Al-Jazeera's Discourse of 'Arabness':
An Examination of the Discursive Construction of Identity in Talk Show Programming

by

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Your file Votre référence
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For my parents
and
In memory of my grandfather

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This project has been prompted by my ongoing engagement with Arab cultural identity and the compelling subject of al-Jazeera. After the cataclysmic events of September 11th, 2001 in the United States, al-Jazeera became virtually an unavoidable topic of discussion in various personal and professional contexts, especially for a Communications student of Arab heritage. The dissertation is consequently a culmination of my endeavor to comprehend al-Jazeera in relation to questions of identity at this particular moment in time.

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Abstract

Al-Jazeera asserted itself in the global media scene shortly after the attacks of September 11th, 2001 in the United States. The station's regional prominence had already been entrenched in the new Arab media environment before it was overshadowed by the station's newfound global fame. Subsequently, al-Jazeera was considered an Arab media ambassador and the "voice of the Arab world." This dissertation provides an analysis of al-Jazeera's programming in Arabic that is lacking in the burgeoning English language academic literature. The dissertation furthermore highlights the way treatment of global current affairs informs a sense of Arab identification on a regional level. Moreover, it argues that, apart from competitive broadcast journalism, al-Jazeera offers an oppositional discourse of identification that does not necessarily challenge the hegemony of Western media discourses. By employing an oppositional stance expressed in typical anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist terms, it constructs an overarching notion of "Arabness" that is predominately discursive.

The dissertation analyzes three live talk shows: *al-Ittijah al-Mu'akis* (The Opposite Direction), *Bila Hudoud* (Without Boundaries), and *Li-Nisa' Faqat* (For Women Only). These talk shows are ideal sites for examining this oppositional discourse because they constitute important forums in which perceptions of identity are cultivated in the discussion of current affairs. In my analysis, each episode is treated as a media "text" that contributes to the formation of a discourse of "Arabness." The objective of the analysis is to identify the recurrent discursive patterns and strategies in providing the basis for this discursive category of identification across Arab state borders. In constructing an oppositional discourse, the United States and Israel are employed as necessary rhetorical references; Islam is infused into "Arabness" as a homogenizing constituent in identity formation; and finally, a culturally-threatened "Arabness" converges upon a context in which the world is marked by globalization. The dissertation concludes by indicating that al-Jazeera offers merely *a* representation of "Arabness" that, despite its power to influence, remains one way of perceiving Arab identity.

Résumé

Al-Jazeera s'est imposée sur la scène mondiale des médias peu de temps après les attaques du 11 septembre 2001 aux États-Unis. L'importance régionale de la station était déjà bien ancrée dans les médias arabes, mais elle a été nettement augmentée par la renommée mondiale récemment acquise par la station. De ce fait, Al-Jazeera a été considérée comme l'ambassadrice médiatique ainsi que «la voix du monde arabe». Cette étude fournit une analyse de la programmation arabe d'Al-Jazeera, analyse encore absente dans le corpus académique anglophone. De plus, l'étude illustre comment le traitement de l'information concernant les événements récents dans le monde renseigne à propos d'une identité arabe à un niveau régional. D'ailleurs, elle démontre qu'indépendamment de la concurrence qu'elle fournit au journalisme en général, elle offre un discours oppositionnel d'identification par rapport à «l'Arabité» qui ne met pas nécessairement en cause l'hégémonie des discours des médias occidentaux. Par l'emploi d'un discours oppositionnel exprimé en termes typiquement anti-colonialistes et anti-impérialistes, elle établit une notion inclusive d'«Arabité», avant tout discursive, qui chapeaute l'identité arabe.

Cette étude se penche sur trois émissions télévisuelles: *Al-Ittijah Al-Mu'akis* (La Direction contraire), *Bila Hudoud* (Sans frontières), et *Li-Nisa' Faqat* (Pour femmes seulement). Ces causeries en direct sont des lieux idéaux afin d'examiner ce discours oppositionnel parce qu'elles constituent des forums importants dans lesquels les perceptions de l'identité sont cultivées dans les discussions de l'actualité. Dans mon analyse, chaque événement est traité comme un «texte» médiatique qui contribue à la formation d'un discours de l'«Arabité». L'objectif de cette analyse est d'identifier les modèles et les stratégies discursives récurrentes que l'on voit apparaître afin d'offrir la base d'une catégorie discursive de l'«Arabité» commune à tous les pays arabes. En établissant ce discours oppositionnel, les États-Unis et l'Israël sont employés en tant que références rhétoriques nécessaires, l'Islam fait partie intégrante de l'«Arabité» en ce qu'il constitue une part homogène de l'identité en formation, une «Arabité» culturellement menacée converge dans un contexte où le monde est marqué par la globalisation. L'étude se termine par la démonstration qu'Al-Jazeera offre simplement une représentation de «l'Arabité» qui, en dépit de son pouvoir d'influence, ne présente qu'une manière parmi tant d'autres de percevoir l'identité arabe.

Note on Translation

The guests featured in the episodes examined in this project are Arabic and non-Arabic speaking. Translations from the original Arabic are all my own, unless otherwise indicated. In the case when analysis of translations from Arabic is conducted, I have attempted to maintain the integrity of the perspectives and arguments. In some instances, where applicable, these perspectives and arguments may have been left "accented," expressed non-idiomatically in English throughout the text in order to convey the type of discourse in Arabic being examined in this project for a reader in English.

Furthermore, some of the ideas, points of view, and arguments of non-Arabic speaking guests interpreted from their original language (English or French) into Arabic during the progress of the broadcast might have been compromised in interpretation. Because access to the original English or French contributions was unattainable, I relied on their Arabic simultaneous interpretations as they were broadcast. Nevertheless, this discrepancy does not necessarily interfere with the objectives of this study and contributes to the examination of notions and arguments in the talk shows as they are understood and interpreted in Arabic by an Arabic-speaking audience. It contributes to the general argument of this dissertation which addresses the way these ideas and notions are conceptualized as part of the oppositional discourse under study.

Introduction

Media, al-Jazeera, and September 11th,2001

Media since September 11th, 2001

To address the subject of al-Jazeera, the Qatari-based Arab news satellite channel, arguably means to recognize September 11th, 2001 as a departing point from which academic interest in the station emerged in the West. The September 11th attacks on the United States were symbolically depicted in the American media as ones against the American people, their beliefs and way of life. In facing this adversity, it was an opportunity for asserting the cohesion of society and for justifying a significant response (Chermak, Bailey & Brown 2003). The words of former FBI assistant director James Kallstrom on CNN echo this expression of unity: "People that hate us and hate what we stand for and hate our way of life have demonstrated that over and over again... and today they've brought that terrible hatred to the United States of America and we, as a country, as a nation, need to stand together" (Reynolds & Barnett, 2003, p. 96). The media contributed to shaping the narrative of this event through a recognizable discourse whose beginning culminated in a war that ended with democratic, moral victory, a discourse grounded in consensus and characterized by moral impulse and a healing ritual that excluded contestations and dissent (Chermak, Bailey & Brown 2003). It appears that, with the repression of dissenting perspectives, the "monolithic tendencies of mass media" represented the unrelenting official American response to these attacks as a favorable one. For

example, Amy Reynolds and Brooke Barnett (2003) explain that "CNN's breaking coverage of September 11 contained a plethora of keywords, images, sources of information, sentences, and thematic elements that, in the end, created a powerful, dominant frame – that a U.S. military-led international war would be the only meaningful solution to prevent more terrorist attacks" (p. 91). They furthermore add that CNN's initial framing of the events provided an impression of the imperative and inevitability of a retaliatory war, exemplifying the complicity of the media in narrowing public debate about this response.

The narrowing of meaningful discourse in relation to the September 11th attacks is not solely a characteristic of American media. In her study of the British press, Maggie Wykes (2003) notes that newspapers that were usually in opposition demonstrated a uniform pattern in explaining the course of action. They promoted a Western-centric unity that was pitted against the enemy of Islamic terrorism in war. Wykes refers to this "unity" as "a representational binding together of the West," that underlies the relationship between racism and war. In an attempt to emphasize patriotism or nationalism, she observes racism in press accounts of war in which the negative labeling of the Arab as "enemy" and the Middle East as "Other" prior to September 11, 2001 were honed to include religion and Islam as a "nation." Accordingly, the response to the events of September 11th corresponds not only to an elusive and ill-defined essentialization of the Arab-Muslim enemy but also to the discursive essentialization of the "West" as a unified response in media representations.

It also appears that, despite the rallying to war, on Afghanistan and subsequently on Iraq, as a legitimate and inevitable response following the

attacks on September 11th, 2001, there is an assumption that victory is not only necessary in the battlefield. In reference to the war on Iraq, S. Abdallah Schleifer (2004) claims that "this war was as much about television and its role in reporting on war and making war as it was about the oft-cited reasons for going to war: weapons of mass destruction, taking care of unfinished business (the 1991 betrayal of a popular Iraqi uprising), ending an oppressive regime, making a grab for Iraqi oil, serving Sharon's interests, or any combination of the above, depending on one's political persuasion" (p. 223). Following from Marshall McLuhan's predictions that future wars will be fought with images depicted in the mass media, Yahya Kamalipour (2004) writes that "[t]oday, 'the war of images' is in full swing, and image-makers are busily packaging and selling everything from soap, toys, and breakfast cereals to presidential candidates nations, religions, and ideas...Wars produce casualties, and in the contemporary war of images, words, and military aggression, the Middle East and everything associated with it suffers, physically and psychologically, from a relentless attack by U.S. and British politicians and the mass media" (p. 92). Therefore, there is a certain hollowness to the rhetoric adopted by American officials when referring to a campaign to "win the hearts and minds" of the people of the Arab-Islamic region. It casts a dubious shadow on the possible meaning of victory expressed in the discourse of American media following the formal end of military combat in Afghanistan, and more recently, in Iraq.

Indeed, the different portrayals of war on Afghanistan and on Iraq for American/Western audiences and for Arab audiences marked varying perceptions and interpretations of the events. James Poniewozik (2003, April 7)

of *Time* magazine remarks that it is not unusual for two sides to differently perceive the same war, especially that Arab and Muslim audiences have their homegrown television networks now through which their perspectives are reflected. This is what George Albert Gladney (2004) refers to as the "bifurcation of global media," and in turn, the "bifurcation of global perception" of war. He remarks that the, "Arab-Islamic world also saw the 9/11 destruction of the World Trade Center through Arab eyes, and global coverage of the investigation of that disaster provides the first real compelling evidence of the great disconnect or bifurcation of global media" (p. 24). He also indicates that to observers of war coverage there is a disconnect between the two media spheres, explaining that these two media spheres depict different realities for their audiences.

Under such circumstances, "winning the hearts and minds" of the peoples of the region, to understand and accept the American perspective, is wishful thinking at best. More recently, in particular reference to the situation in Iraq, the Arab media representing Arab public opinion are cynical of the Anglo-American slogan of "winning the hearts and minds." The Arab media's doubts about the success of selling the concept to the Arab public is employed by apparent failures to firstly sell the idea to a Western public. Therefore, perceived as a propagandist strategy for "mass deception," "winning the hearts and minds" moreover fails when it is expressed in a foreign language (Khoury-Machool 2004). Despite the diversity of opinions expressed in a variety of Arab media shaping wider Arab public opinion, Arab media "have been united in conveying the over-riding message that the coalition members are "invaders," and in representing the Iraqi people as an aggrieved Arab nation alongside the

Palestinians: unjustly occupied, humiliated, and suffering under siege" (Khoury-Machool, 2004, p. 315). The alternative perceptions that Arab media provide for their audiences thence correlate the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq with an invasion of their hearts.[1]

Al-Jazeera post-September 11th, 2001

Al-Jazeera rose to international fame almost as suddenly and unexpectedly as the event whose aftermath led to the station's emergence as an international player on the global media scene. In the wake of the September 11th attacks on the United States, al-Jazeera was formally introduced into the North American lexicon (Vesely 2002; Kelley 2002). Moreover, its name has often been synonymous with war (Iskandar & el-Nawawy 2004). For international observers with interest in media and/or the Middle East, al-Jazeera may have been considered an intriguingly-curious local phenomenon shortly following its inception. However, its global significance for specialists and non-specialists alike could not have been undermined, let alone denied, in the aftermath of the attacks on September 11th. In addition to becoming a household name in the Arab region, as well as, for Arabic-speakers living abroad, al-Jazeera equally became a recognizable name for non-Arabs in North America and across the world following 9/11 (el-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2002, p. 21).

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[1] Makram Khoury-Machool (2004) points out a translation of the coalition's campaign to "win" Iraqi hearts and minds as an "invasion" (ghazw al-qulub) in the official BBC Arabic website. He admits that it is "difficult to establish whether it was merely an unfortunate translation error rather than a Freudian slip" (p. 319). Nevertheless, this manner of translation remains noteworthy for this discussion.

Its rise on the international media stage and its global prominence did not spare the station further notoriety and increasing intrigue on the global scene. In the prelude to, and during the war on Afghanistan, Western governments and media, especially American ones like CNN, questioned al-Jazeera's credibility and news operations. However, circumstances prior to September 11th, 2001 enabled al-Jazeera's accomplishments. Because it was the only one of four media organizations (CNN, Reuters, and AP Television) to accept the Taliban regime's invitation in 1999 to open offices there (Rugh, 2004, p. 217), al-Jazeera was able to secure exclusive coverage of the war in Afghanistan. This wise decision, to invest in a permanent media presence in a country regarded as insignificant in 1999, gave the station a unique edge over other networks in reporting on the events in Afghanistan post-9/11. Al-Jazeera was able to fill a needed void when CNN declined a permanent presence in Afghanistan (Kelley 2002). The Taliban regime before and during the so called "war on terrorism" in Afghanistan solidified al-Jazeera's position when this regime prevented all other foreign networks from broadcasting within the Taliban-controlled areas (el-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2002, p. 24). Furthermore, debates over al-Jazeera's unfettered access that allowed for exclusive footage and news reports broadcast from within Taliban strongholds continued unabated. A rebroadcast of the 1998 interview with, and videotaped statements by Osama bin Laden on October 7, November 3, and December 27, 2001 "brought the network worldwide attention because they were used by CNN and many other broadcasters" (Rugh, 2004, p. 217). This broadcasting of the tapes, statements, and interviews with Osama bin Laden was specifically a primary issue that added to the controversy and intrigue, further

raising questions about the station's agenda and motivations in relation to the impact that these tapes have had on Arab and Muslim populations.

The debates notwithstanding, this monopoly over the coverage of the war on Afghanistan allowed the station to achieve major scoops and news exclusives, an achievement that the station's more powerful and competitive media rivals in the West envied and whose impact immensely concerned the Bush administration. In the aftermath of September 11th, the development of the station into an archrival for most of the main Western media organizations became a pressing concern for the U.S. government. This competitive edge coupled with the potency of al-Jazeera's anti-imperialist discourse and its efficacy in gauging and impacting the sentiments and mood of Arab populations around issues that speak to them did not go unnoticed by the American administration or any other Western government with interest in the Middle East. While al-Jazeera's involvement in Afghanistan during the American military campaign to oust the Taliban demonstrated the station's active and influential role in global media coverage, the American administration's frustrations with this coverage mounted. Consequently, the containment and monitoring of al-Jazeera became an imperative, and the maintenance of the hegemony of the United States in the region became associated with the task of controlling or influencing the station's activities. That the battlefront of ideas during American military campaigns has become a crucial dimension of the so called "war on terrorism" is an indication of this association.

In response, members of the Bush administration leveled allegations, on a number of occasions, of false or exaggerated reporting against al-Jazeera, in an

effort to combat what they perceive as the unfavorable impact of its broadcasts on Arab populations. Concerned that the station's journalistic achievements are contrary to their interests, Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, did not mince any words when he accused al-Jazeera of being a "mouthpiece" for terrorists because it broadcasts bin Laden's messages to the world (Rugh, 2004, p. 233), and Secretary of State, Colin Powell referred to the station's rhetoric as inflammatory, thereby requesting from the Qatari emir during an official visit to tone down what Powell perceived as anti-American content (el-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2002, p. 176; Kelley, 2002, p. 66; al-Zaidy, 2003, p. 94; Rugh, 2004, p. 234). It is not surprising that a stream of images broadcasting Afghan civilian casualties of the U.S. bombing (el-Nawawy & Iskandar 2002) furthermore alarmed the Bush administration, whose members in turn resented the station's reach and attempted to pressure the emir of Qatar to shut it down (Vesely 2002).

This attempt resembles the same type of pressure that Arab governments had leveraged only a few years prior, albeit unsuccessfully. The response of Qatari officials was swift: "How can an American administration priding itself on free speech even make such a request?" (Vesely, 2002, p. 11). The words of its managing director, Mohammed Jasim Al-Ali retort back with the same logic that espouses the democratic right to freedom of expression, whilst exposing the hypocrisy of the American administration: "We learned media independence from the United States and now the American officials want us to give up what we learned from them" (el-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2002, p. 176). In characteristically independent fashion, al-Jazeera's scrutiny of the American administration continued. The station continued to extend its critical eye onto the implications

of U.S. policy and actions pertaining to the Middle East, as it had not spared Arab governments prior to September 11th and the war in Afghanistan.

Al-Jazeera's successes and the publicity generated from controversies entrenched its position and reputation as a capable player in the business of the global dissemination of news. Against this backdrop of events, al-Jazeera was only beginning to demonstrate the extent to which it is able to rival the most powerful and dominant global news networks, especially CNN, through an abundance of scoops and news exclusives. More recently, al-Jazeera continued to demonstrate its influence during the war in Iraq, and following the toppling of Saddam Hussein's regime, it achieved a number of exclusives (e.g. the U.S. siege and subsequent military actions in Fallujah). Through facilitated access, both geographic and linguistic/cultural, to such newsworthy events in the Middle East that are deemed globally relevant, its media status as a pan-Arab news channel enables the success of its operations. These exclusives provided contrasting visual and textual discourses that challenged the ones appearing on American news programming. It is consequently difficult to disregard the implication directly or indirectly suggested by some observers that al-Jazeera is presenting a "new" or alternative type of discourse (Ghareeb 2000; Bahry 2001; El-Nawawy & Iskandar 2002; Rugh 2004). Al-Jazeera's news broadcasts became globally representative of an "Arab perspective," one that appeals to a general Arab audience and that contributes to empowering its presence and access to the news of the region over other foreign channels. For this reason, there is an assumption that al-Jazeera's challenge extends to the presentation of alternative discourses that are endowed with cultural sensitivity and regional appeal, framing the ways

in which news is consumed, interpreted and understood by Arab audiences. Its discourse consequently appears to have the ability to represent, if not establish, a sort of common Arab collectivity.

What is even more compelling is the active role that al-Jazeera seems to play on a global scale in favor of, as it claims, the interests of the Arab and Muslim regions, its ability to effectively infiltrate into the global circulation of competing news media discourses often assumed to be controlled and dominated by American/Western players. Al-Jazeera's challenge to Arab state-governed media, as well as dominant Western media with global reach, suggests a breach in the monopolization of information and news dissemination. For Arab governments, this breach means that the media cannot necessarily assume an effective role in maintaining control over Arab populations through the means of information and news dissemination. As Catherine Cassara and Laura Lengel (2004) claim, al-Jazeera appears to be forming an identity characterized by its lack of restraint in a region wherein there are generally no traditions of free press. Although this lack of restraint attributed to the station a sensationalist tendency in its programming that is offensive to many people, they argue that the station offended and alienated some people by its commitment not to bow down to pressures imposed upon it by governments that seek to mute its criticism of autocratic regimes. On the other hand, the dominance of Western news media discourse, to which Arab audiences formerly flocked to escape the censored information of their state-controlled news media outlets, is challenged, as well as the assumption that the dissemination of information and news can be solely controlled by the bias of Western perspectives. While Arab media observers

recognize the slant in the language and image choices of Arab networks, "they also see bias in Western TV, with its reliance on Administration and military talking heads and flag-waving features like MSNBC's pandering "America's Bravest" wall of G.I. photos" (Poniewozik, 2003, April 7, p. 69). In contrast, the slant adopted by the Arab media networks plays to their Arabic-speaking audiences as well.

In light of these challenges, the station poses a problem for both Arab and Western governments and media alike because it disrupts the status quo. It is, therefore, difficult to accept the view expressed by Hafez Al-Mirazi, al-Jazeera's Washington bureau chief, that his station is "an interpreter of news between the East and West...the translator in the middle" (Kelley, 2002, p. 67), or Mohammed el-Nawawy and Adel Iskandar's simplistic view that the station "is an unofficial two-way communications channel between the Arab and Western worlds," whereby the former tunes in for information and the latter for material and footage (p. 156). That al-Jazeera serves as an intercultural medium fostering dialogue remains a highly contestable issue because it can be perceived as an active, biased member or side in that dialogue, not an "in-between" facilitator that brings the two sides together. Indeed, because al-Jazeera alleges to operate in the interest of Arab populations, an important shift in examining Arab media must be considered. The assumption that there is a link between Arab media outlets and Arab governments no longer applies in this case. Furthermore, new considerations must include Arab public opinion as dissociated and different from the positions of Arab governments on a variety of political, social and cultural issues, one that is taken into account in the news and current affairs

programming of, at least, al-Jazeera. The appearance of British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, the U.S. National Security Advisor, Condoleeza Rice, and U.S. Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, in interviews on al-Jazeera emphasizes this new development. Expressed in the words of Egyptian television anchor and media expert, Hamdi Qandil, this new development "shows that for the first time, the Americans admit that they must address the people, not just the rulers. Their friendship with the Arab governments is not enough" (el-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2002, p. 158).

The relationship between the September 11th attacks on the United States for al-Jazeera cannot be underestimated, for it is the moment when the station turned global. Having secured exclusive media access in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, the station was able to broadcast exclusive footage that was used by media networks across the world. In addition, Arab-speaking audiences were the first to hear broadcasts from the world's most wanted man, Osama bin Laden. As events in the Middle East in the aftermath of September 11, 2001 became globally relevant in relation to the particular context of the "global war on terrorism," the station and its operations ceased to be limited to a regional role. The September 11th attacks became events after which al-Jazeera demonstrated that its impact is not regionally constrained, becoming the Arab region's representative on the global stage and influencing the global circulation of news. In fact, there is a perception that it challenges the monopoly on news by Western broadcasters in other places of the "non-West" where alternative news of world events are sought (Cassara & Lengel 2004). Following tensions with the Bush administration, the response of the Qatari government to the administration's requests to curb al-

Jazeera's rhetoric and activities provides a new instance that is inconsistent with the assumption that the United States could leverage its influence on governments of Arab countries known to be compliant to its demands, especially in the Gulf region. This novel twist possibly suggests new implications for future relationships between the United States and at least some formerly compliant Arab governments in general. In addition, it emphasizes the changing role of Arab media in the region and the renegotiated relationship that they are able to establish with Arab governments, thereby endowing the media with new found influence.

Having procured exclusives upon which Western media depended as footage, the station's rapid success and rivalry with Western media organizations as a new player on the world stage is intriguing to say the least. As Cassara and Lengel (2004) indicate, in spite of the fact that this footage is used in Western news broadcasts and al-Jazeera is cited as a source for facts in their coverage of news events, Western viewers of news broadcasts do not actually have access to the station's own interpretation of the news: "Western news outlets use Al-Jazeera as a convenient source of information in the Middle East, but rarely convey its take on any of the stories they use. Experts who watch both American networks and Al-Jazeera note that the former overlook the Qatari channel's value as a source of breaking news" (p. 230). In light of this perspective, one of the reasons why the Bush administration was incensed by al-Jazeera's operations could be attributed to the difficulties in maintaining a successful public relations campaign complementing its military actions, to promote the American perspective amongst the peoples of the region. Despite its frustrations with the

station, the American administration recognizes al-Jazeera's influential role in disseminating perspectives about its military action. As some scholars have noted, despite the extreme antagonism evoked by the Bush administration's rhetoric against al-Jazeera, members of the Bush administration have been paradoxically eager to appear on the channel to express policy positions (Cassara & Lengel 2004). While al-Jazeera projects itself and is in turn perceived as a station that provides coverage that interprets news from an "Arab perspective," a characteristic with which it prides itself, it "is fundamentally redrawing the map of the Arab world – both the West's understanding of the region and the region's understanding of itself – both impacting the 240 million residents of the Middle East and North Africa, and the millions more in the Arab Diaspora around the world" (Cassara & Lengel, 2004, p. 231).

Al-Jazeera as Discourse of 'Arabness'

Since its emergence as a significant player in news reporting in the aftermath of September 11, 2001, the burgeoning academic interest in al-Jazeera and its relationship to Western media coverage became evident with the increase in the literature in English that examines and discusses the station and the role that it has played both regionally and globally. Despite the modest literature in English devoted to the study of the station, evidence of the increase in academic interest seems to not only appease a desire to understand what has often been labeled as a media "phenomenon" but confirms the significance of this station to

media scholarship in the West.[2] In the context of a bifurcated media sphere, this interest was arguably prompted by the need to identify the influential role and understand the operations of the station in the aftermath of the September 11th attacks on the United States. Yet the disconnection between the two media spheres, Western and Arab, in reporting on the wars does not only suggest a bifurcation in the way that they were perceived. The different relationship that Western audiences and Arab audiences have with the station is implicated in the ways both audiences have come to know and interpret the station. Different viewers have come to know al-Jazeera in different ways and at different times. The former were familiar with the station as an association with the bin Laden tapes while the latter had already become familiar with the station's bold coverage of a variety of issues that interest Arab audiences. Even though American policy makers recognize the channel's reach and power, this aspect of al-Jazeera remains neglected in Western mainstream media (Cassara & Lengel 2004). Arab audiences' familiarity with al-Jazeera preceded its global role in reporting on the military campaigns: by September 11th, 2001, al-Jazeera had been firmly established as a characteristic part of the new Arab media landscape.

Because Western academic interest in al-Jazeera is connected to the post-9/11 context, the focus of most scholarship has been on its style of broadcast journalism and operations, and political-economy concerns such as its role in international relations and its economic self-sustenance. In fact, while al-Jazeera

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[2] Examples of this flow of scholarship on al-Jazeera include two new books that appeared in February and April 2005 respectively. They are Hugh Miles' entitled book, *Al-Jazeera : How Arab TV news challenged the world*, and Mohamed Zayani's edited anthology entitled, *The Al Jazeera phenomenon : critical perspectives on new Arab media.*

has been accused of "inflammatory rhetoric" by American officials, no single study to date has focused on programming content in order to adequately assess, for example, the nature of these accusations. This shortcoming is partly the result of linguistic accessibility to a station that broadcasts in Arabic to an Arabic-speaking audience, a fact that furthermore contributes to the argument of a disconnected global media sphere in which different audiences are exposed to different renditions of world events by influential media.[3] Moreover, there is a perception that percolates many academic and non-academic considerations of the station and its operations. Dubbed as the "voice of the Middle East" (Vesely 2002, July/August) and perceived as the "ambassador for the Arab world" and "the Arab world's CNN," al-Jazeera is considered to possess the "ability (if not mission) to unify Arab audiences everywhere: It has become the pan-Arab transnational channel" (el-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2002, p. 202). However, the conflation of the ability to broadcast signals to a pan-Arab audience, across Arab state national boundaries and beyond the region, and the assumption that this ability constitutes an act of unification across the variety of Arab differences is a problematic one to say the least. This conflation assumes that al-Jazeera adopts a discourse that is the sole representative of a presumably unified Arab voice by virtue of its ability to compete with Western global media giants. It also assumes that this competition challenges the news discourse presented by Western media and provides an alternative or "new" type of discourse.

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[3] Al-Jazeera is planning on launching al-Jazeera International early next year, an English language station based in Qatar that will be competing with CNN and the BBC in Europe and America. According to its managing director, Nigel Parsons, the station aims to reverse the flow of information (Sabbagh 2005).

Apart from exclusives, scoops, accessibility (geographic, linguistic, cultural), and excellence in Western-style journalism relative to the media offerings of the region at the time of its appearance on the media scene, what has al-Jazeera offered besides competitive journalism and news-gathering as a challenge to Western discursive dominance? In this dissertation, I argue that al-Jazeera offers an oppositional discourse with which its audience perceives and identifies itself in the context of the aftermath of the September 11th attacks in the United States. It does not necessarily provide an alternative to the dominance of Western media discourse. Moreover, the rhetoric of this oppositional discourse is not new for its Arab audience. On the contrary, opposition is typically expressed in anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist terms, contributing to the construction of an overarching notion of "Arabness" that is characteristically discursive.

The aim of this project is to provide an analysis of al-Jazeera content that is lacking in the literature on the station and to examine it as an overarching cultural discourse, the diversity of opinions on a variety of subject matter notwithstanding, that informs Arab identity across the region's state borders and beyond. The live talk shows that are featured on al-Jazeera are ideal sites for examining this oppositional discourse. They constitute important popular forums where spontaneous discussions of current affairs are fostered by conditions such as live broadcasts, previously an unknown practice in tightly-controlled Arab media. They are also sites for discursively framing the political, social, and cultural events that the Arab-Islamic region faces. The featured discussions provide the conceptual tools and frames through which events are interpreted by the audience, informing their sense of world events. The programs

take their cues from the news and current events, serving as forums for discussing current events and/or issues of the day. These sites mark the cultivation of ideas and perceptions of politics and society that, in turn, inform the audience's experiences of news, including their sense of everyday experiences of identity in relation to regional and world events. Three talk shows will constitute the sites for examination: *al-Ittijah al-Mu'akis* (The Opposite Direction), *Bila Hudoud* (Without Boundaries), and *Li-Nisa' Faqat* (For Women Only).

Each episode of *The Opposite Direction* features two guests of diametrically opposed views on a specific topic who are pitted against each other in a heated debate, a novel formula in the Arab media. Each guest is expected to explain and defend his or her position. Topics of this weekly debate program are highly sensitive political, cultural or religious issues, although they are often prompted by news and current affairs. Described in the words of its host, Faisal al-Kasim (1999),

> *The Opposite Direction* is modeled on the *Crossfire* format, but this show is even fiercer and more tumultuous than its western counterparts. In a live, two-hour weekly broadcast, two guests from opposite sides of the spectrum on a variety of political, social, economic, cultural, or religious issues come face-to-face in debate and take calls from viewers. (p. 94)

This is arguably the most popular talk show on the station. It has acquired a reputation unmatched by any other talk show. It is evident that scholars and writers on the subject of al-Jazeera frequently refer to this program or its host, Faisal al-Kasim, or both as examples in their discussion of the station or its impact. Notorious for its heated debates, this program is the oft-cited example of the station's sensationalism. Its host is often accused of encouraging such

sensationalism in order to promote a particular agenda, even though his critics exhibit no consensus on the nature of such agenda that has been described in contradictory ways.[4]

Conducted in the form of an interview by its host, Ahmad Mansour, *Without Boundaries*[5] is a weekly program that features political, social, or cultural personalities. These guests include political and religious figures, filmmakers, directors of organizations, activists and intellectuals among others. Topics are also prompted by news and current affairs, political, social and cultural developments in which guests are asked to explain and elaborate on the issue at hand or defend their positions vis-à-vis a particular issue. And finally, *For Women Only* addresses similar types of issues as the other two programs from a women's perspective. It also addresses other issues that are, otherwise, considered to be ones that particularly pertain to the concerns of Arab and/or Muslim women. This program invites a number of guests at a time (usually female) to debate issues and provides previously-taped segments complementing the discussion.

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[4] This is one example of the accusation levelled against al-Jazeera that it advances one agenda over another. While there is no consensus on the exact nature of this agenda, the political orientations that have been levelled against this show have been contradictory reflecting a wide spectrum of critical views. It appears that what these contradictory accusations reveal are the diverse political orientations of the critics levelling these accusations, not necessarily that of al-Jazeera.

[5] While the English translation of the titles of the other programs generally maintains their intended meaning in the original Arabic, the translation of *Bila Hudoud* requires notation. The first word *Bila* is a negation, "*no*" or "*without,*" and the word *Hudoud* can mean any one of the following words: *borders, boundaries, frontiers,* or *limits*. The program's email frontiers@aljazeera.net indicates a preference for using the corresponding word, "*frontiers,*" in English. In my translation, I prefer to use "*boundaries*" instead. To my mind, the word "*boundaries*" semantically encompasses both borders and limits of any kind, while "*frontiers*" in contrast suggests a presumed limitless open space in which freedom of expression is possible. I believe that my translation "*Without Boundaries*" better reflects al-Jazeera's statement and purpose of *actually* lifting censorship over subject matter deemed inappropriate or taboo and the open nature of the dialogue that occurs between the program's host and his guests.

There are a number of reasons for my choices. As most live talk show programming on al-Jazeera, the topics discussed on these shows are all prompted by news and current affairs, or they are recurrent political, social, and cultural issues that are discussed within the context of, or in relation to current events. Because most talk shows deal with issues either directly related or linked to news and current affairs, my concern is to choose talk show programs that are representative of the forms and styles in which such issues are addressed and discussed. In the case of *The Opposite Direction*, two guests are featured in a debate. *Without Boundaries* features an interview with a leading figure, and *For Women Only* invites a number of guests to form a circle discussion of the issue at hand, in addition to its taped segments and accounts from a women's perspective. In addition to receiving live contributions by phone, faxes, and e-mails from viewers, the three programs specifically ask questions at the beginning of each episode that frame the topic and set the agenda for discussing it. With the exception of *The Opposite Direction* which begins by introducing both sides of the debate, each set of questions are important in identifying the framework through which audiences are expected to interpret the topic.

After reviewing all episodes for each talk show broadcast during a six month period (September 2003 – March 2004), the episodes chosen for analysis for my purposes in this project are emblematic of the way themes and issues are treated in the discussions of the talk shows. The episodes were deliberately chosen to represent the political, religious, and cultural dimensions of "Arabness" in general rather than to focus on specific events or news items. My aim here is not to provide a survey or an overview of topics or themes of al-Jazeera's talk

show programming. Furthermore, I am neither suggesting that these topics or themes necessarily dominate the programming of al-Jazeera in general, nor do they necessarily characterize the station's news-gathering functions. Instead, my objective is to identify the discursive patterns and strategies that are recurrent across these episodes that contribute to informing a sense of collective identification across Arab borders. This type of "Arabness" is problematic because, like any identity in general, it is unstable and volatile. Still, the way that it is uniquely manifested in discourse is significant for its rhetorical influence. It provides a powerful and resonant mode of identification, and it is maintained in the discourse of these talk shows in spite of the plurality of perspectives representing a variety of participants, Arabs and non-Arabs, male and female, intellectuals and practitioners in various social and cultural domains.

In my analysis, I treat the talk shows as media texts that form a discourse constructing this notion of "Arabness." Specifically, the analysis of the transcripts of each chosen episode will be conducted on two levels. First, I will examine the questions and introductory comments that frame the topic at the beginning of each episode. The purpose is to identify the underlying assumptions that frame the discussion in order to determine the possibility of a discursive agenda advanced by the program's host. Second, I will examine the guests' interjections by noting the person (or people) who has (have) the upper hand in the discussion or debate and the reasons for this advantage. Moreover, I will examine the ways the host of the program mediates these interjections and contributions, as well as, the impact of the reactions of callers who react to the discussion.

Analysis conducted along these two levels will enable me to organize the recurrent motifs that emerge from the texts of the programs into systems of regularities – or what Michel Foucault calls discursive formations – that inform the order of the particular type of power-knowledge relations and oppositional Arab response to it. I want to demonstrate how "Arabness" as a discursive category of identification is reproduced by patterns that create and separate it from other identities: the conceptual frame through which knowledge of one's "Arabness" is discursively formed and produced, what can be said about identity or otherwise discredited. The findings are limited to achieving this objective. They do not presuppose the ways audiences might actually interpret these discussions. In other words, I am rather interested in the ways in which this discourse related to identity is formed without necessarily assuming the ways it might actually be received or interpreted by the diverse Arabic-speaking viewership. In addition, the purpose of the narrative style of presenting the content of the talk shows in the chapters that follow is to maintain the integrity of the text in Arabic – insofar as translation permits the accomplishment of this end. My endeavor, therefore, is to provide a sampling of al-Jazeera programming content that is otherwise unavailable to a non-Arabic speaking audience.

In the following chapter, in reviewing the literature on Arab media and al-Jazeera, I will consider the context in which it emerged on the Arab media scene and the main issues that contributed to the change in perceptions of, and relationship to news media in the Arab region. In Chapter 2, I attempt to provide a conceptual framework for considering the anti-colonial, anti-imperialist characteristic of al-Jazeera's discourse against the backdrop of intensifying global

interconnections and processes. The remaining chapters consider the United States and Israel as necessary rhetorical references constructing an oppositional discourse (chapter 3); the infusion of Islam into "Arabness" as a necessary element in identity formation and against the backdrop of a perceived Islamic global threat (chapter 4); and finally, the way in which these discursive elements converge to offer a cultural form of identification in relation to a world marked by increasing intensification of global processes (chapter 5). In conclusion, al-Jazeera offers merely *a* representation of "Arabness" that, in spite of its power to influence, remains one image of how Arab identity can be perceived for a region and peoples whose diversity more often than not poses practical problems on the ground than discursive invocations of their collectivity reveal.

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Al-Jazeera and the New Face of Arab Media Communication

Long before its presence and influence were really felt in North America and elsewhere around the globe, al-Jazeera, from its inception, has been the source of controversy and intrigue in the Arab region. Even while a new Arab media environment was taking form with the advent of new communications technology, the Qatari-based Arab satellite news network represented an anomaly against this backdrop. This chapter considers the changing relationship between Arab media and governments post-1990. It begins with an examination of the circumstances and factors that led to the rise of new Arab satellite channels such as al-Jazeera. These factors include the introduction of new technological innovations in Arab media communications, namely satellite television and the relationship of governments to media ownership and operation. I will subsequently argue that al-Jazeera was a unique case at the time of its inception that deviates from the new patterns characterizing this new phase in Arab communications and highlights new stakes associated with media operations in the new media environment in the Middle East. The station furthermore exposes the tenuousness of the new figurations of media and politics post-1990, in its relationship with the Qatari government, as it projects cross-border Arab identification.

The Emergence of Satellite Television

The 1990s could arguably be considered a decade that marked a communications revolution in the Middle East. According to Muhammad Ayish (2001), it comprises the third historical phase in the technological development of Arab mass media following the colonial and post-colonial phases.[1] Against the backdrop of a post-Cold war political environment featuring a global digitally-based explosion of information, Ayish (2001) also remarks that the decade marked two important political developments as well, the second Gulf War and the launch of the Middle East peace process. At the end of the Gulf War in 1991, and in addition to the emergence of a so-called New World Order, developments in the region went beyond the re-configuration of the political scene and a re-positioning of the Middle East within international relations.

One significant transformation of the media landscape during the 1990s was the emergence of a new type of television, one that is broadcast from satellite. In comparison to other media, satellite technology "is doing to television what short-wave did to radio" (Ghareeb, 2000, p. 397).[2] Because the importance of radio and television is attributed to the high illiteracy rates in the Arab region (Amin 2001), the significance of satellite television by virtue of its

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[1] In his own words, Ayish (2001) explains the difference between the first two earlier phases. He writes, "Whereas the colonial phase was characterized by externally induced efforts to introduce media technologies to serve colonial political and missionary objectives, the post-colonial phase was associated with the "dominant paradigm" of development thinking, which envisaged a vital role for the mass media in national transformation" (p. 115).

[2] The uses to which communications technologies were put were informed by indigenous Arab traditions. Radio's efficacy in Arab society was even more unique, as it "became an ideal tool of communication in the orally oriented Arabic culture" (Ayish, 2001, p. 113). For example, the skillful oratory of former Egyptian president Gamal 'Abdel-Nasser benefited immensely from the then new medium of radio, confirming that new communication technologies contribute to political, social, and economic transformations (Ghareeb 2000).

ability to reach and influence large segments of Arab populations is no exception. Yet, one cannot simply attribute the burgeoning and success of satellite television in the Middle East to the mere introduction of this new communications technology and the consequent development of Arab broadcasting practices. The success of American Cable News Network (CNN) and the role it played during the 1991 Gulf war also contributed to the contextual backdrop against which Arab satellite channels, especially al-Jazeera, arrived on the scene (Ghareeb 2000, Rugh 2004). At least at the time, CNN continued to offer the standard for broadcast journalism in terms of professionalism and global influence.

Still, it was not only the success of CNN's 24-hour all-news format in attracting a wide regional audience that was the catalyst for this media transformation in the region. Frustrations over Western and American – namely CNN – coverage, in particular, were echoed throughout the Arab region, even in media circles because reporting was done by a small number of Western journalists belonging to countries who were party to the conflict. The reasons for this frustration varied, ranging from resentment towards the gloating about Western military and technological superiority to the unquestioning and cheerleading attitude of Western journalists in general who were perceived to buy into the government line. Thus, it accentuated the need and calls for major changes to Arab media (Ghareeb 2000). It was common knowledge that Arabs, who had lost faith in their media outlets, controlled by the government and its censors, gravitated towards foreign media to obtain news and information on current affairs. During the second "post-colonial" phase, strict government controls over information flows were effectively circumvented with the aid of new

media technologies. In the 1960s, transistor radio receivers made international news programming accessible, and in the 1970s, audiocassette and videocassette recorders enabled Arab audiences to access uncensored programs and to replace dull official programming (Ayish 2001; Boyd 1993). Muhammad Ayish (1991), in an article that discusses the popularity of the BBC Arabic radio service amongst Middle Eastern audiences, affirms this tendency to rely on foreign media especially during times of crisis. Moreover, he wrote at the time, "audiences lost to foreign media may be regained only through development of national good quality programme output capable of surmounting the temptations of outside broadcasters. In light of the current mass media situation in the Arab World, this challenge does not seem to be seriously considered by Arab broadcasters" (Ayish, 1991, p. 383).

However, a lot has changed since the time Muhammad Ayish provided this recommendation and observed the seemingly discouraging state of Arab media. Even well before the rise of al-Jazeera on the Arab media scene, many Arab governments and private investors (as will be discussed later) had been alerted at the same time to the potential of the satellite revolution against which they found themselves. Not only did Egyptian Space Net play a role in delivering information to Arab military forces during the war, but in its aftermath, in seeking to seize a place in the new era of global communication, Kuwait subsequently deemed it necessary to establish its own network despite the damage that its studios incurred during the occupation and military action (Amin 1996).

My memory of my days in Iraqi-occupied Kuwait, indeed, confirms the popularity of foreign media outlets and serves to recollect an experience in which there was a substantial reliance on the foreign radio news broadcasts. Listening to foreign news bulletins became a daily activity, and the radio as a medium became a symbolic object of liberation around which members of my family and most households in Kuwait hovered. Nonetheless, the contrast between my television experience pre- and post-invasion is noteworthy, as I recall the novelty, for example, in watching broadcasts from the Egyptian satellite channel courtesy of Kuwaiti television.[3] What was perhaps so novel about this experience is the concerted exposure to television that was not otherwise available to Middle Eastern audiences residing outside the purview of a channel's country of origin and its sanctioning, or censoring, government. This situation cannot solely be attributed to the advent of the new satellite broadcasting technology but also to changes in the global political climate in which it was introduced.

