery," the "kitchen," and "marital problems," with titles that index their subject matter: *Laha* (For Her), *Hiya* (She), *Zeina* (Adornment), *Lamsat* (Touches).

On the screens of al-Manar, we find the largest area given to women journalists, especially Batoul Ayyub Na'im, *Bayna Qawsayn* (Between Brackets), Basima Wahbi, *Mashaheer al-Hiwar* (Famous People in Dialog), Manar Sabbagh, Ghada 'Assaf al-Nimr, Fatima Birri, and Fatima 'Awada. All Lebanese, they began their careers with al-Manar. Ayyub came from a legal background, Sabbagh from a literary background, and Birri was a researcher and director at al-Manar before she became a broadcaster. Entrusted with important field tasks and special programs, it was obvious that there was a desire to encourage them, as when Ghada 'Assaf al-Nimr was chosen to represent the station in the delegation accompanying President Rafiq Hariri to the Elysee. Ayyub was chosen to run a major interview with Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah [Chairman of Hezbollah], and was given more than one program.

These examples leave the impression that the role allocated to the al-Manar broadcasters is the strongest, despite the nature of the station, which is socially and religiously conservative. This is because a high degree of commitment and political consciousness is a natural

condition to join al-Manar, a station that represented the voice of a national resistance movement against Israel, and the most prominent medium of information and communication in the informational system of Hezbollah.

### Field Reporters

Women field reporters perhaps redress the balance between the sexes. From Palestine to Afghanistan, from Iraq to Lebanon, young women reporters assert themselves with competence and daring. The Arab viewer is familiar with a number of names from each hot spot: Shireen Abu ʻAqila, Givara al-Budayri, Hiba ʻAqila (al-Jazeera), Layla ʻOdeh, Layla al-Shaykhli (Abu Dhabi) all reporting from Palestine; Rima Maktabi (al-Arabiya), Bushra ʻAbd al-Samad, Katya Nasir, Salam Khader (al-Jazeera) from Lebanon; Manar Sabbagh, Ghada ʻAssaf al-Nimr, Fatma ʻAwada (al-Manar) from Lebanon, especially during the war to liberate the South of Lebanon; Najwa Qasim (al-Mustaqbal and thereafter al-Arabiya) moved between the war in Afghanistan, the war in Iraq, and the war in Lebanon. The case of distinction was Atwar Bahjat, who was kidnapped and tortured to death in Iraq. She had been a correspondent for al-Jazeera from the start of the war and in 2004, as a result of threats from some Iraqi militia, she moved to al-Arabiya.[10] Her personality, courage and death left a deep imprint on all her female colleagues: "I wish I could compare myself to Atwar Bahjat, she is at one end and I am at the other; she is the one who excels; I work in the luxury of the studio in Doha, she presents the news while at the heart of events, of danger. This is the real challenge which faces every journalist" says Layla al-Shaikhly (Muʻtazz 2007). She also expresses her admiration for her colleagues in Palestine: "I am proud of our Palestinian women reporters, I sense the deep honesty and conviction of their words, the defiance in their eyes, while still maintaining the highest degree of objectivity and professionalism" (ʻAttallah 2008). "They are the real stars, the real reporters, at the heart of events, with the daring to convey the truth and the different perspectives, despite the siege and the military tanks and armored vehicles. They work at the heart of the issue that is the most exacting, and most serious in the Arab world, and they leave their impact on all the viewers" (Muʻtazz 2007).

Professionals, audiences, and station executives all concur in this evaluation. The audience views these women reporters as icons, and

sometimes mythologizes them as Amazon women: daring, competent, free in their movement and in their live reports, serious in their appearance, sometimes in bullet proof vests, and free of makeup or hair styling. They present a realistic model quite distant from the illusory one manufactured on screen—the viewer sees his/her own self in them. So Givara al-Budayri's image is preserved as an icon, as she transmits her report, and escapes Israeli fire, then interrupts the report to announce in a trembling voice that the photographer accompanying her had been hit, and continues. The viewer also preserves the image of Shireeen Abu 'Aqila, as she transmits the events from the rubble of Jenin refugee camp, having reported on the visit of Yasser Arafat to the same camp, two months previous to its invasion and destruction. "It was too difficult to express in words: I went searching the houses I visited, for the people I had met on my first visit, but to no avail. The map of the camp had changed completely, this is if we want to say that there still was a map. People had been killed, injured, dispossessed, disappeared; the places had been totally destroyed" (*Nisa' Taht al-Mijhar* 2002).

Perhaps the strongest iconic image is the one delineated by Layla 'Odeh, as she transmitted the killing of the child Mohammad al-Durra at the hands of Israeli soldiers, especially with the emotional charge the reporter struggled to keep under control. She says: "I cried as I wrote my report, and I had been crying ever since I saw this child embrace his father and hold onto him" (Hamada 2000). There are many other images drawn in the viewers' mind by the women reporting on the Israeli war on Lebanon: Batoul Ayyub, Manar Sabbagh, or Bushra 'Abd al-Samad, as she covered the liberation of south Lebanon directly from "Fatima's Gate," the ultimate point between Lebanon and Israel.

As for Najwa Qasim, she inscribed other iconic images through her coverage of the Afghanistan war in 2002 and Iraq in 2003, especially when she rose injured from the rubble of al-Arabiya bureau in Baghdad. Despite that, she refused to leave the field, till her manager threatened to make her return to the station in Dubai.[11] When Israel attacked Lebanon in 2006, she went again into the battlefield (Nayuf 2005). Her courage and professionalism earned her deservedly the title of "the best war correspondent" (Nayuf 2005).

Qasim's model moved another Lebanese woman broadcaster, Rima Maktabi, to become a war correspondent instead of a studio broadcaster: "she wanted to go to Iraq in the footsteps of Najwa Qasim who constituted a model and a challenge. However, the kidnapping

of Atwar Bahjat and her martyrdom froze any similar venture. The station decided not to send any woman correspondent there. The Israeli war on Lebanon in 2006 gave Maktabi another opportunity, and she succeeded. Subsequently, the station charged her with the coverage of the Nahr al-Bared battles between the Lebanese army and Fatah al-Islam, two years later."[12]

Audience appreciation of women war correspondents is reflected in the appreciation of station managements. Even once they decided to return to the studio, their management usually gave them major programs: Najwa Qasim on al-Arabiya and Batoul Ayyub on al-Manar.

## Modalities of Commitment and Orientation

Two kinds of professionals are generally found in the media: professional technocrats and those pursuing the profession with a specific kind of commitment—national, political, cultural, humanistic, or religious. The women working with the four channels occupy a range of positions in respect to the issue of commitment. While all are in agreement on the broad issues, there is a difference in interpretation and priorities. This difference may be rooted in personal perspectives or in the policy of the channel they work with, or the nature of the social and geographic area they come from, and sometimes, in the interests vested in their avowed identities.

The broadcasters belong to different generations, backgrounds, and Arab nationalities. Most of them moved between the Gulf stations of this study and other Arab satellite stations, after working with their home terrestrial stations. Al-Ramahi is a "Jordanian" who moved from al-Jazeera to al-Arabiya; al-Shaykhli is "Iraqi" who moved from Abu Dhabi to al-Jazeera; Najwa Qasim, Rima Maktabi and Nadine Hani are "Lebanese" who moved from al-Mustaqbal to al-Arabiya; Gisele Khoury is "Lebanese" and came from LBC to al-Arabiya. Only the broadcasters at al-Manar are tied to their station in a manner that goes beyond the job, status, and salary. None of them came from another station. Ayyub (*al-Sharq al-Awsat* 2002) states: "I do not consider moving to another station, because my work with a station tied to the resistance is a medal of honor." Al-Nimr adds: "my work with al-Manar is an expression of my patriotism and the fact that the screen of al-Manar is the voice of the resistance against Israeli occupation; this resistance relies greatly on resistance media, so it is natural that those who work in it are immersed in the attachment to

country and religion before the attachment to persons" (*Dar Kulayb* 2002). If this expression seems exaggerated, it is grounded in the nature of any identity tied to a project of struggle, albeit in this case a further element may play an important role, and that is that the other stations do not accept women dressed in the Shi'ite style of hijab except for the Iraqi Shi'ite stations. The latter, however, were tied to groups who officially cooperated with the US occupation, which was opposed by Hezbollah. The only other station which accepts these women in hijab is the Iranian al-'Alam, and it had not been established prior to 2004. Even after its establishment, only one woman broadcaster moved from al-Manar to al-'Alam, suggesting that it is considered a weaker choice.

Until 2010, only two women had left al-Jazeera: al-Ramahi (to al-Arabiya) and Kawthar al-Bashrawi, who rebelled against all the satellite stations. Then came the collective resignations given by Jumana Nammur, Lina Zahr al-Din,[13] Luna Shibl, Jullanar Musa, and Nouf al-'Afli, in 2010, in protest at what they considered sexist treatment, and the interference they had experienced from the deputy news director, which they felt was a form of harassment (Zahr al-Din 2011). This crisis displays the contradiction between the liberal and/or nationalist stance of these women broadcasters, and the increasingly stringent Islamization of the station, which began in 2004. Other elements included confessional issues (Sunni, Shi'ite, Druze), and professional ones such as the insistence of some on greater freedom in the on-air interviews, and on their right to go beyond the questions preset for them, and their demands for a role in editorial work.

Much as their societies of origin, we find the broadcasters also differing in their political orientations: Arabist, liberal, Islamist. "It is true that I carry the US citizenship, and respect it, but Iraq is my homeland and runs in my veins" says al-Shaikhly, expressing the pain that the occupation of Iraq left her with: "I feel bitterness and pain. Why do they kill people with such ease, scientists, professors, and civilians? Why do they target the people who excel in knowledge and language arts? This is the price paid by Iraqis second only to the Palestinians" (Mu'tazz 2007).

Al-Nimr expresses her issue in clearer terms: "when your land is occupied, your home destroyed or barred to you, it becomes natural to transcend your own person, move from the I to the we" (Dar Kulayb 2002). This voices the impossibility of neutrality in the Arab east, which constitutes a region of occupations and critical events, even if the degree of commitment differs, ranging from emotional involvement

and a sense of moral engagement to actual participation in the struggles: "we live in an inflamed region and do not need to motivate events or produce them. For decades, this region has moved from one war to another that is even more difficult: what counts as an event for us is to spend a calm month" (said by Najwa Qasim in *al-Madar* 2008).

Most of the women broadcasters emphasize that as events in the field impose themselves, the media professional still has to remain committed to objectivity and professionalism, requiring self-composure and openness. Indeed, notwithstanding the stance that rejects oppression and occupation, openness for al-Shaikhly, for example, is not abrogated. She declares her role model to be Diane Sawyer and her ABC program *Good Morning America,* because Sawyer combines "humanism with seriousness."[14]

Though it is at times ambiguous whether political stances are personal or are synchronized with the policy of the channel, they are nevertheless clearly articulated. While al-Bashrawi represents a personal model "I value my principles and my Arabist project, so I moved between stations; I left MBC because it prohibited us from describing Palestinians as martyrs, or Israel as the enemy" (*al-Hiwar* 2010), al-Ramahi makes declarations against the Islamist current after she moved to al-Arabiya which she had not expressed when she was with al-Jazeera: "media work is distinct from religion" (*alarabiya.net* 2006). All of them concur in their respect for professional objectivity, yet admit that the hardest challenge is maintaining this objectivity when acts of violence strike your own people. This is especially felt by the Palestinians, Iraqis, and the Lebanese.

Despite all that there is a kind of consensus on what is called "red lines." These appear to be unified, though sometimes vary in modality. For example, refusal to work with the US channel al-Hurra, ranges from analysis to reservation to outright condemnation. Al-Shaikhly demurs with caution: "we move between Arab stations, but we remain on the same field, why should we place ourselves in the dock?"[15] Al-Ramahi, on the other hand, gives an analysis: "It is a station that broadcasts in Arabic, but it does not express the opinions, pulse, hopes and predicaments of the Arab street, and journalists know full well that it is funded by the Pentagon and US congress; its funding is equal to the funding of 10 Arab stations put together, but it does not connect with our audience" (al-Sharif 2007). Al-Bashrawi, however, is condemnatory: "just imagine that I should end my professional career in an institution funded and run by the US congress, the conclave of George Bush who killed our children" (*al-Hiwar* 2010).

Consciousness of responsibility is variously linked to the war for the al-Manar broadcasters, duty for the Palestinians, and to the memory of fallen colleagues, and/or contribution to the process of change for others. "The media professional has her dream, her project, her role is not constricted to execution, she creates ideas" says al-Bashrawi (Hamawi 2007). Consequently, frames of references and sense of satisfaction differ from one broadcaster to another: some of them look for it with station directors, or with those in political office, others look for it with the audience: "I belong to my audience" (*al-Hiwar* 2010). Others declare that "deep self-esteem is what one should look for, because the viewers' memory is short."[16]

## A Qualitative Reading II: Institutions and Contexts

Women's independent and successful presence in the field and the more difficult sites of events leads one to ask where the constraints and barriers lie that prevent equal and effective participation of women in the process of decision making, and in the control of programs inside the stations. Are the women media professionals themselves responsible for that? Or the institutions? Or the surrounding social environment? In what direction will media women's development proceed, and what are the factors that impact it?

### The Media Institutions

The role of the institutions, donors, and management, highlights the problematic relationship between freedom (and/or conviction) and normative requirements, between the liberalism of a market economy and the need for advertising, between the nature of the consumer audience and the capacity of investors and management to impose conditions. These questions may be at the heart of the imbalance in the ratio of graduate women to employed women and in the roles allocated to the two sexes in the media. For some of the stations, competence is not the only element that determines the role allotted to the woman broadcaster or journalist: policy here is indivisible from the dominant ideology, or the mentality of the management, or from the social context.

Consequently, women media professionals attempt to benefit from any opportunity to accomplish some breakthrough: this can come in the shape of wars, particular kinds of interview, the need for a specific competence, or the social environment in which the

station is active. In Lebanon, for example, the strong female presence in the Christian, secular, and liberal stations helped the broadcasters at al-Manar to acquire stronger roles. They also benefited from Hezbollah's need as a resistance movement to activate all its effective human resources and to give itself, especially after September 11, an image of openness. Similarly, women broadcasters in the Gulf stations benefited from the degree of openness to women's roles in Abu Dhabi TV, from the western liberalism of al-Arabiya, and from the competition between the latter and al-Jazeera, to obtain better opportunities.

Perhaps the role of the institutions is best assessed when a woman broadcaster moves from one station to another. As earlier indicated, al-Shaikhly prepared and presented three political variety programs at Abu Dhabi TV. At al-Jazeera, she reverted to an ordinary news anchor, presenting and reading what was prepared for her: "sometimes I run the program *Special Encounter*, according to the directives of the station, not my own choices."[17] On the other side, al-Ramahi who was confined to that role on al-Jazeera, was given her own program at al-Arabiya: "Al-Jazeera includes a large number of big names in journalism who have their long track record, especially on the BBC, and their great competence…I used to feel that there were colleagues who had greater rights than me, even though I was better than them" (al-Sharif 2007).

When al-Ramahi was at al-Jazeera, she wanted at one point to be the first to appear on screen with the hijab. The competition for the title of the first woman with a hijab on the station also involved Asma', al-Qaradawi's[18] second wife. However, Bin Qinna preceded them both.[19] Following problems with al-Jazeera, al-Ramahi afterward moved to al-Arabiya, where there is no possibility of wearing the hijab, even for those who have made the pilgrimage to Mecca, as the station has a liberal policy and 'Abd al-Rahman al-Rashid is categorical in his refusal of the hijab. On al-Arabiya, al-Ramahi appeared in a new more modern style, and declared that she is against "fundamentalism," demanding the separation of media work from religion (al-Sharif 2007).