The Relationship between Media and Government

Television usually operated as a national venture intended mainly for viewers from within the respective national borders of each Arab country. According to Hussein Amin (1996; 2001) Arab broadcast media can be categorized into two groups: the first operates under a national mobilization philosophy and accordingly exercises absolute control over the media (Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen, and Sudan); and the second group operates

[3] Kuwait was broadcasting the Egyptian channel as part of its programming during reconstruction and resumption of its own services following the liberation from Iraqi occupation.

under a bureaucratic laissez-faire philosophy (all other states except Morocco and Lebanon.). With particular reference to print media, William Rugh (2004) adds to, and elaborates on, these two categories for the purpose of analysis into a typology of four categories: the mobilized (Syria, Libya, Sudan, and pre-2003 Iraq), loyalist (Saudi Arabia, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Oman, and Palestine), diverse (Lebanon, Kuwait, Morocco, and Yemen), and transitional (Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia, Algeria, post-2003 Iraq) systems.[4] The similarity in categorization between the two media scholars is evident, as Kai Hafez (2001) remarks that while Rugh's typology was primarily reserved for print media, it can be applied to other types of media as well, namely broadcast media.[5] Hence, although media ownership was influenced by European models in structural terms, "local political and social arrangements in the post-independence era produced highly centralized communication systems geared exclusively toward nation-building goals" (Ayish, 2001, p. 113).

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[4] Consequent to the experience of direct European colonialism, media under the mobilization system developed during politically turbulent times, contain nationalist and anti-imperialist sentiment, and are nationalized by the regime. Under the loyalist system, media experiences varying and inconsistent degrees of freedom, and despite the authoritarian and high degree of government influence, these controls are indirect and subtle. Despite the existence of private press ownership, the print media remains loyal to the regime when presenting news and commentary. In contrast to the previous two, the diverse media is far less authoritarian. There is limited government influence, and it exhibits a significant degree of diversity and freedom of expression. Finally, government influence of the press is conducted through legal means and the courts. The largest circulation print media are directly controlled by the government but privately owned smaller publications exist. While self-censorship and restrictions exist, they are nonetheless openly discussed. This system exhibits characteristics from the other systems, and since it is undergoing change, its outcome is uncertain.

[5] Kai Hafez (2001) was referring to William Rugh's 1979 edition of his book titled, *The Arab Press: News Media and Political Process in the Arab World.* Rugh updates this typology of print media in the 2004 edition of his book titled *Arab Mass Media: Newpapers, Radio, and Television in Arab Politics.* He examines broadcast media and particularly focuses on satellite television.

Regardless of the group according to which the media system of any Arab country is categorized, there is no doubt that Arab media operates and is generally structured in ways that secure and maintain the unchallenged position of the ruling government. In fact, in comparison to other global media systems in the world, the Middle East is considered the most closed and controlled television region (Sinclair, Jacka, & Cunningham 1996). Still, their shared concern over media control notwithstanding, Arab governments are often not motivated by the same national or political objectives and cultural values or outlook. Hussein Amin (1996) explains that one of the features of Arab television is its role as an arm of government policy and national projection. In the case of Egypt, as Amin elaborates, the popularity of Egyptian film and the recognition of the Egyptian dialect as a sort of lingua franca amongst Arabs resulted in political and cultural fallout in relation to some Arab governments who have expressed concern over the liberal ethos of programming. Primarily, the media function to convey news and information, provide commentary and interpretations, reinforce social and cultural norms, and to entertain (Amin 1996, 2001; Rugh 2004). With much of its revenue derived from the state rather than advertising, Arab media systems are implicitly monopolies through which direct government supervision is exercised (Amin 1996, 2001).

Consequently, television programming was subjected to varying degrees of censorship in Arab states, as part of regulatory measures undertaken to serve the interests of national governments and in order to project a unified national front. The limitations placed on freedom of expression vary from one Arab country to another, depending on the political regime in each country. Policies regarding

the freedom of expression have fluctuated according to the political mood in the respective country and to the shifting character of the regime in power (Hafez 2001). This inconsistency has its bearings on analysis and the difficulty in sustaining the aforementioned ascriptions of analytic categories or an Arab media typology. Moreover, the contribution of Arab media has been limited insofar as the media are government-controlled apparatus that distort and disguise information about important social, political, and cultural issues in the respective country, opposing participatory development that encourages the exchange, reproduction and enrichment of information through the media (Hafez 2001). This limitation could be explained by taking into account the conditions of post-independence against which newly independent states had to persevere. These newly independent states adopted the stance that "it is more important to speak with a national voice than to encourage dissent," since the rationale claimed "that press freedom endangers national security and the welfare of the state" (Ayish, 2001, p. 122). The argument for a nationally-unified voice at the expense of dissent, freedom of expression, and open debate continued to be a legitimate justification for the tight hold that governments had on media operations. Eventually, it became an unquestioned aspect of Arab media culture in which even automatic self-censorship in some cases became part of the enforcement of government censorship. It tacitly became part of the censorship mechanisms implemented by governments and according to which media practitioners were socialized and media practices were cultivated.

However, this tight hold on the media began to loosen with the advent of economic and political globalization trends. Not only has the globalization of

national economies meant a relative degree of liberalization and democratization in the governance of Arab societies, but also "the diffusion of free market orientations manifested in the rise of privatization as a defining concept of emerging national and global realities" (Ayish, 2001, p. 122). The introduction of new media, namely the Internet and satellite television, in the Arab region altered the way Arabs receive their news and information and significantly minimized governments' ability to control the flow of information (Ghareeb 2000). In light of the intense competition among emergent private broadcasters, it is likely that Arab audiences will be able to seek their information and entertainment across state boundaries, despite attempts by governments to control news and information (Amin 2001). Indeed, it became possible for people living in the Middle East to access other Arab and international television networks that evade direct control, censorship, or requirements of government approval of content (Amin 1996).[6] The particular conditions, in which these new media were introduced, moreover, upset the traditional setting of Arab media. They furthermore allowed for privatization as a potentially viable challenge to state ownership and control of the media.

[6] The situation is not "new" per se, since the overflow of broadcast signals (weather permitting) and/or the proximity of countries within the range of broadcasting signals allowed for trans-border access. This access however was intermittent, unreliable and uneasy to obtain. The novelty is not precisely the trans-border flow but the ease, consistency, and speed of the flow of signals, facilitated by new media technologies. This development allowed broadcasters to imagine other types of viewing communities outside state boundaries that evaded any concerted attempt by governments to censor programming by blocking signals.

Privatization of Arab Media

The new satellite channels transgress the sanctity of national boundaries to impact in their varying capacities, with varying effects, most aspects of the political, social and cultural life of Arab societies. In addition to the diverse political and social cultures and values across Arab state national boundaries, the diversity existing within the boundaries of each respective Arab state is equally noticeable. John Sinclair, Elizabeth Jacka, and Stuart Cunningham (1996) remark on satellite technology's ability to abolish distance and to link remote territories into new viewing communities; thereby transgressing all types of political and cultural boundaries. They explain that the satellite experience in Europe and elsewhere represented a 'Trojan horse" of media liberalization that, insofar as its ability to transgress borders without threatening national viewing patterns, encouraged otherwise reluctant governments to permit more internal commercialization and competition. In contrast, before 1990 and prior to the introduction of satellite technology, support for the development of a strong television industry and technological investments by Arab governments was motivated by political and social rather than economic factors and marketplace considerations (Amin 1996; Ayish 2001).

In the wake of satellite technology post-1990, the region witnessed a proliferation of satellite channels that mushroomed at an exceedingly high rate in a short period of time, and the emergence of transnational media was coupled with a trend towards the privatization of Arab media. For the first time, there was growing involvement of the private sector in the Arab broadcasting industry, and a feature of the development of satellite channels is the increase of private

sector services whose finances draw from commercial sources (Ayish 2001). According to Muhammad Ayish (2001), "[f]or the first time, commercial interests seem to be competing with political ones in the introduction of new technologies to the Arab broadcasting sector" (p. 116). But to what extent is this assessment accurate? Has privatization in the Arab media system truly been able to eliminate government censorship and allow freedom of expression? Moreover, how successful has it been in eliminating or surmounting the problem of diverse and competing political ideologies that Arab governments espouse? One way of addressing these questions and evaluating the impact of privatization on Arab media systems is by considering the Saudi-based media conglomerates that have appeared on the media scene post-1990.

Commercial media projects inside and outside the Arab region began with print media when the first pan-Arab, Saudi-owned *al-Sharq al-Awsat* and *al-Hayat* newspapers were launched. Both are edited in London, but printed in a number of Arab cities. In fact, satellite technology was first used to transmit daily satellite-printed versions of these newspapers (Ghareeb 2000). It is this technological convergence of media that also underlies not just the commercial nature of these ventures but the emergence of pan-Arab, non-state-identified regional media disseminating within and outside the Arab region and across Arab state national borders. Nonetheless, it is imperative to consider the Saudi connection to this private media enterprise. For example, although both newspapers are apparently pan-Arab in character, their Saudi ownership and Saudi influence cannot be easily dismissed or overlooked.

There is no doubt that Saudi investors are the most visible and influential pioneers of such ventures. A key feature of the current media phase in the Arab region is the rise of Saudi-based media conglomerates and the influence they exert on Arab media systems (Ayish 2001). After 1990, such notable Saudi-owned satellite stations as Arab Radio and Television (ART), Orbit, and the Middle East Broadcasting Center (MBC) beamed their signals into the Arab region. MBC, the first privately owned Arabic-language station, was particularly prominent on the Arab media scene when it was first launched. Adopting Western-style reporting and projecting itself as the "CNN of the Arab world," MBC was a pioneer in breaking taboos; for example, it was the first to interview Israeli guests (Ghareeb 2000) and to open an office in Jerusalem (Amin 1996). By the same token and in its own innovative style, ART established a new trend towards specialty channels through a network that offers programming for children, movies, sports, and other content.

These stations ensured that their programming did not conflict with the views and positions of the government of Saudi Arabia. Privately-owned stations did not mean media operations were free from government influence and/or control. Private owners usually have close ties to Arab governments, and the most notable example is that of Saudi investors, who maintain close ties to the Saudi regime. Therefore, privately owned Arab media does not necessarily mean more liberalization and diversity. As Kai Hafez (2001) points out, privatization is an extended form of disguised control by governments, as in the case of Saudi satellite television whose owners are relatives of the ruling Saud family. In the case of other countries, Hafez indicates that private owners are part of a

framework in which private and state interests are interconnected. As these cases demonstrate, private media remain loyal to governments and resist liberalization and diversification of programming. This is clearly evident in the privately-owned satellite channels that took to the airwaves post-1990. MBC avoided sensitive issues that concerned Saudi Arabia and the Gulf region (Ghareeb 2001), and it reflected pressure from the Saudi regime to spread its views throughout the region (Amin 1996). Evidently, Saudi Arabian political and cultural sensibility sharply contrasted with that of other financially disadvantaged parts of the Arab region. Hence, it cannot be assumed that Saudi-owned or controlled media – as dominating and pervasive as they might be – account for, let alone reflect or represent, other political or cultural tendencies present in the Arab world; this is especially the case as such tendencies can often go contrary to, and compete with, Saudi perspectives.

While the Saudi media conglomerates were able to maintain their hegemony over the Arab media, this strong presence did not necessarily mean that it was left unchallenged. It is noteworthy, then, to acknowledge the diversity of competing media representations of "Arabness," of varying modes of constructing and representing Arab identification. One interesting example is the case of the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation International (LBCI). In 1996, the Lebanese government threatened the channel's news programs claiming that the content was negatively affecting Lebanon's relations with other Arab countries. And despite the government's attempt to establish a censorship board, LBCI went to court and prevailed over the government (Ghareeb 2000). In this case, even more liberal Lebanon cannot easily override the Saudi media

hegemony. The late Lebanese Prime Minister, Rafiq Hariri had very close ties to the Saudis, who have been known to be influential in Lebanese affairs. And whereas Hariri has direct control over his own satellite channel, Future International, its rival LBCI is also affected through actions by his own government.

Privatization of the Arab media, as exemplified by the Saudi media conglomerates, did not necessarily eliminate the strain placed on freedom of expression. Arab governments' notorious sensitivity to what is perceived to be negative or unfavorable news reporting about Arab leadership and governments has caused such reactions as banning satellite dishes (e.g. in Saudi Arabia and pre-2003 Iraq) or refusing to develop telecommunication infrastructures to link Arab countries to the global information community (Amin 2001). However, the competition between the channels did relatively allow for more diversity than Arab audiences had previously experienced. Perhaps, this diversity accentuates the social and cultural differences across Arab national boundaries rather than overcomes them, in pursuit of a more united base with which Arabs across their state borders could identify. Still, Edmund Ghareeb (2000) contemplates the prospect that the

> creation of greater Arab cultural unity through the broadening of cross-border discourse, the accessibility to more authoritative news and analysis, the exposure to other Arab cultural traditions, may all combine to help create a common Arab agenda, and perhaps more important, may plant the seeds for the growth of a more active and involved citizenry, which is better informed and is interested in participating in the decision-making process. (p. 418)

Ghareeb (2000) contemplates the prospect that new Arab media could be seen as creating a new Arab public opinion that is not based on ideology. A policy paper

for the Washington Institute for Near East Policy argues this trend by claiming that pan-Arab satellite channels contribute to a new type of "Arabism" (Alterman, 1998). In this paper, Jon Alterman predicts that this new Arabism, especially if anti-Americanism is central to its movement, is capable of posing challenges to American interests and unilateral action, in such cases as the U.S. sanctions against Iraq and the support for Israel. The new reality of new communications technology indicates that new forms of Arab interconnectedness appear to be demarcated by the reach of satellite signals rather than the borders of Arab states. This new reach establishes and convenes viewing communities of Arabs from the region as well as in the diaspora that could determine new ways of conceiving identity.

Qatar's al-Jazeera and the New Media Environment

Of all the emergent news networks, al-Jazeera has acquired a notoriety that adds to its novelty as a specialty channel operating against the backdrop of the new media environment. The channel has caused much upheaval, impacting the way Arab countries conducted their affairs regionally as well as internationally. Al-Jazeera in particular is a controversial player that has uniquely revolutionized the way news and current affairs are determined, interpreted, and delivered in the Arab region. Al-Jazeera's existence and operation is an anomaly not only because it transgresses pre-1990 media conventions in the Arab region, but also because it exists and operates in ways that, in some cases, are contrary even to the conditions of the new media environment that it gradually became an active participant in shaping. In light of

this deviation from convention, al-Jazeera's new role as a regional player can be understood as providing a specific alternative to Arab media offerings, the most prominently-recognizable one around the world.[7]

Concomitant to the emergence of new communications technologies, the 1990s also witnessed a new political environment. The shifting political landscape in the Arab region witnessed the emergence of new young Arab rulers, namely those who have replaced their fathers as heads of state. The end of an epoch of an older, typically more authoritarian, Arab style of governance induced the relative opening up of Arab societies under the auspices of new young Western-educated rulers. Consequently, the emergence of new media and communication technologies corresponded with changes on the political level. Notable examples of these rulers include King Abdullah of Jordan, President Bashar Al-Asad of Syria, and King Mohammed IV of Morocco, who replaced their fathers after their death. By contrast, the ascendancy of the new emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, to power is one that bears on the uniqueness of al-Jazeera as a representative of a country that had previously been regarded as a less prominent player on the broader regional and international scenes. The circumstances of this ascendancy to power further contribute to understanding al-Jazeera's deviation from the common patterns of media purpose and functions, even from those patterns that emerged and are shaped by the new media landscape post-1990.

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[7] According to al-Jazeera, the station and its online website was recognized by South Korean politicians, journalists and researchers interested in Arab and Islamic affairs as a new and reliable source. They were exclusively dependent on Western media outlets prior to that point. See http://www.aljazeera.net/news/archive/archive?ArchiveId=76338. Retrieved on, July 1, 2005.

Upon his rise to the throne in the aftermath of a peaceful coup, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani of Qatar, who deposed his father while he was abroad on a state visit, was responsible for instituting various reforms aimed at modernizing and democratizing his state. The idea of al-Jazeera emerged from his democratization project, and since its inception, the station benefited from policies aimed at protecting its freedom of expression.[8] He introduced initiatives that were the first of its kind in the state of Qatar, and generally in the Arab Gulf states, which included such notable reforms as granting women the right to vote for members of a newly created Municipal Council and the abolition of the Ministry of Information, traditionally responsible for media censorship (al-Zaidy 2003; Bahry 2001; el-Nawawy & Iskandar 2002; Sakr 2001).

Prior to these changes, Qatar had been unknown on the international scene and was also not very influential on the Arab political scene. The ousted emir, father of the current one, had previously relied on traditional modes of political governance founded on tribal conventions, and his foreign policy had been overshadowed by Saudi Arabia, with which the former Qatari ruler coordinated regarding international affairs. However, the new emir's initiatives have significantly invigorated the stagnant state of Qatari traditional institutions and helped direct his rule away from Saudi Arabia's sphere of influence (al-Zaidy

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[8] Qatar was fortunate from the outset when it found a host of unemployed media professionals, who were available for hiring at the new channel. The majority of al-Jazeera staff worked for the BBC Arabic service, and they were fired after the Saudi-owned Orbit revoked its contract with the BBC because of programming deemed too critical of Saudi Arabia. (See Sakr 2001; Rugh 2004; el-Nawawy & Iskandar 2002). Ironically, Saudi Arabia's fallout with the BBC over content issues contributed to al-Jazeera's staffing with media personnel who have, in turn, continued their critical approach to Arab, and specifically, Saudi affairs with more vigour. Despite the expanded margin of freedom, self-censorship in Qatar, and especially Qatari-controlled media remains (el-Nawawy & Iskandar 2002).

2003). Furthermore, the weakness and inefficiency of the former Qatari ruler and the corruption that prevailed in the government sector had served as the backdrop against which the ruling al-Thani family supported the son's coup against his father (el-Nawawy & Iskandar 2002). Of all the Qatari initiatives, al-Jazeera generated the most debate within political, media, and intellectual circles about the purpose of the Qatari government's establishment of the station. The question that is often posed, and at which no consensus is achieved in response, continues to be at the forefront of these debates: to what extent is this venture motivated by genuine convictions in democratization than by political or other personal interests (al-Zaidy 2003)?

If the main trends of satellite channel ownership in the Middle East post-1990 gesture towards the protection of vested interests and monitoring of editorials and program content, then the relationship between al-Jazeera and the Qatari government is one that is perplexing; at least if one is to comprehend democratization as adopted by the Qatari government and, by extension, to the rest of the Arab region through al-Jazeera. While privatization might, in principle, suggest a liberalizing trend, the case of Arab, especially Saudi, private investors with links to the Saudi government, suggests that privatization alone does not lead to editorial autonomy. Furthermore, government involvement in satellite channels is common across the Arab region, and it is motivated by political reasons (Rugh 2004). The example of al-Jazeera, on the other hand, deviates from this pattern whereby it allegedly maintains autonomy from Qatari government control. Among the major satellite channels, it is the only channel that is completely outside Saudi influence (Rugh 2004). As Louay Bahry (2001)

writes, "[t]he TV satellite, al-Jazeera, is considered privately owned. Although the station is managed independently, it is not owned by private capital; the station still receives financial support from the government" (p. 89).

Still, the financial support of the Qatari government for al-Jazeera continues to raise eyebrows. In an attempt to dissociate itself from al-Jazeera's editorial content, the Qatari government declared the station's start-up funds as a loan that would last five years (Sakr 2001). In other accounts, these funds are reported to be a one-time donation by the emir of Qatar, and in any case, al-Jazeera continues to receive subsidies from the government, as it seems to have failed to generate sufficient income on its own (Bahry 2001; el-Nawawy & Iskandar 2002). In addition, Milan Vesely (2002) reports that al-Jazeera is expected to barely break even that same year. Al-Jazeera's road to financial self-sufficiency is a difficult one that continues to be an urgent imperative if the station is to maintain its credibility as an autonomous media outlet. In spite of the funds given to the station, al-Jazeera remains the only media outlet that is not owned by the Qatari government (Rugh 2004). As Louay Bahry (2001) explains, "Al-Jazeera hopes, when it is financially independent, to be incorporated as a private company and to sell its stock to the general public. Although this is a legitimate objective, it is difficult to see how al-Jazeera could become a completely private enterprise, given its difficulties in raising money from sources other than the Qatari government" (p. 95).

It is not an odd practice that Arab governments directly or indirectly control satellite channels, but a compelling variation from this tendency is the unique relationship between al-Jazeera and the Qatari government. On the one

hand, the Qatari government not only allows, but also subsidizes, al-Jazeera's activities. On the other hand, the same government maintains and ensures the autonomy of al-Jazeera in its media operations. This unique and special relationship did not spare the station and its host country sharp and caustic criticism that emphatically challenged the noble motivations for democratization that Qatar allegedly espouses. In the aftermath of the coup, Qatar's democratizing initiatives, and al-Jazeera among them, were seen as a threat to the stability of the status quo especially in the Arab Gulf states, and generally in the region, and as a result, Qatar has been accused of leveraging the station to enforce its foreign policy objectives regionally and internationally.

For example, the growing rivalry between Qatar and Saudi Arabia, in the aftermath of the coup, has been associated with al-Jazeera's features of some of the most daring commentary and criticism of Saudi Arabia ever attempted by an Arab media outlet. According to Samantha Shapiro (2005, January 2), "before Al Jazeera, Saudi businessmen owned almost all of the major pan-Arab media, including MBC, the only channel that broadcast news bulletins to the whole of the Middle East, so the country and its rulers were rarely scrutinized by Arab journalists. Qatar's emir allowed Al Jazeera's reporters to take on the Saudis, as well as other governments in the Middle East" (p. 28). Conversely, the latter exerted its monopolizing media influence by depriving al-Jazeera from precious advertising contracts (al-Zaidy 2003; el-Nawawy & Iskandar 2002; Bahry 2001; Rugh 2004). Moreover, Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah's rumoured involvement in the Arab News Network (ANN) was motivated by an attempt to boost its ability

to challenge the popularity of al-Jazeera (Sakr 2001).[9] In a region wherein media is associated with prestige, and social and political factors are prioritized over economic ones, al-Jazeera ultimately elevated Qatar's position by placing it on the political map of the Arab region and the world alike (el-Nawawy & Iskander 2002; Rugh 2004). This perception bolstered criticisms that al-Jazeera is part of the Qatari government's publicity campaign for the state, portraying it as a progressive one and is a tool used to complement and promote its foreign policy objectives.

Criticism that al-Jazeera is being employed by the Qatari government cannot be ignored. Observers have noted that al-Jazeera lacks coverage of Qatari domestic issues. The station rarely criticizes the government or leadership of Qatar (Bahry 2001). William Rugh (2004) argues that, in fact, "the government has some influence over programming because of the subsidy and the fact that al-Jazeera chairman Hamad bin Thamar al-Thani is a cousin of the emir and also chairman of the government's radio and television system" (p. 234). Furthermore, Naomi Sakr (2001) also maintains that the government plays a role in the station's affairs: "With the emirate's political reform programme having been devised by the emir himself, and with Al-Jazeera seen as an element in that programme, an alignment between the state and the satellite channel was perceived both internally and externally" (p. 58-59). While al-Jazeera has been

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[9] ANN is a Syrian-owned venture. It is linked to Rifa'at al-Asad, the estranged brother of the late Syrian president Hafez al-Asad. Rifa'at al-Asad put his son, Sawmar, who was only 26 years old at the time ANN was founded, in charge of the station. Since there is no doubt that investment in the station came out of family funds, Rifa'at al-Asad demonstrated his readiness to use the media to solidify his position inside Syria. The circulating rumours about Crown Prince Abdullah's involvement were in relation to the funding problems for the station, after it appeared to have no obvious source of funding beyond the resources of Rifa'at al-Asad (Sakr 2001).

critical of most Arab regimes, it has exhibited deference to the Qatari government's concerns and agenda (el-Nawawy & Iskandar 2002) and has shied away from covering Qatari internal and foreign policy issues (Rugh 2004).

The station's representatives shrug off these criticisms and contend that Qatari issues are not newsworthy or significant. Faisal al-Kasim, host of the most popular talk show *The Opposite Direction* on al-Jazeera, maintains that, in comparison, he enjoyed 20% of the freedom at the BBC, where he previously worked, than that which he currently has working for al-Jazeera (Rugh 2004). He moreover claims "nothing that happens in Qatar is worth covering," in resonance with other al-Jazeera officials, who have also argued that local news of a small nation like Qatar is not as significant as those in larger, more influential Arab countries and is secondary to world news and issues of concern to the broader Middle East region (el-Nawawy & Iskandar 2002). Nonetheless, as Qatar's prominence increases because of al-Jazeera, the role it plays in the region ironically becomes more significant, and what goes on in Qatar could only, in turn, be deemed significant as well. At least, as Mohammed El-Nawawy and Adel Iskandar (2002) argue, the "fact is that events in Qatar *are* important, if for no other reason than that it is a member of the network's target audience – the Arab world" (p. 84). In addition, they note that even the tiny island state of Bahrain receives its share of critical political coverage and question whether Bahrain's domestic politics have greater effect on the region than Qatar's.[10]

[10] It is noteworthy that Qatar's long-standing territorial dispute with Bahrain over the Hawar islands is cited as an apparent reason for critical political coverage of Bahraini issues, and therefore, as an indication of Qatar's employment of al-Jazeera to reinforce the country's foreign policies (el-Nawawy & Iskandar 2002; Sakr 2001).

Despite all the criticism, the relationship between Qatar and al-Jazeera is undeniably a unique and uncommon phenomenon in the new Arab media environment. The Qatari government has consistently dissociated itself from al-Jazeera, and the station has implicitly maintained its autonomy and freedom from any government control. This dissociation implies an alternative type of relationship between an Arab government and a media outlet operating within its jurisdiction, defying even the emergent pattern of media ownership and control in the new Arab media environment. The pattern suggests that, while the conditions of this new environment have changed, the imperatives for governments did not. As Noami Skar (2001) points out, "[i]t is clear from the degree of censorship exercised by most of the leading Arab satellite broadcasters that the authorities behind them do not believe they can afford to leave the content of transnational television to chance" (p. 163). She furthermore adds that "[i]t was not until the uncensored Qatari channel, Al-Jazeera, became widely available to households with satellite access after November 1997 that a gap appeared in the mesh of shared principles and expectations" (p. 163). Christopher Toensing of the Middle East Research and Information Project in Washington, moreover, observes that al-Jazeera has been able to break the information monopoly of Arab governments (Vesely 2002). Hence, whether Qatar's unique relationship with al-Jazeera will impact the overall relationship between Arab governments and the media in the Arab region, freedom of the press and democratic practices, remains to be seen.

A Pan-Arab Channel Causing Inter-Arab Tensions

Even by global media standards, the model that al-Jazeera represents is arguably unique. Unlike other known models of public broadcasting financially supported by governments, like the Canadian, British, or Australian Broadcasting Corporations for example, al-Jazeera is explicitly not Qatari-identified. Rather, it is pan-Arab in character and serves the interests of Arab audiences across national boundaries and the Arab region at large. Al-Jazeera's director, Mohammed Jassem al-Ali, affirms this characterization and explains that, "when you watch Egyptian TV or Saudi TV you know it's Egyptian or Saudi because it says so. In the case of Al-Jazeera, it doesn't have a country identity. It's not Qatar TV" (Sakr, 2001, p. 120). Other observers agree with this proclamation. William Rugh (2004) remarks that "[a]s a consequence of the fact that most of the reporters and presenters have no roots in Qatar, the style and character of al-Jazeera is pan-Arab rather than Qatari" (p. 216). He adds that the "main focus of al-Jazeera program content is pan-Arab as opposed to Qatar's domestic issues, indicating that the management of the station see their role as providing a service for the Arab world not for local consumption" (Rugh, 2004, p. 230). Indeed, there is no doubt that al-Jazeera is distinct in character from other channels: it "is the first Arab TV station based on Arab soil that is expressly critical of Arab regimes and governments and even dares insult them occasionally" (Bahry, 2001, p. 88). Naomi Sakr (2001) observes that its editorial staff represents in an individual capacity a significant number of Arab countries whose "collective efforts, based on training and experience gained inside and outside the region,

shook up the Arabic-language satellite television sector" (p. 126). [11] In addition, Mohammed el-Nawawy and Adel Iskandar (2002) also agree that the station "is not a government entity but a transnational and pan-Arab network that focuses on news and politics from the Arab world and for the Arab world" (p. 84). They also argue that one of al-Jazeera's achievements is its ability, if not mission, to unify Arab audiences, even though they do not spell out how this unity is achieved.

There is no doubt that al-Jazeera has filled a void created by a politically authoritarian environment. The conditions of this environment demanded that audiences, dissatisfied with government-controlled or influenced media, across the diverse Arab region rely on Western media outlets. Nevertheless, viewers recognized a Western bias in reporting, regarding it as unrepresentative of their views or reality (el-Nawawy & Iskandar 2002; Rugh 2004). Because Western media outlets were perceived as foreign disseminators of information whose primary purpose is to serve their own countries, al-Jazeera's arrival on the scene was welcomed by many Arabs with a sense of pride, as a media source that is "genuinely" Arab (Bahry 2001). Furthermore, the station managed to include in its programming a pluralistic account of different types of Arab political and intellectual affiliations and of different parts of the region (Bahry 2001; el-Nawawy & Iskandar 2002). As an Arab alternative to Western media, al-Jazeera has been successful in challenging the authoritarian grip of the government on

[11] A Saudi employee, who joined briefly, was recalled after two months. According to Mohammed el-Nawawy and Adel Iskandar (2002), the Saudi employee was allegedly intimidated to leave the station. This incident is another example that indicates the tumultuous relationship between al-Jazeera and the Saudi regime.

Arab media by opening up political and cultural debates in which diverse positions, antagonistic perspectives, and varying affiliations and associations were represented.

Operating under the slogan "The Opinion and the Other Opinion," al-Jazeera managed to open up public space for political debate. Al-Jazeera staff, like Hafez al-Mirazi, the Washington bureau chief for al-Jazeera, proudly project al-Jazeera's role as a voice of democracy in the Middle East (Kelley 2002). To add to its features of open debates, and its daring commentary on Saudi affairs, it has undoubtedly served as a marketplace of dissent, a platform for marginalized voices (Rugh 2004).[12] According to William Rugh (2004), two features highlight al-Jazeera's prominence: "its extensive news coverage in Arabic by reporters who know what the Arab public wants, and its political discussion programs that deal with controversial subjects" (p.229). Scholars who have examined al-Jazeera agree that the station has evidently broken the mould of Arab television broadcasting by featuring uncensored programming and tackling taboo subjects (el-Nawawy & Iskandar 2002; Rugh 2004; Sakr 2001). Some observers believe that al-Jazeera remains the most pro-democracy of all the stations in the Arab region, and the heated dialogue on al-Jazeera opens up discussions that forces authorities to be more accountable, even though this dialogue does not necessarily translate into democratic politics (Shapiro, 2005, January 20, p. 54). Still, al-Kasim argues that his show, *The Opposite Direction*, at least helped break

[12] Take as an example the program titled *Minbar al-Jazeera* (al-Jazeera's Podium), which is accompanied by an even more suggestive slogan stating that the program is "A podium for those without one." It resonates with the general mood of repression and evokes an invitation for callers to use the platform that it offers to exercise an opportunity to voice their opinions and comments on current affairs.

the fear barrier, despite the fact that the Arab region "is hardly any more democratic now than it was when Al Jazeera began airing the program eight years ago" (Hammond 2004).

In spite of al-Jazeera's innovative style and presentation of programming adding to the novelty of uncensored, taboo-free programming in Arab media, not everyone in the Middle East is convinced of the station's encouragement of democratic exchanges. Some of the station's programming, and especially the heated debates of the most popular talk show, *al-Ittijah al-Mu'akis* (The Opposite Direction), are regarded by some observers as extremely sensationalist (Ghareeb 2000; Bahry 2001; el-Nawawy & Iskandar 2002). If debates are an uncommon feature on Arab television, then the heated debates of sensitive issues certainly raise the stakes and exacerbate the controversy around the station and its programs. Edmund Ghareeb (2000) writes that al-Jazeera revolutionized news coverage of the Middle East, by adopting this combination of professional and credible news coverage of issues and of heated debates that tackled them. He, furthermore, notes that the impact of the station's style of debates and discussion programming is tumultuous even by Western standards, satisfying a need in the Arab region. He observes that in-depth and passionate discussions are offered between political, cultural, and intellectual figures of intensely-opposing views about various sensitive topics, including the taboo subject of sex.

Still, al-Jazeera's demonstrated pan-Arab appeal and influence was not necessarily regarded as revolutionary in its impact. Criticism emerged that the station alienates itself from Arab society by employing Western news agencies and standards, offering programs like fashion shows that are not part of Arab

culture, and exploiting divisions among Arab countries that increase regionalism and divert Arabs from their identity rather than unify them (Bahry 2001). In other accounts, the station has been denounced "as being more dangerous than its Western counterparts, because poisonous ideas through Western channels are easy to handle because their aim is known in advance, but spreading poisonous thoughts and a 'different kind of porn' on an Arab channel, concealing itself behind Arab culture and claiming to speak for the overall Arab interest, is characterized as far more dangerous" (Gahreeb, 2000, p. 408). The paradox emphasizes the shortcomings of government-controlled media outlets from which such criticism is expressed, driving Arab audiences to Western media outlets in the first place. Furthermore, it demonstrates the inability of the governments in power, their affiliates or associates, and other traditionalist circles to bridge the growing gap between dissatisfied Arab populations and their leaderships, as well as, to utilize the new conditions fostered by new communications technology to their advantage.

The indignation that culminated from the controversy and intrigue surrounding al-Jazeera since its inception resulted in an escalation of numerous diplomatic crises between Qatar and a number of other Arab governments. Some of these crises have led to the closure of the network's local bureau and even to the withdrawal of ambassadors by some Arab countries for short periods of time (al-Zaidy 2003; el-Nawawy & Iskandar 2002; Rugh 2004).[13] Because the

[13] For specific disputes between Qatar and other Arab countries, see al-Zaidy (2003) and el-Nawawy & Iskandar (2002).

reputation of nations is considered sacred and it cannot be negotiated, some Arab critics found the public airing of Arab countries' "dirty laundry" unacceptable (Sakr 2001). Aside from alleged positive reporting on Qatar as a progressive state, authoritarian Arab governments have often evoked this cultural value in their favor to oust opposition, and in turn, to allege a united national front. Relying on understood media conventions, according to which governments have the power to control or close down media outlets, has proved futile in attempting to leverage political and diplomatic relations with Qatar to curb or silence the station. Whereas critical responses through government-controlled media argue that al-Jazeera drives a wedge in the presumed commonness of Arabs, they have equally complemented this view with a corresponding response that echoes "government suspicion that this novel approach to Arabic-language news reflected ill-will from their Qatari counterparts" (Sakr, 2001, p. 119). Moreover, accusations of al-Jazeera and its agenda were launched from so many different directions, paradoxically rendering the station, among other labels, as Islamist, secular, pro-Iraqi, pro-American, and pro-Zionist in its political orientation (Ghareeb 2000). Because criticism is projected from all over the spectrum, officials at the station argue that they cannot be accused of bias towards anyone because the conflicting interests of such criticism cancel each other out (Rugh 2004).[14]

The Qatari government's stance has consistently been to side step such diplomatic tensions in the name of al-Jazeera's independence and the due

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[14] These contradictory accusations are captured in the interrogative title of Elaine Kelley's (2002, September/October) article, *Al-Jazeera: Mouthpiece for terrorists, lackey for Israel, or voice for democracy?*

process of the democratic right to freedom of expression. In maintaining its quest for free media operations, the Qatari government consistently deflected the grievances of Arab governments as issues that should be directly addressed to the station which is its own governor (el-Nawawy & Iskandar 2002; Rugh 2004). The perception that al-Jazeera could be curtailed or censored by the Qatari government, a traditionally assumed role Arab governments played in favor of the status quo is gradually giving way to an acceptance of al-Jazeera as a transfixed and unrelenting player in the Arab media scene. Hence, Arab governments soon began to court the station and use it as a medium through which to debate their views (el-Nawawy & Iskandar 2002).

This shift can be traced to al-Jazeera's popularity that has soared unabated. Its rising fame and popularity elevated the station to such an esteemed position among Arab viewers that it became difficult to boycott the station or to enter into direct conflict with it, as a result of the station's popularity (al-Zaidy 2003). Mohammed el-Nawawy and Adel Iskandar (2002) observe that "with every dramatic action a government has taken against Al-Jazeera, its popularity among Arab audiences appears to grow. With every attempt to reprimand or silence the network, satellite subscriptions and website traffic increase" (p.128). Despite the emergence of other pan-Arab news channels such as al-Jazeera's rival, al-Arabiya, "[f]or now... it is Al Jazeera... that sets the standard, and the tone, for Arab television news. According to a poll conducted last May by Zogby International and the University of Maryland, Al Jazeera is the first choice for 62 percent of satellite-news viewers in Jordan, 66 percent in Egypt and 44 percent in Saudi Arabia. In most countries in the poll, Al Arabiya came in a distant second"

(Shapiro, 2005, January 2, p. 28).[15] And finally, despite criticism against al-Jazeera from within other Arab media organizations affiliated with, or influenced by, government, it has become a reality in the Arab region that has lifted the ban on freedom of broadcasting and contributed positively to the Arab media scene (al-Zaidy 2003). Further to its positive contributions, other media outlets also began to adopt al-Jazeera style of broadcast journalism and programming in order to win the favor of Arab viewers who have become accustomed to more cutting-edge news and critical programming and would not be satisfied otherwise.

It is crucial to emphasize that the popularity of al-Jazeera concerns general Arab audiences that must be distinguished from the governments that ultimately do not represent them. The significance of this point is best explained by Mohammed el-Nawawy and Adel Iskandar's (2002) comparison of the effect of al-Jazeera programs to that of Um Kulthoum, the legendary Egyptian singer, dubbed the "Lady of Arabic Song." Her concerts managed to unite Arabs from the Gulf to the Atlantic Ocean around their radio and television sets, and they add that, since her death in the mid-1970s, Arab audiences have not been united around a single mass medium until the appearance of al-Jazeera. To be able to deliver such impact across Arab national borders is a true testimony to al-Jazeera's influential role in the region. This role solemnly assumes the responsibility of the station towards its intended audience, expressed as a sober

[15] The owner of al-Arabiya and its parent network, the Middle East Broadcasting Center (MBC), the Saudi Sheik Walid al-Ibrahim, "started Al Arabiya in February 2003 to provide more moderate alternative to Al Jazeera" (Shapiro, 2005, January 2, p. 28). According to Samantha Shapiro (2005, January 2), his goal "was to position Al Arabiya as the CNN to Al Jazeera's Fox News, as a calm, cool, professional media outlet that would be known for objective reporting rather than the shouted opinions" (p. 28).

political stance in the words of its Managing Director, Mohammed Jassem al-Ali. He states, "though it may dissatisfy some Arab governments, it satisfies the Arab viewer and saves him from having to go to Western channels, which controlled the Arab mind for a long time" (Ghareeb, 2000, p. 408).

Qatar and al-Jazeera: A Marriage Doomed to Fail?

To posit al-Jazeera as a counterbalance to Western media and to imbue its discourse, and that of the station's officials, with anti-imperialist rhetoric is to strike a cord with an Arab audience that regards itself as marginalized on the world stage. While it is true that al-Jazeera's content has not initiated coups or motivated revolt by Arab people against political oppression (el-Nawawy & Iskandar 2002), it remains successful, at least, insofar as its innovations of style and content resonate with popular Arab perceptions, ones that ultimately relate back to conceptions of their identity across their national boundaries. Even more testimony to its popularity with viewers is anecdotal evidence suggesting that word-of-mouth recommendations of the talk shows contributed to the spread of access to the channel (Sakr 2001). Perhaps more significantly, its success lies in its ability to convince many Arabs that it is performing the role of the messenger and is being blamed for doing so. By most standards, al-Jazeera asserted itself as a credible source of information, and consequently, its uniqueness "earned it a loyal and ever-growing following as more people realized that the channel's representatives regarded themselves as messengers, not as originators of the message" (Sakr, 2001, p. 124).

Yet the successes of al-Jazeera cannot evade critical examination. Its relationship to its host country is inextricable. The surprising rise of the new emir of Qatar was soon coupled by the quick rise of a station that took everyone by surprise. The station's unconventional style and content complemented the emir's unconventional initiatives. And finally, the prominence of al-Jazeera regionally and internationally has attributed importance to its host country. For this reason, the station as well as its questionable relationship to the Qatari government can only be regarded as an anomaly. To open up the media and encourage freedom of speech is an initiative that can only be applauded, considering the stringent political climate of the Middle East. The ineluctable accomplishment of al-Jazeera, in breaking taboos and in promoting freer media programming, under the conditions of such a climate cannot be denied. However, in spite of all these positive contributions, it is al-Jazeera's operation within seemingly tacit parameters that must be interrogated in order to help uncover the perplexing relationship between the station and its host country and financial backer.

Qatar, despite its democratizing initiatives, is not a democratic country. It is governed by an authoritarian ruler who is not elected by the people. He represents a society that has neither a consistent, nor a credible, history of democratic practices or traditions. Therefore, while the Qatari official discourse may well play into a diplomatic game with efficacy – especially as it unravels before a distrustful public opinion, Arab and Western alike – it is presumably difficult for regional and international players to pre-figure this contradiction: the support of an undemocratic government for a channel that expressly

promotes the democratic right of freedom of expression. While the Qatari government possesses the power to implicitly curtail or eliminate al-Jazeera, Qatar's response adheres to a principle that cannot be refuted in the court of public opinion. In such a way, it seems to be straddling a precarious fence. The credibility of the Qatari government in the international community might be suspect, but its strategy plays well into a public opinion that can no longer be contained within national borders and will not be convinced by traditional government-controlled propaganda. The success of the Qatari government, hence, could be attributed to its ability to mollify the dissatisfaction of Arab people and gain from an efficient public relations campaign on the regional and international scenes, all the while recognizing the unstoppable force of the transnational flow of mediated information. The extent to which the Qatari government can maintain this tenuous balancing act remains a question worthy of consideration by political analysts. Regardless, it is a wonder to comprehend how an authoritarian, traditional country is encouraging a progressive station promoting democratization of the media. As al-Jazeera is associated with the democratization of Arab media, by the same logic, the Qatari government might have eventually opened the door for challenges to its own legitimacy; the irony cannot be avoided and is not lost on even the least keen observer. And as one observer notes, instability in Qatar or even a change of leadership could mean the end of al-Jazeera, and that would be a serious loss for media freedom and a more open Arab society (Bahry 2001).

2

Old Problems, New Context: Postcoloniality, Cultural Imperialism, and Global Flows

Prior to the attacks of September 11th, 2001, a study of al-Jazeera would not have garnered as much interest in Western academic scholarship as it does today. Only when al-Jazeera became implicated in the global flows of news media discourse following September 11th, an event global in its ramifications, did the station merit attention outside its "local" context. Whether such attention or interest is related to studies of globalization insofar as they are Western or Western-initiated is an issue at the core of the conceptual problematic of globalization itself. In any case, since September 11th, 2001, al-Jazeera has been a participant in this phenomenon of globalization wherein global flows of media discourse crossing national borders in the form of speedy and readily available news coverage, increasingly implicate the whole world in particular ways that were never before perceived. Identification through al-Jazeera transcends the national state system of contiguous Arab countries to represent the region as a whole to the world, and as a result, the station's influence and role is implicated in processes that can only be rendered global in their scale.

Even though al-Jazeera presumably became the Arab region's most prominent representative on the global stage, influencing the global circulation of news discourse, fears of globalization or global processes resonate throughout the

discourse of the talk shows examined in this project. Despite al-Jazeera's apparent successes as a viable global media player, a participant in the very processes of media globalization, global processes articulated in political, economic, or cultural terms provide new manifestations that continue to be feared as a threat to Arab identity, values and culture evident in the discourse of the talk shows. These fears either express familiar anti-colonial and anti-imperialistic sentiments or evoke such undertones as a response to these global processes that are associated with colonialism and imperialism. The paradoxical relationship between local fears of the perceived threat of global processes and engagement in these very processes is, in the example of al-Jazeera, a case in point. This paradox is particularly significant in relation to presumptions that al-Jazeera provides an alternative discourse that subverts Western news media discourse beyond the region. Otherwise, Arab wariness towards the impact of globalization on Arab identity and culture is indeed indicative that media competition does not necessarily translate into counter-hegemonic practices. This indication is attributed to the problematic conceptualizations of "postcoloniality" and the invocation of colonialism in the discourse of the talk shows against the backdrop of the new context of globalization, which could evoke conditions that extend beyond a colonial experience presumed to have ended.

The Problematic of Postcoloniality

Considering the conceptual problematic of postcoloniality helps understand why Arab discourse has not adopted the term in its rubric. This

problematic moreover demonstrates that al-Jazeera's discourse, or at least the discourse of the talk shows examined in this project, is indeed oppositional; or "anti" rather than "post" going beyond conditions of the "colonial." Accordingly, the misconception of this opposition as a new alternative on a global scale, in this light, is moreover elucidated as one that is prematurely enthusiastic; for it overlooks the possibility of examining al-Jazeera in a regional context that far from surpassing its colonial past continues to suffer from the residue of colonialism and the conditions of its new manifestations in the present.

The specter of colonialism continues to haunt the Arab psyche even well into the post-independence era. The resounding anti-colonial and anti-imperialist rhetoric still provokes reactionary sentiments in the region, as if the grip of colonialism has not dissipated approximately more than half a century ago since its formal end in many Arab countries. Leela Gandhi (1998) writes that the emergence of independent nation-states after colonialism is frequently accompanied by a mystifying amnesia, a will to forget the traumatizing colonial past. She refers to postcolonialism as the theoretical resistance to this amnesia of the colonial aftermath. As Gandhi acknowledges, the "colonial past is not simply a reservoir of 'raw' political experiences and practices to be theorised from the detached and enlightened perspective of the present. It is also the scene of intense discursive and conceptual activity, characterised by a profusion of thought and writing about the cultural and political identities of colonised subjects" (p. 5). This "will-to-forget" is consistently challenged in the Arab region, even though it is not postcolonialism's resistance to this amnesia that is

credited for this challenge. It is that colonialism, in new guises, might never have practically ended in the first place.

The colonial past as a scene of intense discursive and conceptual activity is undermined by the shortcomings of the notion of the "postcolonial," one of which is the temporality to which the term refers. In other words, the colonial past should not necessarily be conceptualized as a long-gone past, but an extension of the present. Despite the challenge of postcolonial theory to binaries (such as self/other, center/periphery, etc.), Anne McClintock (1991) argues that the term post-colonialism serves as a re-orientation towards a single, binary opposition of the colonial/post-colonial. As she indicates, there is a shift though in this binary from a binary axis of power to a binary axis of time that is less productive because it does not distinguish between the beneficiaries and the casualties of colonialism, the ex-colonizers and ex-colonized respectively: "The 'postcolonial scene' occurs in an entranced suspension of history, as if the definitive historical events have preceded us, and are not now in the making... the *singularity* of the term effects the re-centering of global history around the single rubric of European time. Colonialism returns at the moment of its disappearance" (emphasis in original; p. 85-86). Anne McClintock's critique moreover argues that the prefix "post" in postcolonialism "confers on colonialism the prestige of history proper; colonialism is the determining marker of history. Other cultures share only a chronological, prepositional relation to a Euro-centered epoch that is over (post-), or not yet begun (pre-)" (p. 86). Accordingly, as Leela Gandhi (1998) points out the category of colonialism becomes a movement between imperial subordination and anti-colonial resistance, through which history

acquires its coherence by dismissing the complications marking this historical narrative that refer to the inadequacy and refusal on both sides of dominance and resistance.

If colonialism in this sense has not ended, then this perspective helps discard the assumption that al-Jazeera's discourse can be a postcolonial one representing or emerging from conditions of postcoloniality to engage with global processes. Nowhere in the discourse of the talk shows is there a reference to any notion or concept that resembles that of "postcoloniality" or the "postcolonial." As Ella Shohat (2000) notes, the notion of the postcolonial has little currency in Middle Eastern intellectual circles following the end of colonial rule because the problem of implying that colonialism is a matter of the past undermines its deformative traces in the present. Shohat (2000) writes that the notion of the postcolonial overlooks the fact that global hegemony persists in other forms than overt colonial rule, and therefore, the term fails to adequately evoke contemporary power relations. Instead, as Shohat claims, it is more helpful to re-conceptualize "colonialism" as an ongoing process evident in new forms and manifestations in the present because cultures today are characterized by tensions, between the official end of direct colonial rule and its existence through hegemonizing neocolonialism within the First World and towards the Third World enabled by nationalist patriarchal elites. Otherwise, the "globalizing gesture of the postcolonial condition, or postcoloniality, downplays multiplicities of location and temporality as well as the possible discursive and political linkages between postcolonial theories and contemporary anticolonial or anti-neocolonial struggles and discourses" (Shohat, 2000, p. 131).

The unequal balance of power that is acknowledged in al-Jazeera's discourse examined here gestures towards a global condition, a new world situation that has not managed to completely elide the terms of colonialism. In reference to Anne McClintock, the assumption of postcoloniality configures a relationship – discursive in this case – that shifts to a binary axis of time in order to *maintain* a binary axis of power. The new terms of colonialism are replicated in new forms by other means. For this reason, the condition of postcoloniality is marked by conceptual limitations. Ella Shohat (2000) explains,

> The colonial in postcolonial tends to be relegated to the past and marked with closure – an implied temporal border that undermine a potential oppositional thrust. For, whatever the philosophical connotations of the past as an ambiguous locus of continuities and discontinuities, its denotation of "after" (the teleological lure of the post) – evokes a celebratory clearing of a conceptual space that on one level conflicts with the notion of neo. (p. 133)

In addition, Shohat adds that when examined in relation to the notion of neocolonialism, "the postcolonial" undermines a critique of contemporary colonialist structures of domination. In contrast, the repetition and revival that the term neocolonialism encompasses has the advantage of emphasis with difference: the regeneration of colonialism through other means. In this way, the term neocolonialism designates broader relations of geoeconomic power.

Contemporary colonialist structures of domination, or "neocolonialism," occurred with the onset of the dismantling of colonialism proper. At least, this is how Gayatri Spivak perceives it (1991). With the passing of the British empire into the hands of the United States, Spivak (1991) maintains that the new type of colonialism became more economic and less territorial:

> in fact neocolonialism is like radiation – you feel it less like you don't feel it – you feel like you're independent....With neocolonialism comes the idea of the Third World... It was because the nature of neocolonialism was economic rather than territorial or cultural that the production of knowledge within neocolonialism seems to have a much subtler role and it's much harder to pin down. It's not just colonialism over again. (p. 221)

With the elusive hold that neocolonialism maintains, postcolonialism's identification with the official 'end' of colonialism becomes falsely utopian or prematurely celebratory because it suggests the existence of a better and unified world order, overlooking problems of "neocolonialism" and the increased divisions within and between societies (Gandhi 1998).

Neocolonialism's association with transnational corporations and the international division of labor and their links to the flow and workings of capital on a global scale extend the early logic of empire. In a critique of the "postcolonial," Arif Dirlik (1997) questions the ascendancy of postcolonial intellectuals and criticism to a level of respectability in relation to this new world situation and re-ordering of global relations. He suggests that the themes in which postcolonial criticism is engaged are now part of a global consciousness, originating in a new world situation experiencing transformations within the capitalist world economy. These transformations, he writes, led to the "disorganization" of earlier conceptualizations of global relations understood previously through binaries such as colonizer/colonized, First/Third Worlds, and the "West and the rest" and in which the nation-state was the globally-taken for granted unit of political organization. Hence, as a description of this world situation, Dirlik (1997) contends that the term 'postcolonial' "mystifies both politically and methodologically a situation that represents not the abolition but

the reconfiguration of earlier forms of domination" (p. 508). He argues that the "postcolonial" is complicit in hegemony reflected in postcolonialism's disregard of contemporary problems associated with various forms of domination by obfuscating its relationship to a condition of its emergence: "a global capitalism that, however fragmented in appearance, serves nevertheless as the structuring principle of global relations" (p. 503). In order to address the old problems of domination in this new world situation, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000) maintain that the "utopian element of globalization is what prevents us from falling back into particularism and isolationism in reaction to the totalizing forces of imperialism and racist domination, pushing us instead to forget a project of counterglobalization, counter-Empire" (p. 115). However, before a counter-position is forged, the concept under whose umbrella this new world situation falls needs to be addressed and understood. Yet, the concept of globalization is itself not any less problematic than the condition with which it is associated.

Which Globalization? Whose Globalization?

For my purposes here, I shall restrict myself to concepts that have emerged from within the specific work on globalization and culture. Though, it is not my intention to dismiss the ample work on the economic and political aspects of globalization, ones that are typically associated with this phenomenon. Indeed, as Arjun Appadurai (2001) maintains, globalization "is inextricably linked to the current workings of capital on a global basis; in this regard it extends the earlier logics of empire, trade, and political dominion in many parts of the world" (p. 4). Moreover, Immanuel Wallerstein's (1990) world-system

theory reminds us that capitalism is at the center of intellectual considerations, as he theorizes a world social system defined as a single unit with a single division of labor and debates the place of culture in relation to the accumulation of capital. However, scholars have argued against Wallerstein's conceptualization of culture in his account of world-system theory, claiming that he expresses a derivative and reactive view of culture that neglects the power and cultural relations preceding the inter-state system and that fails to explain such forces as nationalism, religion and inter-ethnic hostility (Boyne 1990; Bergesen 1990; Worsley 1990).

Hence, in accounting for a cultural dimension of globalization, I will employ a broader – perhaps even, loose – conceptualization of culture that can be articulated in terms of processes. According to Mike Featherstone (1990), this approach might render it possible to refer to the globalization of culture:

> Here we can point to cultural integration and cultural disintegration processes which take place not only on an inter-state level but processes which transcend the state-society unit and can therefore be held to occur on a trans-national or trans-societal level. It therefore may be possible to point to trans-societal cultural processes which take a variety of forms, some of which have preceded the inter-state relations into which nation-states can be regarded as being embedded, and processes which sustain the exchange and flow of goods, people, information, knowledge and images which give rise to communication processes which gain some autonomy on a global level. (p. 1)

With no evident disciplinary home or privileged scholarly context, delineating the field of study of a concept already fraught with theoretical challenges is a daunting, yet crucial undertaking; and defining the concept of globalization also remains an elusive task. Janet Abu-Lughod (1991) expresses her sentiments in terms of a caveat: "One cannot think of a larger domain than global nor a broader topic than culture... The field, if not controlled, can degenerate into what we

might call "global-babble" (p. 131). Furthermore, Zygmunt Bauman's (1998) apt description of the mystique of the discourse on globalization seems to affirm these sentiments. He writes,

> 'Globalization' is on everybody's lips; a fad word fast turning into a shibboleth, a magic incantation, a pass-key meant to unlock the gates to all present and future mysteries. For some, 'globalization' is what we are bound to do if we wish to be happy; for others 'globalization' is the intractable fate of the world, an irreversible process; it is also a process which affects us all in the same measure and in the same way. (p. 1)

Nonetheless, the abstractions of which theorizations of globalization could arguably be guilty must indeed not betray the field's utility in analyzing processes that seem to fall outside the purview of intellectual inquiry in traditional disciplines.

These processes are often qualified in terms such as compression, intensification, connectivity, and totality that, in turn, appear in most attempts at conceptualizing the notion. For example, in anthropological circles, globalization is commonly understood to refer "to the intensification of global interconnectedness, suggesting a world full of movement and mixture, contact and linkages, and persistent cultural interaction and exchange. It speaks, in other words, to the complex mobilities and interconnections that characterize the globe today" (Inda & Rosaldo, 2002, p. 2). Roland Robertson (1992) claims that globalization "as a concept refers both to the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole" (p. 8). He emphatically argues for the autonomy of the globalization process, which should be seen as operating in relative independence of conventionally designated societal and socio-cultural processes, and thus, they are not the outcome of inter-state

processes. For this reason, according to Robertson, globalization serves as a more appropriate conceptual tool that must be distinguished from what might otherwise be called internationalization, a term that refers to the form of which the world becomes "united." He maintains that what has been termed globalization indicates the problem of the form in which the world is united, and globalization becomes the conceptual entry into the problem of ordering the world in general.

While scholars, like Roland Robertson, acknowledge that processes of various exchanges on a global scale have been historically prevalent, there is a general consensus that its current references and usage implicates an idea of the 'modern' or 'modernity.' In talking about globalization in the present context, Stuart Hall (1991a) indicates that references are being made to "some of the new forms, some of the new rhythms, some of the new impetuses in the globalizing process," maintaining that a process of historical amnesia contributes to the presumption that addressing an idea means that it has only just begun (p. 20). Nonetheless, the intensification by which the world is connected and compressed into an apparent totality is characteristically unique to the type of globalization we are experiencing during this current historical period. For John Tomlinson (1999), globalization is the manifestation of a complex connectivity, or an empirical condition of the modern world: "globalization refers to the rapidly developing and ever-densening network of interconnections and interdependences that characterize modern social life" (p. 2). According to Tomlinson, the idea of complex connectivity could be interpreted as both an increasing global-spatial proximity or a certain "unicity" implying that the world

for the first time in history is a single social and cultural setting. From his perspective, Robertson (1992) perceives globalization as an autonomous process that involves a dynamic characterized by the twofold process of "the particularization of the universal and the universalization of the particular." In his words, he explains that "The particularization of the universal, defined as the global concretization of the problem of universality, has become the occasion for the search for *global* fundamentals....The universalization of the particular refers to the global universality of the search for the particular, for increasingly fine-grained modes of identity presentation" (p. 177-178).

For his part, Fredric Jameson (1998a) remains tentative about such perspectives and a cautionary suspicion is evident in his approach to the concept. Opting for a structural account of its forms in the political, economic, and cultural realms, he believes it necessary to insist on the antagonistic tension between these two poles. According to him, globalization can be defined as "an untotalizable totality which intensifies binary relations between its parts – mostly nations, but also regions and groups, which however, continue to articulate themselves on the model of 'national identities' (Jameson, 1998a, p. xii). Even more interestingly for this project, he provides a definition that refers to aspects of the definitions already provided, yet specifically accounts for a communications approach as well. He writes that

> globalization is a communicational concept, which alternately masks and transmits cultural or economic meanings. We have a sense that there are both denser and more extensive communicational networks all over the world today, networks that are on the one hand the result of remarkable innovations in communicational technologies of all kinds, and on the other have as their foundation the tendentially greater degree of modernization

> in all the countries of the world, or at least in their big cities, which includes the implantation of such technologies. (Jameson, 1998b, p. 55)

Certainly, discussions of the term as a recognized academic field of study only gained popularity in recent decades, only for the debates that ensued to suggest a notoriously contested term and increasingly abstract and general conceptualizations. Jameson's unease is certainly palpable. While his working definition accounts for all the recurrent aspects included in other definitions, it, in addition, serves to refer to the communicative aspect of globalization, not merely in relation to new media technologies but in relation to their function of communicating cultural meaning as well in a way that intensifies binary relations; such as the ones examined in this project.

Globalization as Cultural Imperialism

So what might this "unicity," this notion of the world as a single place, mean for cultural meanings and processes? Does it indicate that there is, as Mike Featherstone (1990) directly asks, a global culture? Ulf Hannerz (1990) claims that there is indeed a world culture, although he simultaneously asserts a qualification. According to Hannerz, world culture does not mean that is characterized by a replication of uniformity. Instead, it is characterized by an organization of diversity that evades the homogenization of systems of meaning and expression. Such homogenization is unlikely to occur, even though the "unity" of the world is marked by the same networks of social relationships and flows of meaning, goods, and people between its different regions. Like Hannerz, Anthony Smith (1990) recognizes the world's diversity and the existence of

cultures, in the plural, and concludes, "the idea of a 'global culture' is a practical impossibility, except in interplanetary terms" (p. 171). Moreover, in response to his own question, Mike Featherstone (1990) shares Roland Robertson's view that the intense and rapid global cultural flows contribute to the sense of the world as a single place. He also agrees with Hannerz and Smith's view that there can only be global cultures in the plural and argues that there is little prospect of a unified global culture. In contemplating the (im)possibility of a global culture, Featherstone (1990) draws an analogy with national culture formation to suggest the problem of conceiving culture in global terms as well as the breaking down of such analogies. He likens global culture formation to the process of forming national identities in which the intellectuals mobilizing the "ethnie" attempt to develop a unified national culture. In talking about common culture, disregarding who is defining it, within which frameworks of power, and for what purposes becomes an impossibility, especially in light of the exclusions and rejection of "outside" cultures in an attempt to generate a sense of common cultural identity. Broadening the scale of this process onto the global level "means imaginatively to construct an 'outside' to the globe, the sphere of global threat captured only in the pages and footage of science fiction accounts of space invaders, inter-planetary and inter-galactic wars" (Featherstone, 1990, p. 11). What is significant from this assessment is that Featherstone admits that with globalization the inside/outside distinction fails. For Featherstone, this failure means that whoever was on the outside now becomes a neighbor; or, to use Zygmunt Bauman's (1990, 1998) notion, is considered a "stranger" who is neither/nor, and thus, either/or.

The 'globality,' upon which scholars of globalization agree, appears to indicate that new notions constituting the basis for identification under these 'new' conditions are required. However, to what extent have older forms of identification become obsolete? The proliferation of new cultural forms for encounters may have given rise to a plurality of cultures, or 'third cultures' and may have lead to responses of ecumenism, tolerance and an inclusive universalism. However, it has also led to "resistance to globalization in the form of counter movements, such as the various non-Western fundamentalisms which react against 'Westoxication' or, in the west, seek to embark on a neoconservative programme of de-differentiation to restore Western Christendom" (Featherstone, 1990, p.11).[1] According to Roland Robertson (1990), because "in the present climate of 'globality' there is a strong temptation for some to insist that the single world of our day can be accounted for in terms of one particular process or factor – such as 'westernization', or 'imperialism', or in the dynamic sense, 'civilization' ... the problem of globality is very likely to become a basis of major ideological and analytical cleavages of the twenty-first century" (p. 21). It is these negative reactions and circumspection towards globalization to which I turn my attention now because they emphasize, in the context of this project, the relationship between conceptualizing the directions and flows of cultural processes across the globe and interpretation of the power dynamics of these processes as a backdrop to the examination of the talk shows. It informs the otherwise paradoxical relationship to globalization based on one possible assumption that al-Jazeera is

[1] For example, the work of the Iranian intellectual, Jalal-e Al-e Ahmad, addresses the notion of "Westoxication". See his work entitled, *Gharbzadigi* which roughly translates to "Weststruckness" or "Plagued by the West."

a counter-hegemonic alternative. It is the contradictory dynamic between sentiments of powerlessness causing alarm and fear and the potential to effectively speak out and represent these very sentiments globally. Moreover, if globalization was conceptualized differently, as a phenomenon that is perceived in terms other than Westernization or devoid of imperialist elements, then it would be possible to envision globalization through an alternative conceptual framework that would, in turn, reveal its participatory opportunities for al-Jazeera in preserving cultural specificity.

The work of Herbert Schiller represents one of the more prominent strands advancing the cultural imperialism thesis of globalization. In a relatively recent article entitled, "Not Yet the Post-Imperialist Era," Schiller (1991) asserts that the emergence of communication satellites and cable networks have not diminished the role of television in globally maintaining cultural domination, as the flow of images is increasingly heavier and the source of their origin is the same. For Schiller, the only difference is that television today is one element, albeit influential, in an all-encompassing package. Stuart Hall (1991a) seems to concur with Schiller as he argues that the cultural terms of this new kind of globalization is American, one that concerns a new form of global mass culture that is different from what was previously associated with English identity and cultural identities associated with the nation-state in a previous historical period. In referring to the dominance of the modern means of cultural production, image and imagery, as well as advertising over global mass culture, evident in the preeminence of the visual arts in reconstituting popular life and entertainment, Hall points out to satellite television as a prime example. The reason lies in

satellite television's grounding in an advanced national economy and culture even though its purpose lies in its inability to be limited by national boundaries, enabling the speedy and immediate crossing and re-crossing of cultural forms, especially visual ones, across linguistic frontiers.

As with changing forms of globalization over time, the types of cultural imperialism have changed as well. The distinction between an imperialistic English identity and the current form of global mass culture, American in its character, must be qualified. Anthony Smith (1990) notes an important difference between this contemporary type of cultural imperialism and earlier forms. He observes that current forms of imperialisms are non- or supranational in character representing ideologies such as "capitalism" and "socialism" for example, in contrast to earlier forms of imperialism which were extensions of ethnic or national sentiments and ideologies, such as French, British, or Russian. These currents forms of imperialisms are support by a cosmopolitan technological infrastructure, "in the sense that the same telecommunications base will eventually erode cultural differences and create a genuinely 'global culture' based on the properties of the media themselves, to which the 'message' will become increasingly incidental" (p. 176). Smith's qualification is crucial because it shifts the focus from the *notion* of "cultural imperialism" to the *type* of cultural imperialism encountered in this specific historical era of globalization. It furthermore resonates with Hall's (1991a) point that we are dealing with new forms, rhythms, and impetuses in the globalizing process which then require a new analytical prism from which to refract our understanding of the issues

arising from – in recalling Roland Robertson's conceptualization – the problem of the form of global "unity."

Because "old" issues and concerns, such as post/colonial ones, prevail in new forms, a conflation of imperialisms occurs in Arab public discourse, and they are often articulated in the new language of current globalization experienced in recent times. The new space of post-modern culture as a global formation is a space in which the same "old" contradictions continue in the old dialectic which globalization does not finish off but presents in new forms (Hall 1991a). While direct contact between colonizer and native would have implied direct forms of imperialism, there is a presumption that sovereignty is now being challenged in unconventional ways in the "postcolonial" era. This challenge extends to local traditions and values as well as the formerly colonized, now independent, nation-state, the presumed protector of national culture. The discourse of resistance to these new cultural forms, globalized as they may be, thus continues to be framed in the traditionally post/colonial terms available in the lexicon of the colonized. As Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi (1997) reminds us, "between the political economic analyses of the post-1945 globalizing media industries and the more historically grounded discourse analyses of the globalizing myths of modernity remains a space, an historical examination of the practices imperialism institutionalized that carried the social and cultural infrastructure of modernity" (p. 50). Sreberny-Mohammadi (1997) proceeds by claiming that imperialism "did not maintain its rule merely through suppression, but through the export and institutionalization of European ways of life, organizational structures, values and interpersonal relations, language and cultural products that often

remained and continued to have impact even once the imperialists themselves had gone home" (p. 51).

Indubitably, the ongoing impact of imperialism in contemporary times resonates very well with cultural imperialist paradigms such as those of Herbert Schiller and Serge Latouche. Schiller perceives cultural imperialism in relation to the monopoly of the American broadcasting system and the commercial model of broadcasting which the Third World has been compelled to adopt. In its unidirectional flow, from the center or core (West/U.S.) to the periphery (Third World), local culture is submerged with mass-produced commercial and foreign programming that threatens to eradicate local traditions and values, replacing them with values of consumerism. For Latouche, the standardization of lifestyles explains westernization as a drive towards global uniformity in which cultural uniformity means that the world is being made in the image of the West and globalization implies disseminating all facets of the West's way of being. According to this scenario, cultural diversity disappears in favor of a western-dominated homogenized culture. For this perspective, the globalization of Western culture has occurred to such an extent that it has lost its "natural" connection to a specific geographical territory. In other words, the deterritorialized cultural principle of the West replaces the West as a geo-cultural entity.

Similar in their regard of cultural imperialism as the paradigmatic qualification for global modernity, Schiller and Latouche nonetheless regard cultural imperialism from different vantage points, at least insofar as the former perceives it in terms of Americanization via commercial global broadcasting

systems and the latter in terms of Westernization, a process in which the West is a deterritorialized cultural idea. Despite these differences, both seem to offer perspectives that explain the alarm found in Arab public discourse on globalization. The rhetoric of this discourse typically conveys such imageries of infiltrating audio-visual texts and their accompanying foreign values that corrupt an otherwise presumed "authentic" culture, in turn, rendered defenseless against this onslaught. Typically, these examples are lifestyle related, such as fast food consumption, or the "McDonaldization" of society, clothing, pop cultural forms, especially types of music and music videos and types of television programming that are audaciously beamed into Arab households despite the state's futile efforts to control or censor them. This view of globalization is explained by the omnipresence of global satellite systems and resonates with the belief in the impending homogenization of the world in the image of the West, whereby the "worldwide standardization of lifestyles, in its main features, is not a 'natural' process springing from a fusion of cultures and histories. It remains domination, with the attendant clashes of views, subjection, injustice and destruction" (Latouche, 1996, p. 3). As Inda and Rosaldo (2002) remark the ensuing effect of global cultural traffic in the de-territorialization of culture is the promotion of the convergence of cultural styles inasmuch as Western culture is being embraced in various localities around the world. The impact of Western culture is consequently overwhelming.

The anxieties about this form of globalization perceived as Americanization, or Westernization indicate how overwhelming this impact can be. It certainly is echoed throughout the discussions and debates in the talk

shows examined in this project. Moreover, academic and public debates on and studies in globalization are evident in "other" non-Western locales, such as the Arab region. It is crucial not only to involve other such perspectives but to consider their relationship epistemologically to institutionalized knowledge about globalization here in the West. Indeed, Arjun Appadurai (2001) acknowledges such academic debates of scholars in the "poorer" countries and identifies one form of an evolving apartheid which is characterized by "the growing divorce between these debates [academic ones about globalization as an object of study] and those that characterize vernacular discourses about the global, worldwide, that are typically concerned with how to plausibly protect cultural autonomy and economic survival in some local, national, or regional sphere in the era of 'reform' and 'openness'" (p. 3). Mike Featherstone (1990) concurs, pointing out that discussions of global culture are conducted from within a particular time and place and practice, namely a Western European academic setting in English. He writes that "It is hard for us to imagine from the centrality of our English academic discourse... having to think of the problems of translating our language into that of non-Western languages and how this might effect their sense of place within the world" (pp. 11-12). Accordingly, theorizations of globalization appear not to seriously take into account the perspectives of these marginalized debates, except perhaps for an inclusive tokenism in the name of the very globalization being critiqued.[2]

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[2] Because my purpose in this project is to provide an account of al-Jazeera that contributes to an understanding of the station in a North American setting following the attacks of September 11th, providing a comprehensive review of Arab perspective on globalization falls outside the parameters of my objectives. Instead, I will consider some aspects of this literature as they pertain to the discussions in the subsequent chapters. Still, anxieties about this form of

The Flows of Global Processes

Nevertheless, critiques of the cultural imperialism thesis abound. John Tomlinson (1999) is critical of Serge Latouche's conceptualization of Westernization because Tomlinson takes his critique of the West as a critique of modernity. Tomlinson (1999) argues that Latouche seems to hold onto the essentially western character of institutions like industrialism, urbanism, and the nation-state system even as he claims that their connection to the West has become deterritorialized. Tomlinson writes that it is confusing to speak of western domination as separate from the actual practices and interests of Western societies. While he agrees that a cultural response to "the question of being" has become globally prevalent and "deterritorialized," he argues that such response is better perceived as a response to modernity. Far from being a thesis, Tomlinson (1991) points out that there are only versions, multiple ways of speaking about cultural imperialism. Alternately, he prefers to refer to 'cultural imperialism' as a discourse in order to account for this multiplicity of its articulations. Tomlinson's conception of cultural imperialism as a discourse is useful in continuing to account for dominant forces and players in the cultural

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globalization perceived as Americanization or Westernization are evident in Arab academic and cultural debates, and this point remains an important one for further considerations. An example that typifies Arab scholarly work that opts for an alarmist approach is As'ad al-Sahmarani's (2002) book in Arabic whose title, *The Woes of Globalization on Religion, Language, and Culture*. It evokes the extent of helplessness and fear of the forces of a process perceived as mobilization solely for and by the West. Other writers in Arabic like Turki al-Hamad (2001) do call for an acceptance of globalization as a *fait accompli* in whose processes Arabs must find a way to adapt themselves and in which they must participate simultaneously as they address their cultural needs from within its rubric. He furthermore argues that it is the rejection of globalization that would in fact bring about the elimination of cultural identity, though his discussion participation does not explicitly assume that it will involve the shaping of globalization.

processes that circulate around the globe as well as in allowing for a less simplified model that accounts for the complexity of these processes, including agency and flows that fall outside the purview of West/rest circulation. This complexity appears to be underestimated in accounts of cultural imperialism. Moreover, three main issues are absent or inadequately addressed in these accounts: 1) the presumed unidirectional flow of global processes, from the West to the rest; 2) the absence of an account of circuits of culture that circumvent the West and that link the countries of the periphery with one another; and 3) the assumption that Third world subjects are passive receivers of Western cultural texts and products (Inda & Rosaldo 2002). These issues, as will be discussed in the following, contribute to a general critique of the cultural imperialism thesis.

Alternative models for theorizing the flows of global processes ultimately inform the relationship between the "global" and the "local." In contrast to a unidirectional flow, Arjun Appadurai (1996) evokes a globality of contested "scapes" of disjuncture in which the fluid flows of cultural processes across the globe require imagining social practice in new ways. In addition, there exists no single organizing principle, and consequently, Appadurai (1996) argues for a rejection of the core/periphery model. Thinking of culture more in terms of such processes resonates with Mike Featherstone's (1990) reference to the variety of forms of trans-societal cultural processes, mentioned earlier, which give rise to communication processes and gain autonomy on a global level. Featherstone (1990) recognizes the emergence of "third cultures," although he asserts that these cultures do not imply a homogenizing effect: "It is also misleading to regard the emergence of third cultures as the embodiment of a logic which points

to homogenization. The binary logic which seeks to comprehend culture via the mutually exclusive terms of homogeneity/heterogeneity, integration/disintegration, unity/diversity, must be discarded" (pp. 1-2). Globalization hence becomes an umbrella term for a world of disjunctive flows producing problems that "manifest themselves in intensely local forms but have contexts that are anything but local" (Appadurai, 2001, p. 6).

While Appadurai's notion of "scapes" does encompass the complexity of cultural flows across the globe and highlight the specter of other forms of domination, namely regional ones as more omnipresent in some cases than Americanization, his model remains conveniently too broad. At the same time, as Anna Tsing (2002) remarks, it is paradoxically limited insofar as he restricts his domains to the flows of ethnicity, media, technologies, finance, and ideas. While she agrees that the emphasis on disjunction and the importance of the imagination is suitable for thinking about the interplay of a variety of globalist perspectives, she argues, on the other hand, that imaginative landscapes are diverse lending themselves to an understanding of disjunction rather than a division into functional domains, to which Appadurai refers, as a singular formula for "society." She argues that "instead of hegemonic domain divisions, we turned to the social and cultural struggles through which imaginative visions come to count as "scapes" at all, we might be able to incorporate disjunction not only among domains but also among varied and contested kinds of imaginative landscape making in this framework" (p. 470). According to Appadurai's model, a unidirectional flow is thence replaced by the notion of circulation. However, "a focus on circulation shows us the movement of people, things, ideas, or

institutions, but it does not show us how this movement depends on defining the tracks and grounds or scales and units of agency" (Tsing, 2002, p. 463). This agency is partly what this project is attempting to examine. Furthermore, a model based on fluid flows that circulate around the globe fails to account for sites of power differentials amongst the players in the cultural process and for the ways and extent to which less powerful actors are able to subvert instances of influence and domination.

This tendency in the scholarship to focus on the discourse of circulation and fluidity of cultural processes in general might explain why John Sinclair, Elizabeth Jacka, and Stuart Cunningham (1996) are reluctant to engage with globalization as a framework. Because the local is often equated with the national, they argue against this conflation, and they add that "it is important to distinguish not just the local from the national, but the regional from the global" (p. 22). They also emphasize "the regional level, and the national within the context of the regional, where 'region' must now be understood to be geolinguistic and cultural as well as geographic" (p. 23). Dismissing what they call "the hollow rhetoric of globalization," and despite the relevance of this type of approach, I am reluctant to dismiss paradigms of globalization that are also relevant for understanding the relationship of the regional, in this case the Arab region, to the global.

Moreover, when al-Jazeera is addressed as a "local" phenomenon in this project, the "local" in this case is the regional and cannot be solely examined in relation to the nation-state. As Stuart Hall (1991a) remarks,

> One of the things which happens when the nation-state begins to weaken, becoming less convincing and less powerful, is that the response seems to go in two ways simultaneously. It goes above the nation-state and it goes below it. It goes global and local in the same moment. Global and local are the two faces of the same movement from one epoch of globalization, the one which has been dominated by the nation-state, the national economies, the national cultural identities, to something new. (pp. 26-27)

Anthony Smith (1990) directs us to consider the possibility of this "something new" in a form of nationalism itself that may provide a basis for the rise of regional cultures. He is specifically thinking of "'Pan' nationalisms, defined as the attempt to unify in a single political community several, usually contiguous, states on the basis of common cultural characteristics or a 'family of cultures'" (p. 186). Pan-Arabism is one such example that may form the basis of a regional culture within which al-Jazeera is presumed to participate and nurture. Even though such movements were not a success in unifying the separate states into one state from a political standpoint, assessing them in terms of other dimensions, such as cultural, economic, philanthropic, such movements can be credited for other things. As Smith (1990) indicates, "Pan-Arabism may not have prevented internecine wars among Arabs, but it has inspired inter-Arab development projects and broader cultural and philanthropic links" (p. 186). In this light, the discourse of Arab identity can be explained in reference to a political framework without necessarily measuring its success or efficacy in strictly political terms. Accordingly, it is also my assumption that culture areas, like the Arab-Islamic region, are a product of long-term historical circumstances that represent broadly-speaking common sentiments and identities that are not necessarily less potent or less powerful because they remain inchoate and uninstitutionalized (Smith 1990).

With these critiques in mind, it is then crucial to adopt a conceptual framework that takes into account a multi-directional flow of cultural processes, recognizes the geometries of power along its planes, and finally considers regional collectivities as "local" in their own right existing alongside the nation-state – if they do not surpass it altogether – in relation to the global. Ulf Hannerz (2002) provides such a framework that encompasses these elements in his notion of the global ecumene. Recognizing a world in motion, that the shaping of world culture is an ongoing process, Hannerz (1991) is critical of the perspective that claims there is a global homogenization of culture. This master scenario, he writes, "affords it a certain intrinsic plausibility; it may seem like a mere continuation of present trends. It has, of course, the great advantage of simplicity. And it is dramatic. There is the sense of fatefulness, the prediction of the irreversible loss of large parts of the combined heritage of humanity" (Hannerz, 1991, p. 108). Since, according to Hannerz (1990), world culture is marked by an organization of diversity rather than a replication of uniformity, he conceives its creation in the interconnectedness of diverse local cultures and the development of other cultures that are deterritorialized.

Still, because Hannerz's model is based on center-periphery relationships, it endows this examination with the ability to recognize hegemonic instances of global flows, be they regional or global, and consider the agency of local cultures. Hannerz recognizes that the structure of center-periphery relationships are characterized by many tiers, in which certain countries exercise strong influence in their regions as a result of a well-developed cultural apparatus, such as Egypt in the Arab region (Hannerz 2002). Such tiers suggest a different relationship to

domination that emerges from within regions, a point that Arjun Appadurai (1996) maintains and to which I referred earlier. In addition, his model also does not assume the passivity of peripheral, local cultures. Instead, he provides a scenario in which cultures freely shape syntheses between the global and the local in reciprocal transformations and local culture maintains the capacity not only to receive, but also to give, to synthesize, and to transform (Abou-El-Haj 1991). The center's awareness of peripheral cultures becomes the basis for Hannerz's (1990) conceptualization of cosmopolitanism, an orientation towards, and willingness to engage and to become involved with, the Other. There is an implicit suggestion that transnational and territorial cultures of the world are entangled in the same interconnected web, influencing each other and informing cultural practices, discursive or otherwise, that nonetheless elude anchorage in particular geographic territories and operate in extra-geographic spaces.

More importantly, perhaps, is Hannerz's interrogation of the perceived threat of global cultural homogenization and the efficacy of the transnational cultural apparatus as an instrument of hegemony. He questions whether transnational influences should be perceived as wholly deleterious; the quality of evidence for such alarm that disregards the agency of Third World subjects and the ways they may possibly respond to threats of homogenization; and finally, the way people make sense of transnational cultural flow, keeping in mind the uncertainties built into the communicative process of any 'flow of meaning' (Hannerz, 2002). Two rough scenarios, according to Hannerz (1991, 2002) are then possible: saturation and maturation. Saturation "would suggest that as the transnational cultural apparatus unendingly pounds on the sensibilities of the

peoples of the periphery, local cultural will cumulatively assimilate more and more of the imported meanings and forms, becoming gradually indistinguishable from them" (Hannerz, 2002, p. 43). In contrast, maturation "is based on the possibility that with time, imported cultural items which were at first to some degree in their unaltered, wholly alien forms would with time come to be taken apart, tampered and tinkered with, as people would evolve their own way of using them in a manner more in line with a culture of fundamentally local character" (p. 43).

The maturation scenario helps to account for the extent to which the discourse of the talk shows experiences the infiltration of concepts or notions that are characteristically "foreign" into the conceptual and terminological lexicon informing discussions and debates. As discursive opposition is maintained, the ways in which their meaning in culturally or locally acceptable terms is transformed is equally important. The issue of cultural diffusion then is paramount: "What defines the center-periphery relationship here are above all asymmetries of input and scale. When the center speaks, the periphery listens, and on the whole does not talk back" (Hannerz, 2002, p. 38). However, if al-Jazeera has been endowed with the power to synthesize, to subvert, and to transform the global flow of meaning about the news and current affairs, then how might this impact the way we may theorize postcolonial subjectivity in light of this new relationship between Self / Other positioned in a center-periphery relationship of the type theorized by Ulf Hannerz?

The peripheral corruption scenario, addressed by Hannerz explains the circumspection and cynicism that emerges from the West. This scenario seems to

propel the discursive concerns of postcolonial studies and criticism to the fore. Hannerz (1991) claims that this scenario exists for the people of the center upon which they draw when they are pessimistic about their role in improving the world and when they are doubtful or cynical about the periphery. This deeply ethnocentric scenario, according to Hannerz, denies the validity and value of any transformations at the periphery, ironically, including of what was originally drawn from the center. Hannerz maintains that the question of cultural difference is maintained as a difference between culture and non-culture and between civilization and savagery. The passivity of the Other might have been brought into question within critiques of global cultural homogenization, but the means and extent to which agency is exercised remain elusive. Despite the competition and challenges that it prompts, what cultural influence does al-Jazeera indeed exert over Western discursive practices of news media and the Arab "postcolonial" subject in re-negotiating his/her place in the Self/Other relationship? In other words, "if one tries to arrive at a kind of present-day global cultural flow chart, is to what extent the peripheries indeed talk back; which would in large part be a question of the cultural influence of the Third World on the Occident" (Hannerz, 2002, p. 39).

In *Orientalism*, Edward Said (1994) writes that the "widely diffused notions of the Orient depended on...the almost total absence in contemporary Western culture of the Orient as a genuinely felt and experienced force. For a number of evident reasons the Orient was always in the position of both outsider and of incorporated weak partner of the West" (p. 208). If the aftermath of September 11, 2001 was any indication, the "Orient" was indeed genuinely-felt

and experienced as a force that is strong enough to inflict harm upon the United States and the rest of the world. However, this is the Orient as experienced, felt, and interpreted through Orientalism. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq maintained the idea of the Orient as a weaker counterpart of the West. After all, Orientalism, according to Said, is never far from the collective notion identifying "us" Westerners against all "those" non-Westerners. More pertinently for this discussion though, the argument "that the major component in European culture is precisely what made that culture hegemonic both in and *outside* Europe: the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures" (my emphasis; Said, 1994, p. 7).

At the time of its appearance, Said's controversial text spurred a variety of critiques. One of the most frequent charges against Said that particularly concerns this discussion is the disregard of the self-representations of the colonized and his focus on the imposition of colonial power rather on resistances to it (Loomba 1998). Dennis Porter (1994) furthermore writes that "the feasibility of a textual dialogue between Western and non-Western cultures needs to be considered, a dialogue that would cause subject/object relations to alternate, so that we might read ourselves as the others of our others and replace the notion of a place of truth with that of a knowledge which is always relative and provisional" (p. 153). Moreover, Aijaz Ahmad (1994) accuses *Orientalism* of pandering to the most sentimental and most extreme forms of Third-Worldist nationalism. Ahmad accuses the book of overlooking the accountability of the "Third World" for its own faults and for situations of its own making. He writes, "How comforting such visions of one's own primal and permanent innocence are

one can well imagine, because given what actually goes on in our countries, we do need a great deal of comforting" (Ahmad, 1994, p. 166). Said's later work, *Culture and Imperialism*, addresses some of these critiques wherein he recognizes resistance to the dominance of Orientalist forces. However, while acknowledging the crucial role that cultural nationalism has in ending the era of formal empires, his unease is palpable regarding the possibility that such movements are able to foster reconciliation between the West and non-West. According to Bart Moore-Gilbert (1997), "[t]he suspicion that nationalism can all too easily replicate the essentializing and dichotomizing vision of the culture of the former imperial powers organizes some of the most interesting parts of *Culture and Imperialism*, those which seek to discriminate between different kinds of anti-colonial and postcolonial critic" (p. 65).

Nevertheless, despite the critiques, other scholars applaud *Orientalism* for the new fields of inquiry that it opened. For some, Said's work in general "provides a critical alternative to mainstream Western scholarship on the East. His work encourages us to listen to the voice of the 'Other" and to take responsibility and action in our social and political world (speaking truth to power)" (Abu-Laban, 2001, p. 74). In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said (1993) himself asserts that "only recently have Westerners become aware that what they have to say about the history and the cultures of 'subordinate' peoples is challengeable by the people themselves, people who a few years back were simply incorporated, culture, land, history, and all, into the greater Western empires, and their disciplinary discourses" (p. 195). This challenge resonates throughout Said's work which adopts an approach that "presents an alternative for Western

scholarship to consider "the East" and its people and societies in ways other than those that mirror power holders in the West, especially in the United States" (Abu-Laban, 2001, p. 79). Yet despite Said's accomplishments and as Yasmeen Abu-Laban (2001) remarks, "Said's interventions have not eradicated essentialist and Orientalist ways of thinking" (p. 79).

Arguably, the shift in the pattern of media consumption from Western media outlets to al-Jazeera (and eventually its Arab satellite counterparts) indicates an interesting return of trust in "local" media. In a commentary on the relationship of the "local" to globalization, Stuart Hall (1991a) provides in the following a way to describe the "return to the local" as a response to globalization that aptly describes the general attitude that appears in the discussions of the talk shows:

> It is what people do when, in the face of a particular form of modernity which confronts them in the form of the globalization ... described earlier, they opt out of that and say 'I don't know anything about that any more. I can't control it. I know no politics which can get hold of it. It's too big. It's too inclusive. Everything is on its side. There are some terrains in between, little interstices, the smaller spaces within which I have to work..' Though, of course, one has to see this always in terms of the relationship between unevenly-balanced discourses and regimes. (pp. 33-34)

The relationship between unevenly balanced discourses allows us to begin to appreciate the fear of the threat of globalization against which the discourse of the talk shows is posited. The oppositional discourse is limited insofar as this discourse is unable to effectively address the perceived threat of globalization and successfully maintain a position that can challenge the hierarchy of discursive power with which al-Jazeera's discourse appears unable to completely overcome.