In fact, there are different strategic orientations that decide the selection of anchors and journalists in the two stations. Al-Jazeera depends on attracting established competencies and professional experience, fundamental elements of its success. Al-Arabiya, on the other hand, depends on a strategy of preferring journalists who have not yet been politically or intellectually shaped, and who do not hold particular positions because, on the admission of al-Hadithi,

the Director General of the station (Jabr 2001), they would then be prepared to adopt the channel's policy as is.

### The Socio-historic context

Three socio-historic factors are of special importance:

(1) The different socio-developmental trajectories of Arab societies, especially the Gulf and historical Syria and Egypt
(2) The converse difference in wealth between these societies as a result of the discovery of oil.
(3) The fact that the 4 stations (of the study) were established after 1990.

Al-Manar belongs to a pluralist society, the only Arab society which had (at one time) a Christian majority, making it easier from the nineteenth century on to be open to the West, and receive foreign missions, whose schools and institutions instigated the development of national schools and institutions. Since its early history, Lebanon has been open to modernizing currents. Its heritage enshrines the image of the free woman: children learn the story of Alissar, the princess who mutinied against her royal brother and monarch and emigrated with her supporters to build Carthage, and the stories of the princesses of the Ottoman period and their role in the revolutions of Mount Lebanon against colonialism. In Arabic literature, they study the role of pioneering women in the Arab Renaissance of the nineteenth century, some of whom migrated to Egypt to make their contributions, when Egypt enjoyed greater freedom under Muhammad Ali. They worked in literature, the arts and journalism: May Ziyada, Rose al-Yusif, Asia Dagher, Badi'a Masabni, and multiple others including Zaynab Fawwaz—the writer and militant for women's rights from the Shi'ite Jebel 'Amel. All this served to shape the collective consciousness of women, to contribute to their capacities, and to enlarge the opportunities before them.

Lebanon was one of the first Arab countries in television.[20] Women were present from the beginning—as journalists, anchors, politicians, writers and artists. Their position was reinforced by the deep–seated political activism and the strong cultural renaissance of the period. However, with the civil war, public life, especially the position of women, suffered a great reversal. The emergence of satellite stations brought further reversals, as a tide of consumerism and objectification overwhelmed all spheres, and was reflected in the image of women in the media. This was due to four elements: the interest in

attracting the gulf consumer, the cultural regressions resulting from the isolation of the country during the civil war, the desire to emulate the west without an in-depth knowledge of its culture, and last, but not least, the desire of some to challenge the Arabist line and affirm difference from the Arab Islamic context in a way that transformed women into a glittery and cheapened outer form. Nevertheless, the prewar current of women's empowerment and liberation based on skill acquisition and activism persisted: these two images of women shared the field.

It was not possible for a political party like Hezbollah, which presents itself as a revolutionary people's party, to have remained outside the local context, and not give a prominent role to women on its television stations. Neither was it possible for it to adopt the image of the woman affiliated to nationalist, leftist, or liberal currents, nor to adopt the image of the woman of the consumer age of globalization that it fought against. It was natural that it would present its own model embodying its ideology and needs, and fitting in with its intellectual orientation and practice: "al-Manar does not discriminate between a woman and a man; it seeks competencies, and looks for evidence: when you present it, you can take your full opportunity," says Ayyub (al-Haj 2010). This is attested to by the multiple programs and tasks entrusted to women at the station, all of whom wear the hijab.

The Gulf region, by contrast, is the most conservative in the Arab world, especially when it comes to women. Conservatism that is directly based on religion varies from country to country, but conservatism based on the values of tradition exhibits much less variation, given that the Gulf States of the study are formed out of federated tribal groups. Tribal traditions may be harsher for women than Islamic traditions. Thus, because of the lower level of education and the nature of the social formation in the pre-oil period, Gulf women occupied the worst position among Arab women. For the same reasons, media competencies in general were scarce. The sudden transition to modernity after the advent of oil wealth was an expression of the desire of their rulers to catch up with other societies. This transition constituted a leap that bypassed the natural process of historical social development. The wealth that was available became a means to attract media professionals from the Arab world, and import equipment and technology from the West. Since the appearance of a Gulf woman on the screen, even with the hijab, constituted until very recently a religious and social taboo, it was not easy to overcome.[21] Women broadcasters, even prior to the satellites, were all Arab expatriates, a reality that was consolidated with the satellite age.

Satellite stations are one of the manifestations of the affiliation to the US dominated new world order, characterized by a market economy of consumption; this has meant the diffusion of the glittering culture of consumption, with its poor content, in particular in the Gulf after the 1990s. Al-Bashrawi describes this as "a Gulf phenomenon, that spread since the 90s, and I was its victim; I would spend nights in research, preparation, attempts at mastery, only to be told in the end that I was chosen because I have a beautiful face" (*al-Hiwar* 2010). In as much as beauty constitutes a distinctiveness, it also constitutes a source of constant anxiety: "it is tragic to know that women broadcasters live in terror of wrinkle lines, and with a preoccupation with cosmetic surgery because their professional life is tied to that—what injustice and what hypocrisy" (*al-Hiwar* 2010). Al-Ramahi declares: "the life of a woman TV presenter is limited, determined by wrinkle lines, and this is an unjust discrimination. For the older and more bald the male presenter becomes, the more he is told that he has better experience" (*alarabiya.net* 2006).

This phenomenon acquires a further dimension in news or current affairs stations. Qasim, who moved from al-Mustaqbal to al-Arabiyya, says: "Frankly, when I was in Lebanon, I never noticed that I am a woman in the sphere of political news, because I was not the first. There are generations of women journalists and broadcasters who preceded me. In Lebanon, no one looks at women's presence in the media as a challenge. I began to face this attitude when I moved to work in the Gulf. I feel an insult every time I am asked: why did you choose this field, you are a woman? It is truly an insult, and disrespect for a very difficult professional trajectory that I succeeded in making. I expended a great effort to build my experience, and to shape a serious and effective professional path. Despite that I find people who only want to see in me a woman who challenges men" (*al-Madar* 2008).

The defiance in her words reflects the view of politics and political media as a sphere restricted to men. The women who broke this barrier in the contemporary period were generally activists of the left or the nationalist left, normally unwelcome in global media institutions, and undesirable within the framework of the Gulf societies that fund the satellite channels, and espouse an "ornamental" image of the media woman, it being thought that men are more qualified for difficult tasks, while a woman is a pretty face that decorates the screen. This complaint by women media professionals converges with the analyses of researchers: "the surrounding environment is marked by a discriminatory culture that accompanies negative preconceived

ideas about this profession when a woman takes it up...it is funda-
mentally a profession open to the outside and requires an important
network of relationships within an environment that rejects the pres-
ence of women in the public arena, in societies that have emphasized
preferred professions for women" (al-Mahmudi 2008: 64).

Thus, in Egypt and Lebanon, women constitute 25 percent to
35 percent of editorial teams (al-Mahmudi 2008: 38), a percent-
age similar in Tunis, but very much lower in Libya and Mauritania
(al-Mahmudi 2008: 38). The cultural, economic, and social factors
are the decisive ones, explaining the gender "gap in the more famous
Arab station, al-Jazeera" (al-Mahmudi 2008: 38), in comparison with
the opportunities open to young women who are conservative and
religious in a station like al-Manar.

A further point is "the absence of the correspondence between
the degree of general freedoms and the degree of women's participa-
tion in journalistic institutions, as is the case in Tunis and Kuwait"
(al-Mahmudi 2008: 39), indicating that political authority could
resort to easing restraints in the subject of women as a means of
endowing its policies with a modernist character, without making
any concessions in democratic freedoms generally, notwithstanding
the differences between Bourgiba's Tunis and Kuwait. It also indi-
cates that the linkage between the various social and historical factors
with the vision and decisions of the political authorities can contract
the necessary temporal trajectory, but it cannot circumvent it. The
authority of the receiving audience, and the nature and level of its
culture, also play an important role.

## The Problematic of the Hijab and Freedom

As one of the indices of "Islamic religious commitment," the hijab of
the media professional constitutes an interesting problematic, cast-
ing a number of questions: the degree of openness that the women
wearing it maintain toward the others and its rationale—is it a sta-
tion policy, as is the case with al-Manar? Or a personal choice in the
other stations?

According to those who wear it, the hijab does not contradict free-
dom: "the hijab is a matter of personal freedom, I do not understand
why this freedom is predefined in the case of women wearing the
hijab and not for the others. Let us leave people free in their personal
appearance, this would be the real democracy...dialogue is open to
us all, Islamists, seculars, liberals and nationalists" says al-Qinna,

(Salai 2006), the first broadcaster to wear the hijab on al-Jazeera. She admits that her wearing it "encouraged many other women to do so, and why not for a half of Arab women wear it?" (Salai 2006). She also argues that it does not contradict professional performance, having worn it while interviewing Dominic Villepin.[22] Al-Nimr of al-Manar confirms this: "the hijab transposed me from my narrow feminine self to my wider human self…no doubt beauty is necessary for a TV anchor, but I think my appearance is acceptable, and my features are regular and the screen likes me, though I do not use makeup at all. The more important matter is that I have been able to connect with people, this is what pleases my spirit" (*Dar Kulayb* 2002). She argues that al-Manar demonstrated that a woman with hijab can be a contemporary woman—keeping pace with science and able to participate in all spheres of life (*Dar Kulayb* 2002).

A question arises here as to whether the selection of Bin Qinna by al-Jazeera to interview French officials and al-Manar's selection of 'Assaf to accompany Hariri to the Elysee were innocent choices, or whether they expressed at some level a specific station policy. Ayyub, the foremost woman anchor on al-Manar, responds to this question, admitting that the hijab is a commitment of the station but that "it was never a hindrance, on the contrary, it enabled me to enter all the homes and all the sites. If we live in the age of the image, the beautiful image, I do not believe that a beautiful face becomes ugly in the hijab. Moreover I am not convinced that youth, beauty and tawdry elegance is what make a successful journalist. Larry King and Oprah are the best examples of that. The woman anchor who presents a political program has to enjoy a discreet and simple image, whether in the hijab or without it" (al-Haj 2010).

Ayyub focuses her critique on the reasons behind the view that sees in the woman broadcaster only a fashion model. "these are monetary, commercial, consumerist reasons. They want to convince us to depend on appearance alone. Unfortunately Lebanese women are at the heart of this wave…outer form can attract for a moment but the content is what is decisive" (al-Haj 2010). Ayyub's analytic stance enables a perspective open to the other: "it is not a condition that a woman should wear the hijab for her to appear serious, and luckily many colleagues in the other stations are like that, al-Jazeera for example" (al-Haj 2010). Ayyub does not restrict her observation to the presenters at al-Jazeera, who are known for being more conservative, but extends it to the Lebanese anchor, Maggie Farah, as a role model who possesses the elements of success: "she is one of the best anchors on the Arab screen. She built herself, and she

knows how to disconnect professionally from the policy of her political party in order to ask the questions that concern every viewer" (al-Haj 2010).

In contrast to Ayyub's analytical approach, al-Bashrawi is directly critical: "in a TV interview, Zahi Wahbi[23] asked me 'why do you wear the hijab'? I answered: why do you not ask the others why they reveal their bosoms and their backsides? They ask me why I do not use make-up? I saw in that a violation of my professional competence, of my efforts and my cultural standing" (*al-Hiwar* 2010).

Women broadcasters who wear the hijab agree with other colleagues who object to being viewed merely as beautiful tools, an element of décor necessary on screen. One might ask here whether the obligation to hide one's body in a specific way, including the finer details of its feminine identity, is also a declaration of woman as a beautiful object, or an object of temptation? The answer to this question is complicated: it is linked not only to religious conceptions, but also to a set of social traditions and conventions formed out of the web of economic, social, and cultural relations of power.

## The Culture of Discrimination and the Network of Power: A Semiological Reading

In a study of the gendered distribution of power, Salam Mahadin adopts Foucault's view of the network of power in order to develop an analysis in which man is the bearer of power over woman, but simultaneously, woman constitutes the source of this power, within a complex social network. In a traditional society the value of one individual to the other is determined by his/her reach and the spheres that s/he has power over, and what these constitute in the eyes of the other. But this equation makes the individual captive to the sources of this power. This can be conceptualized as a network of power, based on necessary, hidden, and reciprocal relationships, which are determined by the order of social values of any given society.

Within the Arab context, the notion of honor comes at the head of this order. The sex-based possession of women and their bodies: wife, daughter, sister, mother, even female cousin in the extended family, sits at the top of the principles of honor and its sources. This is semiologically embodied in a sign, the hymen, virginity being considered the objective equivalent of value, and its loss, outside given social norms, the equivalent of the loss of the male ego which is tied to it (al-Mahadin 2009). This explains the reactions to it, which can include

killing (honor crimes), where the man kills to redeem his ego, else he would be constituted as the slain victim. Other signs follow in order, according to their location in the hierarchy of sexual attributes, and the culture of the specific group, where criteria are fixed according to religion, and to traditions that are frequently harsher than religion, and inform its interpretation. Thus the female body takes its place at the principal sites of the intersection of relationships of power, being both its repressed subject and its source.

In the context of audio-visual media institutions, the network of power is translated into the need for women's presence—this is for both political and professional considerations imposed by the contemporary moment, and the need to be responsive to it as a condition for retaining social and political power in the new global order. Both liberalism's gender requirements in the context of consumer culture, and the condition of modernity, require the presence of women in some form or shape. But this presence, in image and practice, threatens two dimensions of masculine power: the professional one relating to the roles allocated at work, and social power represented in the danger of women's escape, in body and in will, from the spheres of traditional male authority.

More than one pattern emerges here: the one in which wealth replaces all other considerations in the chain of values, and the female body becomes a materiality used to achieve power through money (the market), which maintains woman/the body within the circle of property and male decision-making. This is what is represented by some of the variety and entertainment satellite channels. In the serious news channels, however, the presence and image of the woman who is active in communication on-screen, and within its sectors, does not contradict the traditionally acceptable form, and does not challenge the modalities of relating to the appearance of the female-body, nor with the role inscribed for it, nor does it challenge the network of power distribution, so long as the limits of the roles given are carefully delineated.

The topography of women's presence across both entertainment and serious satellite channels points to a historical equation, a duality embedded in the social heritage of traditional Arab societies (a pattern perhaps embedded in collective historical memory), which underpins both patterns: the equation of free women and concubines. Free women were, in the inherited understanding (common sense) of Arab Islamic societies, the women of the family, the "male's women," determined by the blood tie. Concubines, on the other hand, were foreign women, bought or paid for.

Within the wealthy households of Islamic societies, concubines occupied different hierarchical locations—from the servant girl to the dancer and singer, to the cultured woman who recited poetry and played music, and even the learned one, and wife of the Caliph.[24] Thus, different classes of concubines were formed: those allocated to service, those allocated to pleasure and entertainment of all levels, and the high class ones, learned and cultured, distinguished by their beauty, and their freedom to display their knowledge and skills in poetry, music, arts, and even sciences and politics. As for free women, with rare exception, they were, for the most part, of lesser beauty and learning and, more importantly, they were kept in luxury in the harem and out of public life. The male was the one who decided on the status and fate of both species of female.

If we transposed this dualistic equation to our field of discussion, we find that the female broadcasters of the Gulf stations have all been expatriates from other Arab countries, allocated the role that local society refused its own women. It is thus a new equation that reproduces a new duality paralleling the old one. But the configuration of this equation in the contemporary period also works to destroy the walls that surround women, and endows working women with the opportunity of empowerment, reinforcing their human and professional ambitions, and gives impetus to all women to emerge into professional domains. This poses certain challenges: those related to the possession of the woman as body and as subaltern, and those related to the network of sources of power within the domain of work itself. Thus we find that the presence of women on the TV screen offers two models of representation: a consensual model and a shocking one. This applies to the image of woman as agent (presenter or broadcaster or reporter or guest), as well as to her image as subject.

We can identify two modalities of the shocking image: the first threatens the dominant order of values in relation to sexuality; the second relates to the network of power via access to decision making. The shocking image of the first kind is provided by the entertainment channels, the games programs, video clips, and series especially the foreign language ones, which challenge the entire order of values, including taboos related to the body and sexuality. These also challenge the sense of the human in their treatment of the body, not only as a commodity, but as a means to market a commodity. It reproduces the image of the concubine who used to entertain in the wealthy households and palaces of the past. The impact of this shocking, even "pornographic," image, however, may be limited by several constraints. In the first place it does not stimulate a sense of

identification (empathy),[25] and its reception is accomplished within the frame that it is an illusory or virtual world, imagined and different to the real world we live in and plan for. Thus a distinct limiting distance remains between it and women viewers.

On the satellite news channels, however, the image that fills the broadcasts appears to be markedly consensual, the outcome of a positive balance between departure from the sphere of cheap concubines and repressed yet leisured free women, and entry to the sphere of self-realization. This is a conciliation between the traditional order of values, the need of women to be liberated and the need of both society and authority to be consistent with the contemporary period. This is a more acceptable and effective image of the woman broadcaster or reporter that can subliminally consolidate itself as a model.

This overt conciliation however, conceals the second modality of "shock" relating to the distribution of power between the sexes within the frame of equality: participation in decision making. This is the image to which the male responds, defending his historical gains in the world he monopolizes, the world of power. What enables this is the low ceiling of ambition among some of the women who find the easy task of reading what is written for them sufficient, so long as the material remuneration is tempting enough. Yet, at the same time, others nurture their ambitions through work, the acquisition of skills, and the search for opportunities for real change on the road to equality, although they do not load the idea of equality with radical gender notions, but rather, emphasize that it preserves social particularities related to the family and public conduct.

The consensual image is, in part, an element of a wave of practices that constitute the dominant paradigm whose forms express the specificity of the market economy in the era of globalization—homogeneity. This manifests in the presenter-journalist who preserves the appearance of seriousness, within a serious enterprise, news media, but drowns in the forms of consumer culture and its manners, diluting the real movement toward development, and undermining the attempt to redistribute power. Content to present what is dictated, she does not act as a producer of ideas, creativity or media discourse, but as the educated hostesses of a salon, in whom the required conditions are focused on appearance rather than substance. Competition becomes focused on form.

Here, implicitly, the image of the refined concubine reemerges, and the conditions are identified: beauty, youth, education, elegance, all leading to an exaggerated artificial competition along these dimensions. Age becomes an anxious preoccupation—instead of experience

it comes to identify lack of validity. The competition over external appearance becomes subject to a predefined similar model, cancelling specificity and individuality in favor of a stereotype defined by the culture of modern capitalist consumption, manifested in similarity in appearance and performance, ranging from the manner of dress to the wave of cosmetic surgery, to the style of make-up and hair.

The danger here is twofold: the impact of this pattern on the real substantive development of the woman media professional, and the marketing of this model to women in the audience. The image of the serious woman broadcaster is subliminally consolidated as a positive pattern. Not conflicting with taboos, it is desired by many young girls, and by their families, unlike that of the video-clip. Yet, inasmuch as this socially acceptable image embedded in the mind of the female viewer consolidates the value of outer appearance within the culture of consumption, its marketing of a stereotyped consumer model has more impact, and will not directly fulfill the role of confronting the negative standard offered by the other model.

The move toward real and free development requires an in-depth confrontation with the idea of consumer culture based on a specific image and specific behavior of women. This image represents a conciliation between a modern liberal front and content that reproduces the traditional status quo, so that it does not conflict with the culture of consumption. Thus, the stakes of what the image of women broadcasters on the news stations represents are great—either they offer an active vanguard on the road of the development of Arab women, or they consolidate a form which returns women to the sphere of tools and objects, if in a new guise.[26]

## Notes

1. Personal observation, as election observer, journalist and participant in an al-Jazeera program about the municipal elections in 2000: only one candidate (Dr. Jihan al-Mir), finally agreed, after much hesitation, to appear with this author, on a TV panel.
2. Specifically the threesome who were at the top of the station's pyramid between 2004 and 2010: 'Abd al-Rahman al-Rashid, Nakhla al-Haj and Nabil al-Khatib.
3. "The Iraqi media professional Layla al-Shaikhly to *Filastin*: Fame is not a way to reach people's hearts, rather honesty with oneself and the message, very proud and admiring of the defiance I see in the eyes of Palestinian women reporters." (Atallah 2008)
4. Interviews with Layla al-Shayeb, Muntaha al-Ramahi and Khadija Bin Qinna in Doha, 2007.

5. From a table prepared by Taghreed ʿAbdo al-Hijli for her doctoral dissertation in 2001 on women in Arab television. Reprinted in Bin Shaykh 2008.

6. Examples are episodes that addressed women's right to vote and run as candidates, or the exploitation of women's images for tourist marketing, or the trivialization of women through beauty contests, or the international prizes awarded to Arab women and their conditions, and the Kuwaiti elections.

7. Interview with Mohammad Jasim al-ʿAli, Doha, April 2009.

8. Interview with Nizar Dhaw Naʿim, Doha, June 2008.

9. In response to the complaints by executive directors and broadcasters against the dictatorial ways of al-Arabiya's Director, ʿAbd al-Rahman al-Rashid (and Saudi directives) the latter says "some degree of dictatorship is necessary." Interview with al-Rashid, Dubai, May 2007.

10. Interview with Atwar Bahjat, Doha, October 2003.

11. Interview with ʿAbd al-Rahman al-Rashid, Dubai, May 2007.

12. Interview with ʿAbd al-Rahman al-Rashid, Dubai, May 2007.

13. Zahr al-Din's book *al-Jazeera Laysat Nihayat al-Mishwar* (al-Jazeera is not the End of the Road) clarifies her experience and the reasons for her resignation. She signed it on July 12, 2010 on the anniversary of Israel's July war on Lebanon, at the headquarters of the Union of Journalists in Beirut.

14. Interview with Layla al-Shaikhly, Dubai, May 22, 2008.

15. Interview with al-Shaykhli, Dubai, May 22, 2008.

16. Interview with Layla al-Shaikhly, Abu Dhabi, February 2004.

17. Interview with al-Shaykhli, Dubai, May 22, 2008.

18. Shaykh al-Qaradawi divorced his wife Asmaʾ Bin Qidda in 2010 in a manner that provoked a major scandal in media and political circles, especially after she published her story with him on social media sites. She thereafter returned to Algeria, nominated herself for the parliamentary elections of 2011, and won a seat in Parliament.

19. Interviews with Asmaʾ Bin Qidda and Muntaha al-Ramahi, Qatar, May 2004.

20. TV broadcasting began in Lebanon on May 29, 1959.

21. Personal experience of author, working on documentary films and TV programs where it was absolutely prohibited to film a woman.

22. In 2010 Bin Qinna was tasked with interviewing Carla Broni Sarkozy.

23. Zahi Wahbi is a Lebanese poet and broadcaster who used to present a cultural program entitled *Khallik bi-l-Bayt* (Stay Home) on al-Mustaqbal TV.

24. During the Abbasid era, all the Caliphs (with the exception of two) were the sons of courtesan–wives. The most famous of these was perhaps Zubayda, the wife of Harun al-Rashid, and the mother of the Caliph al-Amin.

25. Identification is the basis of Daniel Lerner's theory (1958) for the marketing of the American way of life, and can be considered a means for marketing any other model.

26. This chapter has focused on four stations, three of which are owned and controlled by stake-holders in the Gulf. For these stations, the state of play has not changed radically since the period researched for this chapter. However, there has been important progress in some of the other stations, all of which are located in Lebanon: the new al-Mayadeen channel, Orange TV, and NBN, where a number of women now produce and present significant political programs. This confirms what I have tried to indicate—that the role and image of women in the media professions is an index of the wider social development and accompanying religious openness, something that seems to have had a setback as a result of the multiple developments arising from, and in response to, the Arab Spring. Egypt too offers a distinctly more progressive profile (and is the subject of research to be published later), but still lags behind Lebanon.

## References

Al-Arabiyya.net. 2006. "Muntaha al-Ramahi: Ba'du al-I'lamiyyin wal-Muthi'in Yaslahuna 'Khutaba' Masajid'" '(Muntaha al-Ramahi: Some Media Workers and Broadcasters Are Fit to Be 'Preachers in a Mosque')." July 11. Accessed December 14, 2010, at: http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2006/07/11/25621.html

'Attallah, Hadil. 2008. "al-I'lamiyya al-'Iraqiyya Layla al-Shaikhly li-Filastin" (The Iraqi Media Personality, Layla al-Shaikhly to *Filastin*). *Filastin Newspaper*, March 12.

"Batoul Ayyub: La Ufakkir bi-l-Intiqal min al-Manar" (Batoul Ayyub: I Do Not Think of Moving from al-Manar). 2002. *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*. August 6, No. 8652.

Bin Shaykh, 'Abd al-Qadir. 2008. "*al-Mar'a al-'Arabiyya wa Wad'uha fi al-Mash-had al-Sam'i al-Basari*" (The Arab Woman and Her Status in the Audio-Visual Space). Majallat Ittihad al-Itha'at al-'Arabiyya (Journal of the Union of Arab Broadcasters) Tunis, Issue 1.

"Ghada 'Assaf al-Nimr: 'Amali fi al-Manar Juz'un min Wataniyyati." (Ghada 'Assaf al-Nimr: My Work with al-Manar Is an Expression of My Patriotism). 2002. *Dar Kulayb*. Accessed July 13, 2008, at: http://www.darkulaib.com/vb/showthread.php?p=439342

al-Haj, Hanan. 2010. "Batoul Ayyub: Mizat al-Manar Annaha la Tufarriq Bayna Rajulin wa Imra'a" (Batoul Ayyub: al-Manar's Distinction Is That It Does Not Discriminate between a Man and a Woman.) www.lahamag.com, October 2010. Accessed November 2, 2010, at: www.lahamag.com./page/10-2007/370interview02.pdf

Hamada, Hamada. 2000. "Muthiʻat al-Fadaʾiyyat Hunna Muqawimat Didda Israʾil" (The Women Broadcasters of the Satellites are Resistors Against Israel). *Al-Fajr al-Jadid li-l-Sahafa wa-l-Iʻlam*, Gaza. Accessed July 13, 2008.

Hamawi, Fatin. 2007. "Kawthar al-Bashrawi: ʻAsi al-Hillani Dammarani'" (Kawthar al-Bashrawi: ʻAsi al-Hillani destroyed me'). *Dunya al-Watan*, Gaza. Accessed September 27, 2010.

Jabr, Husayn. 2001. "ʻAli al-Hadithi: MBC Lan Tushaffar ʻala Arabsat wa Imkaniyyatuna fi Dubai Afdal min London" ('Ali al-Hadithi: MBC Will Not Be Encrypted on Arabsat, and Our Opportunities in Dubai Are Better than London'). *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, April 27. Accessed December 10, 2010, at: http://www.aawsat.com/details. asp?article=37193&issueno=8186

"Kawthar al-Bashrawi: Taraktu al-MBC Li'annahum Manaʻuna min Wasf Israʾil bi-l-ʻAduw" (Kawthar al-Bashrawi :I left MBC because it prevented us calling Israel the enemy). *Al-Hiwar.net*. 2010. January 2. Accessed December 14, 2010, at: http://www.alhiwar.net/ShowNews. php?Tnd=3231

Kawthar Center for Studies. 2008. "al-Marʾa al-ʻArabiyya wa-l-Iʻlam: Dirasa Tahliliyya li-l-Buhuth al-Sadira bayna 1995–2005" (The Arab Woman and the Media: An Analytic Study of Research 1995–2005." *Majallat Ittihad al-Ithaʻat al-ʻArabiyya* (Journal of the Union of Arab Broadcasters), Tunis, Issue 1, pp. 71–77.

Lerner, Daniel. 1958. *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East*. New York: Free Press.

al-Mahadin, Salam. 2009. "Writing the Female Body: Discourses and Transgression on Arab Satellite Channels," in R. Subhash and K. Prasad (eds), *Feminist Development Communication: Empowering Women Worldwide Series 3*. New Delhi: The Women Press, pp. 135–156.

al-Mahmudi, Sabah. 2008. "Wadʻ al-Iʻlamiyya al-ʻArabiyya fi al-Fadaʾ al-Samʻi al-Basari Bayna al-Mihaniyya wa-l-ʻAqliyya al-Ijtimaʻiyya" (The Position of the Arab Media Woman in the Audio-Visual Space between the Professional and the Social Mentality." *Majallat Ittihad al-Ithaʻat al-ʻArabiyya* (Journal of the Union of Arab Broadcast Stations), Tunis, Issue 1 (Arabic: Abstract in French).

"Muntaha al-Ramahi: Baʻdu al-Iʻlamiyyin wal- Muthiʻin Yaslahuna 'Khutabaʾ Masajid'" (Muntaha al-Ramahi: Some Media Workers and Broadcasters Are Fit to Be 'Preachers in a Mosque'). 2006. *Alarabiya. net*. July 11. Accessed December 14, 2010, at: http://www.alarabiya.net/ articles/2006/07/11/25621.html

Muʻtazz, Ahmad. 2007. "Layla al-Shaikhly: al-Hurub wa-l-Azamat Tasnaʻ al-Sahafiyyin" (Layla al-Shaikhly: Wars and Crises Make Journalists). *Al-Ahram al-ʻArabi* (Arabic) July 12.

"Najwa Qasim: Every Time I Close my Eyes I See the Faces of my Slain Colleagues in Iraq". *Al-Madar*. 2008. January 10. http://www.almadar. co.il/news.aspx?cid=78&aid=44. Accessed December 13, 2010

Nayuf, Hayan. 2005. "Najwa Qasim: Beirut Ahdatni Alaman fi al-Qalb…wa Baghdad Jurhan fi al-Yadd: 'Qit'at Kristal fi Atun al-Harb'" (Najwa Qasim: 'Beirut Gave Me Heartache and Baghdad Gave Me a Wound in the Hand, 'the Crystal in the Furnace of War'.) *Alarabiya.net*, September 13. Accessed December 14, 2010, at: http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2005/09/13/16761.html

"Nisa' Taht al-Mijhar: Shireen Abu 'Aqila." (Women under the Viewfinder: Shireen Abu 'Aqila.) *Helwa Maktoub.* 2002. Accessed January 12, 2007, at: www.helwa.maktoub.com

Salai, 'Abd al-Baqi. 2006. "Najmat al-Jazeera: Khadija Bin Qinna li-l-*Shihab* (The Star of al-Jazeera, Khadija Bin Qinna to *al-Shihab). Al-Shihab*, July 13. Accessed December 14, 2010, at: http://www.chihab.net/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=1417

al-Sharif, Haytham. 2007. "Muntaha al-Ramahi: Muthi' al-Jazeera Yasta'rid 'Adalatuhu Amam al-Daif" (Muntaha al-Ramahi: The Broadcaster at al-Jazeera Shows off His Muscle before the Guest). *Al-Hiwar al-Mutamaddin*, Issue 1952, June 20. Accessed July 14, 2008, at: http//www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.aspaid=100198

Zahr al-Din, Lina. 2011. *Al-Jazeera Laysat Nihayat al-Mishwar.* (al-Jazeera is not the End of the Road). Beirut: Beisan Press.