The form of globalization to which Stuart Hall refers in the above citation includes considerations of what might be called "power geometries," forming configurations that, according to cultural studies scholars, are often defined according to power relations. The power dynamics that create this imbalance in the processes that circulate around the globe is the point regarding the uneven balance of discourses and the "regimes" that represent them. However, as Hall (1991a) also recognizes, marginality has paradoxically become a powerful space:

> It is a space of weak power but it is a space of power, nonetheless.... The emergence of new subjects, new genders, new ethnicities, new regions, new communities, hitherto excluded from the major forms cultural representation, unable to locate themselves except as de-centered or subaltern, have acquired through struggle, sometimes in very marginalized ways, the means to speak for themselves for the first time. And the discourses of power in our society, the discourses of the dominant regimes, have been certainly threatened by this de-centered cultural empowerment of the marginal and the local. (p. 34)

Despite this encouraging observation, the weaknesses of this space perpetually serve as a reminder that, even with the ability to successfully challenge representations of marginalized identities in global discourse, this challenge remains marginalized nonetheless. This is often the case at least in the minds of those that offer them to their audiences and in the institutional realities that practically reinforce this marginalization, as in the case of al-Jazeera, its nominal successes in challenging this reality notwithstanding. For this reason, any challenge can only be rendered oppositional and in such a way that maintains the unequal balance of power. In a reminder of the problematic of postcoloniality and in drawing attention to the forces of neocolonialism, Ania Loomba (1998) suggests that it may be premature to proclaim the demise of colonialism so long as the inequities of colonial rule have not been eliminated:

> A country may be both postcolonial (in the sense of being formally independent) and neo-colonial (in the sense of remaining economically and/or culturally dependent) at the same time. We cannot dismiss the importance of either formal decolonisation, or the fact that unequal relations of colonial rule are reinscribed in the contemporary imbalances between 'first' and 'third' world nations. The new global order does not depend upon direct rule. However, it does allow the economic, cultural and (to varying degrees) political penetration of some countries by others. (p. 7)

As the following chapters demonstrate, the "Third World" or "postcolonial" voice of al-Jazeera speaks within and to discourses familiar to the "West" ensuring that East-West boundaries are relatively recognizable despite assumptions of hybridizing or syncretizing flows across those boundaries; that, depending on their direction, are nevertheless not equal in their potency.

3

Arabness and its 'Others': "Fixing" the binary of Arab Identification in discourse

To what extent have essentialist and Orientalist ways of thinking been eradicated in the discursive challenges that the "Orientals" themselves broadcast back to Orientalism as media institutions? To what extent has the discourse of the "Orient" avoided the "rejectionism" that Said perceives imperative to surpass on the way to reconciliation rather than confrontation, even though he admits that it formed an important stage in the struggle against colonization?[1] Indeed, is it premature to proclaim the demise of colonialism if the inequities of colonial rule have not been erased? In this chapter, by examining talk shows that address the political concerns of the region regarding the global political role of the United States, its relationship to the Greater Middle East Initiative and the question of Israel's integration within it, I will demonstrate how "Arabness" is asserted as oppositional in the discourse while confirming its Otherness by creating its own others in response, the United States and Israel. In doing so, by adopting a negative dialectic in a reversal of the colonialist logic itself, this discourse of "Arabness" maintains Orientalism's strategy of a positional superiority of which it is aware. This opposition hence fails to challenge the logic

[1] This is in relation to the rejectionism of cultural nationalists like Ngugi and Chinweizu and movements such as Négritude.

itself by adopting a reactive and defensive tone in a moment of self-consciousness.

The United States as Imperial Power since September 11, 2001

While the "war on terrorism" and the military actions, in which the United States have been engaged, have been justified, primarily in American and British news media, in the name of a moral retaliation to the September 11th attacks on the United States, the attacks have been treated differently in al-Jazeera talk show programming.[2] Rather than a reason, the events of September 11th, 2001 are interpreted as an excuse or catalyst for implementing a political strategy already in place. This section will address two episodes that are relevant to the ways the United States is "othered" as an aggressor, an oppressive empire whose actions are illegitimate because they represent the aggressive workings of empire. In the first episode, September 11th, 2001 symbolizes a historical opportunity for the workings of the American empire (Mansour, 2004, February 4). The second episode which invites an American voice to discuss the United States as an empire maintains the "otherness" of American empire as a colonizing and imperialistic one in a polarized relationship with the colonized Arab and Islamic regions, even when nuanced interjections are introduced to complicate an otherwise simplistically polarized relationship standing in opposition.

According to Mahmoud Jibreel, a political strategist invited on the show *Without Boundaries*, American political strategy was readily available for

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[2] See for example Amy Reynolds & Brooke Barnett (2003), *"America Under Attack": CNN's verbal and visual framing of September 11* for a discussion of how the war was presented as the only solution to the horrific events.

execution as far back as Bill Clinton's presidency, for Clinton's statements had revealed references to the need for the United States to be the leader around the globe (Mansour, 2004, February 4).[3] In the aftermath of the fall of the Soviet Union, it is the first time in world history that there stands only one comprehensive power, the United States. According to Jibreel, the emergence of the United States as the sole power in the world controlling and influencing international relations was a matter to which not enough attention was given by most scholars of international relations in the Arab region and abroad alike. Instead, he adds that the preoccupation and focus was on globalization and its economic and technological implications. Arguably, though, if globalization has been conflated with Americanization, then the preoccupation with globalization as a phenomenon in the aftermath of the fall of the Soviet Union could be considered in some ways a preoccupation with the dominance of the United States as a sole power.

Nonetheless, Jibreel questions the fine line distinguishing between leadership and hegemony; he considers September 11th as merely the catalyst that instigated the execution of this strategic plan; and he argues that September 11th, 2001 served as an opportunity for the United States to restructure international relations across the globe. Therefore, he claims that the Arab press focused completely on the superficial implications of the events, the catastrophic and threatening dimensions of the event for the United States. As a response to the events, the Arab press posed questions around the event that considered a wide

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[3] In fact, Jibreel in addition lists Samuel Huntington's book *The Clash of Civilizations* as one of the books that is considered a reference for the United States' strategies in the region.

spectrum of perpetrators, from Osama bin Laden to the CIA to the Israeli intelligence. According to Jibreel, what should have been questioned instead was the advantage that the American administration had in turning the attacks into a historical opportunity to renegotiate international relations on a global level. This restructuring in turn served a pan-American project that is aimed to span a whole century and that is enabled by American technological and economic capabilities and what he terms the "McDonald's culture" which dominates the whole world.

Despite the different stances and approaches towards the events of September 11, 2001, there is a consensus that their effects are monumental not just for the United States but around the world as well. In their aftermath, the dominance of the United States around the globe is especially felt. According to another guest Paul Kennedy, a prominent American historian, the difference between the United States before and after the events of September 11, 2001 does not strictly lie in the magnitude of the United States' power, militarily- or economically-speaking (Mansour, 2003, November 26). Instead, he indicates that the difference is demonstrated in the American anger, determination and realization that the United States is threatened by grave dangers from the rest of the world of which it is unaware prior to 9/11. In light of this difference, the United States consequently committed to expand its engagements and military operations abroad. Based on its economy's inability to absorb high military expenditures, the fall of an empire, Kennedy explains, would require a period of time of at least of a few decades.

Mansour rhetorically questions, in light of this observation, whether the world would be able to put up with the United States for another two decades. Kennedy points out that the strength of the United States and the magnitude of the power which it possesses creates a nervousness and fear for other less powerful countries and that the U.S. administration is experiencing a challenge in convincing its neighbors and friends as well as other countries of its actions, especially other countries in the Arab world. He adds that the United States harbors no feelings of animosity, and it should perhaps demonstrate that it can be a great power without posing a threat. Mansour challenges this last point by implying the implausibility of this interpretation considering the fact that the United States occupies Afghanistan and Iraq, countries that are in the hearts of the Islamic and Arab worlds respectively. Kennedy explains a crucial difference in the situation of both countries whereby the war in the former acquired the legitimacy of the United Nation's Security Council – the displeasure of the people of the region notwithstanding – whereas the war in the latter did not acquire such legitimacy. Mansour dismisses this distinction which he characterizes as a reading of events that portrays the struggle for legitimizing action based on political interests and not the "raw" facts of the situation as he perceives it, a distinction with which Kennedy concurs.

Moreover, Mansour solicits Kennedy's perspective on what Mansour characterizes as the "chains" of the American empire subsequent to a two-year presence in Afghanistan. Kennedy admits the miserable and chaotic situation that is happening on the ground, especially of women and children, and he indicates that the attention of the American media is mainly focused on Iraq

rather than Afghanistan. Mansour seizes this admission as an opportunity to ask about the claim of responsibility for this chaotic situation and the American role as an occupying power. Kennedy confirms the picture that Mansour paints of Afghanistan under American occupation, wherein security is lacking and the planting of opium has increased. This reality notwithstanding, Kennedy renders such circumstances as unintended consequences that are the byproducts of an American legitimate intervention to eliminate the Taliban, re-asserting his earlier point.

It is evident that, even as Paul Kennedy attempts to be precise in his response, Mansour appears to be interested in maintaining a highly critical stance against the United States that advances a particular discursive framework in which American involvement is understood. Mansour seems to want to emphasize the point that American interference in conflicts in any country did not lead to their resolution, and it left these countries in a worse state than prior to American involvement. Kennedy argues that this type of record is not restricted to the United States (e.g. Great Britain's interferences in Iraq in the beginning of the last century), and that sometimes such interference improves situations (e.g. U.S. involvement in Germany and Japan in 1951). In addition, the Iraq situation is compared with Vietnam. Kennedy explains that the effect of Vietnam on the Democrats and the left is a lack of desire to commit or to get involved beyond American means whereas for the neo-conservatives, the lesson of Vietnam is that it is imperative not to retreat or surrender which is what the current administration is intent on demonstrating time and again. For Kennedy, the catastrophe lies in the Arab world's understanding of the neo-conservative

attitude of the American administration which perceives the U.S. as an imperial power in contrast to the Republican conviction that the United State is doing the right thing. Hence, the effects of these conflicting attitudes are witnessed on the streets of Iraqi streets in the form of ongoing violence.

This bifurcation of perspectives is a crucial instance that explains, if not justifies, the oppositional position evident in Mansour's discourse. It is evident that the United States is featured as an important reference against which a colonized and overpowered "Arabness" is posited as antithetical to the United States. The United States' occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq serves as the current threat of contemporary colonialism that is often perceived as an extension of the colonial past. The introduction at the beginning of this particular episode which frames and sets the agenda for the subsequent discussion with Paul Kennedy about the future of the American empire is particularly poignant:

> The face of the world changed in the wake of the events following September 11th, 2001. The greatest and leading power that controls international decision-making was struck in its core, mobilizing all its latent potential for dominance. It sought revenge and chose and identified its enemy. As its wars continue to this day, its forces occupy Afghanistan and Iraq. It proposed a grand project to dominate the world and its fate, changing its culture and its values to correspond with those of the American empire whose president George Bush stated his principle as: "Those who are not with us are against us. (Mansour, 2003, November 26)

This sensationalist interpretation of the developments in the region associated with the United States' "meddling" in the aftermath of September 11, 2001 is provocative to say the least. This framing serves to summarily dramatize the general sentiments felt by many throughout the Arab region, thereby

contributing to the forging of an oppositional relationship to the United States as an occupying force and informing their sense of self in a world dominated by it. This reactionary introduction establishes the discursive framework within which the discussion takes place. It does not discredit the binary but accepts and employs it to discredit and react against the hegemony of the United States, and it positions the Arab perspective in relation to this binary. In doing so, it represents the United States as a domineering force over a world that is seemingly united in its experience of this threat of American hegemony.

Mansour is not simply content with analyzing and examining the United States as an empire. Instead, his line of questioning and interjections seems to have a vested interest in demonstrating the pernicious effects of American actions and stripping it of any credibility or legitimacy. Consequently, the United States remains through this discursive framework as a foreign occupier that creates havoc as it acts in self-interest. Indeed, this framework draws on sentiments associated with colonial history and history of foreign influence and intervention in the era of independence to understand the United States as an imperial power. Mansour reiterates that positive instances in which imperial powers contributed positively through their involvements abroad are a historical rarity, in an attempt to downplay the potentially positive effects that an imperialist power like the United States may bring into the situations that are discussed. This discourse runs contrary to the one evident in American media that sheds a positive light onto American military actions abroad and that evokes the righteousness of American foreign intervention. Ultimately, Mansour in his emphasis on the rarity of the positive contributions of empire in a colonial and

imperialist contextual frame asserts the point that the United States' involvement in Iraq is not one of these rare cases.

Beyond his fixation on diagnosing the pernicious effects of "American empire," Mansour even anticipates its demise as he questions the extent to which the factors contributing to the fall or demise of great powers correspond to the American case. According to Kennedy, three factors affect the fall or demise of great powers: (1) loss of productivity and the ability to compete economically; (2) military losses in the field; and (3) ideas and morale. He elaborates that the last factor is the most difficult one to assess, and it relates to a people's self-perception as an imperial power and their lack of desire to sustain an empire that controls the lives of others many miles away. Mansour interjects to comment that he hopes that the Americans would begin to think in this way, that he was depressed by Kennedy's earlier statements that the United States has the ability to continue as an imperial power for another fifty years, initiating wars and subjecting the world to its thinking. He reiterates his question, which at this point becomes rhetorical, about whether the world would continue to be subjected to American hegemony and the consequent harm that this hegemony brings about in the world.

In response, Kennedy dismisses this view as exaggerated and extreme. He believes that a different administration in Washington outside of the neo-conservative sphere of influence might decide to use a different approach that, for example, takes into account the United Nations and negotiates with other countries, while acknowledging that it is the strongest power in the world. Such an administration would be committed to decisively bring the end to conflicts,

including ones in the Middle East, and it would be considered as one that is intent on providing assistance rather than employing its military arsenal in a reactionary retaliation. For this reason, Kennedy does not necessarily perceive a reason to be disheartened by the state of affairs and an image of the United States as an American empire of evil, for there are those people who promote moderate and more just political strategies towards the region.

However, this alternative perspective remains ineffective in light of Mansour's persistence upon the assumption that the United States as an imperial power extending its military influence abroad is a source of harm. As the episode nears its end, a caller furthermore asserts this and other assumptions that served as the framework for the interview. His comments mainly center upon the United States in the aftermath of the Cold War after which it developed characteristics of greatness, egoism superiority causing the "peoples of the earth" – the "wretched of the earth" perhaps – to develop feelings of hatred. The development of these feelings was the result of its partial foreign policy and double standards and its protection of Arab dictatorships for a long time, all of which constituted the sedimentation of grudges and hatred for years. Consequently, there is currently a state of explosive anger, according to him; and there is also a confrontation with even moderate Islamic movements in the name of the war on terrorism, caused by fear of al-Qaeda. The capabilities of the Arab and Islamic "nations" are weakened as Arab governments are now compelled to exonerate themselves for the United States, by creating conflicts and pre-occupying themselves with Islamic movements as well in the name of the war on

terrorism. This preoccupation distracts their attention away from other more pressing issues, such as the Palestinian issue.

In his concluding comments, Paul Kennedy perceives no tragic and sudden collapse of the American empire in the future, though he thinks that Americans will gradually begin to understand that there are better means than military ones for dealing with the problems of the world. Meanwhile, in order for them to feel secure in their global war against terrorism, they require armed forces that are spread out around the world. He hopes that the Arab world would increasingly perceive that the United States is not harmful and does not resort to violence; that it is more cooperative. He asks for the audience not to relinquish the hope that the American empire will improve itself in a different form than it appears at the moment. This appeal however is arguably ineffective in the context of this interview because the proposed framework of discussion and the interjections made by the program's host Ahmad Mansour strip the appeal to maintain the credibility of the United States as legitimate; instead it is perceived as a colonizing and imperialist empire. It moreover resonates with the rhetoric of members of the Bush administration whose actions on the ground have discredited their discourse in the eyes of many people in the Arab and Muslim region living the consequences of these actions. The implications of the influence of the United States for Arab governments, the Palestinian question, and Islamic terrorism will be the subject of the following sections.

A Greater Middle East

As I demonstrated in the previous section, having rendered the United States as an evil empire prompting pernicious effects, it becomes as an underlying assumption that cannot be easily jettisoned or bypassed in the discourse of most debates making references to it. In this section, I will particularly examine discussions of, and references to the Greater Middle East Initiative proposed by the United States. The Greater Middle East Initiative represents a new way for politically restructuring the region by integrating the various countries in the region. Al-Kasim (2004, March 16) addresses this proposed framework for conceiving Arab political organization on a regional level. For the most part, the majority of interjections and points made (except for its proponent) depict the initiative as threatening for two reasons: firstly, it is proposed by the United States and thus the initiative is seen as an imposition by external foreign forces; secondly, because the initiative involves a regional framework of identification wherein Arab and non-Arab states constitute a part, the conception of a Greater Middle East threatens notions of "Arabness" and traditional forms of political identification. Israel, the quintessential enemy of Arab states and against which Arab identification is predicated, is figured into this new regional formation proposed and promoted by the United States which is perceived as a staunch ally of Israel in the Middle East and a colonizing and imperialist power in the region. Ultimately, the overarching question is whether the Greater Middle East Initiative will eliminate Arab identity, as expressed in the program's survey question. The significance of the episode examined in the next two sections lies not only in confirming the "otherness" of the United States and

in demonstrating the "otherness" of non-Arab entities, namely Israel, but also in indicating that even support of this controversial initiative relies on taking into account and figuring the discursive representation of the "Others" of "Arabness" in a position of support.

The United States' relationship to this initiative is at the center of the debate. Shaker al-Nabulsi, a U.S.-based professor, who is a proponent of this initiative, seems to want to avoid engaging in a defense of the United States. Instead, he appears to constantly want to emphasize the irrelevance of discussing the United States' actions or "mistakes" in the Middle East to the subject of their debate which should be specifically restricted to the Greater Middle East Initiative. Alternatively, he argues that the initiative is proposed by G8 member countries and not solely the United States and presents the Greater Middle East Initiative in the terminology of globalization; that the initiative is a global project and that it is an unavoidable direction in a world that has become a "global village." Moreover, he maintains that the prospect of democracy that is tied to the Middle East Initiative is not something that will be imposed on Arab countries for it will otherwise be unacceptable. In the same breath, he states that the compulsion to reject anything motivated by the West is an attitude that follows from perspectives shaped by conspiracy theories. While he asserts the need for reforms that emerge from within and not as a consequence of foreign pressures, he simultaneously dismisses attitudes that are wary of attempts to exert such pressures.

In constrast, assistant secretary-general of the Arab lawyers union, Abdel-Azim al-Moghrabi, who opposes the initiative, responded by dismissing the

United States and G8 member countries as ones that do not represent the countries of the United Nations in their totality. He furthermore equates the United States to Satan, arguing that "Satan" has never been interested in establishing democracy and that the United States is not trustworthy in any initiative it proposes. In contrast with Western Europe, he claims that the United States' credibility is tarnished in light of its recent record on the international and regional levels. He refers to the hypocrisy in United States' foreign policy that promotes the oppression and corruption which it addresses through such initiatives in terms of democracy and political reforms. From the perspective of a political strategist, Mahmoud Jibreel (Mansour, 2004, February 4) corroborates this argument. He argues that the initiative is motivated by the Americans and not internationally. He also claims that the budget allotted to this initiative is very minimal compared to the Marshall Plan to revive Europe after the war. For this reason, he perceives this budget as an indication of a lack of sincere interest in developing the region, and he points out that the majority of financing will be derived from the riches of the region. Consequently, his issue with the initiative is the use of the wealth of the region to finance foreign, or American, projects.

While the debate between Nabulsi and Moghrabi centers on the initiative being a global versus an American one, there is a concerted effort in Nabulsi's argumentation to avoid discussing the United States and focus instead on the issue as a global initiative. However, this uncomfortable avoidance arguably does not challenge underlying assumptions that regard globalization as Americanization, insofar as the United States is seen as the most powerful country in the West and the world and therefore its leader and representative in

the minds of Arabs. Moreover, it neither challenges perspectives on American foreign policy nor defends the United States. In doing so, the assumption that the United States and its past record and current actions are indefensible is never challenged; rather, it is maintained as the founding assumption upon which a discourse of identity is based. The inconsistency in Nabulsi's interjections, in recognizing the need for change from within, that is not the result of foreign pressures, and his dismissal of Arab suspicions towards a proposed initiative for reform by a foreign power, render the argument that he is trying to make unsuccessful. This attitude also reveals the difficulty in balancing a perspective in the discussion that respects political reforms which are sovereign from foreign interventions and that tries to propose alternative ways of perceiving political identification. It is in such a way that the binary is fixed and the notion of Arab identity is maintained as long as the assumption of foreign (American) threat is maintained.

Nabulsi's attempts at a discursive balancing act begin to falter. It is inevitable that he continues the debate by contradicting some of his opening statements. He begins to recount the ailments of the Arab region including illiteracy, unemployment, and low personal and national incomes, and technological development among others. Moreover, he correlates these issues with the emergence of terrorism that, he argues, is exported to threaten other parts of the world. Consequently, his argument claims that, in the context of an interconnected globe, it becomes the responsibility of certain countries – implicitly understood as Western ones – to initiate reform because the impact of the grave and threatening state of the Arab region concerns them. As democracy

and political reform are features of this initiative, Nabulsi does not deny that democracy is promoted for the sake of the West, for the sake of their interests, though he argues that the benefits of democracy will be achieved by default. The region will become calm and stable, producing oil and other products, and facilitating access within and through it (e.g. airspace). The problem with this argument is that access and facilitation are achieved through the very authoritarian regimes with which Arab populations are dissatisfied because they are seen as agents of the West, especially the United States.[4]

Moreover, Nabulsi's discourse loses any identification with the majority of his audience that he may have had. He confirmed what he has been trying to dodge all along: the hegemonic impact of the United States on Arab affairs. He abandons any attempts to dismiss this point, contrary to his opening statements, when he adopts a discourse that echoes the type with which Arabs are familiar from Western media. He furthermore confirms a point that in a world of globalization there are those powers that exert dominance upon other weaker states, thereby confirming the imperialist framework through which globalization is typically interpreted and featured in Arabic discourse. He also asserts the "how" (disingenuous calls for democratic reforms) and "why" (American self-interest) this takes place as his interjections become distinctively Western-sounding ones to Arab ears. His argument that the ailments and problems of the Arab world affect the rest of the globe therefore affirms the defensive feelings that

[4] This issue is raised later in the debate and is addressed in this chapter in relation to the reactions and hypocrisy of Arab regimes.

perceive a victimization or vulnerability in the Arab position against American/Western dominance.

Despite Nabulsi's frequent interruptions to emphasize that it is not an American initiative, Moghrabi refutes the American presentation of democracy for the Arab region by indignantly rejecting the prospect that democracy could be presented so conveniently on a silver platter for the Arab world. He asserts that the initiative was proposed by members of the Bush administration prior to its presentation before members of the G8 summit. Nabulsi maintains this perspective as one based on the logic of conspiracy theories. Moghrabi does not refute the fact of the weak state of the Arab region and the problems that it faces. Instead, he refuses American initiatives, due to credibility issues, as well as, what the U.S. proposes and the basis and circumstances upon which it is proposed. He holds the United States accountable to limitations in its own democratic practices. He refers to the legislation passed following September 11, 2001 and the concerns over civil liberties in the United States. Moghrabi continues to provide sharp criticism of the Bush administration and U.S. record abroad including issues concerning the environment. He vehemently argues that an administration or country with this track record cannot be trusted when it claims to present democracy to the region.

The relationship of Arab governments to this initiative moreover is addressed by callers into the program. Their comments highlight the gap between the Arab people and their governments. One caller questions to whom this initiative is presented, whether to Arab governments or to the Arab peoples. He equates criticism of this initiative to a defense of these Arab governments who

are rejecting this initiative for fear over their authoritarian rule. These governments in turn will take advantage and speak in the name of their peoples in rejecting the initiative which then provides a cover for these regimes. Another caller states that the reactions of Arab regimes confirm the seriousness of such an initiative. He explains that Arab regimes conveniently resorted to employing nationalist and pan-nationalist slogans in criticizing the proposed political reforms threatening their ability to govern in the manner that they do. The fact that these regimes provided all kinds of security and military facilitations for the United States, including opening their airspace, ground and naval ports, is ironic. These regimes that resist this initiative which introduces democratization into the region are in contradiction with the slogans that these regimes invoke. Their facilitations of American military action as well as their acceptance of unjust conditions dictated by American and international institutions (e.g. World Bank) are contrary to the interests of their populations. He furthermore adds that there is a contradiction of (pan-) nationalist interests in the pursuit of the implementation of social and economic development programs.

Finally, at the level of the "Arab street," this same caller emphasizes the importance of benefiting from democratizing the Arab world for the United States. He raises the following points: (a) the international free market cannot be successfully created without integrating the Arab world into processes of economic globalization, and the region requires democratic regimes that are able to fight corruption and ensure the transparency of the economic process; (b) terrorism emerges from a context in which dictatorships prevail and eliminating terrorism can only be successful when its root and causes are eliminated,

including corrupt ruling regimes; (c) in the absence of democracy, problems such as poverty will continue to place pressure upon Western countries who will continue to face floods of immigration and asylum seekers. In this instance, this caller endorses this initiative as an opportunity for resisting Arab governments to contribute to positive change regardless whether it is prompted by internal or external forces. In other words, he maintains the point that both guests of the show agreed upon: that the need for reforms is undeniable. However, while his contribution to the discussion does not exonerate or defend the United States, his focus remains on attending to the problems and initiating reforms, a point that no one contests in the debate.

In spite of such and other varying perspectives, approaches, and interpretations that were expressed throughout the broadcast, the assumptions from which they depart were never challenged. Primarily, these assumptions include perceptions of the United States' intentions and the perspectives on Arab governments which are seen as complicit in accommodating and facilitating foreign interference simultaneously as their interests (not the interests of Arab populations) are taken into account. The manner in which Arab identity is constructed in the discussion of these circumstances highlights the discursive undertones of the notion of "Arabness" that I am addressing. This notion featured in this discussion is distinguished from any political or institutional forms of (pan-) Arabism.

Israel, Arab National Identity, and the Palestinian Question

For opponents of this initiative, one of the main problems that it poses is the effect that it would have on Arab national identity and the integration of Israel as part of the initiative's framework. References to threats to "national identity" abound, although this identity is always assumed and never explicitly defined. Thus, it is not clear to what this "national identity" refers. In spite of this ambiguity, one could arguably assume that "national identity" refers to the collective of Arab countries as a rhetorical entity, borrowing from the resonance of former pan-nationalist rhetoric. Even if threats to this "national identity" are assumed to be ones experienced within each separate Arab country, the threats nevertheless are assumed to be a common experience for all Arab countries. Perceived generally as a major threat, Israel becomes a threat to the identity of all Arab countries, and the Palestinian question then becomes a crucial issue for the identity of Arab countries across their state borders. As Edward Said (1993) remarks, Palestine is "*an idea* that for years galvanized the Arab world into thinking about and fighting for social justice, democracy, and a different kind of future than the one that has been imposed on it by force and by an absence of Arab will" (p. xxxiii).

The elimination of this sense of "national identity" is therefore an important feature in the discussion of the Greater Middle East Initiative, and in which Israel is figured as the threat that will eliminate this identity. Accordingly, the American-proposed initiative that implicitly implies the integration of Israel is perceived as a gesture aiming to dissolve Arab national identity. This perception associated with opposition to this initiative polarizes both the United

States and Israel against which Arab identification is maintained in the discussion.

When al-Kasim (2004, March 16) inquires about the Greater Middle East initiative as an attempt to eliminate Arab national identity by integrating diverse countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Israel and Turkey into a "Middle Eastern" regional entity, Nabulsi points out that throughout its different phases of colonization, extending back to the Ottomans and past European colonization and rule, Arab national identity has not been successfully eliminated. He equates national identity with language, religion, culture and traditions, all of which have not been eliminated in past historical periods of foreign control or occupation. Therefore, Nabulsi provides reassurances that such fears are unsubstantiated. He moreover adds that there are common characteristics that these countries (stretching from Afghanistan to Mauritania) share including a geo-historical relationship that connects them together, an argument that does not account for the diversity of these countries inasmuch as an all-encompassing "Arabness" overlooks the diversity of Arab countries themselves.[5] For Nabulsi, these countries also experience a hijacking of Islam, and in its name transforming it into a tool for international terrorism, rule of corrupt dictatorships, and problems of development (e.g. poverty) from which these countries suffer. However, his answer does not account for Israel's disconnection from these geo-historical links, as he terms them, because they do not apply to it, and indeed

[5] Nabulsi could have used another line of argumentation, but the logic that frames the discourse forces him to account for his position according to its terms.

only serves to enhance the argument against Israel's integration into a regional framework.

On the other hand, Moghrabi acknowledges and emphasizes that, while there are historical links through which the countries of the region are concentrically connected (following from the order established by former Egyptian president Gamal Abdel-Nasser: the (pan-) Arab national sphere, Islamic sphere, and African sphere) the new development on the scene is Israel. In his view, the intention of the Greater Middle East Initiative is to integrate it and to impose the hegemony of American values over Islamic ones. Therefore, according to him, it is impossible that any gestures from the Americans could be accepted as long as they do not correspond to Arab needs and address Arab concerns. In light of what al-Kasim describes as Arab governments' enthusiastic readiness for establishing peace with Israel, he questions why there is a fear of integrating Israel into a regional framework. According to Moghrabi, their interest in their power notwithstanding, Arab governments who are enthusiastic for such regional recognition do so under American pressure (he terms it "American terrorism") which is not concomitant with the desire of the Arab nation (he implies the people) which responds by giving in with less eagerness. Moghrabi insists that the problem with this initiative seeking to integrate Israel is to eliminate Arab and Islamic identities of the "Arab-Islamic nation" in an attempt to dilute the character of the current political (albeit ambiguously defined) entity, representing its history and civilization and replace it with an arbitrary entity that has no identity, no character, or features lead by Israel. Arab needs and concerns, including the issue of democracy and the relationship of the

Arab peoples to their governments and to Israel, in such a way become rhetorical markers in a discourse that defines Arab self-perception in relation to politics.

Undeniably, the relationship between Israel and the United States as well as the Palestinian question remains at the heart of any discursive regional identification within the framework of any particular political structure. Nabulsi stresses the importance of resolving the Palestinian issue prior to the Iraq invasion but points out that it is difficult to resolve it in light of the corruption of the Palestinian authority. Moghrabi retorts back to qualify Nabulsi's response as one based on an American logic. Mogrhabi refutes the argument by pointing out that, according to the logic of democracy, an elected leader such as Yasser Arafat cannot be disregarded by an American administration that recognized him as such before changing its position in accordance with Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon's position towards Arafat. Al-Kasim (2004, March 16) indicates Israel's success in establishing a democracy for its peoples despite its engagement with five wars with the Arabs; in managing to garner support from the West in its conflict with the Arabs; and in ensuring that every Israeli is a partner in the decision-making process for confronting the "Arab threat,", the "real" as well as the presumed as he qualifies it. Al-Kasim contrasts this depiction of Israel with Arab governments who oppress their populations aspiring for democracy after the governments' failure to confront Israel. In response, Moghrabi emphasizes that there is a distinction between Arab governments and their peoples, who in their turn are concerned with the Palestinian issue, citing Gamal Abdel-Nasser's quote stating that the Palestinian issue is the central issue for the (pan-) Arab nation. He furthermore adds that the Arab-Israeli conflict is one of the main

causes for the current situation, contributing to the slow-down in the economy, imposition of states of emergency, restricting liberties in the Arab world; that Israel is a military outpost for Western military forces in general and American ones in particular; and that terrorism is not a strictly indigenous phenomenon in which the Americans are partners because they supported and trained the now so called "terrorists" contrary to American military action in Iraq which is not typically considered terrorism.

The contributions of the callers to this discussion emphasize the distinction between Arab governments and the Arab peoples and the associations or correlations between the problems of the Arab region and the Arab-Israeli conflict or Israel. One caller remarks about the absence of an indication to the Arab-Israeli conflict as a contributor to the problems in the Arab region, thereby rendering the initiative limited in its offerings and questionable in its seriousness, despite its inclusion of positive points that must be considered and examined. Another caller acknowledges the ills of the region, yet attributes them to the nature of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the question of Arab rights vis-à-vis Israel which has not complied or respected the majority of UN resolutions. A noteworthy point is that he terms those rights "Arab," and not Palestinian, a conflation that perceives the Palestinian question as an Arab issue in the broadest sense. A third caller explains that the Palestinian question is the reason for Arab hatred towards the United States, although he perceives American partiality in engaging with this issue represents an exception in American foreign policy. Here, he is maintaining the assumption that American foreign policy is biased against the plight of the Palestinians and against Arab issues in general, though

he points out that Arabs must recognize that they need to take American foreign policy into account and work through it in order to ensure their concerns and issues are heard and appropriately addressed. A fourth caller perceives the initiative as an indirect way of integrating the "Zionist entity" in the heart of the Arab economy; he uses the metaphor of the body to evoke the cancerous effect of such integration. He interprets the aim of the initiative as a depletion of Arab capital to re-build the crumbling Zionist and American economies, one that is hidden behind the "deceptive" language used to promote the initiative. He summarily dismisses the initiative as a Zionist project.

In contrast, a lone dissenting voice employs the same metaphorical approach of disease to assert the point about the ills of the Arab world, and the threat that its terrorism poses for the world. This is a point that resonates with Nabulsi's perspective which supports the initiative. The caller states that the initiative demarcates the geographic area like a physician determines the size of a cancerous tumor. He attributes the resistance to this initiative and the idea that there is an "illness" from which the Arab world requires a cure to three pretexts, therefore confirming the basis of any resistant opposition to anything perceived to be American: (a) rejection of imported "prescriptions" from the West; (b) concern over (pan-) national identity; (c) negligence of the Palestinian issue. Still, his voice joins the consensus that is highly critical of Arab governments, albeit with a different interpretation. He argues that the Palestinian issue is employed in order to oppress, or that oppression is maintained in the name of this issue; in other words, that Arab regimes trade the issue, in his words "buy and sell" it, depending on their interests. It is the issue around which Arabs

convene to maintain the status quo while rejecting any opportunity or hope for reform. In his view, it is this trend that carves a path towards a clash of civilizations. Drawing from Edward Said's argument against using "difference" as an instrument relegating the rights of others to an inferior status, Marc Ellis (2001), writes that "Palestinians have learned this prohibition not only in the fact of Israel, but also in their experience with Arab states that similarly essentialize Palestinians through ideology and practical politics" (p. 58). This view acknowledges the prominent status of the Palestinian issue in the cultivation of a sense of "Arabness," even if the invocation of the issue by Arab governments can be problematic.

Another episode sheds light on the significance of Israel's "otherness" as a rhetorical invocation that maintains the coherence and cogency of Arab identity construction in the discourse of the talk shows. In this broadcast which addresses the findings of a European survey, the perception of Israel's threat is extended beyond the Arab region to include the world (al-Kasim, 2003, November 11). Broadcasting from Paris, al-Kasim invites two French guests Elisabeth Chemla, a French journalist, and Ginette Heiss, a French activist, to discuss the results of this European survey. In the survey, the majority of its European respondents (56%) regarded Israel as the greatest danger to world peace, a finding that was the primary issue of debate in the program. Throughout the debate, Elisabeth Chemla expresses very ineffective arguments, resorting often to personal attacks against her opponent, Ginette Heiss who consequently continues to gain the upper hand in the conversation, rather than addressing the specific questions posed to her by al-Kasim. Chemla departs from her allegations

that Heiss is supporting extremist Islamic groups, to assert that the Islamists – she makes sure to distinguish them from Islam as a religion – pose a threat that contributes to the cultivation of feelings of danger. She claims that the majority of those people who worked on this survey have Islamist inclinations or associations. In such a way, Chemla re-casts the danger as an Islamist one. By referring to the danger of Islamist orientations, for her, addressing this danger tends to reach the extent of confrontation with Middle Eastern and Islamic countries. Chemla also adds that this survey should have included other non-Islamic nations such as China and Russia whose populations have opinions regarding Muslims. Therefore, Chemla's attempts to divert attention from Israel as the subject of this episode, albeit unsuccessfully, and focus on Islamist terrorism as the threat to the world at large. In doing so, she neglects identification with her audience to whom one would assume she is attempting to reach out.

Chemla's attempts to credibly present her position defending Israel backfire when the legitimacy of her position is challenged. This challenge becomes imperative in order to maintain Israel's "otherness" as the legitimate component in the discursive framework of identification. One caller's interjection is particularly significant in response to Chemla's argumentation. He points out that while Chemla qualifies her opponent, she has forgotten to qualify herself as a journalist who supports Zionism and supports the government of Ariel Sharon. In a subsequent instance, al-Kasim follows up this point with information about Chemla's personal associations (e.g. against the Islamists in Algeria and in support of Israel) which she neglects to address or qualify. The

caller also makes a point that the survey was undertaken after Europe fulfilled a number of conditions requested by Israel: (a) to include the political wing of Hamas in the list of terrorist groups; (b) signing outstanding European trade agreements with Israel; (c) Israel's refusal to receive the new European envoy. For this viewer, this last point demonstrates Israel's disrespectful disregard for Europe which has been received with popular European outrage. He states that it has become difficult for those like Chemla who defends Israel to divert the audience's attention to opinions in China and Russia instead of interpreting the survey as revealing Israel as an unethical racist state that oppresses the Palestinians; it is such a state that constitutes the greatest danger for peace in the world and not the Palestinians who are under occupation. Considering al-Jazeera's Arab audience, the caller's contribution serves to discredit and disqualify Chemla's position by "fixing" the oppositional and typical view of Israel that Chemla failed to challenge in the first place.

According to Chemla, questions regarding the Palestinians are absent in this survey which solely focuses on Israel. In response, Heiss explains that the Palestinians have been dispossessed of their native land and therefore are without a state. For her, not until the two sides become equal partners, rather than represent a relationship of colonizer/colonized, would she accept and support any signed treaty or agreement. She affirms that while the results of the survey do not represent the views of the European governments, the results are accurate insofar as they reflect the popular views of European peoples. Even though she does not deny the importance of the survey, Chemla's attempts at minimizing and critiquing the survey nevertheless suffer from further refutations.

She points out the cautious reaction of European governments and officials towards the survey, and the wariness that characterizes this reaction is connected to the issue of anti-Semitism in Europe which has become important for them. Perhaps the most salient refutation to which Kasim holds her accountable is the issue of democracy. Kasim points out how European peoples and their leaders are polarized. As Western democracy employs surveys in its operations, he is perplexed by official European reactions towards it which included the Italian foreign minister's condemnation and the European Commissioner's deep concern over the results of the survey who maintains that it does not reflect the opinions of his Commission. Judging by official European reception of the survey and in typical sensationalist style, Kasim provocatively suggests in his question to Chemla that European leaders have transformed from leaders of democracy to "oppressive dictators" when matters concern Israel, that they do not recognize those people who elected them to their positions of power. In turn, Chemla's unconvincing response merely states that it is their democratic right to express their opinions.

This instance is particularly significant because a parallel can be drawn to the distinction between Arab governments and Arab peoples that was addressed earlier in this chapter and in reference to another broadcast (al-Kasim, 2004, March 16). It serves to draw a relation whereby the integrity of European officials and governments is questioned in contrast to a European popular sentiment. In recognizing this parallel, the issue of anti-Semitism in Europe is subsequently addressed in the discussion, following from Chemla's comment about European official concern with the rise of anti-Semitism. Al-Kasim appears particularly

interested in tackling the charge of anti-Semitism against Israel's critics, although Chemla's failure to directly answer questions propels him to insist that she respond to the specific questions that he is posing to her. This instance demonstrates that al-Kasim is particularly interested in focusing on certain issues, and Chemla's dismissal of his questions renders her position increasingly non-credible with the progression of the episode. In addition to Chemla's earlier ineffective personal allegations and accusations against Heiss, the orientation of discourse solidifies the latter's position.

On the issue of anti-Semitism, Chemla eventually maintains that Zionism and anti-Semitism are inextricably linked. Al-Kasim questions whether the label "anti-Semitism" is not a "weapon" that is used by Zionist organizations against the Europeans, with which to frighten them with this charge upon the release of the results of the survey. On the other hand, Heiss seems to confirm the assumptions inherent in the types of questions that Kasim poses. In this example, he asks about the backlash as a result of this survey on the Europeans from Israel's lobbies and groups who support it, in order to pressure European peoples or "discipline" them as a penalty for their views which are contrary to Israel's interests. Al-Kasim's line of questioning is perhaps best described in the words of Marc Ellis (2001):

> In the drama of suffering and redemption so evident and articulated with the force, though often unannounced, of a history seen by Jews as central to the divine and human journey of humanity, the resistance to critique and the accusation of another threatened event of mass suffering is enough to reduce most critics to silence.
>
> Yet silence on the issue of Jews and Judaism is more than demanded; it is enforced with psychological and material penalties. The charges of Jewish self-hatred, the new anti-Semitism, and the encouragement of another holocaust are complimented by the highly

> organized and well-financed Jewish political apparatus and institutional structure. (p. 43)

For her part, Heiss does point out that Europeans had not been aware of what has been happening in the Middle East prior to the satellite explosion on the scene and broadcasts of Arab satellite channels, such as al-Jazeera and al-Arabiya. She claims that the majority of Western media offer a Zionist or Zionist-oriented slant and that such Arab satellite channels are a corrective to a partial media environment that serves to complement Western media offerings.

Al-Kasim probes this point by asking whether the results of the survey pose a hindrance to Zionist media that are unable to control Western perceptions of Israel as a victim by using the Holocaust as a means to conceal Israel's crimes in Palestine. Again, Marc Ellis (2001) describes the type of perspective that al-Kasim adopts in his questions:

> Israel is the guardian of Jewish history and America, with its power and moral purpose, its guarantor. Anything that threatens Jewish unity around the question of Israel or undermines America's power and purpose in the world is thus defined as enemy or more; conscious or not, these enemies invite another holocaust. This warning applies to Jews and non-Jews alike, the first accused of self-hate, the second accused of anti-Semitism. If the mission and policies of Israel, even its expansion and wars, are defined in terms of morality and religiosity, then its critics are accused on the same terrain. (pp. 41-42)

Through a dramatic description, al-Kasim states that Western media has failed in brainwashing the Europeans, that the "blinds have fallen from their eyes," that they can no longer perceive Israel as a democracy which is a victim of savage peoples in the Middle East. Neither the cynicism in his tone nor the ironic Orientalist implications of his terms can be easily dismissed as powerful

rhetorical means to maintain a particular framework through which to regard Israel, not only for Arabs but for the European peoples as well.

Ginette Heiss asserts that a significant number of respondents (89%) think that Europe should have better relations with the Arab world, a finding that is equally important for her. Heiss maintains that this survey reflects a democratic process through which people have expressed opinions that are not solicited by their governments. In her final comments, and while evading the point made about European desire for better relations with the Arab world, Chemla asserts an Orientalist position vis-à-vis the Arab-Islamic region. She argues that the region must choose to be modernized and civilized, especially with concern to recent issues of equality, women, and human rights. Al-Kasim retorts back with indignation claiming that she is not responding to his question, that she is depicting Arabs as primitive, who "emerged from behind camels." She maintains that Europeans in their relations with the region must ensure that they are dealing with an Arab world that is civilized and accepts modernity. Her Orientalist commentary is equally received by a vehement opposition that discredits her arguments and perspectives, thereby entrenching Israel as the "Other" against which Arab identification is predicated in any discourse of identity.