# The Framing of the Islam Online Crisis in Arab Media

*Mona Abdel–Fadil*

## INTRODUCTION

On March 14, 2010, employees of Islam Online (IOL) in Cairo discovered that they were prohibited from accessing the IOL server and that certain items had been removed from the website.[1] This was also the day that they were informed that the Qatari Board[2] (formerly the owners of IOL) would close down the IOL-Cairo offices with some 350 employees[3] and move production to Doha. In response, the IOL-Cairo employees staged sit-ins, demonstrations, and hunger strikes. More significantly, they live-streamed their pro-tests and spread their crisis narratives through Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and the blog "Voice of IOL." As will be illustrated in this chapter, the two parties to the conflict held contesting frames about the reasons of the crisis, and IOL-Cairo's extensive use of the media signaled the start of a battle of frames in the Arab media.

I was conducting fieldwork among the Social Team (ST) of IOL-Cairo when the IOL crisis erupted. At the time, I was aware of how IOL-Cairo employees were actively using a variety of media to circulate their narratives about the cause of the crisis. When I asked Salma[4] (ST) about this, she responded, "We are media people, and we are trying to use our expertise to our advantage" (in Abdel-Fadil 2011). Salma's statement mirrors what numerous media scholars refer to when employing the terms "framing" and "agenda setting." "Framing" is often considered as pertaining

to the social construction of a news story. For instance Entman (1993: 52–53) maintains:

> To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described. Typically frames, diagnose, evaluate describe. ( . . . ) Texts can make bits of information more salient by placement or repetition, or by associating them with culturally familiar symbols. ( . . . ) The power of framing and the way it operates (is) by selecting and highlighting some features of reality while omitting others.

In a similar vein, Stephen Reese (2001: 4) contends that framing is used "to interpret an event and determine what is relevant and thereby what is irrelevant," and Aaron Reese (2009: 1) states that a frame is "to define a situation, to define the issues, and to set the terms of the debate." It ought to be noted that Entman's reference to "culturally familiar symbols" is what some scholars term "frame resonance," that is, that certain aspects of the frame resonate with an individual's cognitive schemata or alternatively themes already established in public discourse. In the words of Ettema (2005: 132), "If frames are to construct reality effectively ( . . . ) they must resonate with what writers and readers take to be real and important matters of life." He argues that the success of a frame relies on the ability of a frame to "strike a responsive chord" and "draw upon a cultural repertoire of themes and stores" (Ettema 2005: 133). In this sense, much of media discourse involves struggles over meaning (Gamson et al. 1992). According to Reese (2001: 12): "the power to frame depends on access to resources, a store of knowledge and strategic alliances" what could also be termed as "framing contestation." The latter often entails competing frames. Reese argues that often a news story is the outcome of journalists' "interaction with their sources promoting their various perspectives" (Reese 2001: 12). Likewise, Entman (1993: 56–57) maintains that journalists "frequently allow the most skilful media manipulators to impose their dominant frames on the news." The abovementioned theoretical points link "frame building" with the interrelated activity of "agenda setting." While some media scholars see "agenda setting" as sheer volume or media coverage (Cohen 1963 in Entman 2007), others argue that it also entails the content or framing of a story or "message construction":

> The activities of interest groups, policymakers, journalists, and other groups interested in shaping media agendas and frames can have an

impact on both the volume and character of news messages about a particular issue. (Scheufele and Tewksbury 2007: 12)

In Entman's definition, agenda setting is "successfully performing the first function of framing: defining problems worthy of public and government attention" (Entman 2007: 165). Thus, "agenda setting" describes the efforts of vested parties with regards to both increasing the volume of media-reports and framing their content. Furthermore, if agenda setting is particularly successful it can lead to actors imposing slant on media reports (Entman 2007: 165). According to Entman (2007: 165) "Slant characterizes individual news reports and editorials in which the *framing favours one side over the other in a current or potential dispute.*"[5] These perspectives acknowledge that politics and indeed conflicts can be (in part) played out on the media stage.[6] This is a suitable backdrop for the case at hand for, in my reading the IOL crisis, spilled over into the Arab media. Furthermore, both IOL-Cairo employees and the Qatari Board can be defined as parties wishing to exert influence on the way the IOL conflict was framed in Arab media. This sets the stage for a contestation of frames.

In sum, I consider the theoretical constructs of "framing" and "agenda-setting" as useful tools for investigating how the IOL crisis was framed in Arab media and Arab public discourse. This chapter is founded on a systematic survey of a selection of Arabic newspapers in order to examine *which frames about the IOL crisis dominated Arab media reports.* More specifically, this paper addresses the following questions:

1. How successful were IOL-Cairo's employees in framing the IOL crisis?
2. How successful was the Qatari Board in contesting these frames?
3. Did the Arab media circulate alternative frames?

## Islam Online

IOL had been a successful and stable Islamic website providing a variety of services, including news, fatwas, and social counselling, for over a decade. IOL was launched in 1997, and was formally owned by the Qatari Board, based in Qatar and headed by the prominent, albeit controversial, Islamic cleric Yusuf al-Qaradawi. IOL's main offices were in Cairo and hosted a staff of approximately 350 employees who contributed to the production of the website's multifaceted content

and services. Private donations, primarily from Qatar and Saudi Arabia, funded this vast enterprise (Abdel-Fadil 2011). The relationship between the Qatari Board and the IOL-Cairo staff appears to have run smoothly until the beginning of 2010. In February 2010, tensions between the two began to rise (Abdel-Fadil 2011). By March 2010, it had become a full-fledged conflict. As will be illustrated the Qatari Board and IOL-Cairo employees provided contesting frames as to the causes of the crisis.

## Methodology and Data Collection

This chapter draws on a combination of fieldwork data (observation and interviews) of the social team of IOL in Cairo and a thematic analysis of a selection of Arab newspapers. The combination of field data and media analysis makes it possible to examine whether, and how, the media strategies of the IOL employees were more successful in framing the IOL crisis than that of the Qatari Board.

My data sample was selected on the basis of (primarily) online Google searches in both English and Arabic, with keywords such as "Islam Online Crisis" and "Islam Online Crisis analysis." Among the top hits were two websites that claimed to have collected a number of news items about the IOL crisis. These were: http://yalally.blogspot.com/2010/03/blog-post_1740.html and http://www.diigo.com/list/ahmedikhwan/islamonline-strike-news-. The latter proved the most extensive, containing 262 links to media items dealing with the IOL crisis, in both English and Arabic. My newspaper sample is selected from the Diigo-list.[7]

I excluded all links that were a) not newspaper articles (but rather Google search results, YouTube videos or blogs), or b) newspaper articles in English. The first round of exclusion left a possible sample of 83 links to Arabic language newspaper articles. I included the most frequently listed newspapers in my sample. These were: Egyptian *al-Youm al-Sabi' (al-Yawm al-Sabi')* (23), *al-Shorouk* (13), and *al-Masry al-Youm* (5), the Qatari online news-portal *aljazeera.net* (5). In addition, I have included the Arab-American *al-Watan* (2) which contains interesting data on alternative frames, yielding a total of 48 newspaper articles in the sample for this study (table 10.1).[8]

My sample consists of online newspaper articles. However, all but *aljazeera.net* also provide print editions. In this sense, the analysis also has relevance for offline Arab public media discourse. It ought to be underlined that my primary interest is in *which* frames were reproduced in the media, and how these were contested, rather than

**Table 10.1**   Sources in sample

| Newspaper | Country of origin | No. of articles |
|---|---|---|
| al-Youm al-Sabi' | Egypt | 23 |
| al-Shorouk | Egypt | 13 |
| al-Masry al-Youm | Egypt | 5 |
| aljazeera.net | Qatar | 5 |
| al-Watan | America | 2 |
| **Total** | | **48** |

how *often* a particular frame occurred. If my data reflect that only a limited number of frames occur in all newspapers and can be attributed to specific actors, then one may assume that my selection has "saturated" the data, in the sense that adding more newspaper articles would probably not deliver new frames.

### Profile of the Selected Newspapers

*Al-Youm al-Sabi'*, is an Egyptian independent daily with frequent online updates and an accessible, popular and at times flashy online format. *Al-Masry al-Youm* is independent focusing especially on civil liberties, human rights, and political reform in Egypt. *Al-Shorouk* is an Egyptian independent newspaper particularly renowned for its prominent intellectual Egyptian columnists/commentators. *Aljazeera.net* is Qatari-owned and part of the leading pan-Arab media house al-Jazeera that also produces al-Jazeera TV. *Al-Watan* is an Arabic weekly produced in the United States, primarily for Arab-American audiences.

### Coding

The newspapers in the sample have been thematically coded (manually).[9] The codes were produced in order to analyze how the IOL crisis was framed in Arab media. Codes were formulated against the backdrop of fieldwork-data collected at IOL-Cairo during the crisis. More specifically, the codes function as springboards to examine whether Arab media framed the crisis in accordance with IOL-Cairo employees' frames, the Qatari Board's frames, or alternative frames. Moreover, the emphasis is on causality frames,[10] that is, explanations of what caused the crisis, as these tended to differ. The codes are thus analytical constructions and do not necessarily match the way the Arab newspapers themselves categorize their frames and narratives.

In order to ensure transparency of analysis, the codes are integrated into the discussion of media frames throughout the article.

## Islam Online Cairo Employee's Frames

### Ideological Frames

"They hijacked the website!" (*khatafu al-mawqiʿ*) was possibly the most repeated phrase I heard in the corridors of IOL-Cairo, following the announcement that IOL-Cairo would be closed down, and the retraction of IOL-Cairo employees' access to the IOL server. Ideological framing consisted of my informants describing the IOL crisis as a clash of ideologies between IOL-Cairo (*wasatiyya*) and the Qatari Board (*salafism*). In this particular context, then, I define the "ideological frame," as a frame that considers an ideological divide between *wasatiyya* and salafism as the root of the IOL conflict. In contrast, "political frames" refer to regional or global political topics such as the plight of Palestinians as sparking the dispute. It ought to be noted that I employ an analytical distinction between "ideological" and "political" frames, while in reality they may overlap. Arguably, framing events in a particular manner with the goal of achieving ideological hegemony in a region—may be considered a means of producing a highly politicized frame. I nonetheless believe the distinction between ideological and political is useful for analytical purposes. The following is a reconstruction of IOL-Cairo employees' ideological frames based on fieldwork notes:

> The Qatari administration wants IOL to follow a more conservative, salafi line. We do not believe Qatari funding means that they own the idea. We are the owners because we own the idea, the message. We were used to autonomy with regards to what we produce. We are not used to content being controlled by funding. This is new to IOL, it may not be new to Egypt, but it is new to IOL. ( . . . )The Qatari's accused us of publishing things that were "un-Islamic" and too open-minded. They disapproved of us (ST) writing about Valentine's Day, and sexual relations. They objected to our (ST's) counselling services in general. They disliked IOL publishing photographs of unveiled women and our (IOL's) news-story called "Palestine's Holocaust." This was amongst the first items to be removed from the IOL website, after the Qatari administration denied us access to the server ( . . . ) Now we are blocked from the IOL server, and are not able to do our job. ( . . . ) If they wanted to make a purely salafi website, why couldn't they just start another website? Why did they have to hijack IOL? We are hoping al-Qaradawi will bring IOL back to us. (in: Abdel-Fadil 2011)

This frame paints the picture of "the past" where IOL is featured as a multifaceted enterprise offering numerous services and topics, and a professional one enjoying editorial autonomy. Moreover, there was a division of labor between the Qatari Board (funding) and the IOL-Cairo employees (ideas). As for "the present," the frame depicts the Qatari Board as being displeased with IOL-Cairo employees on several accounts, such as publishing unsuitable and un-Islamic content. In a similar vein, the Qatari Board is portrayed as aiming to refashion the IOL website in a more conservative and *salafi* direction, thereby debasing some of IOL's previous spectrum of content. However, the mention of the news story "Palestine's Holocaust," a story that continuously updated the number of Palestinians killed, suggests a more political framing of the conflict. As will be illustrated "Palestine's Holocaust" receives more emphasis and elaboration at a later stage of the crisis, in what I have for analytical purposes distinguished as "political frames." Nevertheless, this distinction is not clear-cut, and is perhaps best viewed as a continuum where ideological and political frames may at times intersect. For example, I often heard comments along the lines that "al-Jazeera[11] was negatively biased towards IOL-Cairo in their media coverage because they share the Qatari Board's conservative Islamic agenda" (Abdel-Fadil 2011), a description that signals the possible intertwining of political and ideological framing. It is against this backdrop that I formulated codes to identify themes within IOL-Cairo employees' ideological frames.

Table 10.2 lists the thematic codes assigned to the material in the newspaper articles analyzed, and identifies which newspapers featured which theme

### IOL as Moderate, Non–Partial and Unique

*Al-Masry al-Youm* (al-Shobaki 2010) reports that for over a decade IOL was a moderate force of Islam. IOL was successful, professional, and non-partial. IOL was neither an extension of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), *salafi*s, nor extremists. Instead, IOL focused on contemporary Islam, and had no parallels in the Arab world. *Al-Youm al-Sabiʿ*, (Imam 2010) paints a similar picture, describing IOL as having been non-partial, moderate, professional, successful and unique.[12]

### Battle between *wasaṭiyya* and *salafism*

All sources mention an ideological battle. *Al-Shorouk* (al-Habal 2010c) states that the new Qatari Board issued a new editorial policy that puts the *wasatiyya* message in danger. Similarly, *aljazeera.net*

**Table 10.2**  Themes in Islam Online (IOL)-Cairo employees' ideological frame

| Code | al-Masry al-Youm | al-Youm al-Sabi' | al-Shorouk | al-Watan | aljazeera. net |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| IOL as professional, non-partial and unique | x | x | | | |
| Battle between Wasatiyya and *salafi*sm | x | x | x | x | x |
| al-Jazeera biased[1] | | x | x | | x |
| 'Hijacked' by conservative agenda | | x | x | | x |
| Qatari Board discontent with open-mindedness, themes and content | x | x | | | x |
| Ownership of ideas (IOL-Cairo) vs. funding (Qatari Board) | x | x | x | | |
| Aim to transform IOL into strictly religious website | | x | | | x |
| Al- Qaradawi as mediator/ remedy | x | x | x | x | x |

[1] The implication is that al-Jazeera reveals a region-political ideological bias in favor of conservative Islam over moderate Islam.

(Jum'a 2010) and *al-Masry al-Youm* ('Abd al-Halim 2010) articulate that segments of the new IOL board are conservative and wished to silence IOL-Cairo's *wasatiyya* voice, through exerting editorial control. In *al-Youm al-Sabi'*, ('Abd al-Hamid and Majdi 2010) the conflict is considered an ideological battle between moderate Islam and *salafi*s and/or conservatives. Indeed, it is seen as part and parcel of Gulf efforts to silence reformist and liberal Islamic voices in the Muslim world. The move to Doha is held to symbolize strong Gulf influences. Moreover, *al-Youm al-Sabi'*, (Hadya and al-Basha 2010a; Hadya and al-Basha 2010d) suggests that this ideological difference may go farther back in time. It is argued that al-Qaradawi had a long-standing ideological conflict with the more conservative cleric al-Ansari.[13] *Al-Watan* (Kamal 2010) mentions the Qatari Board wishing editorial control and, in yet another article, it explicitly reports of a battle of *wasatiyya* vs. *salafism* (Ja'ffar 2010).

### Al-Jazeera *Bias*
*Al-Shorouk* (al-Habal 2010f; al-Habal 2010g) quotes IOL-Cairo employees who accuse al-Jazeera of being unprofessional and of

being biased in favor of the Qatar Board in their reports about the IOL crisis. Similar negative sentiments toward Qatari media is expressed in *al-Youm al-Sabi'* (Hadya and al-Basha 2010a), although al-Jazeera is not critiqued directly. Rather, the newspaper reports in a rather circuitous manner that "some people claim, that there are sources that reveal that Qatari media have been warned not to report on the IOL crisis." Thus, the implication is that al-Jazeera reveals a regional-political-ideological bias in favor of conservative Islam over moderate Islam due to its Qatari-ownership and Qatar's alleged ambitions to promote conservative forms of wahabist Islam in the region—at times through al-Jazeera itself. Interestingly, *aljazeera. net* (Jum'a 2010; *aljazeera.net* 2010a) and *al-Shorouk* (al-Habal 2010c) quote al-Ansari from the Qatari Board, accusing Egyptian media of inaccurate reports.

### Hijacked by a Conservative Agenda
*Al-Shorouk* (al-Habal 2010c) writes about the new Qatari Board "hijacking the content of IOL." *Aljazeera.net* (2010c) reports that "Al-Qaradawi is opposed to the hijack of *wasatiyya*" in IOL. In a similar vein *al-Youm al-Sabi'*, repeatedly reports of the "hijack of content" or that "IOL was hijacked by a more conservative agenda" (al-Basha 2010; 'Abd al-Hamid and Majdi 2010; Hadya and al-Basha 2010b).

### Qatari Board Discontent with Open–Mindedness, Themes, and Content
*Al-Masry al-Youm* (al-Shobaki 2010) maintains that certain content displeased the new IOL board in Doha, such as IOL's counselling services, family pages, and topics related to sexual relations. In a similar vein, *al-Youm al-Sabi'* ('Abd al-Hamid and Majdi 2010; Hadya and al-Najjar 2010f) describes IOL as having published on taboo topics such as pornographic addiction and homosexuality, a fact that aggravated the Qatari Board. The latter are portrayed as being dissatisfied with IOL-Cairo's content and editorial policy, and it is reported that the crisis was triggered by IOL-Cairo's publishing a story about Valentine's Day. Supporting a similar theme, a*l-Jazeera.net* (Jum'a 2010) maintains that the Qatari Board wished to transform the content into something more traditional (*taqlidi*).[14]

### Ownership of Ideas (IOL–Cairo) vs. Funding (Qatari Board)
*Al-Shorouk* (al-Habal 2010f) discusses the relationship between ownership, funding, and ideas. It is argued that funding does not necessarily mean editorial control or "ownership of ideas." Similarly

*al-Masry al-Youm* (al-Shobaki 2010) and *al-Youm al-Sabiʿ* (al-Turky 2010) report that the IOL project was fueled by the combination of "Egyptian ideas and Gulf money." *Al-Masry al-Youm* (al-Shobaki 2010) also mentions that the media-savvy Qataris who run al-Jazeera, were no longer satisfied with only providing the funding of IOL, they now wanted more control of content.

### Aim to Transform IOL into a Strictly Religious Website

According to *al-Youm al-Sabiʿ* (Hadya and al-Najjar 2010d) the Qatari Board's goal is to create a strictly religious website, and do away with topics like cinema, family issues, sexual counselling, and parturition, similar to the *aljazeera.net* article mentioned above (Jumʿa 2010). This theme overlaps with the "discontent with open-mindedness" theme. However, the "aim to transform IOL" was coded at a separate node, because the goal of refashioning the website into a religiously conservative is indeed a different and more elaborate claim, yet, nonetheless related to discontent.[15]

### Al-Qaradawi as Mediator/Remedy

All of the selected newspapers suggested that al-Qaradawi tried to use his standing to put an end to the conflict. Coverage included reports that al-Qaradawi: attempted to mediate behind the scenes to solve the conflict (*al-Shorouk*, al-Habal and ʿAdel 2010 and *aljazeera.net* 2010b); pressured the new Qatari Board (*al-Masry al-Youm*, ʿAbd al-Halim 2010; Khalil 2010); threatened to resign if IOL-Cairo's employees' demands were not met (*al-Shorouk,* al-Habal and ʿAdel 2010; *al-Watan*, Jaʿffar 2010); reversed the new board's decision of closing IOL-Cairo (*al-Shorouk*, al-Habal 2010b; *aljazeera.net 2010b*, Jumʿa 2010; *al-Watan*, Jaʿffar 2010); and declared on the al-Jazeera program, *al-shariʿa wa al-ḥayat*; that "the IOL Crisis will be solved shortly and all will return back to the way it was" (*al-Youm al-Sabiʿ*, Hadya and al-Basha 2010b).

### Reflections

It should be evident from the above that the Arab media to a large degree employed IOL-Cairo employees' ideological frames. In fact, all five of the newspapers in the selection repeatedly framed the crisis as ideological. Indeed, several of the themes within the ideological frame featured in the various newspapers. *Al-Youm al-Sabiʿ*, was the newspaper in the sample that projected all themes within the IOL-Cairo employees' ideological frames. Thus, it appears that IOL-Cairo

employees met with considerable success in framing the IOL crisis and setting the agenda in Arab newspapers.

Employing Entman's (1993) terminology about framing—this frame's *problem definition* is "the hijack of IOL by a conservative agenda," its *causal interpretation* is the new Qatari Board consisting of people of *salafi* leanings, and must be seen as part of wider ideological battle in which conservative Gulf Islamic interpretations are trying to take root in Egyptian society. The *moral evaluation* is that 1) Qatari funding does not give the Qatari Board the right to own IOL's ideas; 2) IOL-Cairo's *wasatiyya* ideas are, if not superior, then at least preferable to the Qatari Board's *salafi* ideas; and, 3) the *treatment/recommendation described* is al-Qaradawi as a mediator between IOL-Cairo and the Qatari Board. Still, this does not explain *why* this particular frame gained salience in Arab media.

In order to understand why this particular frame gained the upper hand in Arab newspapers, a contextual analysis based on the concept of "resonance" may prove helpful. In my view, the ideological frames of IOL-Cairo employees refer to key themes that hold the potential to "strike a responsive chord" among journalists and media audiences. Arab and particularly Egyptian public discourse has featured discussions and fears of the import of Gulf-branded and funded conservative ideologies of *wahhabism* and *salafi*sm into Egypt (Field and Hamam 2009). In a similar vein, conservative ideologies have been deemed a threat to moderate homegrown Egyptian interpretations of Islam. In this sense, the debate is about authenticity and foreign import, in addition to moderate vs. conservative Islam. Moreover, the Egyptian government has been suspected of favoring a-political *salafi*s over regime-critical politicized Islamists, and employing them as a tool against the Muslim Brotherhood (Field and Hamam 2009).

The critique of the Qatari owned al-Jazeera is not unrelated to the preceding scenario. al-Jazeera is often critiqued for being negatively biased toward Egypt and the Egyptian government (and other governments in the region), while remaining blissfully uncritical of the Qatari regime. This contributes to scarring al-Jazeera's credibility (Kraidy 2010). Moreover, al-Jazeera is held to propagate a conservative Gulf brand of Islam and the IOL crisis escalated at a time when al-Jazeera was receiving heavy criticism in Arab media for their conservative policies toward their employees. A case in point is the resignation of five female anchors due to a conflict with al-Jazeera regarding "un-modest dress and makeup" (al-Makky 2010).[16] These public discourses are relevant for two reasons. Firstly, they help explain why IOL-Cairo employees perceived of the IOL crisis in these terms.

Secondly, they contribute to an understanding of frame resonance, by highlighting preexisting schemata that enabled the ideological frames to become salient in the Arab media. Somewhat schematically, one can discern between IOL-Cairo employees framing the crisis primarily in ideological terms at the beginning of the crisis, and political frames dominating at a later stage.

### Political Frames

Only two days after al-Qaradawi's reassuring statement declaring that the IOL crisis will be resolved, he was expelled from the Qatari Board, and al-Ansari was instated as head of the board. This dramatic and unexpected turn of events set the stage for a shift toward a more overtly political framing of the IOL crisis among my informants at IOL-Cairo. The previously mentioned news story "Holocaust of Palestine"[17] was now given heightened political significance and I repeatedly heard the rhetorical question "Is it a coincidence that 'Holocaust of Palestine' was amongst the first items to be removed from the website after the Qatari Board took over?" Themes in which al-Qaradawi was considered a target also surfaced as part of the political frame. For instance, Amani told me:

> It is quite a shock. We are starting to wonder if they were after al-Qaradawi himself. It seems that the Qatari state was under pressure from America to remove al-Qaradawi. It may be related to IOL's active reporting on Palestine. It could be related to accusations about al-Qaradawi being a supporter of terrorism, you know. (in Abdel-Fadil 2011)

The political frame among my informants at IOL-Cairo can be summarized as such:

> The Holocaust of Palestine is one of the main reasons of the crisis. The evidence for this is that it was the first item to be removed from the IOL-website. The Qatari state gave into pressures from US Congress and/or Israel.[18] IOL-coverage of Palestine put Israel in a bad light. It was a plot to get rid of al-Qaradawi while he was prohibited from responding due to illness. Qatar hosts a US military base and has trade agreements with Israel and cannot afford to upset its allies. (in Abdel-Fadil 2011)

This frame depicts IOL as being too political and critical in their coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Moreover, al-Qaradawi

**Table 10.3** Themes in IOL-Cairo employees' political frame

| Code | al-Masry al-Youm | al-Youm al-Sabiʿ | al-Shorouk | al-Watan | aljazeera. net |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Plot to get rid of al-Qaradawi/*wasatiyya* | | x | x | x | |
| Terrorism list, Qatar, US congress and/or Israel | | x | | x | |
| Zionist Plot/ 'Palestine's Holocaust' | | x | x | | x |
| Protection of al-Qaradawi | | x | x | x | |
| New Islamic website to be launched | x | x | x | x | x |

himself was a target, due to "being on a terrorism list" and his dismissal was necessary. Another prominent component of IOL-Cairo employees' frames, after al-Qaradawi's removal, was talk of launching a new *wasatiyya* website to replace the old IOL (Abdel-Fadil 2011). Less common themes related struggles of regional influence between Qatar and Egypt, or Qatar and Saudi Arabia. The former relates to IOL being an influential enterprise, and the latter to Saudi Arabian donors being dissatisfied with the Qatari take-over. These themes point once again to the overlapping of ideological and political frames, as discussed in the previous section.

It is against this background that I formulated codes to identify themes within the IOL-Cairo employees' political frames in the selected newspapers.

Table 10.3 lists the thematic codes assigned to the material in the newspaper articles analyzed, and identifies which newspapers featured which theme.

*Plot to Get Rid of al–Qaradawi, wasaṭiyya*

The Qatari ministry of interior was involved in the decision to remove al-Qaradawi from the IOL board according to *al-Masry al-Youm* ('Abd al-Halim 2010), *aljazeera.net* (2010b), and *al-Youm al-Sabiʿ* (Hadya and al-Basha 2010b). *Al-Youm al-Sabiʿ* (Hadya and al-Basha 2010a) contends that the IOL crisis can be considered a plot to get rid of al-Qaradawi, by his enemies, some of whom were on the new Qatari Board. *Al-Shorouk* (al-Habal 2010d) and *al-Watan* (Kamal 2010) tune into the theory that the closing down of IOL may be a plot to get rid of al-Qaradawi while he is sick and unavailable due to a health trip to Saudi Arabia.

*Terrorism List, Qatar, US Congress and/or Israel*
*Al-Watan* (Kamal 2010) reports that the closing down of IOL may be part of conjoined American and Qatari efforts in the war against terrorism. In this reading, the Qatari government was pressured by the US Congress (from August 2009) to put both al-Qaradawi and IOL on a terrorism list for allegedly supporting terrorism. Closing down IOL was thus a response to these pressures, and is part and parcel of the US Congress' efforts to close down all of al-Qaradawi's organizations. In a similar vein *al-Youm al-Sabi'* (Hadya and al-Basha 2010a) discussed pressures from the US Congress on the Qatari government to put al-Qaradawi on the terrorism list.

*Zionist Plot, Palestine's Holocaust*
Most of the newspapers in the sample deal with whether it is a mere coincidence that (1) the crisis erupted at the same time as IOL was running critical stories about Jerusalem, and (2) that the "Holocaust of Palestine" story was among the first items to be removed from the IOL website after the Qatari take-over. *Al-Youm al-Sabi'* (Hadya and al-Basha 2010c) reports that the fact that IOL-Cairo employees were prohibited from reporting on Zionist attacks on al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem signals that the IOL crisis is politically motivated, and that strings are being pulled from "the hidden fingers of Israel and America." Similarly, *al-Youm al-Sabi'* (al-Jaly 2010) argues that by removing IOL's Jerusalem story from the IOL website, the IOL board in Doha was in effect supporting Israeli politics. *Al-Shorouk* (al-Habal 2010h) and *aljazeera.net* (2010c) also highlight IOL's critical reports about incidents at the al-Aqsa mosque as having possibly contributed to the IOL crisis.

*Protection of al–Qaradawi*
*Al-Watan* (Kamal 2010) refers to alleged statements that the Qatari Emir had negotiated with the US congress to ensure that al-Qaradawi was not put on the United States' terrorism list, that is, Qatar "protected" al-Qaradawi. Likewise, *al-Shorouk* ('Abadeen and Muhammad 2010) claims that the Qatari state negotiated al-Qaradawi *off* the terrorism list, because Qatar considers both al-Qaradawi and al-Jazeera to be "untouchable" by foreign interests and allies. Likewise, *al-Youm al-Sabi'* (Hadya and al-Basha 2010e) reveals that the Qatari Emir interfered on behalf of al-Qaradawi, and speculates whether Qatar in return had to sacrifice IOL by changing its editorial policy and moving it to Doha.[19]

### New Islamic Website to Be Launched

All of the newspapers in the sample report that the IOL-Cairo staff plan to launch a new Islamic website, in order to spread *wasaṭiyya* and that al-Qaradawi supports the new project presumably to be called "Global Umma"[20] ('Abd al-Halim 2010; al-Habal 2010e; *aljazeera.net* 2010c; Hadya and al-Basha 2010f). *Aljazeera.net* (2010c) states that the new project will be global in content and funded internationally. In *al-Youm al-Sabiʿ* (Hadya and al-Basha 2010a; Hadya and al-Basha 2010e) IOL-Cairo employees promise transparency and a new organizational model so that a similar "hijacking" cannot take place in the future. According to *al-Masry al-Youm* ('Abd al-Halim 2010) the decision to launch a new website was made, only two days after al-Qaradawi announced that the problem would be solved. *Al-Masry al-Youm* (2010) also underlines the importance of this project both within the Islamic world but also as a window of moderate Islam with a view to the West. The categories "political" and "ideological" are merely analytical tools. The new website launch is categorized here as "political" to illustrate the political and regional ambitions of the website launch. However, the spread of *wasatiyya* ideology can be seen as integral to the political goals of regional influence.

### Reflections

The IOL-Cairo employees' political frames were frequently reported in the media examined in this study. One feature of the newspaper reports examined is that they include numerous quotes from a variety of IOL-Cairo employees, thereby giving their frame not just *a* voice, but *numerous* voices. Returning to Entman's (1993) terms, the *problem definition* was either IOL's zealous critique of Israeli politics or al-Qaradawi himself (and terrorism allegations). Furthermore, the *causal interpretations* were 1) Israeli-Qatari pressure to close down IOL, and 2) a US Congress/Qatari plot to remove al-Qaradawi. The *moral evaluations* of the frame were (1) IOL was doing its duty in reporting on Palestinians' grievances as a result of Israeli attacks, and (2) al-Qaradawi was wrongly accused of supporting terrorism. In this sense, the Qatari Board's takeover of IOL is evaluated as an injustice to IOL-Cairo. In the political frame, the *treatment* prescribed is the launching of a new *wasatiyya* website to replace the old IOL site. This "treatment" was somewhat ingenious in that it also served as effective marketing for the new website that the IOL-Cairo employees were planning on launching. Indeed, this theme made several headlines in the sampled newspapers.