This final exchange in conclusion of the debate (al-Kasim, 2003, November 11) is particularly significant because it demonstrates a potential fragmentation of the "West" as a unified entity once imagined in Arab discourse. An oppositional discourse that is critical of notions of European democracy is maintained, and European popular views are portrayed as sympathetic or

attentive to the Arab world and specifically the Palestinian question which is at the heart of overarching Arab identification. Al-Kasim's indignant cynicism also indicates recognition of, and an attempt to discredit Orientalist depictions and notions of the Arab region that have profound associations with a colonial past.

"Islamic Terrorism" and Foreign Power Struggles

One of the most prominent Orientalist depictions of the region is an anti-modernist, uncivilized one that is dominated by a globally-threatening Islamism. Awareness of such depictions remains at the heart of opposition to Orientalism which discursively maintains the "West" as a deterritorialized cultural notion, rather than a clearly articulated or defined – however problematically – geo-cultural entity. In this section, I will account for the viability of the "Islamist threat" in relation to the increasing influence of the European Union (as well as other countries, like China and India) that challenges American hegemony. The episode that features the political strategist Mahmoud Jibreel exemplifies treatment of "Islamic terrorism," especially as it informs the current political climate following from the attacks in the United States on September 11th, 2001. This episode also exemplifies the different treatment of these attacks in the discourse of the talk shows, contributing to Arab self-perception and self-understanding. It offers an interpretation of global affairs currently prompted by terrorism, which is often identified with Islam, and re-casts the issue of terrorism as a pretext for foreign power struggles that acquits Islam from the allegations leveled against it.

From a strategic point of view, Jibreel (Mansour, 2004, February 4) argues that "Islamic terrorism" is an excuse and not the reason for implementing political strategies. He moreover argues that the United States also contributes to the global phenomenon of terrorism in order to carry out its strategic plans around the globe. A concept that eludes explicit definition, "terrorism" serves strategic planning by liberating it from time and place constraints. Strategies, he explains, are comprehensively concerned with regions and not countries, and consequently Islam defined in terms of Islamic extremism prevails in regional terms across the boundaries of many countries and the globe in general. Like Communism before it which included a multitude of nations, "Islamic terrorism" serves as an appropriate replacement for liberating strategic political planning from the specificity of time and place in the aftermath of the fall of the Soviet Union. Terrorism is a sort of political extremism that is present across the globe and is not particular to the Arab region (it exists in the U.S., Israel, and Europe), however the choice of a characteristically-transnational "Islamic terrorism" becomes a particular and deliberate one. The lack of specificity of place and time ensures that the implementation of strategic plans continues in the pursuit of this assumed threat. The "ghost" of Islamic terrorism which is not fixed or particularly manifested in any particular country allows strategic planning to extend its objectives across the globe in search of this threat anytime and anywhere in the world. Therefore, in such a way, the threat of terrorism, he argues, resolves the dilemma of dealing with countries of the Third World after the demise of the Soviet Union.

Moreover, Jibreel argues that the perception of "Islamic terrorism" serves a politically-strategic purpose. He asserts that China and India as well as the European Union pose an actual threat to the United States in its attempts to consolidate its power across the globe. The type of "global war" against terrorism in which the United States is engaging is aimed to create particularly strategic centers of military presence in order to contain the rising influence of China, India, and the European Union and not the threat of Islamic terrorism. He explains that any extremist group, Islamic or non-Islamic, is a product of the new scene of the phenomenon of globalization, a clash between the nation-state understood in its traditional conception and a manifestation of the freedom of mobility of individuals or organizations as influential actors on the political international scene. Furthermore, American presence in the region is not to control the oil for American interests, in the strict sense. Instead, it is to control and monitor the increasing need for oil by these rising powers. Consequently, the Middle East became the battleground in which international affairs are conducted, and according to his view maintain sentiments of victimization felt by the people of the region.

Ahmad Mansour (2004, February 4) adopts and maintains this view, that the visible threat is Islamic terrorism and adds that countering the threat goes beyond military action. He presents the cultural dimension to the politics that he is discussing with his guest, Jibreel. Mansour presents the cases of the "war" on the "hijab" (the Muslim headscarf) in France and all things rendered "Islamic." According to Mansour's presentation, the implications of politics and political developments are associated with actions that extend into cultural or religious

practices and beyond the battlefield. Nonetheless, Jibreel maintains that the Islamists are merely the pretext upon which any action is predicated. He argues that America's war is a political one and not a religious one and that the motivations for going to war are strictly political as well, contrary to how Arab media has addressed and treated the current topic of war.[6] Instead of understanding these motivations and strategizing with these rising powers, Jibreel argues that Arab discourse debilitated itself in a reactionary type of self-defense, one that is preoccupied with proving the innocence of Islam from all the heinous allegations leveled against it. According to Jibreel, Arabs or Muslims in their current state pose no threat to anyone because they possess no resources to achieve the type of power necessary to consolidate an effective position within international relations. These resources do not contribute to forming any type of economic, military, technological, or other such threats that contribute to the rise or fall of any civilization. Jibreel contends that the Americans managed to preoccupy Arabs with an interpretation of the events of September 11, 2001 that suggests their culture poses a threat rather than the opportunity that September 11, 2001 represented for the United States. Arab strategic planning furthermore failed to properly account for and interpret this event as an opportunity in which a weaker political entity is able to mobilize. According to Jibreel, the events of September 11, 2001 demonstrate that the United States can be hurt and suffer blows like any other political entity.

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[6] This debate is featured in *The Opposite Direction* in an episode entitled "Religious Wars" wherein two guests debate whether the American reasons for waging war are religious or not. This episode will be addressed in the following chapter.

Jibreel's argument could be interpreted otherwise. It could very well serve as a critique of the oppositional discourse with which news and current affairs are received and treated in Arab media. The preoccupation with a "misguided" interpretation of the events of September 11th, 2001 could be regarded as typically associated with an oppositional refutation of this interpretation. Jibreel continues to describe how the United States successfully utilized this opportunity. He claims that it transformed 9/11 into a holocaust in the psyche of the American individual through which it is able to mobilize American public opinion for any foreign policy issue. Because September 11, 2001 caused a blow to American pride that cannot be matched with previous events like the attack on Pearl Harbor or the war in Vietnam, the American response was cruel. In his view, he finds it difficult to believe that the casualties of war were mistakes or accidental, such as the ones that resulted from the air bombings. The sophisticated technology employed in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq could not have been so arbitrary in their effect. Although he admittedly qualifies his opinions as possible exaggerated allegations, he does add that according to his view, the bombings represented a way to restore American pride, especially in the psyche of the American individual, in retaliation to what has been done to it, though it is crucial to maintain legitimacy for its actions and presence in the region in order to avoid a clash with its peoples and to maintain a favorable image in the world.

The cultural dimension of such legitimacy concerns the issue for Arab identity. In order to legitimately consolidate its power in the region, a transitional period will involve the cultivation of what Jibreel terms the "Western-oriented gentleman," a Westernized character who dreams and speaks

"American" and is American-educated. This transitional period will prepare the scene for the more crucial phase of establishing legitimacy for American presence. Mansour raises the issue of changing the school curricula as a constituent in the new American strategic plans for the region. Jibreel explains that changing the curricula is part of the plan to create a new generation of Arabs that perceives itself as an extension of American civilization and cannot perceive legitimacy past an American one. Therefore, the main issue causing the most imminent danger is not the military action and presence in the region per se; rather, it is the aftermath of this presence with consequences that Jibreel claims will threaten the future of Arab identity and the future of the Arab citizen and nation. By dismantling educational, social, developmental, religious, and media institutions as they currently exist, the United States strives to achieve a legitimate presence in the region. Changes will occur through a filtering process of all terminology that calls for violence and segregation based on religion and other such basis, as well as anything that is related to "jihad" and renouncing the "Other."

Although Jibreel does not deny that changes are imperative and necessary in the Middle East, as do other progressive Arab intellectuals, he argues that the purpose of changes should be to rehabilitate the citizen who has been undermined by these institutions. This purpose is in contrast with what he perceives to be the true aim of the United States in introducing such changes: to legitimize its presence and dominance in the region. Hence, while there is agreement in principle between the American vision for the region and progressive Arab intellectuals, the objectives and reasons remain diametrically

opposed. For Arab intellectuals, the rehabilitation of the citizen is part of this objective, as a starting point for initiating an effective development plan. Issues of the participation of the citizenry, the issue of democracy and dialogue, and tolerance towards "otherness" and difference are all ones that institutions must adopt and foster. Attention to such issues, Jibreel asserts, will contribute to the creation of a citizen that is unified with the "nation" and that is capable of defending it. Therefore, despite the need for change, democracy, as it is proposed by American initiatives and plans cannot be "ready-made." Democracy must be internally-rooted in the Arab psyche, and not imposed by external forces, a recurrent theme in the discourse. It must be "home-bred" and established in such places as mosques, schools, and in the media. This type of indigenous democracy is what cultivates a political consciousness that "ready-made (American) containers" of democracy can never achieve.

The themes that are recurrent throughout the discourse of the episodes analyzed in this chapter maintain an oppositional stance towards a neo/colonial power. Sentiments of victimization prompted by the hegemonic force of the United States are coupled with indignation at the disregard for the rights of the Arab peoples, including Palestinian ones, enabled by the support of the United States. Hence an oppositional stance towards Israel and its complicity with neocolonialism is equally maintained. Israel arguably constitutes a colonial occupying power of its own, and Edward Said (1979) in *The Question of Palestine* extends his perspective on Orientalism to elaborate on the Palestinian cause, underscoring "the connection between Orientalism and the Zionist settler-colonial project which rested on the dehumanizing erasure of an indigenous

population" (Abu-Laban, 2001, p. 78).[7] Furthermore, the twinning of the United States and Israel renders their "otherness" complicit. The perception of the United States and Israel, as places of compassion and goodness and places of refuge for Jews in an otherwise hostile world by American Jewry may explain why this coupling in Arab discourse is inevitable (Ellis 2001). Consequently, discursive confrontation or opposition is tied to the coupling of complicit "Others." In such a way, the polarization of the binary is established against which "Others" are identified and opposition is maintained.

The discursive positioning of an oppositional Arab self in the binary maintains a colonizer/colonized dynamic instead of challenging its logic. Ania Loomba (1998) reminds us of the inextricable link which Michel Foucault's work suggests; that "colonial authority, like any other, is legitimised through a process during which it constantly has to negotiate with the people it seeks to control, and therefore the presence of those people, oppositional or otherwise, is a crucial factor in studying authority itself" (p. 51). Hence, the message of Orientalism is still relevant today. According to As'ad AbuKhalil (2001), "[t]he defeat of the Palestinian national movement and American military supremacy around the

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[7] This point can be linked to the problematic temporality of postcoloniality. Ella Shohat (2000) writes: "If one formulates the post in postcolonial in relation to Third Worldist nationalist struggles of the 1950s and 1960s, then what time frame would apply for contemporary anti-colonial/antiracist struggle carried under the banner of national and racial oppression, for such Palestinian writers as, for example, Sahar Khalifeh and Mahmoud Darwish who write contemporaneously with postcolonial writers? Should one suggest that they are pre-postcolonial? The unified temporality of postcoloniality risks reproducing the colonial discourse of an allochronic other, living in another time, still lagging behind us, the genuinely postcolonials" (pp. 130-131). Furthermore, the "Palestinian struggle also exemplifies something which for Said characterizes both anti-colonial and post-colonial or anti-imperialist resistance, namely people's rejection of the attempt to confine them – whether physically, or by means of strategies such as representation" (Childs & Williams, 1997, p. 109). In addition to demonstrating the problematic of temporal categorization, the discourse of "Arabness" co-opts the Palestinian issue as one closely associated with such resistance.

world have relegitimized sentiments of prejudice and hostility toward the people of the East. The defeatist mood in the Middle East has also created a hospitable climate for ideas long ingrained in classical Orientalist dogmas. The dogmas of Orientalism have been released from the confines of the academic world into the larger popular cultures of Western and Eastern countries" (p. 104). Moreover, the dynamic prompts a vague differentiation between "East" and "West," the latter in this instance is discursively configured as the United States while Europe is distinguished between governments and peoples, a parallel drawn from the Arab situation. The authority of the "West," specifically the United States and Israel, represent a strategically essentialized totality wherein Europe's inclusion is questionable, or it is ambiguously excluded. In planning a strategy that counters the American one, Jibreel refers to a counter-action in terms of Arab countries as a coalition or organized structure. Hence, by the same token, "Arabness" becomes a discursively strategic totality as well that "fixes" a binary in an oppositional discourse of identification that, nevertheless, does not lose sight of the power of its "Others."

4

Islam in Arab Identification and the Strategic Essentialism of 'Arabness'

The binary in which the oppositional discourse of "Arabness" entrenches itself best achieves a strategic essentialism that is manifested in Islamic identification. While the discourse of "Arabness" identifies its "Others" as specific states, its own status, presumably as a discursive totality, remains ambiguously-defined and conspicuously vulnerable to interrogation. Islamic identification in the discourse of "Arabness" accommodates, and arguably cements, the gaps that render the oppositional constructions of "Arabness" questionable; for "Islam, as a world religion, has become peculiarly identified in the public consciousness with the Arab region, and especially with those parts of the Arab world thought to be hostile to western interests" (Macdonald, 2003, p. 152). It discursively contributes to the persistent need to overcome the (neo-) colonial grip and provides an anti-colonial discourse that cannot be easily dismissed. To be able to go beyond colonialism, "post-colonialism" becomes a need articulated in Simon During's definition of the term: "the need, in nations or groups which have been victims of imperialism, to achieve an identity uncontaminated by universalist or Eurocentric concepts and images" (Childs & Williams, 1997, p. 159). Indeed, this is the choice that Gayatri Spivak argues must be made in distinguishing the border between the theoretical and the

practical, at which theory can often be limited against the pragmatism of concrete circumstances. Spivak (1990) explains that "You pick up the universal that will give you the power to fight against the other side, and what you are throwing away by doing that is your theoretical purity" (p. 12). In such a way, a "strategy is different from a theory – it is not general but directed, combative, and particular to a situation....Such a use of essentialist concepts is as a mobilizing force at a specific moment" (Childs & Williams, 1997, p. 159).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, from the perspective of political strategy, Islam is conveniently the "new global threat" possessing a regional presence that is transnational in its reach and whose "terrorism" cannot be "fixed" in any one particular place or any particular time. However, its prominent implication in the specific historical moment since September 11th, 2001 compels its treatment in the discourse. In this chapter, I will discuss how Islamic identification is employed as a strategic essentialism in a discourse of "Arabness" that maintains the religious dimension of political events at the forefront of media discourse. Ironically, the ability to maintain such a discursive coherence of identity is enabled by the discursive exigencies of the colonizer's discourse.

The Religious Dimension of Confrontation

It is difficult to separate the religious dimension from the political and military events on the ground when allegations of "Islamic terrorism" and the threat of Islam are perceived as motivations for political and military action. Bush's characterization of the war as a Crusade serves the perception that there

are religious grounds motivating military action and American political plans. One episode in particular debates the type of framework through which the current American-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and subsequent campaigns should be interpreted (al-Kasim, 2003, December 2). It questions whether the American-led military action is a continuation of the tumultuous history of the region extending as far back as the Crusades and subsequently European colonialism, and thence, is religiously-motivated. The two guests, al-Mullah Karikar, head of *Ansar al-Islam* group in Oslo, and Salah Issa, editor of the Cairo Newspaper, depart from similar critical stances against American empire. However, they differ on the qualification and motivations of the war waged by the United States. This episode demonstrates how, despite the contrast in opinions in interpreting political and military events, both sides maintain the "otherness" of the United States. In addition, the episode also exemplifies that as a result of this "othering," as a response that opposes the notion of "Islamic terrorism," Islamic identification is essentialized and infused into notions of "Arabness."

According to Karikar, the religious grounds upon which military action is based have been evident during and following Ronald Reagan's presidency in the neoconservatives who now lead and govern the United States. This issue of American hegemony and its relationship to Israel reappears in this episode which considers the religious implications of recent American military action. However, Issa maintains that the issue with the United States is a longstanding one that dates back to the independence movements during Western occupation of Arab countries. It is furthermore linked in the current period to the Palestinian question. These national (independence of Arab countries and the Palestinian

question) and pan-national (Arab) issues contribute to the perception that the West has never justly regarded these issues. The war in Iraq and the prevalence of the hegemonic policies of Empire adopted by the Bush administration contributed further to the perception and sensibility that the West, and especially the United States, is a source of animosity. The animosity that characterizes the relationship between the United States and "us" is one directed at American (foreign) policies that compromise "our" rights. He vehemently emphasizes that it is an animosity directed towards policies. Within the Arab world, there are those people or groups who seize the mistakes and abuse of the "enemy" towards the sanctity of religion, undeniably despite their crudeness, as an opportunity to promote the dangerous idea of religious wars and notion of the Crusades.

The rise in hostility towards Islam and/or Muslims since the attacks of September 11, 2001 exacerbate a situation in which academic and media treatment of Islam has equated it with fundamentalism that is a global threat. As Edward Said (1981) in *Covering Islam* points out, this trend has been escalating and the aftermath of September 11th, 2001 does not suggest it will carry on unabated. As'ad AbuKhalil (2000) supports this perspective and claims that the persistence of Western identification with Zionism and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism rendered Western authors comfortable in their hostility towards Arabs and Islam as they maintain the West as a model of freedom and equality. For AbuKhalil, this trend is exemplified by Samuel Huntington's notion of "clash of civilizations" which constitutes an epistemological break between East and West. He adds that the "record of colonialism and imperialism is now almost forgotten, and neo-conservative voices articulate nostalgia for colonial

domination of Third World countries" (p. 103).[1] For Issa, religiously-based notions are promoted as characteristically religious battles between "us" and the West as a whole and not as particular policies of specific countries. There is no point in denying the existence of fundamentalisms, be they Christian, Judeo-Zionist, or Islamic which characterizes the struggle that is taking place in the Middle East although they do not represent all peoples of all orientations. It appears that Issa is avoiding the polarizing trap of an oppositional stance based on essentialisms that fail to reveal the complexities of Islam, Muslims, and the societies that they inhabit.

In this debate, Palestine is also a recurrent reference in a way that readdresses issues tackled previously (in al-Kasim, 2003, November 11). The American campaign is perceived as associated with Zionist-Christianity that drives the Bush administration and Zionism more broadly. Al-Kasim poses a question to Karikar regarding the value of imbuing the resistance to the American-Israeli onslaught with religious motifs and slogans when Zionism depicts Arab resistance to the Israeli occupation and settlements as emerging from an anti-Semitic religious fanaticism which then becomes illegitimated. As Palestine is perceived as a national and pan-national issue, al-Kasim asks whether this endows "the enemy" by characterizing resistance with religious attributes, thereby facilitating the equation of resistance and Islam with terrorism

[1] In contrast, John Strawson (2003) argues that since September 11, 2001, "the media became an important forum through which contested images of Islam were circulated, which fragmented the homogenous Orientalist framework and offered new points of departure for the exploration of even notoriously difficult areas of Islam jurisprudence such as Jihad" (p. 17). However, I find his argument unconvincing because sites of power accommodate contestations, although it is typically monitored and re-interpreted in ways that maintain, rather than challenge power. Nevertheless, this argument remains one that requires further consideration and analysis.

especially after and since September 11, 2001. Karikar refutes the argument that the problem is primarily a political one; rather that there are religious grounds for the military action and recent political developments, that they are religiously-motivated. He draws parallels between the Crusades in history and what is occurring currently in Iraq and demonstrates the implications of adopting religious metaphors in naming military operations and the subtly of religious references in the American administration's discourse about the war. This parallel interpreted from the American administration's discourse can be explained by what Howard Zinn (2005) calls "American exceptionalism," a notion "that the United States alone has the right, whether by divine sanction or moral obligation, to bring civilization, or democracy, or liberty to the rest of the world, by violence if necessary." According to Zinn, this is not a new notion in American history and in the particular form of the current administration, it is "divinely ordained": "With God's approval, you need no human standard of morality." [2] While Issa does not disagree with Karikar regarding Bush's policies, he argues against conflating the political and the religious and infusing religious issues into ones that primarily concern economic and political interests. The use of religion or a religious faction's involvement in order to serve these interests does not render these issues as religious ones. Issa furthermore questions the presence of any discursive invocation of a Crusade when the United States was an ally of Muslim groups in resisting the spread and influence of Communism. He

[2] Zinn, Howard. (2005). The power and glory: Myths of American exceptionalism. Retrieved July 4, 2005, from <http://bostonreview.net/BR30.3/zinne.html>

points out that the Americans supported Islamic sentiments during this period in order to build a barrier against Communism's infiltration.

Moreover, for Issa, the idea of religious wars leads to the worst types of wars that history has known not only between followers of different religions but also between followers within the same religion. He maintains that fundamentalism exists, as noted earlier, and goes on to provide the example of the secular nature of the Zionist movement and its appropriation of Judaism to accomplish strictly political goals. Hence, one must regard issues strictly within their political frame, and in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States, in advancing its empire-building project to dominate the world, has an interest in maintaining an effective presence in the Arab-Islamic region. This interest is motivated by economic, political, and strategic reasons that strictly have no relationship to Islam or Christianity. More importantly, characterizing military action as a Crusade risks fomenting inter-religious divisions amongst Arabs that compromises Arab national unity. Entering into conflict against an international Crusade presumes that Arab Christians, who are Arab citizens, constitute part of the enemy since they would accordingly be regarded as its ally. This scenario would enable the "enemy" to achieve its political goals, and the fundamentalisms that orient the Islamic and Arab nations in that direction will lead them to battles for the wrong reasons. As Karim Karim (2000) points out, ""Arab" has been conflated with "Muslim" to such an extent that native Christianity in the Middle East has almost completely disappeared in dominant Northern discourses. Although the Christian communities within Muslim societies are the oldest in Christendom and have their own churches,

festivals, and religious customs, they are largely invisible to the Northern observer" (p. 112). Consequently, in opposition to Western discourses overlooking the religious diversity of Arab and Muslim societies alike, as religiously-motivated discourse enables this conflation insofar as it enables the essentialization of an oppositional Islam as "Arabness."

A caller's contribution furthermore differentiates a Christianity that speaks to this Arab national unity from the type of Christianity taken to represent such Crusades. He makes a distinction between Bush's evangelical Christianity and other denominations of Christianity around the world, including Western and Eastern ones. He supports the argument that this type of Christianity motivating Bush and driving his policies is against Islam, although he differs on the methodological frameworks for understanding this type of onslaught. He also argues that Bush's war is not against extremism which emerges from the type of Christianity that Bush follows; that it is unique in contrast to the stance demonstrated by Christianity around the world that shifted its position in the 21st century and that opposes his policies of hegemony and his wars. Furthermore, despite Karikar's insistence on the religious motivations of current military actions, he does express perspectives that reach out to people of other faiths. He disagrees with the point that rendering the issue as religious would lead to clashes between inter-religious as well as intra-religious factions, as Issa indicated. He provides examples of coexistence from his home town and historical example of Jewish and Christian appointments in the Ottoman state. He maintains his point that there is an ongoing war aimed at uprooting Islamic

groups that he characterizes as the "conscience of the nation" to which those people who feel these injustices resort.

It is evident that the idea of religious wars, or wars based on religion, is popular, as Issa acknowledges. However, he explains this popularity as a reaction to the rage and anger that is felt against American foreign policy for the reasons that he mentioned. It is a popularity that serves the essentialism of Islamic identification as "Arabness." In such a way, "Islamism is a form of protest – political and discursive – against external domination, just as Islamist movements within these societies are protests against social and political power that excludes them from power" (Halliday, 2002, p. 33). He finds it contradictory that some people who follow a magnanimous religion like Islam could be sympathetic to Osama bin Laden by default. He indicates that it is their anger towards American policy that explains this sympathy and not because they support bin Laden's actions. He argues that there has to be another means for expressing these feelings of rage and anger against American policy than this dangerous way that threatens stability and security. Issa maintains that he opposes Western foreign policy, specifically American foreign policy. However, any opposition to such policy must depart from its actual reasons. Elites, as non-religious as they sometimes are, invest the religious sentiments of the populace to lead them into war, an approach that becomes a feature of the way in which their interests are served. Issa (like Ali Harb in al-Kasim, 2004, February 10) seems to be more concerned with self-critique, with the actions and activities by Islamic groups themselves. He believes that the Islamic movement is remiss when it involves political components of struggle with charity work provoking the West to

close in on such activities and the groups that conduct them because it was evident that such activities were financing terrorism. Islamic leaders and figures of these groups who appear on Arab and Western media are to blame for claiming to impose Islam upon the whole world.

Issa's argumentation notwithstanding, callers continue to support the view that there is a religiously-motivated campaign against Islam that corresponds to the program's survey which had an overwhelming majority in favor of such a perspective. Issa maintains his opposition to the campaign to establish American/Western hegemony, and he reiterates his contention that the main problem is the characterization of the struggle which is predicated upon sensationalizing the issues in the name of religion to lead people into wars whose logic is fallible. It is interesting that while they both agree on the problems, they do not agree on the solutions to these problems. Their approaches are divergent. Issa insists that being a secular democrat does not mean an opposition to Islam. He argues that building strong rising countries and opposing oppressive regimes is one approach to countering this hegemony.

Departing from a common history as a civilizational community, Karikar agrees with Issa in his view that they must confront the same fierce campaign to which they are both subjected; though he differs with Issa in his view from within the "Eastern" (Arab-Islamic) civilizational structure, criticizing the Left (which Issa represents) for its paralysis in the wake of what Karikar terms the "Islamic awakening." One caller sums up this "quagmire" of terminology that characterizes the discussion. He acknowledges that both guests agree upon their diagnosis of the situation, regardless whether it aims to establish American

hegemony or to uproot Islamic groups. Therefore, for him, it is primarily unimportant how the onslaught that is being experienced is qualified. However, in spite of this observation, it is precisely these differences in terms that characterize the varying perspectives of many of these debates and the framework through which an overarching discourse of "Arabness" is constructed; for definitions of terms will arguably inform the type of relationship with this perceived hegemonic onslaught and will characterize and inform an understanding of identity based on the type of defensive (re)solutions necessary to combat it.

The Clash/Struggle of Civilizations

The Orientalist framework against which an oppositional discourse of identity is maintained establishes an ambivalent and symbiotic relationship between Islam and the West. Fred Halliday (2002) describes this polarized relationship and argues that the tendency on both sides can generally be characterized by alarmism and simplification. On the one hand, the West is alarmed by the threat that Islam is perceived to pose, and the aggressive attributes of the Muslim region and its unwillingness to allow diversity and debate. On the other hand, Muslims have simplified their identity as a unitary one, interpreting text and culture in a unitary way, as they stereotype the "West." However, the exception I take to Halliday's presentation, in balancing the "two sides" in a seemingly equally-reciprocal relationship is to disregard the power dynamic according to which "both sides" are motivated. While Orientalism accompanied, supported, and justified colonial and imperial ventures as Said

(1994) explains, the negative imagery or essentialist stereotyping of Westerners by Arabs or Muslims "did not develop an overarching discourse about the West comparable to Europe's institutionalized study of the East (Orientalism), that grew in tandem with imperialist venture" (Karim, 2000, p. 2). Despite claims by cultural essentialists, the monolithic cultural blocs that are assumed and referenced in discourse are not endowed with the same potency in any case.

Samuel Huntington's (1997) thesis of "clash of civilizations" is a case in point. The potency of his thesis demonstrates the prevalence of its discourse in maintaining the idea of the inevitability of a "clash" between both essentialist cultural entities, Western and Islamic, in *both* these "clashing" discourses. The Arab-Islamic response of defensive soul-searching and refuting is indicative of the ambivalent relationship and the power dynamic that belies it.[3] Through such response, it moreover ensures that any opposition would require an essentialist stance that maintains its logic rather than defeats it. It is testimony to the hegemony of discourses that are not discursively challenged in opposition with convenience or ease. According to Huntington, the fundamental source of conflict in a new world order will be a cultural one between nations and groups of different civilizations, primarily between "the West and the rest," or Islamic civilization in particular. His argument is Orientalist in his regard of the superiority of the former and in calling for the necessity to preserve and protect it. Seyla Benhabib (2002) critically remarks that, "[p]receding from a holistic understanding of cultures and civilizations – terms which he at times conflated

[3] For example, the Kuwaiti-based *al-Arabi* magazine devoted at length special sections to the subject in two consecutive issues. See *al-Arabi Magazine*, January 2002 and February 2002, issues 518 and 519.

and others distinguished – Huntington was unable to differentiate one "civilization" from another, with the consequence that, apart from "the West and the rest," he could not specify how many civilizations there were and how they were to be differentiated" (p. 40).[4]

Others have also critiqued Huntington's approach that reifies cultures and regards them as static, causing immutable divisions (Abu-Laban 2001; Featherstone 2002). Edward Said's response to Huntington is perhaps the most pronounced. While he admits that "it would be invidious not to acknowledge that cultural or civilisational conflicts do exist and seem to have intensified since the end of the Cold War" (Said, 1998, September 10-16), elsewhere, he critically argues that, "Huntington is an ideologist, someone who wants to make "civilizations" and "identities" into what they are not, shut-down, sealed-off entities that have been purged of the myriad currents and counter-currents that animate human history, and over centuries have made it possible for that history not only to contain wars of religion and imperial conquest but also to be one of exchange, cross-fertilization, and sharing" (Said, 2001, October 11-17).

In the context of the aftermath of September 11, 2001, Huntington's "clash of civilizations" thesis gained popularity as a fulfilled prophecy. According to John Strawson (2003), "essentialist cultural conflicts could both explain September 11 and serve as warning for perhaps worse to come. Islam and the

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[4] Arguably, Huntington even overestimated his "West's" willingness to project this coherent totality. Chris Patten (2004, July 2), the European Commissioner for external relations, differentiates Europe from Huntington's logic. He writes that, "Europe's recent history of gas chambers and gulags, our "Christian" heritage of flagrant or more discreet anti-Semitism, do not entitle us to address the Islamic world as though we dwell on a higher plane, custodians of a superior set of moral values" (Retrieved July 3, 2004 from, http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_ID=10&article_ID=5814&categ_id=5).

West's collision course could not be avoided" (p. 18). Despite the seeming inevitability of this "collision" in which a defensive oppositional discourse is complicit, understanding of Huntington's thesis is predicated upon its translation into Arabic, wherein "clash" is often commonly translated and referred to as "conflict" or "struggle." This differentiation bears a conceptual discrepancy in understanding the thesis in Arabic and English respectively. It furthermore has bearings on critiques of Huntington that point out his essentialization of culture, and in turn his tacit assumption that the civilizations to which he refers have essences that drive them towards a clash. In this light, Edward Said's critique of Huntington ironically could serve to support those people who *agree* with Huntington's notion or accept such a reading of the world *in Arabic*. Therefore, there are important implications to be kept in mind when discussing Huntington's thesis that follow from the slippage of the conceptual meanings of "struggle" or "conflict" versus "clash" which forms the basis of Huntington's thesis.

These discrepancies are evident in an episode that addresses Huntington's thesis (al-Kasim, 2004, February 10). It demonstrates the epistemological break that occurs in conceptualizing 'culture' in the context of Huntington's thesis. It furthermore gestures towards the ways Islamic-identified "Arabness" is accordingly constructed in an oppositional stance predicated on a differing epistemological basis. In this episode, there is no disagreement between the two guests that a "struggle" or "conflict" exists. However, the point of contention is the basis for approaching the issue and the conceptual frame through which it is addressed and understood. It replicates the dynamic of exchange in the previous

section. The issue of translating the term "clash" as "struggle" or "conflict" as well as conflations of terms like "culture" and "civilization" contribute to contentions surrounding the conceptual framing of Huntington's thesis. There is also an additional issue of the different conceptions of "culture" itself in the West and in the Arabic tradition. My purpose in this project is not to engage in an analytical differentiation of such terms in the two traditions. Rather, it is to demonstrate how the ambiguity in defining concepts and terms contributes to varying understandings and interpretations of issues, many of which inform the oppositional discourse of "Arabness" that I am addressing here.

The first guest, Ali Harb, a Lebanese intellectual, regards Huntington's thesis as a perspective on or reading of the world, though subsequently he points out that it is employed by extremist or fundamentalist factions, whether religious, nationalist, or political in their orientation. He explains that the significance of discussing Huntington's thesis became particularly relevant following 9/11 after it was used to inflame struggles and to feed campaigns of animosity and hatred towards Arabs and Muslims. Specifically, in a critique of Huntington, Harb's stance is that there is one civilization but many cultures. For him, the complexity of the issue requires a distinction between culture and civilization: civilization is the material and technical productivity and patterns of production, modes of invention, means of communication and media, commodities etc., whereas culture is symbolic and intellectual production, myths and legends, religions, beliefs, philosophies, arts and letters. It is through making this distinction that Harb raises his objections to Huntington's thesis, or "reading of the world"; for Harb believes that religions are *one* of the foundations of civilization, not *the*

foundation of civilization as it is a constituent of culture. This point seems to resonate with Sulaiman al-Askary's (2002, January) view that "Islam today remains a religion, not a civilization with a core state to lead it in confronting other civilizations. Civilizations rise, prosper, then are defeated and decline. But the religion remains an essential part of the spiritual fabric which makes up humanity, and no one can remove." [5] In addition, Harb also argues that all societies, including Arab societies, are part of one global civilization, the civilization of the industrial and electronic ages, the civilization of the digital, technical, and media ages. As for the Islamic civilization, its fate is like all other old civilizations, it is dead and lost its efficacy and vitality. For Harb, what exists is an Islamic culture and cultural struggle/conflict between Islamic precepts and values and Western ones. It is a struggle not only between Islam and the West, but a struggle that exists from *within* and in the heart of the Islamic world as exemplified by the issue of *hijab*, the Islamic headscarf worn by Muslim women.

On the other hand, the second guest, Ahmed al-Qasas, a Lebanese writer and head of the Cultural Awareness Union in Lebanon, argues that the "conflict of civilizations" is not a new issue or phenomenon, but an old and historical one. This struggle which Huntington purports is a new issue in his thesis is what drives history and what gives it its basic characteristic features. For Qasas, he does not view the distinction that Harb is making between civilization and culture and interprets Huntington's, as well as the Western view of "struggle" of civilizations, as a "struggle" of cultures, that they are one of the same thing.

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[5] This translation is not my own. This English translation was retrieved on July 11, 2005 and can be found at http://www.alarabimag.net/arabieng/data/2002/1/1/Art_52205.XML.

Qasas does not perceive the references to this struggle as ones pertaining to the struggle between Japanese, American, and German electronics and industrial corporations for example. When referring to, or talking about civilization, it therefore includes ways of living and accordingly "civilization" and "culture" cannot be mutually exclusive. He indicates that the widely-used term "culture" has been translated into Arabic as both "civilization" and "culture." Consequently, what is being addressed is the same thing. Alternatively, what he does distinguish is civilization and civic culture (*madaniyyah*).[6] According to him, the former (civilization) refers to a particularity in modes of living that is specific to every society and nation and the latter (civic culture) are tangible, material forms circulating amongst people without obstructions, as they do not characterize a particular form or mode of life. Interestingly, he acknowledges what he perceives as a common scientific and technological legacy shared by human beings about which they are not in conflict; about whether to adopt this knowledge and technology. This adoption exists in a competitive context. He draws historical parallels of Muslims in the past, during their progress when their understanding of Islam was "true," who according to him were prepared to receive knowledge, in medicine, physics, chemistry and the like whilst being cautious about receiving modes of thinking and ways of living. They were not

[6] Though there is no indication as to what both or each term conceptually means, problems in the conception of culture and the issue of translation arise contributing to confusing arguments on both sides. According to *al-Mawrid al-Quareeb* Arabic-English dictionary, "madaniyah" means "civilization" or "culture." Undoubtedly, this conflation of terms requires further consideration and analysis, though it serves to demonstrate the point how this conflation contributes to a construction of an oppositional discursive framework.

receptive to philosophies, laws and views on life, for meaning of life and their system and structures of life was derived from religious sources.

The problem with his distinction is the lack of clarity in defining the concepts and his apparent conflation of terms. Conceptual definitions aside, where he does draw a distinction between culture and science and technology delimits the boundary at which, or extent to which intercultural interaction and borrowing takes place. In other words, he falls short in situating science and technology in culture.[7] Even so, his rationale does not take into account moral and ethical issues that are derived from scientific or technological advancement with which Islamic communities perceive grave problems, suggesting that social, cultural and political concepts and ideas are not derived from, prompted or cultivated by science and technology. [8] This determines how people live, opening up discussion about taboo topics that would otherwise not be allowed if it weren't for the anonymity accorded by internet technology. Moreover, technological advancements influence people's cultural perceptions and values in the way their social, political, and economic realities are constructed and organized, as Peter Mandaville (2002) and Karim Karim (2002) indicate with regards to the internet's contribution in re-imagining a virtual Muslim global community, or *ummah*.

Qasas does not deny that there exists in history other forms of wars and struggles that occurred within "civilizations" or that can be qualified in other

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[7] The Arabic etymology of "culture" implicates "skill," to mean perfection of a skill or skills. Hence, his separation of science and technology from culture is a dubious one.
[8] For example, the issue of cloning is considered a highly contentious one for religious groups. Moreover, examples in which "culture" is implicated in science and technology include the re-conception of many religious notions and concepts in relation to new information and communication technologies such as "e-jihad."

ways than "civilizational." However, he emphasizes that the main struggle or conflict that gave history its features is one between civilizations, as reflected in the way historians categorized different epochs according to historical turns (e.g. the fall of the Roman empire, the fall of the Byzantium empire, the French Revolution, etc.). Nevertheless, Qasas asserts that the struggle for which Islam called is a "struggle/conflict of civilizations." History, he argues, is driven by a struggle between differences and assuming otherwise is illusory. He maintains that alternatively people fight for trivial issues and most of the battles of the previous century and in the past, like the first and second world wars, was for the most part competition for wealth and colonization and control in addition to the civilizational struggle which shaped the basic historical turns. Islam identified the struggle of its "nation" between modes of living corresponding to Islamic values and between other patterns of life which are predicated upon people impelling each other forward.

In this context, the United States is ultimately opposed to any other civilizational model that is contrary to its own and that threatens the hegemony of its own model, including not only the Islamic model but the Chinese, and even the European models. Consequently, for Qasas, as far as the "struggle of civilizations" is concerned, he regards a struggle between two incompatible and distinct entities. In reference to an Islamic civilization, he is referring to a mode of life that existed in the past but was destroyed to a great degree as a result of an American intellectual and civilizational invasion of the world, though he believes it is still alive in the spirit of the people who are eager to re-establish it anew. Hence, the foundation upon which Islamic civilization is built contrasts to a great

extent the basis upon which Western civilization was founded. Here, Qasas appears to be resorting to an argument of essences whereby his use of the term foundation carries a meaning that conflates it as essentialism.

Islamic Threat or Islamic Retrogression?

In a previous episode (Mansour, 2004, February 4), Mahmoud Jibreel, an expert in political strategy, argued that Islam poses no threat to the United States, that it merely serves as the pretext for American implementing foreign policy. The position that Arabs and Muslims in modern civilization occupy an irrelevant position rendering inconsequential talk about an Islamic threat is however challenged by Qasas (al-Kasim, 2004, February 10). Qasas' response is that Western foreign policy itself refutes such a claim. He provides examples which include Bush's qualification of the Iraq war as a Crusade and his statements about initiatives to change the ideology and culture of the region; Rumsfeld's talk about war of the minds; Powell's talk about the Middle East Initiative to change people's mentality and pressures on governments to change school curricula; official statements about the Islamic tide and qualifying it as terrorism. He also questions why wearing the "hijab" by girls threatens a powerful country like France and its identity. All these examples, according to him, demonstrate that Islam poses a threat to Western civilization headed by the United States. They equally maintain the dominance of the perspective that military confrontation is religiously-based, as discussed in the previous section.

Despite the lack of a political entity representing it on the ground, he believes that there still remains in the Islamic nation something of Islamic

culture which maintains the purpose of struggle and resistance and the rejection of succumbing to the West, its culture, and Western mode of living. He also argues that the United States and Western governments discovered that the primary challenge to regimes in Muslim countries is an Islamic one, meaning that the main preoccupation that unsettles those regimes created by the West in Islamic countries is the Islamic movement. Consequently, according to him, the current American war is on Islam and Islamic civilization. He believes that it is a preventative type of war because the Americans are aware that, if Muslim peoples were given an opportunity to express themselves and their wishes are represented by governing authorities, then it will be done through Islam which will be their choice. This preventative campaign is to ensure that political Islam does not reach a position of a governing power.

Al-Kasim addresses Harb to account for Qasas' point about the threat that Islam poses for the West. He mentions that the governing party of the British parliament indicated that the war in Iraq was a Crusade against humanity's greatest danger, i.e. Islamic fundamentalism, and whether this reference confirms perceptions of the war as religiously-motivated. In such a way, al-Kasim's questioning groups the British governing party with the American administration which expressed statements to this effect. Harb's response is that these types of statements are made by fundamentalisms of any kind, who in turn serve as reflections of each other. By example of the late Pope John Paul II, who was against the war, as well as the dissidence that was witnessed in the pluralistic countries of the West is evidence to the contrary. Instead, extremism – religious or political, whether Protestant, Zionist, "Bushist," Islamic or nationalist – holds

on to the idea that there is a "struggle/conflict of civilizations." This idea is deceptive and it yields oppression and terrorism and the destruction to both the self and "other," moreover adding that since World War Two there was no clash/struggle. There existed Islamic countries and Islamic parties and organization that were allied with the United States and served its strategic interests in bringing down the regimes that were loyal to Moscow. When they turned against American interests, the Americans in turn seized this opportunity for which they were waiting. Ultimately, according to Harb's perspective, the two sides are faces of the same coin; or in other words, "[i]f Huntington means by his idea on the clash of civilizations that 'Western civilization is confronting other civilizations,' [then] the real meaning is that 'America is confronting the world.' The paradox here is that Huntington and Bin Laden represent two sides of the same coin" (al-Askary, 2002, January).

Harb asserts that the Arab and Islamic worlds have been influenced by the West, with which a "clash" is ironically assumed, in terms of civilization, culture, knowledge, and science, from titles (such as the adoption of professional titles like "Doctor" by religious scholarly leaders) to fashion to the usage of Western culture in the sciences, philosophy and social sciences. For him, fundamentalism overshadows the reality of the organic relationship between "us" and the West, since the Napoleonic expeditions to Bush's invasions; that this relationship is inseparably intertwined whereby there is a Western need for "our" strategic locations, natural resources, and import markets and an Arab dependence on the West, on its culture, sciences, knowledge and even on modes of living and entertainment. This interdependence reveals that the purity of any essence is

non-existent contradicting the premise of the "clash of civilization" notion that posits identities in exclusive camps, by drawing reference to the complexity of the identities of Arabs living in the West. In addition, he remarks on the glibness of declaring revolutions (e.g. Khomeini's Iranian Revolution) and convening conferences in the West, wherein even the center of Islamic jurisprudence became situated there, in making the point that more freedom is enjoyed in the West. This is a point that resonates with Fred Halliday's (2002) "modernist argument that much of Khomeini's rhetoric, like that of Islamists elsewhere, is derived from a modern and a Western populist and revolutionary vocabulary. Despite the fact that Islamists reject aspects of the modern world, they are grappling with similar problems and use similar instruments, of which the modern state, and the resources of the modern economy, are central" (p. 26). According to Harb, if Westerners through their civic, intellectual, and philosophical cultures do "us" more justice than we do ourselves, or if they use "us" to serve their interests, then the situation is alarming in both cases.