The IOL-Cairo employees' political frames, much as the ideological frames, incorporated familiar themes from public Arab discourse, such as US government involvement and Israeli/Zionist involvement, thereby accomplishing frame resonance. Several scholars analyzing media coverage in the Arab world argue that Arab media frequently respond to popular and "street" anti-Israel sentiments (Schleifer 2007). According to a survey cited in Marmura (2010: 2) 12 percent of the Egyptians polled believed that the United States was behind the 9/11 attacks and 43 percent believed Israel was responsible. In Marmura's (2010) view, rather than constructing frames to influence audiences, Arab and particularly Egyptian media reinforce and activate existing views about US and Israeli involvement in local and trans-local politics. He argues that specific events in Egyptian history in which US and Israeli involvement did actually take place "make it more likely that Arab media are responding to grass root fears and suspicions rather than generating them." Against this background, it can be argued that IOL-Cairo employees' frames were designed to create resonance, and thereby ease their ability to set the agenda in Arab media. This is not to say that proponents of these frames do not also consider them plausible.

Overall, the IOL-Cairo employees appear to have been successful in both setting the agenda and framing the IOL crisis in the Arab media. Both their ideological and political frames appear to have dominated Arab media reports in the sample examined in this chapter. A total of 43 out of 48 newspaper articles employed IOL-Cairo employees' frames of the conflict (table 10.4).

The success of IOL-Cairo employees with regard to setting the agenda and framing the IOL crisis in Arab media seems to have been significant, perhaps even significant enough to warrant a "media slant"

**Table 10.4**  Frequency of IOL-Cairo employees' frames in newspapers

| Newspaper and no. of articles | IOL-Cairo employees' frames |
| --- | --- |
| *al-Youm al-Sabi'* (23 articles) | 23 |
| *al-Shorouk* (13 articles) | 11 |
| *al-Masry al-Youm* (5 articles) | 4 |
| *aljazeera.net* (5 articles) | 3 |
| *al-Watan* (2 articles) | 2 |
| **Total: 48 articles** | **43** |

in their favor. However, before drawing this conclusion, we must turn to how the Qatari Board's frames feature in the newspaper-sample.

## The Qatari Board's Frames

During my fieldwork, my informants told me that the Qatari Board denied that the crisis was due to an ideological battle and/or political motivations. This signals that the Qatari board was actively responding to the IOL Cairo frames, albeit by refutation. In addition, the Qatari Board made claims about IOL Cairo straying from the core vision, and expanding too much, which can be considered professional or managerial differences. Moreover, the Qatari Board stated that they wanted to develop the website and focus more on content from the Gulf region. On a more serious note, the Qatari Board accused IOL-Cairo of mismanagement and corruption (Abdel-Fadil 2011). The Qatari frames were, by and large, dismissed by my informants as non-plausible or considered false allegations. Salma, for instance, says:

> Now the Qataris' lawyer[21] is accusing 65 IOL-Cairo employees of corruption and what not. Even people who no longer work for IOL and are not even in Egypt are being accused!

The only intersection between Qatari Board frames and my informants was on the question of expansion and, to a certain degree, mismanagement, albeit among interviewees other than my key informants. Some of the contracted[22] IOL counsellors indicated that they could see why the Qatari Board may have been displeased with IOL-Cairo's constant expansion of the organization. Their critique was that IOL-Cairo's top leadership exhibited poor management of IOL by expanding too much and too fast, and without suitable financial security, since IOL was funded through fluctuating donations. One example is the short-lived *Ana* (I) counselling satellite channel, which was abruptly shut down due to lack of funds (Abdel-Fadil 2011).

The codes identifying the Qatari Board's frames have been constructed on the basis of what my informants' told me, and on the basis of the content of the newspaper articles in the sample. For analytical purposes, I distinguish between a) the "Contesting Causal Frame," which employs the IOL Cairo ideological and political frames as a main reference with the purpose of refuting them, and, b) the Professional and Management Frame, which offers an alternative

**Table 10.5**   Themes in the Qatari Board's frames

| Code | al-Masry al-Youm | al-Youm al-Sabi' | al-Shorouk | al-Watan | aljazeera. net |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Not political | | | x | x | x |
| Not ideological | x | x | x | x | x |
| Corruption | x | x | | | x |
| Expansion/ mismanagement | x | | | | x |
| Developing the website/ vision | | x | x | | x |
| Straying from the core / content | | x | | | x |
| Regional influence | | x | | | x |

explanation of the causes of the IOL crisis based on professional and managerial differences between the two parties.

The table above demonstrates the incidence of the codes in the various sources (table 10.5).

### The Contesting Causal Frame

*Not Political*
According to *aljazeera.net* (2010c) the Qatari Board denies allegations of political motivation for relocating IOL. In addition, they argue that if they were planning to silence anyone they would have shut down the more influential al-Jazeera. *Al-Shorouk* ('Abadeen and Muhammad 2010) reports that the Qatari Board denies that Qatar was under pressure to close down IOL due to al-Qaradawi's being on a terrorism list. On the contrary, it is claimed that both al-Jazeera and al-Qaradawi are "untouchable" or "non-negotiable" assets for Qatar. Thus, these arguments of the conflict not being sparked by political differences can be considered *responses* to the political frames put forward by IOL Cairo. By extension, the Qatari board denies the relevance of a political lens when trying to make sense of the IOL crisis.

*Not Ideological, the wasaṭiyya Message Will Prevail*
*Al-Shorouk* (al-Habal 2010c), *al-Masry al-Youm* (al-Hawafi 2010), *al-Shorouk* (al-Habal 2010c), *al-Youm al-Sabi'* (Hadya and al-Basha 2010c), and *aljazeera.net* (2010b) all state the Qatari Board denies ideological motivation for closing down IOL-Cairo. Once again,

this is a responsive frame demonstrating the power of IOL Cairo frames and their salience. Moreover, *al-Shorouk* (al-Habal 2010c), refers to the Qatari-board assuring that "the *wasatiyya* message will prevail," which can be considered a response to IOL Cairo's frame about the Qatari board's alleged *salafi* influence. *Al-Masry al-Youm* (al-Hawafi 2010) writes that the message from the Qatari Board was, "The IOL website will continue to exist, but its production will be moved to Doha."

### The Professional and Management Frame

*Corruption*
In *al-Masry al-Youm* (al-Hawafi 2010) the Qatari IOL board accuse the Cairo management of corruption and mismanagement of funds, and question who had access to IOL's funds (and why). Moreover, the Qatari Board states that many IOL-Cairo employees were given large loans that add up to a total of three million Egyptian pounds. In an *aljazeera.net* article (Tawala 2010)[23] the Qatari Board declare that their motivation was to renew and develop IOL, due to their discontent with the management and the state of financial matters. *Al-Youm al-Sabi'* (al-Turky 2010) only mentions the IOL board's accusations of monetary corruption in IOL-Cairo indirectly, in the context of the allegations being dismissed as false by IOL-Cairo employees.

*Expansion/Mismanagement*
*Al-Masry al-Youm* (al-Hawafi 2010) reports that the Qatari Board believed that IOL-Cairo was too large and had far too many employees. They questioned the necessity of IOL having 300 employees, when al-Jazeera only has 100 employees. Similarly, *aljazeera.net* (Tawala 2010) reports that the Qatari Board believed that IOL-Cairo had too many employees, the IOL offices were too expensive, and IOL was lagging behind in terms of technology.

*Developing the Website/Vision*
In *al-Shorouk* (al-Habal 2010c) and *al-Youm al-Sabi'* (Hadya, Imam, and 'Abd al-'Aleem 2010) the move to Qatar is deemed "a further development of the website." Likewise, in *aljazeera.net* (Tawala 2010) the Qatari Board state that their motivation was to "renew and develop IOL," but that the IOL-Cairo management refused to enter into a constructive dialog with them about these matters.

*Straying from the Core and Regional Influence*
*Al-Youm al-Sabi'* (Hadya and al-Basha 2010c) argues that Qatar may have been dissatisfied with having funded an enterprise of which "Qatari content" constituted only 5 percent of all content. *Aljazeera.net* (Tawala 2010) reported that the Qatari Board complained that IOL was losing its core identity (straying) and had no editorial policy, and was too Egypt-focused. The code *regional influence* intersects with the code *straying from core* in that *al-Youm al-Sabi'* (Hadya and al-Basha 2010c) and *aljazeera.net* (Tawala 2010) refer to the Qatari Board wishing both to make the content of IOL more Qatar and Gulf-focused, as well as to control content so as to enjoy more influence in the Arab region (table 10.6).

*Reflections*
The Qatari board pitched their themes within "professional" or "management" frames in contrast to the political and ideological frames of IOL Cairo. The Qatari Board's frames are by and large represented through *one* voice, that of al-Ansari, the new head of the board.[24] This is in contrast to how the IOL-Cairo employees' frames are represented. In the latter case, media reports communicate the many voices of IOL-Cairo employees. Employing Entman's terminology one could argue that the *problem definitions* and *causal interpretations* of the Qatari Board's frames were intersecting and numerous. They can be summed up as: IOL-Cairo strayed from the core/content, was too Egypt-focused, expanded too much and mismanaged funds. The *moral evaluation*: the Qatari Board is obliged to correct the wrongs of IOL-Cairo employees. The *treatment*, implies the move to Doha, and the Qatari Board ensuring that IOL sticks to the core, better management of funds and more coverage of Gulf matters, thereby ensuring a sound (further) development of IOL.

**Table 10.6** Frequency of Qatari Board's frames in newspapers

| Newspaper and no. of articles | Qatari Board's frames |
| --- | --- |
| *al-Youm al-Sabi'* (23 articles) | 3 |
| *al-Shorouk* (13 articles) | 3 |
| *al-Masry al-Youm* (5 articles) | 1 |
| *aljazeera.net* (5 articles) | 5 |
| *al-Watan* (2 articles) | 1 |
| **Total: 48 articles** | **13** |

As illustrated, the Qatari Board's frame was present in the media as a contesting frame to those of the IOL-Cairo employees. However, the Qatari Board's frames were only featured in 13 out of 48 articles, while IOL-Cairo employees' frames dominated in 43 out of 48 articles. This seems to indicate a "media slant" in the sample of newspapers, that is, the favoring of one frame over others. Also, in most instances, even when the Qatari Board's frame was presented in a media report as a contesting frame, the meta-frame was that of the IOL-Cairo employees, in correspondence with Entman's (1993) definition of "media slant." That is, usually the frames that contest IOL Cairo's perspectives do so in response to IOL Cairo's frames. Hence, there appears to be a media slant in favor of the IOL Cairo frames in Arab media coverage of the IOL crisis (table 10.7).

Why then was the Qatari Board less successful in setting the agenda and framing the IOL conflict? The Qatari Board's frames contested and attempted to dispel the IOL employees' ideological and political frames of the IOL crisis. This is not an insignificant strategy. It signals the success of IOL employees' frames, in that the Qatari Board must explicitly refute them. This is especially true of the themes that were likely to resonate with a large portion of Egyptian audiences. Still, the Qatari Board's frames did not themselves contain components that played on established cultural symbols or themes salient in Arab public discourse. Arguably, allegations of corruption may have been designed to serve this function, but in this case—did not—perhaps because allegations did not relate to macro-politics. Accusations of corruption in a medium-sized business may have less potential to stir sentiments than accusations at state level. Another possible explication is that accusations of corruption are so commonplace in the entire region, that people simply shrug their shoulders in response.

**Table 10.7** Comparison of frequency of IOL-Cairo employees' frames and Qatari Board's frames in newspapers

| Newspaper and no. of articles | IOL-Cairo employees' frames | Qatari Board's frames |
|---|---|---|
| al-Youm al-Sabi' (23 articles) | 23 | 3 |
| al-Shorouk (13 articles) | 11 | 3 |
| al-Masry al-Youm (5 articles) | 4 | 1 |
| aljazeera.net (5 articles) | 3 | 5 |
| al-Watan (2 articles) | 2 | 1 |
| **Total: 48 articles** | **43** | **13** |

What does seem evident is that the Qatari board appeared to lack themes designed to "strike a responsive chord" in the public. This in turn may have contributed to the frames of the Qatari board relatively lacking success in setting the agenda. Moreover, the Qatari Board's frames can be interpreted as less specific and elaborate than IOL-Cairo employees' contesting frames, and, perhaps even come across as less credible for this very reason. While IOL-Cairo employees' themes fit neatly into their meta-frame(s) about political and/or ideological motivation to the IOL crisis, the Qatari Board presented an array of causes that did not necessarily tie in together, nor were they in dialog with a clearly defined meta-frame. In this sense, the Qatari Board may have been less successful than the IOL-Cairo employees with regards to the actual frame construction. It could also be argued that the Qatari Board lacked media expertise with regards to project-ing their frames onto Arab media. Or perhaps the Qatari Board was able to exert more influence on local media than on Egyptian media. It does not seem insignificant that the Qatari-owned *aljazeera.net*, and one of the sources in my sample with the fewest articles (5), was the *only* source to devote an article entirely to the Qatari Board's frame. In contrast, and equally interesting is that *al-Youm al-Sabi'*, the Egyptian newspaper with the most articles in this sample (23), is the source to devote the least space to the Qatari Board's frame.

## Alternative Frames: The Muslim Brotherhood

One of the causality frames about the IOL crisis that surface in the sample of Arab newspapers is that the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) played a role. Intriguingly, this frame is either dismissed as futile or simply met with silence by both the Qatari Board and the IOL-Cairo employees. According to the newspaper reports in this sample, the Qatari Board refutes all forms of political motivation for the conflict, including any frames that refer to the MB as the cause. In contrast, the IOL-Cairo 'employees do emphasize the political motivation of the IOL crisis (particularly after the dismissal of al-Qaradawi), but do not mention the MB. It is of interest that a few of my informants mention their awareness of the MB frame but dismiss it nonetheless, as can be seen in Sarah's comment:

> And by the way the IOL-crisis has nothing to do with the Brotherhood (*ikhwan*) either. There are people who are pro- Brotherhood on both sides, and there are people who are anti-Brotherhood on both sides.

**Table 10.8**  Themes in the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) frame

| Code | al-Masry al-Youm | al-Youm al-Sabi' | al-Shorouk | al-Watan |
|------|-----------|-----------|------------|----------|
| IOL-Cairo and MB harbored too close links | | | x | |
| IOL-Cairo Denies too close links to the MB | | | x | |
| MB displeased with IOL-Cairo, led to IOL-Crisis | | | | x |
| MB denies IOL-Crisis related to MB | | x | | |

*Aljazeera.net* does mention the MB, but *al-Masry al-Youm* (al-Sho-baki 2010) only mentions the MB in passing, stating that IOL is "non-partial, it is not MB, not *salafi*, nor extremist but contemporary (*mu'asir*) with no parallels in the Arab world." Still, the fact that some Arab media persist in representing MB frames is particularly interesting when taken together with the omission or negation of this frame by both the Qatari Board and IOL-Cairo employees. As will be illustrated, IOL-Cairo employees' dismissal of the Muslim Brotherhood frames surfaces in media reports. Another intriguing factor is that the MB frames are at times contradictory. The codes in this section are derived from the newspaper articles' content (table 10.8).

### IOL–Cairo and MB Harbored Links that Were Too Close

In *al-Shorouk* (al-Habal 2010a) it is argued that the Qatari IOL board was negative to IOL-Cairo's close links to the MB in Egypt.