Furthermore, Harb adds that if the relationship between "us" and the West is an organic one that is characterized by interdependence, in which one cannot relinquish the other, then the relationship should be based on partnership, exchange, and recognition of mutual responsibility for common fates. The difference for him lies in the absence of cultural production that is capable of effectively contributing to civilization. Accordingly, the clash/struggle of civilizations thesis goes contrary to the current global formation. In a world that is experiencing integration due to globalization whereby there is common concern for issues of security, the environment and health and there is the

phenomenon of hybridization and mixing of identities and nationalities, binaries that emanate from notions such as the "struggle/clash of civilizations" transform societies into destructive and deceitful opposing camps. Hence, this notion distracts people from a primary issue: participation in the creation of civilization. Harb's argument resonates with Edward Said's (1993) view on culture which he perceives as permeable, a universal norm that is based on borrowing and interdependencies of all kinds from different cultures. As he rhetorically asks, "Who has yet determined how much the domination of others contributed to the enormous wealth of the English and French states?" (p. 217). Bart Moore-Gilbert (1997) asserts that, for Said, the way to move forward is by espousing the hybridity of the intertwined histories of the modern world and by eschewing conceptions of identity as fixed ontological categories. Otherwise, there remains the risk of eternally maintaining a "posture of confrontation." For Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000), the dialectical logic of cultural politics seems "completely illusory": "The power of the dialectic, which in the hands of colonial power mystified the reality of the colonial world, is adopted again as part of an anticolonial project as if the dialectic were itself the real form of the movement of history" (p. 131). Consequently, an emphasis on a position that entrenches the essentialism of an oppositional identity confirms this dialectic and assumes that the movement of history forward will and can only remain conflictual.

Finally, Harb argues that there has never been an abundance of Islamic traditionalists who are calling for the impossible return to a type of life that existed in antiquity. According to him, there seems to be reluctance on their part to acknowledge Western achievements and influences. By means of (albeit

exaggerated) example, he indicates how Western scientific or medical knowledge production is often attributed to the Quran, which Harb perceives as intellectual appropriation, or appropriation of Western knowledge. The Islamic world failed to seize and profit from great assets such as the wealth of heritage and resources (oil) in proposing alternative epistemological ways of knowledge production and successful models of development, respectively. In reference to Qasas' argument, al-Kasim questions Harb about the reasons for Western perceptions of the Islamic threat: considering the idea that Arabs and Muslims appropriate the knowledge of others and they amount to nothing in terms of intellect, development, culture, technology (as Harb claims), then why is Islam such an obsessive preoccupation for the United States and the West and is perceived to pose a great threat? Are they really a source of terrorism? According to Harb, this is a deceitful ploy intended to lead Arabs into this type of thinking and to be consumed by it, for the strategic plans for the occupation of Iraq have existed since some time. He does not believe the reasoning that attributes the current situation to a relinquishing of the past. He believes that the past is evidence of creation and invention in contrast to the cultural examples and forms available today; contrary to the creators and inventors of the Muslim past, the present time is witness to nationalist and cultural Islamic elites who are in fear of the age of globalization which is evidence of a triumphal opening to the world. One of the most significant features of Islamic civilization was communication and exchange, and considering this is also a feature of our modern age, it is unclear where communication and exchange is present in current discourse.

Conversely, al-Kasim addresses Qasas and questions the threat that the Islamists could pose to the West, considering they only possess some ideas and slogans in comparison to the threat of Communism to the West, prior to its defeat. Al-Kasim elaborates that, in comparison, Marxists had considerable influence on the cultural life in many countries and possessed a huge following even within the great centers of the West and by broad sectors of oppressed, colonized, and marginalized people. Summarily, Communism was politically, intellectually, and culturally a powerful opponent for the West, and hence, al-Kasim questions what Islamic civilization possesses today with which it can enter into a struggle with the West except for some dated ideas. In response, Qasas makes a distinction between Communism, a strictly political tangible entity that was imposed on people by force, and Islam, that lives within the conscience and psyche of the people. When it dissolved as a political and material entity, Communism came to an end. In contrast, Islam proved its presence and challenge to other civilizations throughout the centuries even after its political structure collapsed. Islam is the reality that most people live, and it is the reality that every political, intellectual and cultural circle discusses. Islamic discourse mobilizes people on the street in the Islamic world in such a way that no other is able to equal or replicate, indicating its efficacy and vitality. Hence, Qasas asserts his point that the most powerful and effective force on the Arab and Islamic streets are Islamic notions.

The issue of a "national" political structure becomes central to Qasas' perspective in the debate. Qasas does not negate the failures and limitations of current Islamic culture. However, his argument centers on the Islamic "nation's"

divestment of a political entity or structure representing it. He argues that the productivity of a civilization is only actualized when there is a political entity that serves as its representative. Notwithstanding this lack, the West continues to have misgivings about Islam and to perceive it as a threat. For him, the greatness of Islamic civilization lies in the West's obsession with fighting off the "specter of Islam," even though it does not exist structurally as an entity. In his critique of Huntington, Sulaiman al-Askary (2002, January) acknowledges the absence of an Islamic structural entity: "It is well known that no civilization can be established without the existence of an economically, scientifically and militarily strong core state which plays the role of its guardian. According to this view the Ottoman state was the last strong core, at least militarily, for Islamic civilization. In the present world situation, with the regional and international political, economic and military balances, no relatively large Islamic state (Iran, Egypt Indonesia, Pakistan, Turkey) can play the role of core state which could lead this – alleged – modern Islamic civilization in its confrontation with the – also alleged – Western civilization, or any other marginal civilization." [9] There is also resistance on the part of Qasas to Harb's point about integration within the rubric of contemporary (Western) civilization. He seems indignantly dismissive of what he perceives as an implication to succumb to, merge with, a civilization that exerts dominance upon the world, that Muslims have to live in their own countries according to Western ways which he perceives to be driven by implicit material gain that abandons all ethical and spiritual values and regards the

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[9] For English translation, see http://www.alarabimag.net/arabieng/data/2002/1/1/Art_52205.XML.

human being as a commodity. Moreover, by adopting this position, he is in fact confirming the "us and them" binary that forms the basis of Orientalist discourse and President Bush's statement to which Ahmad Mansour (2004, February 4) referred in his introduction to an episode discussed in the previous chapter.

Al-Kasim interjects and continues to challenge Qasas about values, the point of these Arab-Islamic values that did not result in much in terms of intellect, culture, industry and technology. In response, Qasas argues that these values have been compromised for a long time which led to further deterioration and dilution, characterizing a tenuous existence historically and currently. He argues that when Islamic civilization, its culture and values, existed, it transformed the "Islamic nation" into the greatest nation in history. Muslims abandoned this civilization and forestalled some of its values as they acquired aspects of Western civilization on the account of some of their Islamic notions. Consequently, their culture became diluted in a mixture that possessed residual elements of their Islamic concepts and perspectives and a great number of Western ones. This mixture became unidentifiable leading to the loss of identity itself. Ironically, despite arguments that it would be more helpful to think of the Muslim *ummah* as a diaspora and not a nation based on exclusionary universalism writ large (Sayyid 2000), Qasas maintains a viewpoint that emphasizes a core political structure for Islam that is based on the idea of a nation-state essentialized in its values and culture. In other words, contrary to other views which argue for a non-essentialist definition of 'Islam' based on the notion of Muslim subjectivity (Mandaville 2001), Qasas overlooks contestations *within* Islam as he emphasizes a perspective that maintains and projects it in

terms of a given culture and essentialist structural entity thereby maintaining the unbridgeable "debate" between Islam and the West. Based on the colonial past, this oppositional perspective is a combative stance that aims to promote "the construction of a politically conscious, unified revolutionary Self, standing in unmitigated opposition to the oppressor" (Parry, 1987, p. 30). In such a way, instead of going beyond Andersonian imaginations of the nation, the *ummah* is re-imagined by an anti-colonial, anti-imperialist nationalism that invokes a shared past and a cultural essence that is equated with a religious entity. As Ania Loomba (1998) reminds us, such "new identities were often appropriated for anti-colonial purposes: thus Arab nationalisms in the Middle East and North Africa invested colonially created territorial units with their own meaning of community or nation by drawing upon myths of Arab origin or the Islamic golden age of the Caliphates, even though some early Arab nationalists were Christian" (p. 197).

Al-Kasim re-phrases his challenge and maintains that the struggle between civilizations is a struggle of power, of technology, of economics, and of ideas. He inquires about the resources or capabilities that Islamic civilization possesses in order to engage in such a struggle when, for example, the gross national product of all Arab countries combined does not equal that of the poorest European country (e.g. Spain). Politically-speaking, Qasas perceives the first front in this struggle of civilization to be the political entities and regimes in place in the Arab world, for they stand in opposition to an Islamic nation's ability to express itself as a political entity that fosters Islamic civilization. Because the Islamic nation is not realistically manifested in a political entity, it is debilitated and unable to

politically express and defend itself and furthermore be able to challenge and to invade the West anew with its civilization. Therefore, the first step in the struggle of civilization with the West is a struggle against the regimes that the West has created and enabled in Arab countries and all its byproducts, including manufactured ideas that are imported from the West. In terms of resources, this nation possesses wealth that could render it the most powerful nation on earth. And preceding a wealth of resources, an Islamic nation is endowed with the most important component of a nation; that is a perspective on life providing a unique mode of living that contrasts with what is called contemporary or modern civilization which is Western civilization. This contrast constitutes the primary concern of the West in addition to wealth that includes a demographic factor, strategic locations, resources, as well as, those who are willing to sacrifice themselves in the name of God. These elements, Qasas continues to argue, potentially qualify this nation to overcome the United States from the point in time that it regains its political structure. Moreover, he claims that the United States "terrorizes" the Islamic world by attacking it with American civilization. Qasas interprets Harb's position as a call to relinquish all that is constant, definite, and realistic, a call to abandon "our" values, realities, and way of life in order to join the United States in its Western way of life.

Harb maintains his view that the Western assault corresponds to strategic sites, interests and markets. Therefore, if Western interests correspond to helping the Islamists, then they will help them; if it did not, then they will not. The issue cannot be reduced to a struggle against God or against "Arabness." On the contrary, the issue corresponds to the nature of interests, and the struggle is a

military and strategic struggle for control. It does not exist between "us" and the Western world, but *within* the Western world as well. The struggle *within* the Arab-Islamic world is even more alarming when considering the actions of Arab governments, a point that tacitly agrees with Qasas' critical stance against these governments. While Qasas counter-argues that his example of Arab governments does not provide evidence to what Harb is saying, Harb's concern and point is precisely that the onus is on the Arab-Islamic world to accept that the likes of Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein are byproducts of their particular cultural and religious environment and not manufactured by the Americans. This type of environment induces people who are born into a nationalist Arabist culture and religious culture to become tools that blindly execute what their political, social or religious leaders command.

Despite Harb's critical argumentation, the force of his argument is overshadowed by viewers' live contributions by phone. They support the view that indeed emphasizes the existence of a struggle of civilizations that targets Islamic civilization. This view is based on a perception that there is a Western invasion to eliminate the features of Islamic civilization and replace it with Western values and political, social, and cultural notions. Harb's perspective is therefore marginalized, as he insists that the problem is that this type of discourse is not sufficiently self-critical, that the problem is not with the West; rather it lies within Islamic countries and between groups and factions within the Islamic region. Still, what this dichotomy of perspectives demonstrates is not merely the prevalence of such opposing viewpoints but more significantly the popularity of essentialist, "fixed" notions of identity whose stability is maintained

throughout the discourse despite the challenge of more nuanced and critical perspectives. These notions in turn contribute to the "fixing" of meaning by means of a strategic oppositional essentialism that maintains the binary logic.

The Arab-Muslim Woman as Battleground

The subject of the Arab-Muslim woman is one of the features of current Orientalist discourse. Consequently, she serves as the battleground with which Arab-Islamic discourse asserts its identity against the West by adopting the same logic and demonstrating the West's hypocrisy in applying its own values. In some cases, the issue of discrimination against Arab-Muslim women within their own culture and tradition in most cases lacks sufficient self-critique and is instead exteriorized in this process in the context of Western society, in order to render such critique unnecessary or irrelevant.

The difficulties of Arab women's integration in Western society are one such case in point. One episode centers on the issue of the identity of immigrant women, especially second and third generation women, who live in the West (Bin Qada, 2003, October 20). The episode highlights and addresses some of the struggles and the everyday living circumstances that underlie these struggles. The issues are introduced within a framework that, on the one hand, presents a paradox between the policies of Western governments calling for integration in society and their contributions to the racist and discriminatory manifestations evident in the everyday reality of these women. Whether in the fields of education, workplace, or residence, discrimination is considered to involve even the basic rights that reflect the freedom of religious practice involving the choice

of clothing and the right to wear the "hijab" in educational institutions as is the case in France; where French politicians at the time of the broadcast were still working on issuing a law that bans the wearing of the "hijab" in such institutions. Under these circumstances, the program's host, Lona Shibel, claims that tolerance and the acceptance of difference and calls for integration become words that lose their meaning when corresponded to the reality of what happens in Western societies.

On the other hand, an ongoing struggle is depicted between second generation girls and their parents/families as a result of the difference between the values and culture of the place of origin maintained by the parents and those values and culture of their recent adopted home in which they were raised. Perhaps, the relationship between the opposite sexes is the most notable of all these struggles, causing conflict between daughters who consider the normalcy of dating and having relationships with men and parents who oppose such relations. The episode explores the alternatives provided by the family and organizations of ethno-cultural minorities that aim to accomplish integration in Western societies without fully melting into them.

There is no doubt in the responses of the three guests, Safa' al-Sawi, member of the Arab Women's Coalition in London, Raghad al-Takriti, member of the Islamic Coalition in London, and Amina al-Qadi, an Arab-French human rights activist in Paris, that Arab women in the West face a reality which includes encounters with racist discrimination. Hence, a consensus is established concerning the discrimination as presented in the introduction of the episode. The questions and issues in the discussion focus on the type and extent of

discrimination encountered by Arab women, the discrepancy between the values of equality and democracy, and discrimination against citizens of the same society. There are three different levels upon which the discussion of discrimination is based: 1) governments and their policies, laws and regulations; 2) media representations and public relations; 3) and the people encountered on an everyday basis constituting the particular Western society in reference. Each interjection by one of the three guests addresses one level of discussion.

While al-Takriti does not perceive any problems with the laws and policies or with the people, whose awareness of political and cultural issues of the region has increased and in turn their participation in pro-Iraq and pro-Palestine demonstrations is evident, her main contention rests with the discriminatory representations of the Arab and Muslim woman in Western media that still exert influence on the people, in spite of their humanistic sensibility against these representations. For this reason, it is crucial to direct this sensibility towards a more positive orientation in light of the existence of a minority right wing extremist presence that is gradually gaining popularity.

For al-Sawi, the distorted image of the Arab/Muslim woman in the media is perceived as part of the broader negative stereotyping and imaging of Arabs and Islam. This image depicts these women and their context within the backward frame of terrorism which casts an inferior regard upon them. In addition, she goes further to explain that racist discrimination takes subtle and "polite" forms whose inferior regard towards Arabs and Arab women specifically are nonetheless sensed in daily interactions, such as upon entering a store. Discrimination also does not have to require any type of direct interaction as

exemplified by the way (white) British people move out of a neighborhood upon the arrival of Arab neighbors.

For al-Qadi, women of Arab origin who hold important offices in government and maintain anti-Arab or anti-Islamic views or politics are not restricted to those representing the Right in response to a question that regarded the acceptance of Arab women as predicated upon their adoption of an extremist right-wing agenda. Instead, al-Qadi argues that these Arab women who hold these views can represent either the Right or the Left. Moreover, the problem in general is the gap between principle and practice; hence, while the laws of Western countries entrench the principle of equality, the practice of equality is what remains problematic. In the case of France, she refers to the failure of the project that dilutes immigrants into a French identity, except that it is evident that second and third generation immigrants have not lost their sense of self or culture of origin and are not fearful of hanging on to Islam. The failure of this project subsequently led to the emergence of the issue of integration which is understood as the recognition of one's (French) citizenship without forsaking or losing her sense of origin. However, for her, the question of integration is problematic insofar as it addresses the integration of individuals who are French citizens in every sense of the word. And for this reason then, the issue must not be one of integration but of social justice.

In discussing the types and extent of discrimination and issues of integration, discrediting "the West" aligns a women's perspective with the mainstream Arab discourse. In this case, discussing issues of immigrant Arab-Muslim communities in the West is an opportunity to demystify the West as

progressive even on its own terms. It furthermore serves to evade or overlook possible critiques from *within* Arab-Muslim society. In addition, it maintains the alarmist tone over loss of values and traditions that constitute identity; women become the quintessential target of a Western onslaught, especially the Muslim woman who is easily identifiable. The magnitude of the threat is exacerbated when ensuring an environment that encourages these values is no guarantee of their preservation. According to a survey initiated by al-Takriti, there is not necessarily a correlation that suggests that teenage girls belonging to families that abide by traditional Arabo-Islamic values are more likely to avoid the social pressure of having a boyfriend with whom she is engaged in sexual relations. The survey revealed that a significant number of girls have cyber relations that were developed after chatting online or have personal relations with a member of the opposite sex, indicating that there is a generational gap between children and their parents. This gap specifically indicates that the new generation is gradually detaching itself from the values and traditions of their parents. It is imperative in her view to develop the religious identity from an early age in order to raise a discerning person capable of maintaining these values.

In the context of the family, balancing acts are undertaken in an attempt to combine the two worlds while other families become extreme in rejecting all that is Western and in maintaining Arabic or Islamic traditions as the appropriate or "correct" ones. According to al-Sawi, the reaction of an Arab/Muslim girl can either be in isolating herself from society or in rebelling against her traditions. She considers the latter to be more dangerous because she completely abandons her identity as she re-fashions herself, thinking that this re-fashioning will enable

her to better live her life. For her, this is indicative of the phenomenon of (cultural) schizophrenia. Arguably both cases may indicate an unstable character which does not necessarily lead to an emotionally or psychologically healthy or "stable" personality, although her focus here emphasizes the loss of identity and the inability to maintain a coherent or stable sense and conception of identity as the one worthy of concern. However, al-Takriti indicates alternative cases in which girls successfully combine the two identities, by identifying as "British-Muslim" whereby they conceive their religious and cultural values and traditions within the framework of a Western identity. Still, she argues that it is crucial to establish and maintain organizations that are able to fill the inter-generational gap and attend to the needs of these girls in order to avoid reaching the stage of "schizophrenia."

The notions of isolation and exclusions are furthermore considered against a broader political context. Discriminatory policies are interpreted as a means to ensure the exclusion of Arabs even in their places of residence. By referring to the example of the HLM in France, the questioning drives the argument that Arabs are being isolated in their neighborhoods and in a low social and economic class against the backdrop of Western claims of democracy and equality. The exclusion and isolation of Arab communities and residential ghettos are moreover related to the "racist Separation Wall" that Israel has built in Palestine. In drawing this relationship between discrimination experienced by the Arab community in Western societies, in general, and what is considered a discriminatory barrier in Palestine/Israel, this discrimination becomes a reflection and, indeed extension, of Zionist policies in Western societies. In other

words, this parallel equates both cases as one of the same thing that targets Arab families and individuals as a mode of interaction.

The question continues to reappear throughout the episode, whether the Arab/Muslim woman's voice in particular is adequately heard in Western societies. The assumption remains that her ability to exert any influence is dependent upon her total dissolution into Western societies thereby forgetting her Arab-Islamic roots and failing to represent her Arabic and Islamic culture and traditions. Nonetheless, the guests still point out the advances that the Arab and Islamic communities managed to accomplish by participating in political life (e.g. memberships in political parties) and forming groups and organizations (e.g. Arab Media Watch), which are observations that may detract from this point that Shibel is attempting to emphasize in the discussion through her questioning. However, the issue of inter-religious marriages is a particular example of the dissolution of identity. Because it is illegitimate in the eyes of religion, this type of marriage takes place after a woman has lost or abandoned any sense of her Islamic identity, of her values and traditions. In turn, such a marriage alienates her from her religion and consequently these cases of inter-religious marriages are usually failures. Despite this regard, the reasons that a Muslim/Arab woman may consider marrying a non-Muslim man are related to the different assumptions concerning the cultural differences in men's character. According to one view, there is the assumption that the Western man interacts with a woman in a "civilized" and "progressive" manner whereas the Arab man maintains control over women and denigrates them. Shibel seems to indirectly prompt a response that would debunk or challenge this view, and for this reason, bringing

this point of view up to the forefront seems deliberate for this purpose. Al-Sawi does not necessarily challenge this view, though she acknowledges that there may be cases that may prove this assumption. However, she believes it is imperative to find solutions to this "problem" and to the actual cases of inter-religious marriages in a way that does not exclude the Muslim woman or excommunicate her from the faith. It is interesting to note here that in the discussion there is a conflation between, and interchangeable use of, the terms "Arab" and "Muslim." This is particularly interesting because it accordingly excludes the Christian Arab woman who marries a Western man and it excludes the Muslim Arab woman who marries a Christian Arab man, thereby maintaining the focus upon a framework of West-East relationships. This framework also assumes a conflated notion of Arab identity that is necessarily bound to Islam.

The Issue of *Hijab*

The issue of banning the "hijab" in France is probably the quintessential case example employed to demonstrate the double-standard application of Western notions of equality and rights. It is featured as an important issue demonstrating the difficulties of women's integration in Western society. Prior to the official law banning symbols of religiosity in schools, this issue is prominent in the discussion of difficulties in integration (Bin Qada, 2003, October 20). In this particular discussion, the issue is moreover broadly linked to politics proper, or to the West and Israel. The questioning and direction of the discussion focuses on the politicization of the issue of the *hijab*, one that is perceived to have a hidden agenda driving the campaign and public discourse against it. In doing so,

it is emphasized that there is a contradiction between the values of freedom and human rights and the problem that France has made of the *hijab*.

Since the issue dates back fifteen years, it is not new in France and is constantly revived. The reasons for, and timing of this return which recently was situated at the forefront of public discourse in France are worth noting, according to Amina al-Qadi, who claims that the *hijab* is a disguise for other more significant issues. She describes the backdrop against which two main issues were presented: anti-Semitism and the issue of the *hijab*. Around the time that these two issues suddenly emerged in public discourse in September 2003, the summer had witnessed the death of 15,000 senior citizens during the heat wave, in addition to the pending issues that had not been resolved prior to the commencement of the summer vacations, including unemployment, social insurance, increasing costs of living and other economic problems. In discussing the issue of anti-Semitism, certain well-known French philosophers with particular ideological orientations (al-Qadi neither identifies these philosophers nor their orientations) frequently appearing in French media concluded that the new anti-Semites are the Muslim youths living in the suburbs. At the same time, a specific case of two teenage girls insisting on wearing the *hijab* was transformed from a typically marginal issue to one that concerned the primary concern of the French media, as if to suggest that the problems that France is facing stems from the *hijab* rendering the French state in danger. In responding to a question about the motivation that drives the issue of the *hijab* in such a way in France, as well as in the United States (examples in Chicago were noted), al-Qadi proposes a hypothesis. She extrapolates that this group of French philosophers who are

known for their support of Israel have grown pessimistic about the current situation in France. This situation involves French youth (presumably of Arab origin) who are pro-Palestinian and who assert their right to practice their cultural and religious difference. In addition, the Palestinian cause is gradually gaining support in France from everyday people. She maintains that, otherwise, the coincidental emergence of the problem of the *hijab* in France and all the ensuing assault on Muslims and Islam in general by various segments of French society is perplexing.

Safa' al-Sawi asserts that the issue of the *hijab* is part of the political game against the "Arab nation." Otherwise, she finds it perplexing as well that a mere head cover is a cause for such problems when head covering is worn by nuns and nurses. The problem is with particular media targeting of Arabs on all aspects that are part of a campaign against Arabs and Muslims in favor of Israel without being endowed with the ability to respond. Raghad al-Takriti maintains the consensus that there is a war against Islam and against Islamic identity. She points out that the Muslim woman is the first line of offensive because she is easily identifiable by her hijab in comparison to a Muslim man. Therefore, she will be the targeted victim of any offensive campaign against Islam or Muslims. Still, she argues that despite the difficulties and obstacles facing a *hijab*-wearing woman, she has been able to prove herself in a variety of domains, political and media for example. However, al-Sawi is quick to dissipate the possibility of idealistic or optimistic diligence. She remarks that such a woman's ability to prove herself will depend on her line of work. In public institutions, it is part of the tokenistic practices of diversifying the workplace to include women of a

various ethno-cultural backgrounds, in order to demonstrate good intentions and inclusive democracy.

In line with the agenda-setting politics that motivates the issue, an important question is posed inquiring about the contradiction between the circumstances of the issue and France's more sympathetic political position regarding the issues of the Arab world. Al-Qadi provides two reasons: firstly, France's tumultuous historical relationship with the Church causing a rift with religiosity and rendering an attitude that regards anything religious as a private matter that must be kept away from the public eye; and secondly, in addition to its symbolic reference to religion, there is a fear that the *hijab* conceals political agendas and fundamentalist organization that lead to terrorism. She adds that the decision-makers in France have not yet been able to comprehend the new phenomenon of cultural and religious pluralism in France that is evident in young people who are not afraid to assert their belonging to a different culture and religion. For this reason, there needs to be a dialogue through which Islam is explained and the issue of freedom of choice is addressed. In relation to the latter, she claims that the *hijab* is perceived as a source of oppression for women ironically as a decision imposed upon women to ban it contradicts the value of freedom of choice. Moreover, the contradictions between opposition to the *hijab* and individual freedoms are maintained from another perspective. Al-Sawi responds to the issue of the *hijab* by indignantly comparing it to the cultural and sub-cultural scenes in the West, such as punk or Goth culture as well as aspects of queer culture (such as transvestites). She expresses her fear of encounters with members of these groups on the street and wonders how the permissive nature of

society exemplified in such cases and others of "scantily clad" women and men on the streets can not be extended to the *hijab*, which has been transformed into an exaggerated comical issue in this light. Interestingly, Shibel maintains that the subject, a cultural issue, has been politicized, as if to suggest the separation of politics from culture, and tacitly appears to dismiss the relevance of this parallel.

When the *hijab* was finally banned in France, it provoked another debate on the women's talk show. While an examination of the episode prior to the ban highlighted the political dimensions of this otherwise socio-cultural issue, the episode following the ban emphasized these issues and elaborated on them by maintaining an oppositional stance towards the ban. In the aftermath of the Stazi Commission's recommendations and the official banning of the *hijab*, in French schools, the contradictions and double standards between Western/French notions of freedom and equality and their implementation is maintained as a framework for discussion in this other episode devoted specifically to this decision (Bin Qada, 2003, December 22). The framework according to which this episode is set up addresses the issue of the *hijab* in France in a way that demonstrates how secularism has failed one of its own objectives which is the protection of the right to religious freedom of practice and expression.

Following from the recommendations of the Stazi Commission and his statement that he perceives hostility in the *hijab*, the episode refers to French President Jacques Chirac's speech in which he announced a ban upon wearing it in schools and government offices. Consequently, this ban provoked many Muslims for whom the *hijab* is a religious obligation and not merely a symbol of

their faith that secularism has committed itself to protecting. Subsequently, Shibel introduces the issue of *hijab* as one surrounded by numerous erroneous misconceptions, notably following the president's reference in his speech to the *hijab* as a symbol of oppression. The introduction indicates though that the women who insisted upon wearing it did so in direct contravention to patriarchy; that is, their parents, school administrators, or their superiors at work.

The main issue addressed here is whether the banning of the *hijab* in schools is a source of oppression or of protection for women. The introduction explicitly indicates a politicized response to this issue. Its prefatory questions inquire about the reasons for the absence of individuals who are able to communicate a true understanding of the reality of the *hijab* and its place in Islam, Chirac's rendition of clothing worn by millions of Muslim women as hostile, and al-Azhar's dismissal of the matter as an internal affair. The introduction also indicates that girls who insisted on donning the *hijab* have done so in direct resistance to the patriarchal authority of their parents and the heads of educational and professional institutions. This particular point has many implications for feminist analysis worth mentioning in brief. The patriarchy to which reference is being made here is a Western one that overlooks the relationship between both Western (neocolonial) and native patriarchies. Moreover, if resistance to traditional Arab patriarchy is commended in such away, then why does this particular type of resistance prominently concern an oppositional discourse of identity? Can it fairly be considered a resistance to patriarchy when it is in the benefit of traditional Islamic patriarchy to employ this issue in its neocolonial opposition as an *ummah* or "global diaspora."

What this peculiar instance indicates is the ambivalent complicity between the two patriarchies, the opposition of native patriarchy to a Western patriarchy. Despite its contestations of ideas of feminism to promote a traditionalist patriarchal agenda, it nevertheless captures and redirects them against the patriarchy of "other" (Western) culture(s), ironically, in the service of colonialism. It confirms the notion of "colonial feminism" which used the idea of women's oppression "to render morally justifiable its project of undermining or eradicating the cultures of colonized peoples" (Ahmed, 1992, p. 151). It is to this extent that feminist issues are infused in the Arab discourse of opposition to the extent that it serves its purposes, regarding it as a crucial component of religio-cultural practice in defining Arab-Islamic identity. Hence, this treatment leaves unanswered the question of the role that patriarchy in the Arab region plays in this situation, ironically to confirm that which it supposedly opposes. How does it contribute to enforcing women's oppression (defined and manifested differently) in the name of Western misconceptions and false pretenses that threaten notions of identity?

These types of questions are usually left unaddressed in the pursuit of a unified oppositional discourse of, as al-Sawi (Bin Qada, 2003, October 20) earlier termed it, "the Arab nation." As Ania Loomba (1998) points out, "if a certain sphere of domain, such as gender, is regarded as intrinsic to national culture, such a domain cannot be addressed as other than national" (p. 194). In light of Qasas' perspective discussed earlier (al-Kasim, 2004, February 10), the interest in women exists only to the extent that they are useful for discussing the "nation" in whatever form it might take, and a response to the rhetoric of neocolonialism

would take the form of discrediting this moral justification: "The assertion of a gendered spiritual or inner core thus becomes the site for the construction of national identities across a wide political and ideological anti-colonial spectrum. The communities that are imagined by anti-colonial nationalism often invoke a shared past or a cultural essence that is regarded as synonymous with a religious or racial identity" (Loomba, 1998, p. 195). In sustaining the "implacable enmity between native and invader" (Parry, 1987, p. 32), "the battle lines *between* native and invader are also replicated *within* native and invader" (Gandhi, 1998, p. 10-11), as Harb argued (al-Kasim, 2004, February 10).

It is noticeable that the presentation of this episode is aimed at refuting the basis upon which the decision to ban the *hijab* in France is based. Throughout the episode, the foundation upon which the decision was made, including the make up of the Stazi Commission is portrayed as biased in favor of this ban regardless of the "true" reality of the *hijab* as an obligatory Islamic practice. The Stazi Commission has concluded that the *hijab* is a symbol for expressing religious affiliation or ostentatious sign of religiosity. The misunderstanding and distortion of the perceptions of *hijab* as merely a symbol is emphasized. In the first part of the episode, the point that it is a religious obligation, a religious precept to which a follower of the faith must adhere, is maintained. Therefore, the decision is emphasized as an affront to Islam in addition to rendering its logic or rationale as contradictory to the commitments of secular thought towards religious practice.

Firstly, the point that the *hijab* is a religious obligation rather than a religious symbol is established as an assumption upon which the rest of the

discussion is based. Mihriziya al-Abaidi, the vice-president of the International Interfaith Congress for Peace in Europe, explains that the significance of the *hijab* does not merely lie in what it represents. Instead, a Muslim woman responds to a religious precept expressed in the Quran that obliges her to wear it as a practice of faith. She wears it for herself and not to flaunt it in front of other people, as part of a contract of faith between her and God in which she enters by choice which assumes obligations to which she must commit. Hence, far from being merely a religious symbol, there is a spiritual dimension to the *hijab* that must be taken into account, one that organizes a woman's relationship with God and the rest of society. A video excerpt featuring a religious authority, Youssef al-Qaradawi, is used in order to demonstrate and reiterate this point. He speaks about the popular misconception that the *hijab* is considered a religious symbol, for if it were such then a Muslim woman in Muslim countries would not feel obliged to wear it in order to indicate her religious affiliation. In contrast to other religious symbols like the Christian cross, the *hijab*'s purpose surpasses a mere representation of the religion with which it is associated. He finally asserts that considering it as a symbol is a misconception that is evident in a lack of concerted depth of understanding or consideration of this matter.

The host, Lona al-Shibel turns to another guest of the show Guylaine Hudson, a school principal and member of the government-appointed Stazi Commission, in order to question why the true meaning of *hijab* in Islam has not been conveyed to President Chirac by the Stazi Commission which made recommendations based on faulty misconceptions. Hudson responds by indicating that it is difficult to assert whether the *hijab* is merely a symbol or not,

as it is difficult to assert the true meaning of the *hijab*: some people believe that it is a form of obeying God and others believe it is a religious symbol. Shibel challenges the credibility of this perspective by invoking al-Qaradawi as a religious authority who has unequivocally addressed the matter to further question whether the Stazi Commission based its recommendations on false misconceptions. Hudson maintains that the Commission did not base its decision on false beliefs as perceptions of its symbolism vary from one person to another. She also states that the Commission did not recommend the banning of any religious symbols in France, and instead, its recommendations broadly centered on the understanding of beliefs and the information that may be exported to the public through a particular religious practice, especially if it were religious which then would not be acceptable to the committee which focused on *hijab* in schools.

Shibel refers to Hudson's point about religious exportation in order to emphasize the point of contention that the *hijab* is not a religious symbol. Shibel turns to her third guest, Hamida Na'na', a writer and novelist living in Paris, to inquire about the contradiction of the ban with what France represents and has been known as the country of freedom and democracy. Based on false pretenses beginning with the perception of *hijab* as a religious symbol, Shibel asks her guest about the extent to which the mechanisms of the modern state are supposedly responsible for making decisions based on facts. Na'na' enters the conversation by stating that she does not want to debate whether the *hijab* is a symbol, or whether a woman should wear it or not. She does state though that in any case it is an indication that a woman is Muslim, wearing it out of her

obligation to her faith. She moreover believes that it is time for Muslim scholars to actively engage in a modern intellectual movement that is able to provide the Muslim person with the ability to understand the circumstances in which she lives and to adapt to these circumstances. Nonetheless, she personally believes that banning the *hijab* in a country where freedom of expression and belief exists contravenes the very meaning of the secular state which grants freedom in all aspects of life. Al-Abaidi agrees with her last point, though sensing Na'na's' critical stance towards Islam, asserts that Islamic thought is not stagnant and has been adapting to modern conditions of life. Contrary to the seeming portrayal that there is an impending invasion of women in Islamic garb in schools and workplaces, the Islamic insistence on learning is evidence to the contrary and an important component of a Muslim woman's faith compelling her to abide by the regulations of their institutions demanding them not to wear the *hijab*.

Shibel proceeds to insinuate through her questioning the bias of the Commission despite the apparent facts that have been established about the *hijab*. She consults a list of the members the Commission indicating their affiliations and professional backgrounds. By highlighting each member's political or highly politicized stance, the direction of the discussion was aimed at presenting the Commission as biased and anti-Islamic, or at least anti-*hijab*. Hudson defends the Commission by arguing that its composition is professionally diverse (whether they are politicians or academics) as well as politically (whether they represented the Right or the Left). She also points out that they are diverse in their cultural backgrounds as well. Shibel uses this last point to reiterate the underlying principle of her questioning (the bias and

unbalanced composition of the Commission) that even the diverse cultural backgrounds is merely tokenistic. The two "Muslim" representatives are a woman who is well-known for her extreme opposition to the *hijab* in schools and an academic who is known for his methodological research project that strips the sanctity of the Quran in its treatment as merely a historical text. Therefore, Shibel's interjection that questions her guest indicates that this tokenism is not representative of a Muslim point of view. Hudson adheres to her argument that the Committee is diverse in its composition, including members of a variety of backgrounds that reflect a diversity of views. She asserts that the Committee is independent as well as its members, each member having his or her unique professional and cultural background that does not necessarily reflect a bias or imbalance. She also reminds the viewers that the Committee also received feedback from the public containing a variety of opinions on the matter that required attention, and that it is imperative to contemplate and consider all that has been communicated and acknowledge the differences that exist within France representing unique perspectives and affiliations. According to her, the objective here is to try to revive diversity that is a benefit to everyone.

It appears that Hudson adopts a cliché discourse of diversity and multiculturalism that overlooks the subtle workings of racism and discrimination, furthermore confirming Shibel's point about tokenistic inclusion. Shibel bluntly asks her why the acceptance of *hijab* is not part of, or not implied in, this notion of diversity of which Hudson speaks, of the type that accepts and accommodates the "other." Hudson's response is merely a reiteration that the Commission was not directly responsible for banning the *hijab*. She furthermore

reminds that France is a secular state that ensures the separation between religious and political aspects. Turning to her third guest, Shibel asks Na'na' whether members who are representatives of political parties and academic scholarship that is evidently biased against the matter can possibly be neutral. Na'na' responds that the issue of the *hijab* has been politicized to an exaggerated extent that it overshadowed the position that France has taken in the world against the policy of the United States whether in Iraq or in Palestine. She points out that President Chirac was the first personality to declare his position in solidarity with the Arab world, and he has the experience with, and cultural awareness of the Arab world and Islamic civilization. Her deflection is successful insofar as she employs the discursive framework with which her audience identifies, by aligning the French president against the United States in the matters of Iraq and Palestine. In addition, while she does not want to assert that all members of the committee were knowledgeable about Islam, she asserts that one member, her thesis supervisor, who was the representative of Islam, is knowledgeable in both Islamic and Western civilizations.

Shibel stresses on the absence of someone who can truly explain Islam. and specifically the *hijab* within it, to this Committee. She tacitly rejects that there existed any member who adequately represented the Islamic point of view, or views, as the case may be. Al-Abaidi maintains that regardless of Hudson's and Na'na's emphasis on the neutrality of the Committee, she argues that there was no neutrality in the public domain, referring to the press coverage as well as statements made by politicians. Political parties from either end of the political spectrum far from contributing positively to a calmer environment in which the

issue can be discussed added to the tensions arising from this subject. She makes references to the failure of the socialist party to integrate immigrants, the provocation through social interactions, and the problems that are prompted by a cautious government that is wary of the extreme right and upcoming elections; even though the prime minister had initially dismissed the issue of the *hijab* from the onset. She argues that there are larger and more significant problems in schools than the issue of the *hijab*. The last strike by teachers was the longest lasting since 1968 indicating that there are far more substantial problems in schools. The issue of the hijab was exaggerated amidst a very partial environment that was offensive to Islam and *hijab*-wearing women. This aggrandizing effect served to overshadow more pressing problems in a way that portrayed Muslim women as a threat to the French republic. She claims that the issue goes beyond the school and has ramifications into the political realm of French society whereby there is a tendency to solve "the Islamic problem." This interjection specifically emphasizes the Muslim subject as victim of an unfounded Islamophobic onslaught rendering Islam as the scapegoat which is a running theme throughout the discourse.

Regarding a question that links the right to wear the *hijab* to the French law of secularism of 1905, Hudson maintains that there is complete religious freedom in the French republic, and the Commission has recommended promoting better knowledge of religious matters. In her view though, this freedom must have restrictions, for example, in schools wherein discussion of religion should not be permitted for fear of causing conflicts between students in schools as well as protecting those girls who have been forced to wear the *hijab*

and requested such protection. However, the validity of this perspective is compromised against the refuted assumptions underlying the discourse of the debate. Shibel points out that the issue of the *hijab* appeared in the universities and other educational institutions where Muslim students insisted on wearing it against the will of their parents. Even in the workplace, some women have insisted on wearing the *hijab* despite the opposition expressed by men.

These instances explain what some women have stated is an expression of a feminist movement that refuses patriarchal guardianship or that of Islamic movements. In this light, the *hijab* as a symbol of the oppression of women becomes questionable. Hudson responds by emphasizing the imperative for anyone who chooses to occupy a professional position in the French state to adhere to "our" laws. There is a moment here – an instance in translation perhaps – where a binary is invoked. The host follows Hudson's comment with an abrupt rhetorical interjection demanding that she explain to whom she is referring (i.e. "the Arabs in the studio"). Even though this point is never clarified, it asserts the binary without any doubt and hence the oppositional basis of the discussion contributing to the discourse. In an effort to trivialize the assumption that *hijab*-wearing women are oppressed, Shibel jokingly addresses al-Abaidi, who is wearing the *hijab*, by asking her if she is oppressed. It is a fleeting instance through which the triviality of the allegations and perspective against the wearing of the *hijab* is emphasized.

Despite the existence of cases in which women were forced to wear the *hijab*, al-Abaidi maintains that the French laws already in place protect women from such incidents without resorting to a ban on the *hijab*. However, she asserts

that no Islamic organization or group made a statement in the media expressing that women should be forced to wear the *hijab*. She recognizes the guarantees of liberty that a country like France affords them and maintains that, contrary to any claims to impositions, the objective is to practice that which is protected under the law. Moreover, the issue of wearing the *hijab* is one that resides in the choice of the girls who decide to wear it. These girls' protestations in wearing their *hijab*, in expressing themselves, and in confronting the opposition to their choice were manifested in ways that reflected their French education and socialization in French society. Their demonstrations were conducted in ways that asserted their French identity which influences even their religious practices. For this reason, al-Abaidi argues that it is not appropriate to speak of them as an "Other," a depiction that is associated with the prevalent representation of Islam and Muslims as problems and to portray the Muslim family in such a way as if to suggest that it is specialized in the oppression of its girls and women. Her argument re-emphasizes the point that negative perceptions of Islam are motivated by unsubstantiated discrimination that reveals not the hostility of the laws and foundational principles of the French republic but the practices which contravene them.

Hamida Na'na' provides an alternative reading based on a secular perspective that is more attuned to the religious culture and that maintains the integrity of secular thought interpreted by Shibel at the beginning of the program. For her, the *hijab* represents an identity and she uses the example of Iranian women who wore the chador to express their identity during the Iranian Revolution as a sign of rejection of the Westernization that the Shah of Iran

presented to them at the time. While she indicates this instance of the *hijab* as a feminist strategy, she still considers the experience of Arab and Muslim women in France as lacking in integration in French society. Na'na' explains that, in contrast to an American approach of coexistence based on the free individual, the French approach is based on integrating the individual into society. She points out that the issue of the *hijab* emerged immediately after the events of September 11th at a time when Islam was vilified and the misunderstanding of Islam was the greatest. By rendering the events of September 11th a reflection of Arab-Islamic civilization and culture, Islam is corresponded with terrorism. In her view, she regards the *hijab* as an issue of personal freedom of choice, and as the reference here is to a country that respects different religions and freedom of choice, then a Muslim woman has the right to wear the *hijab* as much as another woman has the right not to do so. In such a way, Na'na' agrees with al-Abaidi that banning the *hijab* contravenes the secular principles of the French republic, although she does so from a supposedly (Arab) secular view. In spite of the differences of orientations, the basis of the opposition in discourse is maintained.

President Chirac's comments that the *hijab* is a sign of hostility provoked the question for al-Abaidi as to whether the mere presence of *hijab*-wearing women is aggravating. She is perplexed by such considerations of hostility. She moreover adds that the comment and perception found its way into the lexicon of intellectuals and teachers, who obviously have expressed discomfort at the mere sight of the *hijab*. Hence, al-Abaidi argues that the *hijab*-wearing woman is being judged on the presumption of hostile intentions and not on the problem that any particular person casting this judgment has with it. It is as if a Muslim woman

upon wearing the hijab does not act out of internal conviction but in reaction against the "Other," and Chirac's comment is offensive for this reason as well. A caller points out that in demonstrating its hostility towards Islam, the "West" begins with women as the first battleground, thereby confirming a perception expressed by Raghad al-Tikriti in a previous episode (Bin Qada, 2003, October 20). The ban on the *hijab* is a dangerous issue that threatens the existence of the Islamic community in Europe, especially as the French decision is gradually spreading to other European countries such as Germany, Belgium, and Denmark. At least, it contributes to offensive assaults and harm inflicted upon Muslim women by right-wing extremists.