### IOL–Cairo Denies Close Links to the MB

In *al-Shorouk* (al-Habal 2010a), an IOL-Cairo employee claims that IOL had covered the internal elections of the MB professionally, to the extent that some people in the MB were displeased. The speaker rounds off his argument by stating, "In any case the dispute with the new board is greater than the MB as indicated by the Qatari Board's disapproval of the social section[25] etc."

### MB Displeased with IOL–Cairo, Led to IOL Crisis

*Al-Watan* (Ja'ffar 2010) reports that the MB was discontent with what they saw as IOL's biased and unprofessional coverage of the MB revealing clear biases toward the reformist wing of the MB. Sources close to al-Qaradawi say that they informed him of IOL's unprofessional coverage of the MB elections, and urged him to get involved. However, al-Qaradawi had refused to interfere on behalf of the MB, stating that "it is not the IOL Board's policy to get involved in editorial content, and it has been this way for more than 10 years." The newspaper also stated that al-Qaradawi had declined the MB's invitation to celebrate the success of the conservative candidate in their elections, a gesture that is thought to have further soured relations between the MB and IOL. In consequence, the MB in Egypt and Qatar joined forces to pressure IOL by threatening to withhold funding. The MB urged the move to Qatar, in order to be able to exert more control of IOL.

### MB Denies that the IOL Crisis Is Related to the MB

*Al-Youm al-Sabi'* (al-Turky 2010) reports that IOL employees maintain that the claim that the MB initiated the closing down of IOL because of their discontentment with IOL's coverage of the MB, is false.

### Reflections

While the MB meta-frame is to suggest that IOL's relations with the MB lie at the heart of the IOL conflict, many more contesting frames are shaped as responses to the latter by refuting that the MB has anything to do with the conflict. Thus, interestingly the MB frames contest with *one another*. Returning to Entman's typology, the MB frames have competing *problem definitions*. The causal interpretations are either 1) the MB of Egypt and Qatar united to move IOL to Doha, or 2) the Qatari Board moved IOL to Doha to prevent unwanted influence from the MB. The *moral evaluations* are similarly poised against each other, either the MB's right to influence the content of IOL or their lack thereof. The *treatment* in both frames is moving IOL to Doha in order to exert more control of its output. Even though both IOL-Cairo employees and the Qatari Board refute the MB frame, it makes its way into the Arab media. This does not seem insignificant. It can perhaps be considered part

of journalists' strategies to expose alternative frames to those of the involved parties in the conflict. Still, the MB frames certainly link up to preexisting public discourses about the MB in Arab media. The way the MB is portrayed in Arab public discourse reveals contesting sentiments of applause and suspicion and contestation about their role and intentions in politics, and about the relationship between politics and religion (Marmura 2010). Part of the picture is that the Egyptian government has launched negative media campaigns against the MB (Marmura 2010). Indeed, as several scholars point out, the MB is large and contains both opposing views and a multitude of different ideological streams (Brooke and Hamid 2011). In other words, Arab media portrays the MB as an influential factor, to be reckoned with, but to what ends is disputed. The latter point surfaced in the diametrically different goals ascribed to the MB in the media frames presented about the IOL crisis. Moreover, as can be seen in the discussion above, Arab media assign the MB anything from highly central to marginal influence in a range of incidences in the Arab world.

## Conclusion

This chapter has examined a cross section of Arab media with regards to the framing of the Islam Online crisis. I have demonstrated that IOL-Cairo employees were more successful in setting the agenda and framing the crisis than the Qatari Board. There are several possible explanations that may account for what appears to be a media slant in favor of the IOL-Cairo employees. First, IOL-Cairo employees' frames drew upon established themes, connections, and schemata in Arab public discourse, such as Gulf conservatism and US/Israeli interference in local politics. This is likely to have contributed to frame resonance and thereby salience. A few of the newspapers included alternative frames about the MB, refuted by both the IOL-Cairo employees and the Qatari Board. Significantly, this very collection of themes resurfaced during Arab media discussions of the Egyptian revolution and other pro-democracy uprisings in the "Arab Spring" of 2011, and in the transitional phase Egypt has been thrust into—ever since.

I demonstrate how IOL Cairo employees were particularly successful in shaping the way the IOL crisis was framed in Arab media. These findings coupled with analysis of first hand empirical data, suggest that IOL-Cairo employees' extensive usage and knowledge of new and old media, greatly facilitated their ability to spread their

crisis narratives in the Arab media scape, and was crucial to their success. An interrelated finding, is that it seems that IOL-Cairo employees from an early stage understood the importance of setting the agenda in Arab media, knew which strings to pull, and were extremely active in doing so through a variety of new media. Or, to put it differently, the IOL-Cairo employees considered part of the battle of IOL to be taking place on the media stage, and had the necessary expertise and media strategy to meet this end. In contrast, the Qatari Board was less successful in setting the agenda. It could be argued that the Qatari Board felt that they were in a winning position and thus did not need to employ the media to their end. Yet, the very fact that they were refuting the IOL-Cairo's frames signals that they wished to exert influence on how the crisis was understood, perceived, and framed. Was their lack of success related to the Qatari Board's lack of media expertise or influence? One could argue that this study's sample contains an over-representation of Egyptian newspaper articles, and that the Qatari Board met more success in framing the crisis in local newspapers. The Qatari *aljazeera.net* is the only newspaper in this sample to provide the Qatari frame in all its articles, and to donate articles entirely to this frame. Still, in my analysis the Qatari Board's lack of frame salience is also related to the content of the frame, and the presentation of a less focused frame that included few or no themes that resonated with preexisting themes in Arab public discourses.

The outcome of the crisis is that the Qatari Board proved to hold the most power to determine IOL's future. IOL was indeed relocated to Doha, and the website totally refashioned by August 2010. In this sense, it could be argued that the IOL-Cairo employees lost the battle. However, the current analysis indicates that they may have won an equally important battle, that of framing the IOL crisis in the Arab media. Part of their success is in all likelihood related to crafting frame resonance. The analysis illustrates that Salma was right on target when she told me "We are media people, and we are trying to use our expertise to our advantage." Through their media expertise IOL-Cairo employees were able to exert a significant amount of influence in the way that the IOL crisis was framed in the Arab media, the epitome of which is the marketing the launching of a new *wasatiyya* website, www.onislam.net, which in mid-crisis, IOL Cairo employees had the foresight (and deftness) to announce as an upcoming replacement of IOL. In this way, IOL users were subtly yet effectively invited to leave IOL and become users of the

new website. When www.onislam.net was finally launched in August 2010, we saw the conclusion of this marketing strategy, with the text "On Islam is brought to you by the creators of Islam Online" flashing on the brand new *wasatiyya* website. In this sense, the success of IOL-Cairo employees' frames may have had repercussions for the new IOL, in terms of user-infidelity, long after the end of the IOL crisis.

## Notes

1. *Acknowledgments*: Many thanks to Liesbet van Zoonen, Sarah Jurkiewicz, Naima Mouhleb, and Kari Vogt for their valuable feedback, on earlier drafts of this chapter. I would also like to thank Anne Sofie Roald and Lena Jayyusi for their editorial suggestions and support.
2. The Qatari Board is also known as the "Balagh (Cultural) Society," and the "IOL Board."
3. The number of regular employees was reported to be between 250 and 350. Numbers vary in news-reports collected on http://www.diigo.com/list/ahmedikhwan/islamonline-strike-news-, and, http://yalally.blogspot.com/2010/03/blog-post_1740.html. According to one of my informants, IOL-Cairo had 350 employees, 150 of whom worked with editorial content.
4. All my informants are anonymized, and the names used in the text are pseudonyms.
5. Emphasis in original.
6. It ought to be noted that there are other interesting aspects of framing such as "framing effects" (focusing on audience reception) but these are beyond the scope of this chapter.
7. The Diigo-list is compiled by an individual with Muslim Brotherhood affiliation as can be seen in the tag "ahmedikhwan" (ahmedbrother). This could potentially account for some biases in the list. For instance, that there are no *al-Ahram* articles on the list. When conducting independent searches, I was able to locate some additional sources. However, these were very few, and gave no indications of the list having been very biased against certain media sources. Moreover, the Diigo-list is among the profiled hits, it is a likely place for surfers to begin their search for information about the topic.
8. The numbers I operate with in this text are equivalent to the number of unique articles included in my sample. Newspapers that featured with only one unique article on the Diigo list were not included in this study's sample.
9. My data analysis software program is not fully compatible with Arabic text.

10. Certain themes were omitted from this chapter, for instance, the technical side of the contract between the IOL board in Doha and IOL employees and subsequent negotiations of a settlement package to ensure workers' rights. These themes were also coded but are beyond the scope of the article, as they do not primarily deal with the cause of the crisis.

11. In my interpretation, it is presumably the TV channel my informants are referring to, but as *aljazeera.net* is part of the same media house, such claims to biases are worth examining in the data sample in this chapter.

12. This emphasis on IOL's professionalism and moderation echoes parts of IOL's institutional narrative, that is, how IOL employees describe *themselves*. For a more in depth examination of the institutional narrative within IOL, see: "Islam Offline – Living the Message Behind the Screens," (Abdel-Fadil 2013).

13. The same person who eventually replaces al-Qaradawi as the head of the IOL Board in Doha.

14. Less innovating and thus less controversial.

15. This separation is based on my analysis of important (individual yet interrelated) themes in the IOL crisis narratives.

16. There are also suggestions that the resignations were about much more than dress-code, see for example Muslimah Media Watch (2010).

17. This story was referred to as "The Holocaust of Palestine," "The Holocaust of Jerusalem," "the Jerusalem story," and "the al-Aqsa story" interchangeably during my fieldwork at IOL Cairo.

18. Sometimes there is mention of CIA, the US Jewish Lobby, or Zionists, but this is less common than, say, United States or Israel.

19. The newspaper article reports that this idea is based on "an unconfirmed source."

20. The website was launched and made available to the public in August 2010, under the name On Islam (www.onislam.net).

21. The lawyer representing the Qatari Board of IOL.

22. These counselors were not working in the IOL offices on a daily basis and were not full-time employees of IOL. Rather, they were contracted to answer IOL users' problems, and could do this from any location.

23. This article was last accessed online December 12, 2014. Yet, by the time that this edited volume goes to print, the *aljazeera.net* article in question is no longer available online, nor are there any traces of any other *aljazeera.net* articles that convey the same information. Since this appears to be the al-Jazeera article in my material with the most confrontational narrative(s), its active removal from the al-Jazeera's online archive may be deliberate.

24. Other members of the board are mentioned by name, but nearly all quotes are attributed to al-Ansari, himself.

25. The social section is the section dealing with family matters and counselling and, in other accounts, it is targeted for being too liberal, open-minded, and controversial in dealing with sensitive topics like sexual relations.

## References

Abdel-Fadil, Mona. 2013. "Islam Offline: 'Living the Message' Behind the Screens in Contemporary Islam." *Contemporary Islam*, 7 (3): 283–309.

Abdel-Fadil, Mona. 2011. "The Islam-Online Crisis: A Battle of *wasatiyya* vs. *salafi* Ideologies?" *CyberOrient*, 5. Accessed December 12, 2014, at: http://www.cyberorient.net/article.do?articleId=6239

"Al-Ansari: Islam Online Mawqi' Qatari wa la Muwadhdhafin Lana fi Masr" (al-Ansari: Islam Online Is a Qatari Website and We Have No Employees in Egypt). 2010, on *aljazeera.net*, March 18. Accessed December 12, 2014, at: http://www.aljazeera.net/home/print/f6451603-4dff-4ca1-9c10-122741d17432/f39c19cb-926a-4231-8bd1-87183a79313d

"Al-Balagh Tu'akkid Sawn Huquq Muwadhdhafiha" (al-Balagh Affirms the Preservation of the Employees' (legal) rights). 2010, on *aljazeera.net*, March 24. Accessed December 14, 2014, at: http://www.aljazeera.net/news/arabic/2010/3/24/-

Brooke, Steven and Shadi Hamid. 2011. "The Muslim Brotherhood's Role in the Egyptian Revolution," in CTC SENTINEL. Accessed December 12, 2014, at: http://www.ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/CTCSentinel-Vol4Iss2.pdf

Entman, Robert M. 1993. "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm." *Journal of Communication*, 43: 51–58.

Entman, Robert M. 2007. "Framing Bias: Media in the Distribution of Power." *Journal of Communication*, 57: 163–173.

Ettema, James S. 2005. "Crafting Cultural Resonance: Imaginative Power in Everyday Journalism." *Journalism*, 6 (2): 131–152.

Field, Nathan and Ahmed Hamam. 2009. "Salafi Satellite TV in Egypt." *Arab Media & Society*. Accessed December 11, 2014, at: http://www.arabmediasociety.com/articles/downloads/20090506151157_AMS8_Field_and_Hamam.pdf

Gamson, William A., David Croteau, William Hoynes, and Theodore Sasson. 1992. "Media Images and the Social Construction of Reality." *Annual Review of Sociology*, 18: 373–393.

Jum'a, Mahmud. 2010. "Da'wa li-Hal Azmat Islam Online" (Call for Resolving the Islam Online Crisis) on *aljazeera.net*, March 19. Accessed December 12, 2014, at: http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/B68C6D5F-C779-45D4-B38D-7B51D89062C6.htm

Kraidy, Marwan M. 2010. *Reality Television and Arabic Politics: Contention in Public Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Marmura, Stephen. 2010. "Tales of 9/11—What Conspiracy Theories in Egypt and the United States Tell Us about 'Media Effects'." *Arab Media and Society*, issue 11. Accessed December 12, 2014, at: http://www.arab-mediasociety.com/?article=752

"Mawqiʿ Jadid li-Muharririyy Islam Online" (New Website for Islam Online Editors). 2010, on *aljazeera.net*, March 24. Accessed December 12, 2014, at: http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/AE460545-6805-45C1-A70F-02E4E608A5FE.htm

Muslimah Media Watch. 2010. "Al-Jazeera's Wardrobe Malfunction," June 23. Accessed December 12, 2014, at: http://muslimahmediawatch.org/2010/06/al-jazeeras-wardrobe-malfunction/

Reese, Aaron. 2009. "Framing April 6: Discursive Dominance in the Egyptian Print Media." *Arab Media and Society*, issue 9. Accessed December 12, 2014, at: http://www.arabmediasociety.com/?article=715

Reese, Stephen D. 2001. "Prologue- Framing Public Life: A Bridging Model for Media Research," in S. Reese, O. Gandy, and A. Grant (eds.), *Framing Public Life: Perspectives on Media and Our Understanding of the Social World*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Scheufele, Dietram A. and David Tewksbury. 2007. "Framing, Agenda Setting, and Priming: The Evolution of Three Media Effects Models." *Journal of Communication*, 5: 11: 9–20.

Schleifer, Abdallah. 2007. "Media and Religion in the Arab-Islamic World." *Arab Media and Society*, issue 1. Accessed December 12, 2014, at: http://www.arabmediasociety.com/?article=31

Tawala, Muhammad Kamal. 2010. "Al-Jazeera Talk min Majlis al-Ansari, Qissat Islam Online" (al-Jazeera Talk from al-Ansari's Headquarters, the Story of Islam Online) on *aljazeera.net*, March 26, http://aljazeeratalk.net/node/5849

Newspapers

ʿAbadeen, Fikri and Amani Muhammad. 2010. "Azmat Islam Online Tatasaʿad fi al-Dawha" (The Islam Online Crisis Escalates in Doha), in *al-Shorouk*, March 19.