These perspectives recognize Orientalist depictions of the "Eastern Other" as a threatening primitive hostile character. Responses are limited to opposition of such portrayals and recognition of political factors motivating the agenda to ban the *hijab*. Towards the end of the discussion, a context is advanced in which political factors impacted this issue, linking the *hijab* to political or fundamentalist Islam, or Islamic terrorism. After indicating the parallel between Islam and terrorism in Western depictions, this assumption thence becomes the basis for inquiring about the links of *hijab* to fundamentalist political Islam, or in another term, terrorism. Shibel furthermore rhetorically employs a caricature to trivialize the issue as one that potentially implicates the *hijab*-wearing woman as part of an attempt to overthrow the French republic and instate an Islamic state in its place. Hudson expresses her discomfort at such caricature to re-emphasizes the point that some girls requested the protection from pressures to wear the *hijab*. She also re-emphasizes the impartiality of the Committee which

is not taking sides against Islam. Instead, she calls for increasing dialogue that addresses integration in society. The various forces in France notwithstanding their diversity and difference work towards the protection of the state and its citizens. On the other hand, al-Abaidi asserts that these girls are the first to exemplify integration in French society, since their aspirations upon conclusion of their studies is to find their place in French society. However, she maintains that there are voices, including some voices within the Stazi Commission, who always refer the matter back to extremism in upholding the notion that every *hijab*-wearing girl conceals extremism or an extremist.

As Frantz Fanon (1967) reminds us in the battle over the veil between the French colonizers and the colonized Algerians, the battle over "un/veiling" has a colonial history that is ongoing. While the terms employed for justifying the rejection of the veil might have slightly shifted today to emphasize links to extremism and terrorism, the veil nevertheless continues to symbolize Islamic inferiority. This irremediable chasm between the intent on "inferiorizing" native customs and religious practices and the persistent resistance to its Westernizing implications continues to supply interpretations of cultures and civilizations, like Huntington's, with a validity that inexorably underlies the foundations of cultural discourse. The opposition developed to resist the neocolonial narrative, in order to negate it, ironically adopts the symbolic terms and practices (veiling) of the original narrative in order to resist and negate it in the process of self-valorization. Leila Ahmed (1992) observes that the veil "came to symbolize in the resistance narrative, not the inferiority of the culture and the need to cast aside its customs in favor of those of the West, but, on the contrary, the dignity and

validity of all native customs, and in particular those customs coming under fiercest colonial attack – the customs relating to women – and the need to tenaciously affirm them as a means of resistance to Western domination" (p. 164). In the Iranian case, the veil came to represent a rejection of forced Westernization (El-Guindi 1999; Shirazi 2001). However, the extreme realities of pre- and post-revolution in Iran gesture towards the patriarchal complicity: "Just as Reza Shah 'unveiled' women before the Islamic Revolution, the Islamic Republic "veiled" women after the Revolution" (El-Guindi, 1999, p. 175). As Faegheh Shirazi (2001) explains, in pre-Revolution Iran, "Reza Shah's order to his cabinet to effect the removal of the veil was not rooted in his desire to reform the status of his female subjects but in his belief that, in order to be modern, Iran must only look Western. Perhaps his three unveiled wives were the best examples of his stress on image rather than substance" (p. 89-90).

Conversely, the moral force with which the *hijab* is impelled as feminist resistance in the name of preserving identity and culture remains questionable when treated by a characteristically patriarchal Arab discourse invested primarily in anti-colonial and anti-imperialist androcentric interests. As a result, this strategically essentialist discourse that requires the maintenance of opposition in resistance cannot afford challenges to its complicit dialectical logic. Otherwise, any such challenges would be perceived as an affront to the presumably innate merits of Islam and/or Arab culture.

5

Preserving "Arabness": The Question of Authenticity in the Age of Globalization

Whether the new satellite channels expose and highlight inter-Arab political and cultural differences or whether they are a conduit for fostering a sense of commonness amongst Arabs vis-à-vis the West, or the U.S. in particular, remains a question open for debate. However, the shifting interest and focus on issues of culture, and in this case culture's relationship to media, is undeniable. Without disregarding political concerns of governments, the discourse concerning new media in the Arab and Islamic parts of the world has noticeably shifted towards issues of culture and religion, as the cultural implications of information technology can no longer be disregarded (Hafez 2001; Amin 2001). This preoccupation often corresponds to perceptions of the West's cultural invasion facilitated by the new technological innovations in media communications. For this reason, Arab policy makers focus on individual and institutional technology users rather than on industries. Public discussions overlook economic benefits of highly developed communications services and are "preoccupied with the potential negative effects of information and communication technologies on social values and traditions as well as on existing political arrangements" (Ayish, 2001, p. 112). Because the diverse media systems that operate within the various Arab countries as discussed previously, are

indicative of diverse political and social cultures, suggesting a myriad of cultural practices and values, it is reasonable to expect varying engagements with cultural questions pertaining to new media communications. However, the stability of identity and culture becomes a rhetorical exigency in light of the circumstances of globalization. In what follows, I will examine how concerns over the future of Arab identity are treated under these circumstances and how globalization figures as a threat, prompting the need to preserve aspects of culture.

The Future of Arab Identity and Character

An episode that addresses the future of Arab identity serves as the nexus in which the main issues discussed thus far convene to construct the cultural character of Arab identity (Mansour, 2003, October 8). In this episode, issues of identity and culture are discussed in relation to a political context in which the United States is perceived to exert its hegemony, in turn politically influencing the character of Arab cultural identity. The episode discusses the psychological effects of identity and personal character of the Arab individual against the political backdrop of initiatives and democratization plans proposed by members of the Bush administration and other American officials involved in American foreign affairs. [1] In the wake of infiltrating media messages beaming from satellites onto the television screens of Arab households, the foreignness of media content exacerbates the threat to commonly-shared cultural values and traditions which this content contravenes. In addition to American pressures to modify

[1] Initiatives mentioned summarily include changes in school curricula in the Arab counties as an American attempt to eliminate hatred and violence in the region and to spread tolerance amongst the peoples of the region. This call was subsequently reinforced by President Bush, former Secretary of State, Colin Powell, and former National Security Advisor, Condaleeza Rice.

such things as school curricula coupled with the cultural invasion of American, or American-perceived, mass media content, cultural concerns become linked to political pressures. Moreover, there is a perceived absence of religion, in terms of leaders and institutions, as sources of guidance to promote what are considered "respectable and noble values" of virtue. The controversial role of women in society and their relation to the family are also featured as important aspects of this discussion.

In framing his discussion, Ahmad Mansour adopts an alarmist tone that establishes the orientation of his conversation with his guest, Dr. Hani el-Sabki, a psychiatrist. Particularly, Mansour is warning against the role that the United States is playing in the Arab region and its proposed plans to effect modifications on school curricula in order to allegedly diminish the violence and extremism in the region and pave the way for democratization. In Mansour's view, this interference and the pressure that the American administration is placing on Arab governments to effect these changes is on the account of the individual character of the Arab person whose identity is at risk of being eroded. In his words, Mansour begins his introduction by saying, "Arab identity and character is subjected to a dangerous process of dilution driven by the United States of America that, although it may have been previously covert, is now being undertaken overtly in a systematic and direct way." He goes on to add that, "the matter does not stop at school curricula, for there are tens of Arab television channels, some of which operate around the clock broadcasting American films, values, culture, and habits with an intentional absence of Arab identification and culture. The region's governments explicitly contribute to their elimination, in a

context wherein the role of the family, the mother, religious, educational, and cultural institutions is noticeably absent." Mansour proceeds to pose the following questions against this backdrop: "What are the psychological effects upon forming the Arab individual, his [sic] identity and formation? And how will the subsequent generations of Arabs, who carry the legacy of their nation, its history, civilization and language, look like? Will they transform into something else? Or have they transformed already? And to where would our [current] situation lead if it continues as it is for another decade or two? And what is the exit, and what is the solution for saving the nation and saving the [coming] generations from these destructive plans in which we have all become accomplices [to the extent] that they have imprinted us upon themselves?"

The stability of Arab culture is necessary if it is going to inform a stable identity that is employed in resistance to perceived Western or American neocolonialism or imperialism. In defining the concept of identity and personality traits or character, two implications must be considered. Firstly, there is a conflation between the two; that is, identity and personality traits or character. They are ill-defined, too generic and all-encompassing. According to el-Sabki, a character is encompassed by all that is inherited throughout one's lifetime and previous generations. This amalgam constitutes the person through his or her behavioral pattern as personality traits. This inheritance is one of history, beliefs, environmental and familial circumstances among a number of many other attributes. These attributes express a person's intellectual and historical orientations as well as the orientation of his or her beliefs.

Secondly, there is a problem with essentialism as far as identity is concerned. While el-Sabki continues to explain that the factors which contribute to the formation of a character are fixed for a human being all across the world, the conflation that occurs between identity discussed in terms of personality traits and behavioral characteristics renders his conceptual definition of either term a presumptuous and daring assumption by any measure. The assumed definition of identity formation, as it is conflated with character, as a process that is determined by fixed factors becomes particularly problematic for my consideration here. The contradiction that emerges from this conflation assumes that the variety of historical, social and cultural circumstances of these presumably fixed factors exist in isolation within the respective regions or societies to which they correspond, that there is no occurring intercultural interaction or contact that challenges the fixity of any particular set of circumstances, and in turn, the "fixity" of identity and the cultural character or traits of a personality. While he may be speaking of identity from a psychological perspective, his direct linkage of such an identity to the identity of a particular culture of a particular (Arab) "nation" – in the broadest sense – requires that this assumed broad form of national or cultural identity described in such terms is challenged. This practice of representation implicates the position from which these two men speak, their positions of enunciation, and the idea that identity is a "production" that "is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" problematizes the very authenticity of 'Arab cultural identity' to which they refer in the discussion (Hall, 1994, p. 392).

Mansour recounts a list of articles and calls from American officials and journalists that are concerned with political reform in, and reshaping the Middle East. He also recounts the Bush administration's announcement that its engagement in democratization initiatives in the Middle East is its ethical responsibility during this epoch. He questions what these political initiatives might mean for the character of Arab identity. El-Sabki's response is problematic. He claims that identity can only be formed internally, from within the organic environment of a person claiming this identity. The involvement of any foreign elements in changing this character would not be completed, although it can be successful in disrupting or unsettling it. He is not convinced that that those allegations to modify the Arab character, whether by changing educational curricula or establishing democracy is for elevating the region's standing. Ahmed Mansour remarks that Arab governments do not seem to find a problem with these initiatives but quickly expresses that his intention is not to involve his guest in politics or in a political discussion.

This is an expression of an intention that ironically places politics in the heart of a "cultural" discussion that is presumed to be apolitical. In this instance, Mansour is obviously interested in politicizing the discussion of identity and culture, although his remark is intended to distance his guest from political engagement that might, one would presume, compromise him with the authorities. It is here that one can begin to detect a contradiction between the guest's expertise and his problematic conceptualization that seems shrouded by what appears to be his personal political stance. Mansour's guest explicitly admitted a political position with regards to the American initiatives. Even when

Mansour allegedly insinuates a deviation from a strict political discussion to center on the character of Arab identity in the individual, it nonetheless stems from a strictly political context and is explicitly discussed in relation to it. If this discussion of Arab identity stemming from a very particular political context is not considered involvement in politics according to Mansour, then a psychological or behavioral analysis of the characteristics of Arab identity inhered in Arab individuals is unequivocally politicized as el-Sabki's statement indicates. El-Sabki's political stance towards what he perceives as American meddling in Arab affairs further contributes to the fixed foundation upon which Arab identity is based, rendering his essentialization of character and identity formation processes as problematic. What this statement really serves is a deviation from the political context, strictly-speaking, to discuss American infiltration into the Arab cultural sphere via new communications technologies.

Mansour questions the means by which one can protect identity, culture, character from the impact of television channels that, in his view, through Arab investments, broadcasts American culture day and night (e.g. video clips that broadcasts "sexuality") as well as the changes in school curricula. Through such questioning, Mansour implies the actual need to preserve and protect "Arabness" as identity and culture. He dissociates Arab identity and culture from "American culture," expressed through permissive sexuality, in order to define Arab identity and culture as ones characterized by "noble and pure" notions of conservative traditions and values. In doing so, he takes the moral high ground. In affirming Mansour's framework and definition, el-Sabki laments the negligence in building the character of "Arabness," or at least preserving what had existed in this

character. For him, this negligence consequently created what he perceives as an atmosphere that allowed an infiltrating Western counterpart to exert its cultural influence through modern communication technologies in light of the failure of Arab identity to assume responsibility of strengthening the force of its character. The negative effects of this situation are allegedly manifested in el-Sabki's reference to his patients, who offer examples of the sense of loss and disorientation that is a consequence of this cultural invasion via the global mass media. After all, one does not have to contend only with the example of being an immigrant or second generation Arab-Muslim girl in the West to experience the "cultural schizophrenia" that Safa' al-Sawi raised with much concern (Bin Qada, 2003, October 20). The effects of this "schizophrenia," "disorientation" or "loss" are experienced by Arabs "at home."

El-Sabki addresses the role of the family in the development of children's character. He argues that gender roles of men and women as parents in the family unit have been confused or conflated in such a way that negatively affects the development of their children's characters. Moreover, he bemoans the deterioration of traditional or conventional definitions of Arab masculinity manifested in such notions as chivalry and responsibility towards the family and the ability to lead a family. [2] Under these circumstances, the implication is that the Arab man, who serves as a role model for his (primarily male) children,

[2] In his discussion of statistics that came out of Egypt over domestic abuse, Mansour points out that physical abuse is two-way, that is it can be directed at women or women directing physical abuse at their male spouses. What is disturbing about this exchange between two males, following a discussion of the loss of traditional notions of masculinity, is their sympathy towards a man in such a situation. They neither reciprocate this sympathy towards a woman in an abusive situation nor validate women's pursuit of career ambitions.

becomes responsible for their emulations of his behavior, whether positive or negative. Interestingly, el-Sabki's descriptions of the child's relationship to parents whose gender roles have been confused or conflated ironically possess psychoanalytic undertones. Although it is not the subject of my inquiry here, I still find it peculiar that psychoanalytic notions are reinterpreted in terms that are conveniently applicable to an Arab context viewed for this particular perspective. In a discussion framed by a psychological analysis and interpretation of the character formation of children, the role of the parents and family as a site in which character is developed is emphasized. This character is explicitly understood to involve social and cultural values that inform, or in fact that are, those which define the identity of the Arab "nation." Consequently, and in light of the introduction of the episode's subject matter within a framework of foreign political pressures, the connection between a discussion of blurring gender roles, the crisis in masculinity, and the "nation" identified in terms of this type of character formation of Arab identity cannot be easily overlooked. This framework invokes the language of post-colonial discourse in resuscitating the figure of the emasculated male whose responsibility is to protect a "feminine" nation's honor from the onslaught of foreign invasion.

Mansour turns his questions towards the issue of women's rights and asks his guest about the relationship between a woman's pursuit of such rights and the effects that this activity may have on her child. In addressing his guest, Mansour's understated cynicism in posing his question implies that a woman is negligent or inadequate in her role as a mother – when she leaves her child in a daycare for 8 hours – in an effort to "search for her rights." El-Sabki's response

assumes a diplomatic tone that attempts to level the field before turning his attention to such a woman, who is depicted as selfish in her focus on *her* rights. In a semantic play on words, he claims that women's rights are not lost; that they are rather *neglected* for periods of time; that women have also neglected rights towards their husbands; that not all husbands have deprived women of their rights; that not all women are waiting for, or expecting rights. Hence, rights are pre-determined and never questionable or in need of re-evaluation. He moreover claims that a great number of women have achieved their full rights but have forgotten their obligations in an implied selfish pursuit for *their* rights, echoing Mansour's perspective that is more than subtly evident in his questioning.

It is apparent that the issue of women's rights seems to be one that concerns women only and that these rights somehow do not correspond to the benefit of (patriarchal) society at large. Contrary to feminist invocations for the right to wear the *hijab* as a resistance to patriarchy (Bin Qada, 2003, December 22), feminist interests appear to have been trivialized and dismissed in this discussion. As miriam cooke (2000) observes, "Women are peculiarly vulnerable where their men are most threatened...the growing prominence of Islam in world politics has drawn attention to the ways in which Islamist groups use women as passive cultural emblems. Women's responsibilities and images in the new Islamic systems are symbolically foregrounded and then pragmatically relegated to the political margins" (p. 100). Leila Ahmed (1988) adds that "the versions of history perpetuated as authoritative do not bear the privileged 'impartial' relation to reality to which they lay claim but, rather, present a version representing the interests and visions of the male governing classes" (pp. 218-219). For this

reason, she points out that the versions of Islam or "true" Islam as it is maintained corresponded with the interests of this class. Since Islamic notions are infused into, if not conflated with, "Arabness," patriarchal complicity in its disregard for women's interests when it serves its purposes becomes characteristic of its oppositional discourse of resistance.

Moreover, two men discussing women's rights in such a way is unsettling to say the least. The perplexing irony lies in the fact that the virtue of addressing the issue can mistakenly appear as a progressive gesture. Yet, it is overshadowed, and indeed negated, by a framework that is characterized by a traditional patriarchy shrouded in an interpretation appearing to embrace the modern circumstances in which they claim women participate. The way this is achieved is by tracing it back to the West. As soon as el-Sabki makes reference to the conferences that are convened to discuss women's issues, and indeed begins to state their importance, Mansour quickly interrupts him to remark that they are "motivated by the West for the purpose of diluting everyone's identity into a particular melting pot contradicting the values of many peoples and nations." El-Sabki continues in affirming this point by adding that it is important to give women their rights but also to inform them of their obligations.

However, as Lila Abu-Lughod (1998) argues, the idea of the family and women's role within it, as these men represent it in their discussion, does not stand in opposition to Western intrusive influences as they perceive them. Abu-Lughod regards such calls for the "retraditionalization" of women's status and

roles – in her case in Egyptian society – as a vision of modernity:[3] "this vision of family and women's proper relation to husband and children is profoundly modern and its sources are entwined with the West as surely as are the negatively perceived public freedoms of women the Islamists denounce" (p. 255). Abu-Lughod argues that this bourgeois vision of women's domesticity has been so entrenched in the upper- and middle-classes in Egyptian society that even those arguing for a rejection of Western ways do not consider dislocating it. As much as they vilify the foreignness of their perception of the Western emancipated woman, they assimilate "tradition" by seeking to find Islamic bases for it. Abu-Lughod indicates that, in spite of the changes to this model that an Islamic inflection or translation of these ideals may propose, the claims of indigenous tradition are spurious.

This modernized form of patriarchy is therefore not traditionalist in the strict sense of the word. It is what Hisham Sharabi (1988a) in the context of the Arab region terms "neopatriarchy," represented by the peculiar duality of coexistence between the modern and the patriarchal in contradictory union, "that neopatriarchy as a social formation is nothing else than corrupted patriarchy wedded to distorted modernity" (p. 3). Sharabi (1988b) explains that dependency characteristically defines neopatriarchy. Patriarchy, as traditionalism, is not what brings about this conversion into a transformed newer form. Instead, it is dependency brought about by Western imperialism which

[3] Following from both Mansour's and his guest's Egyptian nationalities and from Mansour's generalization of statistics from an Egyptian study to the Arab region at large, it is appropriate to use Lila Abu-Lughod's argument based on her study of Egyptian society. By using her argument, I am demonstrating that even when adopting the same logic of their discussion, it appears that theirs is problematic.

constitutes its historical expression and agency. Sharabi stresses that dependency presents itself in other ways that those typically associated with Western domination, aggression and economic and military overpowering of the peripheries:

> In the Arab world, dependency presents itself in all these forms but additionally and crucially in the form of an *inner* cultural relation, on sustained in the shadow of the dominant Other. In this sense, besides being a political, economic, and military *outside*, the relation of dependency is also a cultural *inside*. This is the essential character of the socio-psychological structure we call neopatriarchy. (emphasis in original; Sharabi, 1988b, p. 3)

In the context of the episode, how a woman's rights are defined and who will be providing her with instruction remains implied, and this overpowering act that suggests women are unaware of their rights and obligations and require instruction on them is never considered or questioned. As Leila Ahmed (1988) aptly describes the situation, the notion that women's justice is a Western idea has proved serviceable for those, even the ignorant and well-intentioned amongst men, who persuade Arab women that the choice is between betraying their culture by adopting these Western ideas and accepting their status as an intrinsic and immutable constituent of an "authentic" cultural heritage. Consequently, treatment of this marginalized group is co-opted in a way that does not render oppression as self-evident because it is ingenuously undermined in discourse.

In an effort to acknowledge the circumstances of working women, el-Sabki maintains that a woman must be given rights that account for her situation as a working person. He does not oppose women's right to work but rather he opposes women's "lack of work" as mothers. He explains that, when a woman relinquishes her role as a mother, a child's identity becomes confused and

distorted as maids and nannies assume the role of the caretaker of children in the household. These caretakers are foreigners hired as domestic labor who allegedly inculcate the child with a foreign culture and heritage. Mansour seems persistent in sympathizing with the husband in this discussion by drawing a link between a mother who has relinquished her role to foreign hire and a wife whose presumed obligations to feed and clothe her husband is compromised by her absence from the household. The implications of these type of statements are grave, nevertheless emphasizing the earlier extrapolation that neopatriarchy remains a vital agent in determining the rights and obligations, and indeed, fate of women, even when it attempts to accommodate the current circumstances of modern life through a perceivably enlightened despotic approach. Furthermore, el-Sabki points out that, with the possible employment of a number of caretakers from different foreign cultures through a child's early life, the end result is a person who is a "cocktail" of identities without any real foundation. Mansour continues to interrupt him to assert the point about Western or foreign infiltration with regards to this mélange of elements shaping a child's identity, by emphasizing the prevalence of foreign "identities." These influences include the infiltration of American and Western culture through media content broadcast on television channels. The consequence of this bombardment of foreign factors upon the form of Arab identity, according to el-Sabki, is that the Arab individual has no sense of self that can be truly identified.

American interest in entering the foray of education in the Middle East is linked to the assumption that education contributes to the development of the Arab character. The two men discuss a variety of dimensions to education and

culture. For el-Sabki, there is a distinction that contrasts a situation in which the tools for learning are available as a process of education and another in which learning is conducted in the form of instruction. Education, curricula and loss of credible references, mentorship and role models in society are marked as being replaced by pop artists and athletes, in highlighting the prevalence of materialism over humanistic concerns in society. Mansour asks about the depiction and image of religious scholars to which el-Sabki responds by referring to their inability to connect with people and criticizes them for adopting titles such as "Doctor" as opposed to "Shaykh," a title used to address a religious leader in some parts of the Islamic region. Mansour perceives this transformation as a loss of legitimacy and value that is associated with the adoption of Western standards. This point confirms Ali Harb's argument about the paradoxical relationship between leaders who adopt such Western forms and ironically castigate and resist the West in their rhetoric (al-Kasim, 2004, February 10).

Mansour also questions the changes in social relationships, especially between genders (e.g. the introduction of notions of "boyfriend" and "girlfriend"). For el-Sabki, such relationships along those lines are not human-based, but physically-based which then affects the way marriages take place. El-Sabki also refers to the traditional Oriental or Eastern man, embodied in Naguib Mafouz's character "*si Sayyid*", a macho and assertive male, as something that is shameful, a point that resonates with the discussion about inter-religious marriages in the previous chapter (Bin Qada, 2003, October 20). An elitist approach that forces particular art forms upon people is furthermore considered as a means to overcome sexual urges through "tasteful" art. Referring this discussion back to

the Arab child, Mansour addresses the way children pass their time through means that he regards as trivial, such as the long hours of watching television (approximately 7 hours according to a survey he cites) and using the telephone and cell phone. He contrasts the resources available to children with those resources available to children in the West, by referring to the number of available satellite channels and magazines aimed at children. El-Sabki argues that the Arab child suffers from what he calls an "intellectual indigestion" whereby s/he is consuming foreign media content that does not correspond to his or her social environment, apart from exposure to Arabic media content that addresses issues primarily for adult consumption. Under these circumstances, the search for identity is ultimately attributed to its ambiguity.

One caller posed a compelling question about the possibility of correspondence or harmonization between the entrenching or rooting ("authenticating") of identity and the inevitable opposition of this identity to others in societies that contain more than one form of identification based on varying historical or religious references. Although it is not clear whether the question was intentionally or unintentionally misinterpreted, the response centered on the simple "clash" of identities by reinforcing the effect of Western education in the Arab region. According to Mansour, the prevalence and popularity of foreign/Western schooling in the Arab region is an instance to re-assert his point throughout the episode about the fact of foreign infiltration, its threat and negative impact on Arab identity formation. Also, for him, it is further indication to the disorientation that is currently a characteristic in identity formation in children leading to a fragmentation of identity. While his point may

be valid in speaking to the complexity of identity formation that feeds the discussions and debates around identity politics, there is a problematic emphasis on the assumption that there exists an authentic Arab identity that is founded upon a commonly understood Arab culture and values. It is a stance that tacitly appears to emphasize the outright rejection of the possibility, the validity even, of hybridized identity, or a multiplicity of identification.

Because political oppression has effects on forming the identity of Arab peoples, el-Sabki asserts that there is a correlation between democracy and intellectual creativity; that is, when the former decreases so does the latter. He adds that a decrease in democracy means that there is a decrease in thinking – and I would qualify, by adding, critical thinking – which leads to fear, individualism, and isolation. He elaborates that an "Arab democracy" must be established, one that is characteristically derived from its own identity, a democracy that carries Arab identity and not one that is imported from the West. According to el-Sabki, the solution to the problems that were posed in this episode seems to lie at the doorsteps of governments. Whereas democracy is directly associated with the solution to this crisis in identity formation, it is ironic how undemocratic governments, allegedly compliant under American pressures, will take responsibility for this undertaking. Moreover, there is an admission that the programming that appears on Arab television screens, that governments presumably are able to curtail, is one that audience's demand after all. In my view, there seems to be an apparent contradiction between calls for democracy, the relegating of responsibility to undemocratic governments that facilitate or overlook programming content, and finally the admission that, according to

democratic principles, the masses really want to see what they allegedly complain about after all.

In his final analysis, el-Sabki emphasizes the importance of asserting the Arabic language and culture in everyday practice in light of the presence of foreign influences. Mansour summarily prescribes the ways to successfully ensure the preservation of Arab identity and culture; that the father reclaims his role in the family; that the family reclaims its role in society; that scholars reclaims their role in universities; that beginning with the individual at a micro-level and building upwards will lead to changes in governments, and in turn, all the negative and offensive stations that bring the destruction to the individual. On the level of the family unit, it is the responsibility of the parents to censor this type of programming and prevent their children's accessibility to it. This responsibility is conventionally acceptable, although Mansour employs it as an opportunity to reiterate the point about the erosion of the traditional male role in the family and the fatalistic state of masculinity in Arab society. El-Sabki replies by requiring that a search for men's rights is also necessary. The disturbing irony in this line of thinking is that the man in Arab societies generally and traditionally assumes the role of the authoritarian decision-maker at the level of the family unit, a role that resembles the leaders of Arab governments at the macro-level who adopt a paternalistic rhetoric in their discourse to and about their peoples.[4]

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[4] This is a point that Faisal al-Kasim, host of *The Opposite Direction*, has reiterated on a number of occasions.

The Family and Preserving the Arabic Language

The responsibility of the family in preserving what arguably is considered the most salient feature that unifies Arabs across their differences, the Arabic language, is rendered the subject of women's concerns (Bin Qada, 2003, December 1). Implicitly, as the title of the episode suggests, the family unit invokes a domestic space for which women are solely responsible and in which the preservation of the Arabic language is – at least primarily – the assumed responsibility of its caretakers. Despite the important role it plays as a non-neutral communications tool in shaping identity and the particularity of civilization and culture for a nation, the introduction explains, there is a noticeable decline in the use of the Arabic language on the level of the state, society, and the family unit. In addition to the prevalence of foreign schools in the Arab world, the introduction attributes this decline to the advent of globalization which is a catalyst in light of the apparent reliance on the employment of foreign languages. Consequently, foreign languages became the languages of knowledge, the market, and the formative basis of future careers, rendering foreign language acquisition a crucial imperative for younger generations. Under these circumstances, the compulsion to learn foreign languages at the expense of the Arabic language is presented as a problematic issue that is evident in the unforeseen changes in the quotidian lifestyle pattern of the Arab child prompted by the imperatives of the use of the foreign language.

The episode addresses the responsibility of parents and the family in the diminishing use of the Arabic language, as they insist on transforming the foreign language into the lingua franca of basic interpersonal interactions and the home.

It also addresses the role that school curricula play in the aversion felt by the younger generations towards the subject in school, as well as, the ways in which international powers employ language as a means of cultural penetration in pursuit of economic interests and the opening of more markets in which to promote more products. Throughout the discussion, there is no indication that the guests have a stance against foreign language acquisition. In fact, statements indicate that the importance of learning more than one language is encouraged by the guests as a way into learning about another culture. However, issue is taken against such acquisition that takes place on the account of the Arabic language which is then compromised in favor of the foreign language on the personal and professional levels. Specifically, there is an emphasis on the less than primary role that Arabic has taken in the everyday communication and interaction within families as well as on the level of institutions and in the professional realm. As the following contributions to the discussion reveal, the diminishing role of the Arabic language is associated with Western neocolonial and imperial hegemony that is articulated in the language of the market and globalization. It is associated with a weak relationship between Arabs and their language which is an important element in underscoring a unifying collectivity.

Hadia Sa'id, a London-based writer and novelist, points out the different variations in defining language as a spoken tongue or a "being" that lives within the people or as an identity and culture. She contends that if it is a spoken tongue, then the family is responsible; and if it is a "being," then it is the responsibility of media, cultural institutions and organizations, and the state to keep it alive in the spirit of the people and develop affection towards it.

Primarily, the issue for her is the decline in the *affection* towards the Arabic language and adopting it as a spoken tongue and a way of "being." In turn, the foreign language becomes not a tool for knowledge acquisition but an indicator or standard of excellence, whereby acquisition of a foreign language by a child is regarded as a sign or indication of excellence. The issue is then not the acquisition of the foreign language but when and how it is acquired; that is, whether it should be regarded as a tool for knowledge or an indication of excellence.

The second guest, Ni'mat Fu'ad, an Egyptian professor of Arabic, confirms this view by emphasizing the importance of learning another language in order to acquire literary and cultural knowledge. However, she also emphasizes that this knowledge must not occur on the account of the Arabic language by compromising its position in the home, in schools, and in the workplace. She does admit that there is a decline as well as limitations over Arabic language use. In acknowledging this fact, she asserts that the Arabic language must assume a primary role in everyday usage. The link between Islam and the Arabic language is also maintained in her interjection. As a means for preserving the language, she encourages teaching children the Quran, and she provides an example of a Copt who memorized the Quran in order to maintain the eloquence of his written word and oratory in Arabic. Imposing the Quran upon Arab non-Muslim children serves to perfect the fluidity and eloquence of their Arabic. As she equates learning the Quran with strength of training in the Arabic language, she argues that the importance of perfecting the Arabic language is an issue of preserving the pan-national language for both Muslims and Copts.

For Moza Ghabbash, head of *Ruwaq A'isha bint Hussein for Culture*, the decline of Arabic language use is a partial phenomenon that belongs to a much broader issue. As a primary element of Arabic culture, discussion of the decline of the Arabic language is one about the future of the Arab region and Arab civilization. It is to discuss the strength of the region, the strength of "Arabness," and the strength of Arab society in its internal composition in terms of human interactions. She finds that it is difficult to discuss language as separate from the demise of the Arab development project as a whole, for the decline of the Arabic language is a factor in the failure of this development project culturally, militarily, politically, and economically. And this weakness of the Arabic language is a cause for the failure of the development project.

Moreover, she adds that in public schools, the decline is related to a notion of education that is based on the requirements of the market. As education is linked to the market, education becomes a tool for the market and causes public schools to weaken. This market is created by Western economies and is opened to serve the needs and policies of the West in order to maintain its hegemony. The tendency to follow unconsciously in this direction overlooks the consequence that Arabs are not serving their own interests but those interests of the West. She argues that it is not necessary that Arab companies and economies be predicated upon the foreign language. The infrastructure of the public school system can also be strengthened by maintaining the perspective that education is aimed to cultivate an aware and educated generation that builds a civilization regardless whether it corresponds to the market or not. This inclination to cater to Western capitalistic markets, she maintains, is a repetition of a previous historical period

during which colonialism, in its various forms, transformed the region into markets.

More importantly, for her, the emphasis should not simply be placed upon the transformation of the notion of education to meet the needs of the market but on the mental transformation of the Arab person and her way of thinking. If there existed a decision-making power that is discernible in the quality of education being adopted centered on the Arabic language, then this strength would have been spread throughout Arab society, which is otherwise weakened by a weakened language, religion, and educational institutions. In the wake of the prevalence of foreign language use in all levels of education (schools, colleges, universities, and graduate studies), she deems it crucial to maintain public education and to revive it, a revival that corresponds to the revival of a whole nation and civilization, politically, militarily, and culturally, and ultimately a revival of the Arab development project in general.

The decline of the use of Arabic is associated with the role of globalization that appears to re-cast the problem of decolonization in this new context. This frame of addressing the issue indicates that globalization does not necessarily represent a new phase, but new circumstances for the continued experience of colonialism even after its official end. This relationship between the new context and old problems is treated by an invited phone contribution from al-Muqri' Abu-Zaid, a professor of linguistics at Hasan II University in Morocco. He points out that the extraordinary hegemony of two languages, English and French, on the Arab world, the former on its eastern part and the latter on its western part, is unhealthy because it is imposed by the subsequent residue of colonialism

governing the region. Although colonialism officially ended about half a century ago, it is actually ongoing in the form of the pressures of globalization that submit nationalist systems to the pressures of foreign policies, economic indebtedness and dependency. Instead of reverting back to Arabic and other local and national languages in which Arab identity, creativity and success resides, he observes that there is a compliance with these pressures that excuses parents' encouragement to adopt English and French at the expense of Arabic. The reasons for this encouragement are excused in the name of the necessity to open up to globalization and market imperatives that lead to the perfection of foreign languages, their cultures, specialties and knowledge.

In turn, the Arabic language is rendered boring and impractical, as students become disaffected towards it. This result stems from a policy that marginalizes the Arabic language and its ability to reach its audience simultaneously as it facilitates the tools for learning foreign languages, indicating the strength of the civilizations that they represent, and the civilizations that represent them, as a cultural and colonial present in Arab countries. On the level of the individual, he moreover recommends that the difficulties of grammar and theoretical learning of Arabic language can be avoided in favor of the practice of language which will provide a more convenient means to education through proper representation of language in song, film, and computer software for example. He also stresses the importance of learning Arabic through a focus on learning the Quran and other religious texts of a literary nature, further emphasizing Ni'mat Fu'ad's point which highlights Islam's prominence in "Arabness."

With the advent of globalization, Lona Shibel, the program's host, points out that families tend to exhibit a tendency to educate their children in these languages in order to secure their futures, especially since a lack of proficiency in a second or third language does not secure a promising career. Here, globalization is conceptualized as a Western phenomenon in a manner that follows from a previous thread: that globalization is based on the Western economies and their need to access markets. In light of the fact that there is a popular tendency towards education in foreign languages, Shibel states that Arab countries have failed to adopt policies that balance the effects of globalization and ensures the preservation of identity. According to this presentation, globalization, which is Western, is posited against identity, which is threatened by the West and for which language is its most important basis. Moza Ghabbash notes the state of impressed amazement towards Western culture experienced by the Arab intellectual, or more broadly, movements that are critical of Arabic culture. This state of amazement, she claims, is furthermore transferred to the Arab family. In such a way, she explains, Western culture penetrates into the intellectual and cultural formation of the Arab person, whether a novelist or a school educator, who adopts forms of Western culture as a model or standard. As a result, there is a repetition of the same historical experience in the Arab region whereby a Western mode of thinking and foreign languages are adopted.

However, the alternative which is implicitly regarded in opposition to problematic Western ones may not be the best suited to the reality of the Arab region and is not less problematic either. In terms of cultural creation, the alternative to Western models is a traditionalist one that is based on, or

corresponds to an Islamic model, both of which are preconceived models that dominate cultural life. On the one hand, the reality of cultural experience evokes ostensible elements of Westernization, and on the other hand, the heightened awareness of the threat of Westernization compels a traditionalist interpretation advocating for the return to tradition (implicitly an Islamic one) and a non-descript notion of "national identity" (Abu-Deeb 1988). In the words of Kamal Abu-Deeb (1988),

> we must place cultural activity within the space of two opposing forces: the shock of modernity (or the shock of *other* as an external entity), and the shock of tradition (or the shock of *other* as a distant self). So far Arab intellectuals, outside the traditional sphere, have been fighting to internalize the other, to absorb the other into the organic structure of the culture. Now, they are trying to externalize the self, to turn the tradition into a force capable of shaping the present and to prove that it is more relevant to our problems than the external other. (p. 161)

Aspects of this dynamic are evident throughout the discussion perhaps most noticeably between Hadia Sa'id, who tries to emphasize the fluidity of language as a "being" that lives on the tongues of its speakers and its sustenance through external borrowing, and Moza Ghabbash whose more conservative approach highlights the relevance of tradition in addressing the problems that identity and language face in the era of globalization.

Lona Shibel orients her questioning to emphasize the alarming fact that the impact of the West on the region never ceased to exist since colonialism. Still, I would argue that this alarm seems to offer nothing new except in revealing the new ways that the Western threat is being refashioned, identified, and diagnosed in the wake of processes rendered global in scale. Shibel indicates that, while the old colonialism entrenched itself and its dominant language by the force of

military might, there was an assumption that the influence of the colonial language will decline with the demise of colonialism. However, in the wake of a new economic phase and the transformations of the world economic structure, language became a tool of cultural penetration. Therefore, colonialism re-entered in a new form through language with the purpose of accruing economic benefits. The basis of this evolving notion of colonialism is that "colonial domination is not just to be found in the whip and gun – one does not even have to see the actual tools of repressive power for colonial relationships to be solidly in place – but is also, perhaps above all, in the thoughts and justifications that underpin colonial relationships" (Niezen, 2004, p. 151). Ronald Niezen (2004) points out that "colonialism has a power to last beyond the dismantling of empires... [and] ... the need for resistance has a historical reach that extends well beyond the granting of national independence to former colonies" (p. 151).

In the particular context of the debate over the status of language, it is regarded as a tool for this new form of colonialism, as a biased mediator in its cultural form possessing an economic purpose. However, despite the pessimistic tone of Shibel's depiction, all three guests seem to dismiss fears that the Arabic language is under threat of elimination. It is interesting to note that their interjections go contrary to the direction that Shibel is taking the discussion. According to Hadia Sa'id, there is no fear that the Arabic language will be eliminated as a spoken tongue. This is evident in the survival of languages that remained alive because they are spoken at home as exemplified by ethnic communities abroad; even though these languages may not contribute to the making of history or assume a role in the making of a civilization. In these

homes, there is a conscientious effort to preserve the language as a spoken medium in the home, an endeavor that exemplifies concerns over the preservation of identity and an affirmation of cultural belonging. A noteworthy point that she makes is the affirmation of identity by writers in French who express themselves in a foreign language and struggle and converse with the hegemonic Other in its own language in order to assert their identity and presence. For her, this is an indication that their identity did not dissolve, and instead, they exemplify a case in which their identity is asserted in another language. Ultimately, she perceives that the political and cultural penetration manifested in globalization is a penetration of a strong power no matter who represents this power.

Her argument is crucial because it challenges the stability of identity in representation and gestures towards the ambivalent third space of enunciation that identity can occupy (Bhabha 1994). However, it appears that such challenges that deviate from the impending danger over language and identity deviates from the direction that Shibel seems to want to take the discussion. In her questioning, Shibel advances the idea that language is not a neutral element, falling within an economic framework of globalization that maintains economic hegemony and serves market interests. She uses the example of the funding of the Francophonie and the economic returns that the major sponsors, France and Canada, receive and the type of market that member countries of the Francophonie represent. In response, Sa'id questions the need to posit this example against the recession of the Arabic language and the focus on hegemony, as she points out that it is not odd that, like any other cultural group, the

Francophonie would devise and adopt ways to preserve and protect itself in the context of a globalization that is equally perceived as a threat. She emphasizes that the focus must be on the means and mechanisms through which to facilitate the learning of Arabic and endearing it to its speakers. [5]

The end of the episode maintains the emphasis on the benefits of learning a foreign language, and throughout the episode there is no negation of this point. However, as Moza Ghabbash argues, the problem exists when the spoken language ceases to become the intellectual language of thought. She furthermore argues that when intellectual thought is removed from everyday spoken language, a transformation in belonging occurs and preferential treatment is given to the foreign language, or language of thought. Such transformation affects social relations and values adopted by the individual, comprising the collective notion of communal relations in the Arab family as well as a general sense of loss of self-esteem or of a strong sense of "Arabness." She stresses on language not as a spoken tongue but as a mode of thinking and a mentality. In the concluding remarks, Shibel asserts the hegemony of Western languages and questions whether the "targeting" and "violation" of the Arabic language remains a form of Western hegemony and control, contributing to regression and feelings of inferiority. Sa'id responds by maintaining that the focus and onus should be on the action – rather than reaction – of the Arab Self and not the actions of the hegemonic Other; that it is important to take action rather than to simply *re*act against hegemony; that acquisition of the Arabic language as a tool for knowledge

[5] This particular instance as well as the portrayal of the dismal state of the Arab language, always posited against the West or Western threats, is a stark example of the ways the orientation of the discussion is motivated to maintain the coherence of the discourse.

that is able to contribute in writing history can only be achieved through its ability to comprehend, translate, and include other cultures. This emphasis finally remains in contention with the view that a vulnerable Arabic language continues to face the onslaught of colonizing Western languages.

Arab Culture and the Era of Satellite Television

As satellite television services developed during the 1990s, the emergence of specialty channels added to the fodder for conservative and traditionalist criticism of the effects of new media. It certainly did not alleviate the already tense relationship between some broadcasters and governments and conservative circles in a number of Arab countries. The new specialty channels appeared on the scene, alongside the government sanctioned satellite channels (usually a derivative of the nationally-regulated terrestrial channels), whose programming exclusively catered to an interest-based audience, such as music, news and current affairs, sports, and women's issues. Country specific channels – usually national or government sanctioned ones – gone satellite already caused tensions because of the discrepancy between (Arab) social and cultural values. The raucous of criticism caused by the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation International (LBCI) channel programming is a case in point. Specifically, Arabic music channels, and the music videos they broadcast, are examples that exacerbated the conflict over cultural values and continue to be the topic of hot debate today. Arabic music channels are numerous, a fact that is testimony to their wide popularity especially among Arab youth, and the channels seem to

have continued with the trend to which the likes of LBCI already began to sensitize audiences.