ʿAbd al-Halim, Hisham ʿUmar. 2010. "Al-ʿAmilun bi-Islam Online Yutliqun Hamla li-Inshaʾ Mawqiʿ Jadid baʿd Iqalat al-Qaradawi" (The Workers of Islam Online Announce the Creation of a New Website after the Dismissal of al-Qaradawi), in *al-Masry al-Youm*, March 24, 2010. Accessed December 12, 2014, at: http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/28040

ʿAbd al-Hamid, Reem and Inji Majdi. 2010. "Al-Suhuf al-Baritaniyya: Azmat Islam Online Taʿkis Haymanat al-Thaqafa al-Khalijiyya" (British Newspapers: The Islam Online Crisis Reflects the Dominance of Gulf Culture), in *al-Youm al-Sabiʿ*, March 17. Accessed December 12, 2014, at: http://www.youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=202011&SecID=88&IssueID=0

al-Basha, Siham. 2010. "Grub li-Muḥarriri Islam Online ʿala al-Facebook" (Facebook Group for Islam Online Editors), in *al-Youm al Sabiʿ*, March 17. Accessed December 12, 2014, at: http://www.youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=201918&SecID=65&IssueID=31

al-Jaly, Muhammad. 2010. "Muʿtasimu Islam Online: Qatar Tatawataʾ maʿ Israʾil" (The Islam Online Protestors: Qatar Conspires with Israel), in *al-Youm al-Sabiʿ*, March 16. Accessed December 12, 2014, at: http://www.diigo.com/bookmark/http%3A%2F%2Fwww.youm7.com%2FNews.asp%3FNewsID%3D201832?tab=people&uname=ahmedikhwan

Jaʿffar, Sami. 2010. "Tasfiyat Hisabat Intikhabat al-Ikhwan ʿala Hisab Islam Online" (Settling the Accounts after the Muslim Brotherhood elections, at Islam Online's Expense), in *al-Watan*, March 21.

al-Habal, Ayat. 2010a. "Al-ʿAmilun fi Islam Online Yabdaʾun Tasʿid Didd al-Idara al- Qatariyya" (The Employees in Islam Online (start to) Escalate against the Qatari Management), in *al-Shorouk*, March 17.

al-Habal, Ayat. 2010b. "Al-Qaradawi Yusdir Qarar bi-Waqf Tasrih Muwaththafin Islam Online" (al-Qaradawi Issues a Decision to Halt the Dismissal of Islam Online Employees), in *al-Shorouk*, March 17.

al-Habal, Ayat. 2010c. "Hathf Safahat Munasira l-il-Aqsa min MawqiʿIslam Online" (Deleting the pro- al-Aqsa Pages on the Islam Online Website), in *al- Shorouk*, March 21.

al-Habal, Ayat. 2010d. "Iqalat al-Qaradawi min Raʾs Mawqiʿ Islam Online" (The Dismissal of al-Qaradawi as Head of the Islam Online Website), in *al-Shorouk*, March 23.

al-Habal, Ayat. 2010e. "Al-ʿAmilun fi Islam Online Yadʿamun al-Qaradawi bi-Itlaq Mubadarat Iʿlam al-Umma" (Employees of Islam Online Support al-Qaradawi by Launching Initiative of Informing the Umma), in *al-Shorouk*, March 24.

al-Habal, Ayat. 2010f. "Idrab Sahafiyyi Islam Online ʿan al-Taʿam wa Tadamun Sahafiyyi al-Maghrib Maʿahum" (Islam Online Journalist (and) Hunger Strike, Morrocan Press Support Them), in *al-Shorouk*, March 20.

al-Habal, Ayat. 2010g. "Iʿadat Bathth Islam Online Wasat Daʿwat al-Iʿtisam Amam Safarat Qatar" (Re-transmitting Islam Online amidst Call for Sit-in in Front of the Qatari Embassy), in *al-Shorouk*, March 19.

al-Habal, Ayat. 2010h. "Manaʿuna min al-Kitaba l-i-l-Difaʿ ʿan al-Aqsa, Shiʿar Muharriri Islam Online" (They Prevented Us from Writing in Defence of al-Aqsa (mosque), the Symbol of Islam Online Editors), in *al-Shorouk*, March 16.

al-Habal, Ayat and Ahmad ʿAdel. 2010. "Islam Online Yuhadid bi Fasl 250 ʿAmilan" (Islam Online Threatens to Let 250 Employees Go), in *al-Shorouk*, March 15.

al-Hawafi, Nashwa. 2010. "Media International Tuqassim al-ʿAmilin bi Islam Online li-Thaltht fiʾat" (Media International Divides Islam Online Employees into Three Types), in *al-Masry al-Youm*, March 24.

Hadya, Sha'aban and Siham al-Basha. 2010a. "Al-Qaradawi Yu'ayyin Mas'ulin Judud li-Islam Online" (al-Qaradawi Appoints New (People) to Be Responsible for Islam Online), in *al-Youm al-Sabi'*, March 18. Accessed December 12, 2014, at: http://www.youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=20 2677&SecID=65&IssueID=102

Hadya, Sha'aban and Siham al-Basha. 2010b. "Al-Qaradawi Yu'akkid 'Awdat Islam Online Qariban" (al-Qaradawi Affirms the Return of Islam Online, Soon), in *al-Youm al-Sabi'*, March 22. Accessed December 12, 2014, at: http://www.youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=204127&SecID=65&Issu eID=0

Hadya, Sha'aban and Siham al-Basha. 2010c. "Muharriru Islam Online Yuhaddidun bi-dam Usarihim l-i-l-I'tisam" (The Islam Online Editors Threaten to Add Their Families to the Sit-in), in *al-Youm al-Sabi'*, March 17. Accessed December 12, 2014, at: http://www.youm7.com/News. asp?NewsID=202244

Hadya, Sha'aban and Siham al-Basha. 2010d "Al-'Amilun fi Islam Online Ya'tabirun Iqalat Qatar l-i-l-Qaradawi Bidayat al-Tankil bi-l-'Alim al-Jalil, wa Yutliqun Mubadarat Iktitab li-Insha' Mawqi' Badil" (Employees at Islam Online Consider Qatar's Dismissal of al-Qaradawi the Beginning of the Maltreatment of the Renowned Scholar and Will Initiate Contributions to Launch Replacement Website), in *al-Youm al-Sabi'*, March 23. Accessed December 12, 2014, at: http://www.youm7.com/ News.asp?NewsID=204821

Hadya, Sha'aban and Siham al-Basha. 2010e. "Al-'Amilun fi Islam Online Yatadamanun ma' al-Qaradawi" (Employees at Islam Online Support al-Qaradawi), in *al-Youm al-Sabi'*, March 24. Accessed December 12, 2014, at: http://www.youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=205033

Hadya, Sha'aban and Siham al-Basha. 2010f. "Al-'Amilūn bi-Islam Online Yatlubuna 'Awdat Baththth Mawqi'uhum min al-Qahira wa al-Sayyidat Yuhdirna Atfalihum li-l-Musharaka wa Baththth Mubashir li-Fa'aaliyyat I'tisamihum wa Shukuk Hawl Dawr Qatar li-Waqf Baththth al- Mawqi'" (Islam Online Staff Demanding Return of Production of Website from Cairo, and Women Attending with Their Children and Livestreaming Their Sit-ins and Doubts about Qatar's Role with Regards to Halting the Broadcast of the Website), in *al-Youm al-Sabi'*, March 18. Accessed December 12, 2014, at: http://www.youm7.com/News. asp?NewsID=202687

Hadya, Sha'aban and Mustafa al-Najjar. 2010. "Qatar Tuwaqqif Tahdith Islam Online min Masr" (Qatar Prohibits Updating Islam Online (website) from Egypt), in *al-Youm al-Sabi'*, March 16. Accessed December 12, 2014, at: http://www.youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=201691

Hadya, Sha'aban, Nahid Imam, and Dina 'Abd al-'Aleem. 2010. "Bi-l Suwar, I'tisam Islam Online wa-l-Qaradawi Yastaqil" (In Pictures, the Islam Online Sit-ins and al-Qaradawi Resigns), in *al-Youm al-Sabi'*, March 15. Accessed December 12, 2014, at: http://www.youm7.com/News.asp?Ne wsID=201231&SecID=65&IssueID=0

Imam, Nahid. 2010. "Al-Shobaky wa Rashwan wa Tadamunan maʿ al-Muʿtasimin bi-Islam Online" (al-Shobaky and Rashwan in Solidarity with the Protesters at Islam Online), in *al-Youm al-Sabiʿ*, March 19. Accessed December 12, 2014, at: http://www.youm7.com/NewsPrint.asp?NewsID=203207

Kamal, Muhammad. 2010. "Al-Qaradawi Yatadakhkhal li-Inhaʾ Azmat Islam Online Baʿd an Haddada bi-Taqdim Istiqalatihi wa Moghadarat al-Dawha" (al-Qaradawi Intervenes to End the Islam Online Crisis, after Threatening to Resign and Leave Doha), in *al-Watan*, March 18. Accessed December 12, 2014, at: http://watan.com/10/2008-10-01-00-38-32/20885--q-q-.html

Khalil, Yasser. 2010. "Al-Qaradawi Yuwaqqif al-Mutasabbibin bi-Azmat Islam Online Baʿda Dughut min Aʿdaʾ bi-Balagh" (al-Qaradawi Stops Those Responsible for the Islam Online Crisis after Pressures from Members of al-Balagh [society]), in *al-Masry al-Youm*, March 17.

al-Makky, Muhammad Ahmed. 2010. "Istiqala Jamaʿiyya li-Khams Muthiʿat fi al-Jazeera Iḥtijajan ʿala Mudayaqat fi al-Lubs wa-l-Mathhar al-ʿAm" (Collective Resignation of Five (Female) Announcers in al-Jazeera in Protest against Harassment Related to Their Attire and General Appearance), in *al-Hayat*, May 30.

"Mutalabat bi-Inshaʾ Naqaba li-sahafiyyi al-Mawaqiʿ al-Elektroniyya Baʿd Azmat Islam Online" (Demands of A journalist syndicate (for) electronic websites after the Islam Online crisis). 2010, *al-Masry al-Youm*, March 25.

al-Shobaki, ʿAmr. 2010. "Nihayat Istithnaʾ Islam Online" (The End of the Islam Online Exception), in *al-Masry al-Youm* March 17.

al-Turky, Muhammad. 2010. "Hasm Azmat Sahafiyyi *Islam Online* ʿala al-Hawa fi Manshit al-Yawm" (Resolving the Crisis of Islam Online Journalists on the Air, in Today's Headlines), in *al-Youm al-Sabiʿ*, March 18. Accessed December 12, 2014, at: http://www.youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=202542&SecID=48&IssueID=100

# Contributors

**Mona Abdel-Fadil** is a post-Doctoral Fellow in the Department of Media and Communication at the University of Oslo. An Egyptian-Norwegian social scientist and ethnographer, her research interests include anthropology of the Middle East, Islamism, religious interpretations, gender, media, counseling psychology, and political transitions in the Arab world. Abdel-Fadil's publications include *Islam Online Guides Spouses towards Marital Bliss (2013), Islam offline—living 'The message' behind the screens* (2012), and *The Islam-Online Crisis: A Battle of Wasatiyya vs. Salafi Ideologies?* (2011). Mona Abdel-Fadil is a regular contributor to the academic blog "The New Middle East Blog" (http://newmeast.wordpress.com) and is the Coordinator of the Nordic Network on Media and Religion.

**Miriyam Aouragh** is Leverhulme fellow at the Communication and Media Research Institute at the University of Westminster in London, where she teaches on the internet, media, and politics. Previous to that, she was awarded a Rubicon grant in 2009 for postdoctoral research at the Oxford Internet Institute, where she focused on the political role of Web 2.0 for grassroots activists. Her book, based on extensive field research, *Palestine Online*: *Transnationalism, the Internet and the Construction of Identity* was published by I.B. Tauris in 2011.

**Hayat Howayyek Atiyya** is a PhD in Mass Communication from the Sorbonne. A lawyer and public intellectual, she has been a long-standing columnist and commentator in the Jordanian media and various Arab newspapers, and is one of the best known and most respected media personalities in the region. Howayyek Atiyya is also a translator from French to Arabic and vice versa. Her latest books are *JORDANUBE-Dialogue of the Rivers* (2013), and *Geopolitics and Discourse of the Arab Satellite News Channels* (2013–in Arabic).

**Amahl Bishara** is Assistant Professor of Anthropolgy at Tufts University where she teaches and researches on media, journalism, knowledge production, expressivity, and the Middle East. Her book,

based on fieldwork, *Back Stories: U.S. News Production and Palestinian Politics*, was published by Stanford University Press in 2013.

**Toufic Haddad** has a PhD from the School for Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London, where he has been a Senior Teaching Fellow in Development Studies. His research focuses on the political economy of neoliberal approaches to conflict resolution and state building in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. He is also the co-author of *Between the Lines: Readings in Israel, the Palestinians and the U.S 'War on Terror'* (Haymarket Books, 2007, together with Tikva Honig-Parnass). His writings on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have been featured in a wide collection of print and online media including *The National*, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, *Monthly Review Zine*, *Counterpunch,* and *Jadaliyya*.

**Sadok Hammami** is Associate Professor at the Institute of Press and Information Sciences in Tunis, and is Founder and Editor-in-Chief of The Arab Portal for Media and Communication Studies, an independent, academic online portal devoted to the diffusion of media and communication research in the Arab world. He is the author of several publications in French and Arabic, including *New Media: Epistemology, Problematic and Contexts*, Manouba University Press, Tunis, 2012.

**Charles Hirschkind** is Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of California, Berkely. His research centers on religious practice, media technologies, and emergent forms of political community in the Middle East, North America, and Europe. His book, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics,* (2006) New York: Columbia University Press, won the 2007–2008 Sharon Stephens First Book Prize from the American Ethnological Society and a Clifford Geertz Prize "Honorable Mention" from the Society for the Anthropology of Religion.

**Marwan M. Kraidy** is the Anthony Shadid Chair in Global Media, Politics, and Culture and the Director of Project for Advanced Research in Global Communication at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania. He has published more than 100 essays and 6 books, including *Reality Television and Arab Politics* (Cambridge UP 2010), which won three major prizes.

**Olfa Lamloum** is Lecturer at Université de Sciences Juridiques et Politiques de Tunis and Director of International Alert in Tunisia. She is a PhD in Political Science, from the University of Paris VIII, and has been a researcher in Political Science at Institut Français du Proche-Orient in Beirut, where she was Director of Programs on "Media in the Arab Space" and "Voting and mobilisation in Lebanon." Her interest is in media research in the Middle East and she has particularly dealt with Hezbollah's TV-channel al-Manar. She is author of *Al-Jazira, miroir rebelle et ambigu du monde arabe*, (La découverte, 2004) and co-editor of *The Middle East in the Media. Conflicts, Censorship and Public Opinion*, Saqi Books, 2009.

# TRANSLITERATION

This book uses a simplified version of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (IJMES) transliteration system, which can be found on the IJMES website.

Diacritics are therefore not used except for the 'ayn (marked by a single open quotation mark) and the hamza (marked by a single closed quotation mark).

For Arabic words now established in English usage, the English spelling is used without italics or diacritics, except where the English usage has acquired unnecessary resonances (so Shaykh is used, and not Sheikh). Arabic terms that are not commonly known are italicized with the 'ayn and hamza marked, but without other diacritics.

Person or institution names that have an established English usage are spelled accordingly (e.g., Saddam Hussein instead of Saddam Husayn; al-Arabiya instead of al-'Arabiyya). Similarly, where there is an established English form for a place name, it has been used instead of the Arabic form: Bethlehem and not Bayt Lahm. All other person and place names are spelt in accordance with the IJMES system privileging the standard classical Arabic form of the name, rather than its colloquial form that renders the name according to a particular dialect. However, the names of authors, artists, and media professionals (as well as still living persons) are spelt the way they have chosen to spell them.

# Index

Page numbers in bold denotes figures.