In addition to the liberalizing and democratizing potential that new communications technologies, like the Internet and satellite television, appear to represent, questions of tradition, social and cultural values are also inextricably linked to the stability of political regimes. As censorship remains an issue for consideration, religious constraints and fears of cultural invasion and threats of cultural imperialism confirm that the development of "global" television in the Arab region is not proceeding readily, despite the spread of satellite dishes and channels (Amin 1996). Saudi Arabia provides the most salient example of the uneasy response to satellite television. By adopting the invasion paradigm, it justifies restrictions to mass media, including satellite television while basing its rule on religious-cultural legitimacy; moreover, Saudi media empires are a response to the supposedly harmful influence of foreign media (Hafez 2001). Other Arab countries may not go as far as Saudi Arabia in banning satellite dishes (in 1994), but some have attempted to control/ban or limit the reception of satellite broadcasts, like in Algeria and in Damietta and Dakhahlia in Egypt whose governor banned public viewing of satellite channels in coffee houses (Amin 1996).

Even though LBCI's news offerings are not its most striking programming, the channel nevertheless remains at the top of the list of the most successful Arab satellite channels in terms of entertainment. This success cannot dismiss, though, the uproar that is caused by conservative circles, especially in the Gulf region, over the channel's entertainment programming. It also means that one

would not have to go far beyond the Arab region, say to the West, to demonstrate a case of conflicting social and cultural values "spilling over" across the borders of Arab states. Issues of social and cultural values are, more often than not, at the heart of Arab political legitimacy. The intermixing of politics and culture is evident in LBCI programming which includes interviews with prominent political or social personalities conducted by young women interviewers donning "revealing" clothes in addition to the sexual overtones of the programs (Ghareeb 2000).

The ambivalence that is characteristic of conservative attitudes in the Middle East, especially the Gulf, towards the types of entertainment programming that is presented on the screens of LBCI is evidence of an uneasy balance. On the one hand, viewers are compelled to frown upon such programming for its audacious exuberance in ways that conflict with what is traditionally viewed as Arab and Islamic values and social mores. Yet, on the other hand, viewers, as they simultaneously struggle with the first compulsion are unable to rid themselves of the appeal for such programming that, without a doubt, experiences an unmistakable popularity. For example, such ambivalence could not have been better portrayed than in the latest Arab version of *Star Academy* that had featured participants of both sexes cohabitating in the same premises and even engaging in sexually-evocative contact. [6] While there is not a shortage of sharp and resounding criticism against this type of programming, its effect on people and efficacy in censoring the programs or pressuring its authors

[6] While LBCI got away with Star Academy, in contrast, MBC was unable to get away with *Big Brother*. The fact that the *Big Brother* house was situated in Bahrain, rather than say liberal Lebanon, compounded with MBC's Saudi affiliation, could arguably explain its failure to continue on the airwaves.

for modifications is gradually becoming more subdued with time. It is testimony that even Arab audiences are succumbing to the globalizing of media programming and participating in the reality television fad sweeping many regions across the globe.

The example of Arabic music videos is also one of the most contentious issues in Arab public discourse. The issue's significance derives from its discursive positioning at the heart of Arab cultural identity and from its relationship to questions of cultural imperialism and penetration of Western values. Nevertheless, there is argument that cultural values in Arab societies are changing as exhibited by the Arab media. The apparent transformation of Arabic music videos, or "clips," the staple of Arabic music satellite channels may suggest this change to be the case. In a commentary on the evident "revolution" in the production of Arabic music clips, Charles Paul Freund (2003) refers to a new type of Arab liberalism in the name of individualistic formation and assertion of identity; although I would add, one that is fashioned in apparent – to many Arab viewers – Western garb. In the article, Freund, senior editor at *Reason* magazine in the U.S., discusses the new phenomenon of music video clips containing sexual exuberance, namely in the women pop stars who provocatively express themselves through erotic or eroticized fashion, movement, gestures and voice. Most notably the likes of Haifa Wehbe, Nancy Ajram, and Ruby acquired a notoriety that continues to unabashedly exhibit itself before typically conservative Arab audiences. Arab men's performances are not devoid of such excess either. Both men and women stars engage in imagined worlds characterized by a cacophony of images and sounds, thematic constituents of

their video clips, that are appropriately postmodernist and global in their sensibility. In remarking on the academic disinterest in mass-mediated popular culture of the region, Walter Armbrust (1996) observes something of a "postmodern condition" in relation to Arab popular culture which features in the lives of most people in the Arabic-speaking Middle East; it is a condition "in which reality and images blur into each other, perhaps even define each other" (p. 3). To what extent does this "condition" relate to identity, especially outside the typical political ideological frames through which it is regarded, remains an open question for areas, like cultural studies whose field of study is largely unfamiliar in a region whose popular culture remains largely unfamiliar within a field practiced in the "West."

Furthermore, Freund claims that a latent Arab region characterized by liberalism and modernization is contained in this genre of music video making, which has demonstrated various and numerous approaches to being "Arab." In reference to the failures of previous political systems (pan-Arabism, Baathism, Nasserism, and Islamism) to deliver the hopes of Arab peoples, he concludes by asserting that the goal of a liberalized modernity in the Arab world is achievable through such commercialism that addresses the personal visions of Arab viewers. However, determining whether commercialism is able to accomplish this goal through academic study seems unlikely considering the trends in academic interest, for it is commercialism that stands in the way of serious studies of Arab popular culture. Writing in the specific context of Egypt, Walter Armbrust's

(1996) account of this dismissal implicates the Arab world as a whole.[7] He points out that (Egyptian/Arab) commercial culture maintains a precarious relationship to the West. Commercial culture is perceived as diluting authentic non-Western culture. Armbrust claims that Egypt's relationship to the West is one of the defining characteristics of its popular culture, even though adoption of Western culture has never been unambiguous or uncontested: it can neither be considered a straightforward imitation of the West nor a cryptic resistance to hegemonic power. While the cultural transformations that Arab societies are undergoing cannot be denied, I would contend that it would be a rash conclusion to assume that the aspirations of Arab peoples cannot be articulated in political terms. Indeed, as I have demonstrated earlier, the inextricable link between political structures and cultural values suggests otherwise; that they function in tandem, according to a logic that renders economic considerations secondary, to construct other more cogent forms of Arab identification.

It is not my contention here to argue against Freund's claim that this new genre of music making does not serve to adequately represent alternative forms of Arabness. Whether such commercially motivated ventures "count" as evidence to the changing manifestations of identity construction and representation falls outside the purview of this project. However, elsewhere Armbrust (2005), in a commentary on another article by Freund, states that his position on video clips

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[7] Egypt is the hub of mass-mediated popular culture in the region aimed at an Arabic-speaking market. Although other Arab countries have specific forms of mass-mediated popular cultural production aimed at the same market, they remain nonetheless restricted in their accessibility to Arabic-speakers as a result of an inability to understand dialectical spoken variations of Arabic to give one reason. Aided by a recognizable and easily understood Arabic dialect, Egyptian mass-mediated pop cultural forms remain the strongest and the most prominent, saturating Arab markets across the region, despite existing competition, most notably Lebanese.

resembles the positive reception of al-Jazeera in the West prior to the September 11th, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States. Far from the promise of independent journalism, the presentation of "real debates" and the hope for civil society in the region that al-Jazeera was forecasted to promote before September 11th, 2001, Armbrust observes that al-Jazeera in contrast was vilified in the American press when it contradicted the American line on the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

One cannot also dismiss the relationship of such ventures to the global processes that impact the ways music is made locally. Rather than Freund's claim that the Arab region will be revolutionized through sex, Armbrust's account attests that emulation of the West in local Arab flavor cannot strictly be regarded as an unambiguous or uncontested feature, not only in Egypt but elsewhere around the region as well. In any case, it is equally crucial to take into account how global conditions influence and negotiate the otherwise typically-local approaches to self-perception in order to construct terms for belonging, or identity. It would also be foolish to discredit the pervasive overarching discourse in the Arab region that criticizes these new cultural practices, as well as, to ignore the corresponding sentiments that underlie the perception of Western cultural influence and domination of Arab cultural forms. This criticism and its motivating sentiments consider Western hegemony disguised as, or positively presented in the name of, globalization presented as a *de facto* force of modern progress.

Freund's claim is simplistic and limited at best. It fails to posit this new phenomenon of music-making within the broader context of changing media in

the Middle East, the emergence of satellite technology and of privately-owned general interest and specialty channels and news programming that altered the typical content previously seen on government-owned terrestrial channels. Arguably, political ideologies might have failed some Arab aspirations, but politics and political discussions of current affairs continue to supply ample opportunities for their revision, negotiation, and perhaps even modification, if not replacement through Arab media. Certainly, without undermining their impact, music channels are not the only type of specialty media to effect change. And as far as the general perception in the Arab region is concerned, they are not the ones that have attracted the most attention and caused the most tensions on the political level. After all, if economic considerations are rendered secondary against political considerations of the media, then it is arguably the news and current affairs channels, like the Arab News Network, al-Arabiya, and al-Jazeera that serve as pioneers in the destabilization and challenge of traditional forms of "Arabness," of which cultural forms are a part and to which they contribute.

Among entertainment programming offered by Arab satellite channels, the subject of reality television in particular garnered especial attention for Ahmad Mansour. Broadcast in two parts, he invited two guests of opposing viewpoints to discuss this phenomenon. It is worthwhile to cite the introduction of the first episode at length (Mansour, 2004, March 3):

> In spite of the great progress in all aspects of life, human rights and the value of the human being in Western countries, Arabs became professionals in emulating the worst in the West. As soon as a bizarre and odd fad appears in food, drink, clothing, triviality or silliness, Arabs blindly and ignorantly rush to emulate it. Perhaps the most prominent evidence is the prevalence of the music video clip and television programs that are copied from European channels. These programs are based on

> decadence, stripping, writhing, empty absurdity, spying, and elimination of privacy, and the spread of offensive flaws present in Western societies under the pretense of reality television. This phenomenon is spreading as Arab satellite channels are racing to acquire the rights to these programs whilst emulating them by using Arab youth, as millions of viewers gather in front of television sets to follow what this and that person is doing leading to the demise and destruction of Arab society's values, culture, civilization, and identity.

This introduction is featured in the first part of this two part series. It clearly articulates a position against these programs by highlighting the stakes for Arab identity and culture. Furthermore, this introduction is featured in the first part when a proponent of reality television is invited to present his position. In contrast, no introduction is featured in the second part of this debate (Mansour, 2004, March 10) in which an opponent to reality television is invited to present his perspective, leaving no doubt that this superficial rendition of a "balanced" debate is biased against reality television, as a feature on Arab satellite channels that is characteristically-Western and is threatening Arab identity, culture, and civilization. The quote assumes the passivity of both broadcasters and the television audience. In doing so, it encourages the perception of the helpless, 'does-not-know-any-better' Arab audience against the onslaught of an external Western force that is defined in a moralistic sense against an Arab identity and culture that is nonetheless ill-defined.

In the second episode during which he interviews an opponent of reality television, Mansour (2004, March 10) attempts to superficially represent the point of view of the other side of the debate even though he never presses his guest for answers. In one instance, Mansour unconvincingly alleges that he is fulfilling his role in playing the devil's advocate in an attempt to represent a

favorable point of view of reality television. However, Mansour's position regarding the issue is unmistakable. What is even more compelling is not so much what this position represents but how this position is articulated throughout the discussion.

Initially, the guest of the first episode (Mansour, 2004, March 3), Ramzi al-Najjar, representative of advertising agencies in Lebanon, objects to the translation of the phrase "reality TV" suggesting that its translation in Arabic represents the idea of "TV of reality." In other words, what he is trying to argue, as a launching point for his argument, is that the Arabic translation somehow evokes the notion that what is being seen on television is reality. Ironically, in his quest to establish this semantic differentiation and "clarification," the point he is really attempting to put forth is a re-examination of the conceptual notion of "reality TV," or how might reality television be framed, understood, and thence addressed in discussion; for ultimately, his semantic reshuffling most probably appears perplexing for his audience and even his word reshuffling in English does not necessarily hold. Mansour, even requests that his guest remain away from what Mansour terms "linguistic philosophizing."

Still, there is something very compelling about his attempt to conceptually differentiate "reality TV" insofar as it is being understood by an Arab audience. He argues that it is merely a genre of television, like realism in the arts or literature. On the benefits of this genre of television, al-Najjar maintains that there is a benefit if it is qualified in relation to consumerism. He argues that we live in a consumerist age in the aftermath of the slogans and noble issues of justice related to the industrial age and the age of liberty and independence. He

gives an example that the citizen has been replaced by the consumer, who even consumes principles and values. Al-Najjar explains this condition of consumption as an international illness prevalent around the world and from which the Arab suffers as well, even though it is perceived as a problem because the Arab has a sense of authenticity towards his/her culture and values.

Throughout the discussion, Mansour stresses his position regarding reality television as an immoral form of media as he outlined in his introduction, spreading vice and debauchery and promoting the worst of human instincts and subliminal desires such as spying and prying into the privacy of others, who exhibit silly and trivial behavior. Al-Najjar does not challenge this view, and I believe that in overlooking it in his defense of reality television, he maintains the perspective of a static notion of Arab values and culture. Instead, he qualifies his support for reality television in terms of two points: that reality television is a new fad and that it must not be subjected to censorship. The first point centers on the idea that this is a fad in television programming. In the age of globalization where it is difficult to instate any form of boundaries preventing the infiltration of any global phenomenon (al-Najjar makes references to the show's title, *Without Boundaries*), this type of television has become a fad with which Arab broadcasters are compelled to jump onto its bandwagon. Hence, his support and position regarding reality television is to allow this fad to pass without addressing the issue through reactive or combative means. Metaphorically, he likens this attitude to combating a virus that can become stronger in resisting the remedies employed to combat it. Alternatively, he argues that it is better to ensure that it remains weak by letting this fad pass, lest

the negative approaches and reactions in the name of noble morality blows this phenomenon out of proportion and backfires on Arab media that fight and resist it.

In fortifying the "immune system" of the Arab audience, he argues that it is in this way that the Arab audience member is given the opportunity to reject what he or she sees on television. Mansour's contention remains that Arab media themselves promote this type of characteristically-Western programming and not that the Arab viewer is seeking this type of programming on Western satellite channels. He likens it to alcohol being offered in one's home which for him is a cause of alarm in comparison to a person who deliberately seeks alcohol in the places known for providing it. This metaphoric analogy is crucial because it is a subtle way of highlighting the Islamic associations with these values – drinking alcohol is forbidden in Islam – that are expressed in relation to Arab culture and values.

Since it is difficult to reject what internationally arises as a novelty, al-Najjar argues that the way of addressing it is by educating and endowing the audience with the values that would deflect the dangers of such phenomenon.[8] More interestingly, he equates it with a new type of colonialism which he says was historically something that neither Arabs nor their ancestors were able to stop. Mansour's alarm that Arabs have become the means that propagate it is addressed with a response that compares the old and new types of colonialisms. Like those people that propagated colonialism in the past as if it were a primary

[8] In his response, al-Najjar who descends from a Christian family, avoids the metaphor of alcohol and replaces it with a metaphor of drugs. He argues that it is important to educate his children about the dangers of drugs to make his point.

national issue, al-Najjar maintains that there are those people today who serve this new form of colonialism as well. Based on a *de facto* style of shrewd argumentation, al-Najjar, however, does not contest colonialism itself. In doing so, his arguments effectively express a compelling position, although he does not trouble the logic off the discursive framework that marginalizes it. Throughout the episode, al-Najjar continues in his defense of reality television by providing subversive re-interpretations of the issues put forth without directly troubling the premises upon which they are based.

As his second qualification in his support of reality television, the issue of censorship is sparked as a response to Mansour's resistance to accept this type of television as inevitably a *fait accompli* and insistence on questioning the reasons for featuring a type of programming that is morally dangerous in the first place. In line with the narrative of colonialism, Mansour points out that it is Saudi money and Lebanese expertise that are destroying the Arab person and his/her morals. Al-Najjar's response questions the ethical and moral role that television plays; whether it determines morality or is a tool for information or entertainment. In the name of the same barrier against freedom of expression that al-Jazeera managed to break down, al-Najjar challenges the extent to which one becomes a censor over what constitutes as entertainment in maintaining values.

This point refers back to al-Najjar's argument that it is the audience that must be endowed with the ability to determine what s/he rejects or not. Ultimately, al-Najjar does acknowledge that he does not support whatever broadcasting of "reality" entails in its dismissal of human values and

manipulation of human instincts and desires, though he does equally acknowledge that any form of emulation will not constitute an importation that maintains local standards. Al-Najjar explains that the issue of manipulating human instincts and desires, such as "spying" on others that are contrary to ethical convention, is one of sensationalism which has proven to be a lucrative strategy for media operations. The regard of the viewer is a point of disagreement: Mansour maintains that s/he is the deceived victim of this operation and al-Najjar argues that s/he is an accomplice or participant in this situation. However, al-Najjar does concede that, with regards to the consumerist character of these types of operations, there needs to be more clarity in the media concerning the "high cost" of participation in this form of entertainment that may otherwise not be evident to the viewer. In turn, he does acknowledge that the greatest motivation for these programs is the quest for attracting the greatest numbers of viewers and devising new and creative ways to achieve profit, through telephone participation for example.

All callers into the program presented views that were against this type of programming. A significant number of callers adopt a position opposing these types of program from a strictly Islamic perspective that more often than not precedes any Arab or "Eastern" affiliations. According to one caller, these programs constitute part of the "Westernizing campaign" driven by Arab and Muslim businessmen in order to distort and corrupt the identity of Arab peoples. In relation to this comment, Mansour makes reference to conspiracy theorists who claim that the aim of such programs filling Arab satellite channels is to distract the viewer away from serious programs. Another caller emphasizes

"Eastern" values by challenging whether al-Najjar as a father would allow his daughter to appear in such compromising ways. In a shrewd response, al-Najjar, who only has male children, invokes this same overprotective "Eastern-ness" as the one requiring this type of 24-hour monitoring of the actions of youth and especially females. For al-Najjar, the problem then lies in the solidity of faith and traditions. He argues that faith is about the ability to face any adversity rather than avoid it: the problem then rests with the Muslim who is assumed to have no ability to withstand the experience of witnessing this broadcast and "falling so fast into its seductive appeal." For him, forbidding a person who is not immune to perpetuating the mistakes and withholding the forbidden in these phenomena are more dangerous than permissiveness. He goes on to assert that eliminating the taboo factor, by increasing the availability of such programming, contributes to the elimination of the desire for the forbidden.

One caller specifically prioritizes affiliations to Islam and the adoption of Islamic values that in his view contravene these programs. He rhetorically compares the emulation of such Western programs to the consumption of pork and alcohol "marinated in Arabic spices" to justify its presentation to Arab audiences. This position is poignant in light of al-Najjar's Christian Lebanese background and is an indirect personal attack on the person of al-Najjar. Mansour responds by pointing out that Arab society is not all Muslim and that there are Christians and continues by elaborating on the virtues of al-Najjar's person as one who is knowledgeable in Arabic literature, language and culture. Al-Najjar points out that there is a popular perception that it is the Lebanese who are at the forefront of these television innovations, and they bear the brunt of

being prominent and successful in their field even though the phenomenon cannot be characterized as Lebanese. He moreover disrespects those views that generalize Islam in terms that do not represent it and adds that he feels pride to identify with Islam in its true conception even if he is not a believer. Mansour affirms that there are many other non-Muslims who feel this way as an attempt to maintain an inclusive position. This moment is a very interesting one because it affirms belonging to an identity that is not detached from Islam and an affiliation to Islam even as a non-Muslim. As a shrewd diplomatic discursive gesture confirmed by Mansour's affirmation, what this exchange asserts is the imperative entanglement of Arab and Islamic identities in a figuration that ensures they are not dissociated in discourse. Aside from diplomatic pleasantries and the maintenance of the status quo, it does not offer a challenge to this association.

In the second part of the series (Mansour, 2004, March 10), Mansour invites Mohammed al-Awadi, a well-known Muslim scholar and public figure and member of the founding committee for the Islamic Media International Organization. This representation ensures that the framework for presenting a position against reality television is derived from a strictly Islamic perspective. From the onset, his guest attempts to clarify the framework of standards or criteria of reference upon which such a debate should be based. He draws a distinction between those who chose Islamic values and standards as a reference and those with whom conversation should be based on some form of neutral, objective, or empirical basis for standards of reference in debate or dialogue with those that identify themselves otherwise.

Even though al-Awadi's distinction is an interestingly reasonable one, especially in light of al-Najjar's particular subjectivity in the previous episode, the first part of his distinction assumes that Islamic standards are homogenous for all Muslims. In other words, if one identifies as a Muslim or chooses Islam, then there are implicitly a particular set of non-negotiable values and standards. In any case, Mansour dismisses what he terms his guest's philosophical introductions and requests that his guest address the general public which is diverse in terms of their identifications, be they intellectual cultural and educational backgrounds. In acknowledging the diversity of his audience, Mansour's dismissal ironically reinstates the dominant framework of discourse. Throughout the discussion, an Islamic framework and references to Islam prevail. While it can be argued that Mansour's dismissal is reasonable insofar as it acknowledges a diverse audience that will respond to an accessible language devoid of academic or philosophical ambiguity, the discursive framework that is set up from the onset does not allow for nuance or negotiation of a pluralistic "Arabness," despite the reference to the diversity of the audience. Throughout the episode, al-Awadi demonstrates and exemplifies the ways in which reality television contravenes religious (Islamic) norms, values, and standards. The particular discussion of reality television is framed then in terms that represent Arab values and traditions according to Islamic standards and tradition, contributing to the construction and maintenance of a particular discourse of "Arabness," or how the Arab should view herself or himself.

In contrast to Mansour's impassioned position in the previous episode against reality television (Mansour, 2004, March 3), Mansour's subdued

engagement with his second guest confirms his comfort with his guest's position. In the previous episode, Mansour's engagements are often indignant and challenging, as he maintains his position even in the way he directed the conversation with Ramzi al-Najjar and the type of questions and way that he addressed him. In the second part of the series, Mansour does not pose any challenges to al-Awadi, and his presentation of the opposite side of this debate is tokenistic and hence unconvincing. Despite claims of neutrality, there is no doubt that, for Mansour, reality television is a dangerous phenomenon that has severe implications for the character and values of Arab societies.

Nevertheless, Mansour presents the opposing perspective to al-Awadi, even though he does so symbolically and not in a manner that adequately challenges his guest's position. In referring to the popularity of these shows and the "facts" of globalization that people experience – through these shows in this case – Mansour points to the "Arabization" of these programs, by taking into account the local context in which they are broadcast. In contrast to the example of the Dutch version in which Mansour claims the popularity of one of the participants is linked to sexual activity on screen, the Arabic version of *Big Brother* was modified to correspond to the "nation's interests and values," as Mansour terms it: it featured a *hijab*-wearing girl and there were copies of the Quran and a place for prayer.

For al-Awadi, when it comes to standards, the issue falls outside notions of popularity and the appeal of the majority. He argues against these modifications by claiming that there is a deviation occurring in the history of Islam and the nation that separates the concept of worship from practice, ethics, and

entertainment and pleasure, whereby a Muslim person performs the duties of worship separate from his/her other life practices. His contention is with the ways in which, and means by which people relax and entertain themselves. He also indicates that, in contrast to the Western person who is productive during the week in his self-development or in the development of his/her country, the Arab nation is suffering from unemployment, appropriation of wealth by authorities, colonialism, and fragmentation. In his second point, he tries to debunk the argument that people are in need of entertainment to distract themselves from the ongoing problems that encompass them by indicating that attention must be paid to the development of the Arab self, society and nation. In other words, these problems are the cause of this need for distraction in the first place and therefore must be addressed as the root of the problem. By stereotyping the Western person as productive, al-Awadi also reveals the inadequacy with which the Arab identifies in herself/himself, one that is necessarily connected to the failure of the Arab development project to which Moza Ghabbash referred (Bin Qada, 2003, December 1). Hence, this interpretation constitutes an oppositional confirmation of, rather than a challenge to the neocolonial relationship between the Arab and the "West."

Mansour makes a claim that Arab governments' acceptance and support for these programs is evidence that the channels that feature them are not at fault. Judging by governments' commitment to the Media Code of Honor that was put in place as a standard for the various Arab channels, the only exception is al-Jazeera which was seen as violating this code. In a sarcastic tone, Mansour questions his guest whether this is not a confirmation that Arab values and

standards protected by Arab governments are still being adopted by these programs and these channels. In this tongue-in-cheek statement of support for al-Jazeera, Mansour contrasts these programs – which most people perceive as pointless and dangerous – with the positions that governments have taken against al-Jazeera; in turn tacitly depicted as serving the interests of the Arab public at large. Despite claiming reservations towards all stations and not exclusively al-Jazeera, al-Awadi does not challenge Mansour's comment. He finds all programming and stations questionable, and moreover points out a correlation between the acceptance of Arab governments of this "deplorable" media situation and Israeli satisfaction from this situation. He quotes a statement made by an Israeli official as evidence that the Israeli Ministry of Culture praises these programs and claims that they provide proof that the enemy is not Muslims but Islam and its teachings. In addition to distracting the youth from more "serious" – educational, cultural, or more ethical – programs, the result of the interest in these programs and the pursuant mentality of the Arab peoples that follows is a numbness that distracts the youth away from the search for the "truth" and the demands necessary for the development of their countries, by preoccupying them with their urges to the satisfaction of Israel.

In such a way, the "Other" is invoked as a means to draw attention away from the Self in an attempt to maintain an oppositional front. One caller furthermore alleges that there are suspect bodies that fund or are connected to funding these satellite channels. He claims that "international Zionism" stands behind this funding in order to destabilize and subvert Arab-Islamic values. While al-Awadi dismisses that Zionist institutions are necessarily behind them,

he claims that Zionism invests in the vulnerability, weakness, and lack of conditions for reviving the "nation," rendering it prone to colonialism. Quoting an Israeli official who states that the program encourages the prospect of living with the Arabs, al-Awadi argues that Israelis as well as Arab governments are satisfied with such programs, although he merely gestures towards the reasons for this complicity and refrains from explicitly providing them.

The crux of the issue for al-Awadi is the lack of a credible reference according to which such media ventures are based. Instead, the problem remains implicit economic gain and the focus on the market on the account of all social standards. While he does not perceive entrepreneurship and economic gain in itself as a problem, the principles and standards upon which it is based is in question. The problem with the idea that these programs are a fad and allowing them to continue without opposition, for al-Awadi, lies in the lasting effects of these programs on people after they disappear. He also argues that there is the possibility of taking matters to more extreme levels in the programs which may follow in the pursuit of newer fads. He argues that these effects include the normalization of this type of "debauchery" and the desensitization of sensibilities to the gravity of the situation that is seen on television impressing itself on the viewer. As one caller points out, this is a phenomenon that is characterized as the transposition of Western corruption into Arab, and most specifically Islamic, societies and serves as another catastrophe experienced by Islamic youth and society. Instead of focusing on its symptoms, he asserts that eliminating corruption is through the elimination of its source. This source, or illness, is the existence of regimes that promote corruption. They represent guardians of the

"nation" for the West, and they propagate these corrupting notions in their capacity as guardians for the West. The solution, he claims, is with the presence of an entity for Muslims that protects them, a sentiment that echoes Ahmad al-Qasas' perspective (al-Kasim, 2004, February 10).

In an attempt to maintain solidarity of perspective across difference, another caller contributes a Lebanese Christian perspective. By addressing the accusations that the Lebanese are behind this type of programming, the caller denounces all that which tarnishes human dignity and family values and asserts that it is rejected by the church. However, when he attempts to indirectly articulate a position of difference by pointing out the diversity of Arab peoples and the diversity of their beliefs, Mansour directs him to focus on the particular issue of reality television. And on the issue of the popularity of these programs, another caller argues that popularity cannot be a standard upon which to base a debate surrounding these programs. He considers the majority of the audience to be youth who lack media literacy. Corresponding to this illiteracy is the ability to influence the viewer prior to the possibility of economic gain, thereby arguing that economic gain follows the influential effect of these media. He argues that, in contrast to structures that ensure the classification and monitoring of television programming in the West based on their suitability for particular audiences, such structures are not imported with such programming from the West. Therefore, there is a blind emulation of a Western experience that does not take into account the lessons already learned from the West. This point refers back to Ahmed Mansour's (2004, March 3) introduction in the first part of the

series which maintains the blind emulation of the West in what is now, through discursive consensus, determined as the worst of what it has to offer. [9]

The issue of cultural authenticity and its preservation lies at the heart of the debates concerned with the infiltration of mass-mediated cultural forms, like reality television, that are associated with increasing global flows. Perceived as typically Western, or Western-derived, these invading cultural forms are perceived to represent instances of (neo)colonization expressed in a familiar rhetoric of anti-colonial opposition that fears the dissolution of identity and culture. As scholars have noted, there is generally an agreement on the existence of Arab cultural authenticity, a consensus that such authenticity exists motivating a collective project of collective visions, dreams, and aspirations. However, the nature of this authenticity and its project was a subject of disagreement deeming the notion of cultural authenticity vague, even though it is expressed passionately in the rhetoric of its competing discourses (Boullata 1988; Abu-Deeb 1988). Issa Boullata (1988) observes that the "modern cultural encounter with the West is perceived by the Arabs to be more forceful and pervasive than others in their past, not only because the West is more powerful, but also because they view it from the position of their contemporary weakness following several centuries of virtual stagnation and subordination" (p. 149). Boullata explains that despite the adoption of many elements of Western culture, there developed an increasing resistance to this process and demands for the preservation of national cultural

[9] Pointing out classifications of programming and disclaimers for viewer discretion is a gesture towards one aspect of the discourse about the effects of certain types of programming in the West that may include violence or sexuality for example. However, it disregards or is unaware of the plurality of positions in the debate over television content in the West, and the context and circumstances under which such mechanisms are put in place.

heritage intensified, as the Arab region moved towards political independence. Tradition provided the certainty, stability and strength during times of change, and in which identity and cultural authenticity are to be found. Hence, as Boullata writes, "what Arab authenticity is and should be is an ideological question" (Boullata, 1988, p. 153).

It is apparent from the discussions of the talk shows examined in this chapter that Arab cultural authenticity corresponds to the Islamic tradition and is threatened by "otherness." This perception follows from traditionalist interpretations and views of Arab culture. It is a position that advocates for the elimination of external – especially Western – cultural influences in an attempt to return to the pristine essence of Islam as it is imagined in the early centuries. Modern life must conform to this heritage, whereby Arab heritage is basically the Islamic heritage (Boullata 1988).[10] Kamal Abu-Deeb (1988) remarks that Islamist ideology is "the one ideology that had for long been absent from the political sphere and had as a result not been so totally battered as other forces... and not been associated with Arab defeats... it is the ideology which is identifiably 'specific' or 'authentic,' capable of defining itself oppositionally, especially in relation to the West and Israel" (p. 167). The oppositionality of the discourse accordingly seems to underlie a struggle with modernity: "the struggle of the modern has elicited reactions from the dominant, traditional culture which have

[10] Issa Boullata (1988) contrasts this traditionalist view with the liberal and radical views of Arab culture held by Arab intellectuals. In their drive for renewal and reform rather than radical change, the liberals reinterpret the viable elements of Arab culture in modern times and develop them to correspond to modern Arab needs, by supplementing with new elements if necessary. The radicals, on the other hand, adopt a historicist approach and examine the socioeconomic and political setting of Arab culture, in which religious content is an expression of these historical conditions. In the context of the discussions of the talk shows examined here, views contrasting a traditionalist perspective are absent altogether in the case of Ahmed Mansour's talk show and subdued in the episode of the women's program.

taken the form of a violent rejection of the West – for long associated, indeed identified, with modernity – and a clinging to 'specificity,' national character, tradition, and 'authenticity.' All these epithets are variants of a much simpler term: *the past* – the golden age (which nobody has defined clearly so far)" (Abu-Deeb, 1988, p. 167). In the final analysis, opposing the West/Israel, identifying with Islam, and preserving cultural authenticity all become threads that weave a discourse of "Arabness" in opposition.

Conclusion

"Arabness" in Opposition:
Identity, Modernity and Configurations of Discursive Antinomy

> Why do we have to continue seeing ourselves through the eyes of others? Now we are going to begin seeing ourselves through our own eyes.
>
> -- Aram Aharonian, Latin American journalist and General Director of Telesur [1]

The problematic of "Arabness" in the discourse of the talk shows examined throughout these pages is contingent upon the rigid notions of Arab identity and culture. They are considered as monolithic entities that are static and founded upon supposedly "authentic" and immutable elements found in a strictly Islamic tradition which, in its own turn, is considered as a monolithic corpus of standards and values. Such a traditionalist form of identity is never reconciled with (Western) modernity. More significantly, this discursive trend should nevertheless not be necessarily considered anti-modern and instead should be regarded as playing a role in the formation of global modernity, for as Issa Boullata (1988) observes, "authenticity" and "modernity" do not strictly represent terms in opposition. Furthermore, he believes that an overprotective attitude towards cultural authenticity "is not only unwarranted in the contemporary Arab

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[1] Quoted in Gary Marx (2005, July 17), Will truth go south on Telesur news? The Chicago Tribune Online Edition. Retrieved July 28, 2005 from <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/chi-0507170302jul17,1,540341.story?ctrack=1&cset=true>.

world, but also inimical to the very cultural authenticity that is being adduced to justify it" (p. 147). He moreover writes that "the unfortunate placement of "authenticity" in opposition to "modernity" in its thematic consideration is the result of a misconception which is shared by many people in the Arab world and thus is in itself evidence of the crisis. Authenticity does not necessarily have to be a quality that locks people up in the past or in a limited understanding of Arab culture and the Arab heritage as products of an ideologically-selected, specific period of the past" (p. 154).

Rather than setting them up in opposition, I argue that traditionalist views of "Arabness" that form the basis of opposition in al-Jazeera's talk show discourse are implicitly tied to modernity. Timothy Mitchell (2000) offers an interpretation of modernity that considers its staging in the West, rather than one regarded as a stage in historical development. Mitchell argues that the histories of the "non-West" are recaptured into the historical home, both spatial and temporal, of the West. Hence, seemingly anachronistic developments "overseas" are recaptured into its historical time and space, and in such a way, the "identity claimed by the modern is contaminated. It issues from too many sources and depends upon, even as it refuses to recognize, forebears and forces that escape its control. To overlook these difference requires a constant representing of the homogenous unity of modernity's space and time" (p.13). Instead of proposing alternative modernities of the non-West, ones that cannot be gathered into the form of a single narrative, Mitchell contends that it is not that there exists a multiplicity of (alternative) modernities, but that "the significance of allowing the non-West to disrupt the history of the West is to show that the West has no

simple origin, despite its claims to uniqueness" (p. 24). The particular representations of forces and events that seem to stand outside the staged constitution of (Western) modernity elide "the role of the non-West in the production of the West and [ignores] the constant displacements involved in staging the difference between the two" (Mitchell, 2000, p. 27). As Mitchell (2000) notes, the performance of modernity as a distinction between the modern and the non-modern, the West and non-West, assumes the possibility of figuring the non-modern as a contamination that displaces and disrupts the authority of the modern. The staging of modernity, he furthermore adds, involves a differentiation between representation and reality, whereby generating multiple significations assume that there is another material realm unaffected by these proliferating signs and simulations.

Accordingly, the representation of "Arabness" in a discourse of opposition cannot be seen outside the construction of the modernity it seeks to reject in asserting its identity. Instead, it serves as its "constitutive outside" that helps to construct this modernity by asserting the difference that such modernity seeks to highlight in its own assertion. In this light, the representation of "Arabness" evokes a reality that assumes a preexisting social and cultural order that is tacitly implicated in its processes of signification and only present in its representation. This is recognized as a "common strategy of post-colonial self-assertion... [that] attempts to rediscover some authentic pre-colonial cultural reality in order to redress the impact of European imperialism" (Ashcroft, 2001, p. 2). The processes of signification, both Orientalist and Arab, are consequently tied in the same representational configuration in discourse and can arguably be said to

represent the same process of signification, or modernity. The colonial implications of the discourse are prevalent, and the Orientalist binary is maintained, although the newness lies in a discourse that is vehemently critical and oppositional to the dominant one featured in Western media. Resistance as a simple oppositionality in this case is a liability because it "locks it into the very binary which Europe established to define its others" (Ashcroft, 2000, p. 13).

Moreover, globalization, associated with the "West" and especially the United States, which is perceived to advance its hegemonic influence through this process, becomes the contemporary context in which these discussions are situated or to which they refer; even as the discourse itself is ironically enabled by a satellite channel that is implicated in this very process. Critical of adopting globalization as a framework of analysis, Walter Armbrust (2000) suggests that doing so may transform it into a self-fulfilling prophecy. Pointing out the difficulty in separating globalization as an agenda of economic determinism, a practice of modern identity, or a postmodern culture of media consumption, Armbrust remarks that the "totality of these agendas is like flypaper: even if one rejects them, one is still forced to argue against them. Cultural practice not done in consciousness of globalization becomes an affirmation of the local in response to the pressure of the global" (p. 12). According to Armbrust, this study may well have fallen into this inevitable trap. However, it is otherwise unavoidable, for even the discourse of the talk shows which is predominately and vehemently rejectionist of globalization commits itself to its reference as a discursive frame in addressing the subjects of discussion. Still, this methodological quagmire is perhaps telling of the nature of the discourse itself and contributes to the

argument I am advancing: that this oppositional discourse is configured as necessarily irreconcilable with the discourse that ironically enables it. Its rejectionist stance renders it dependent upon that which it rejects, constructing configurations of discursive antinomy that indicate epistemological rifts in the ways notions are addressed and understood.[2]

The types of issues that are discussed in the episodes of the three talk show programs are worthy of more in-depth examination and inquiry than attributed in this project. Indeed, the topics addressed in the episodes have each been the subject of academic inquiry across many fields of study. Such consideration, examination, and comprehensive analysis fell outside the scope and research objectives of my project. My intention was solely to demonstrate how these issues contribute to, and inform a discourse of "Arabness," a notion with which al-Jazeera is perceived to project to the world. I attempted to address these issues to the extent that they reveal their relationship to such a discourse. In doing so, my intent is on demonstrating al-Jazeera's complicity in a discursive configuration that questions presumptions about the type and extent of the challenge the station's discourse poses to dominant (Western) media discourses. As the previous chapters demonstrate, the way the issues are treated indicates that there is nothing particularly "new" or alternative that articulates a specific counter-hegemonic agenda. It is sufficient to say, by way of conclusion, that the treatment of these issues in the discourse of the talk shows presented variations of arguments and interpretations that are already familiar. Each issue already

[2] The notion of "clash of civilizations" is the most salient example of such an epistemological break addressed in this project.

appears in academic and public discourse, in which it is addressed in more depth than this project has been able to account for. In the specific context of this project, the treatment of the issues, if anything, demonstrates the way al-Jazeera's articulation of "Arabness" throughout the discourse of the talk shows represents an oppositional stance that is necessarily linked to hegemony even as it ironically claims to challenge it. In order to better determine and qualify the implications of their inner workings for this discourse of/on identity, the relationship between these issues and the discourse require closer examination and analysis in their own right. The motivation for undertaking further research along these lines is indeed to challenge the discursive assumptions upon which opposition is based, in an attempt to more effectively articulate alternatives that move us beyond the grip of binary modes of identification and the essentialism that is necessitated by opposition as its strategy.

Instead of falling into the trap of interpreting post-colonial resistance as an opposition that resists absorption into Western/colonial modalities, a different type of engagement would require a reconsideration of methodological approaches to identify specific instances in which the interplay between typically dominant and marginalized actors as a transformative process (Bhabha 1994; Ashcroft 2000). Such an analysis might contribute to ways of conceiving, perhaps, alternative rather than oppositional discursive enunciations. In other words, it is to consider ways in which agency "is effected within relationships that are radically unequal" (Aschcroft 2000), for I do not want to dismiss "the disproportionate influence of the West as a cultural forum, in all three senses of that word: as a place of public exhibition and discussion, as place of judgment,

and as market-place" (Bhabha, 1994, 21); in which the imperative for examining and interpreting al-Jazeera arises as relevant after a particular historical moment that brought a "media phenomenon" from overseas into the narrative of (Western) modernity. Such an undertaking should also avoid the type of non-essentialist, 'processual' conceptions of identity, like broad notions of hybridity, that are descriptive, and rendered commonplace and pervasive, of which Marwan Kraidy (2002) is critical. By considering the ways in which imperial ideology and identity is contaminated (Bhabha 1994) and in which discourse is interpolated – interjected, interrupted and subtly changed – by the colonial subject (Aschroft 2000), one may begin to question contemporary Western media representation of cultural globalization in relation to the non-West (Kraidy 2002).

It is not my desire to argue against the possibility of resistance, discursive or otherwise, or the possibility that the "colonized" or "neo-colonized" cannot somehow subvert or challenge colonial or neocolonial power; for arguing so would otherwise assume that the Foucauldian view of colonial power is all pervasive. This would be too simplistic and fatalistic an assessment. However, what I am arguing is that presuming that al-Jazeera's discourse somehow presents a discursive form of "Arabness" that successfully evades the intricacies of discursive power in a presumed subversion of such power is equally a prematurely-enthusiastic and simplistic conclusion. The oppositional discourse of al-Jazeera's talk show programming requires the maintenance of the binary of identification that relies on an essence in order to construct the threat of its dissolution and justify the calls for its preservation. This discursive framework fails in providing an effective oppositional stance that seeks realistic alternatives.

As Stuart Hall (1996) reminds us, "because identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse, we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies. Moreover, they emerge within the play of specific modalities of power, and thus are more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion, than they are the sign of an identical, naturally-constituted unity – an 'identity' in its traditional meaning (that is, an all-inclusive sameness, seamless, without internal differentiation)" (p. 4). The particular form of discursive "Arabness" constructed in the talk show programming examined here evidently subscribes to a modality of power in marking its own difference and exclusion.

Instead of challenging or subverting the logic of this framework, al-Jazeera's discourse of opposition examined here configures itself into the discourse of Orientalism. Al-Jazeera's ability to compete with what are perceived to be the media forces of (neo)colonizing Western powers assumes that it has acquired the self-confidence to employ notions from its own cultural forms. As Kamal Abu-Deeb (1988) aptly argues,

> Such forms, however, being part of the traditional system which had been in the first place associated with the inability of the culture to maintain its strength and independence, will now tend to lose their original significance. They will be used afresh as a new semiotic system whose main function is not to denote traditional concepts or meaning or modes of thinking and existence but, to a large extent, to assert national identity as an opposing identity, i.e., in the fact of the colonizing identity. (p. 170)

These notions and the quest for authentic cultural forms implicate Western and Arab contact, whereby the latter assumes the purity of its identity, in turn,

informing, as its negation, the former of its own. By locking itself into Orientalist logic, the discourse adopts an assertive function that, as Abu-Deeb remarks, characterizes the second phase of the struggle between colonizer and colonized and confirms its "otherness" through anti-colonial, or anti-imperialist rhetoric in what could be called an "oppositional compliance." This type of opposition does not equalize, let alone reverse, the relationship between the "colonizer" and the "colonized." It is an opposition that maintains the power dynamic by acknowledging its logic in opposition. By confirming the logic of hegemony, the potency of countering becomes spurious and ineffective. While I do not want to dismiss that successful challenge is possible, assuming that discursive power can be so conveniently toppled is a prematurely enthusiastic perspective because it underestimates the agility of power in relation to challenges to it. As Ania Loomba (1998) observes, "[d]iscursive practices make it difficult for individuals to think outside them – hence they are also exercises in power and control," although she continues by adding that "[t]his element of control should not be taken to mean that a discourse as a domain of utterance is either static or cannot admit of contradictions" (p. 39). There is no doubt that the dynamic interplay between media discourses on the global and local levels renders the process of intercultural negotiation more complex. By paying closer attention to the contradictions, assessments of al-Jazeera can achieve the nuance that they require.

The notion of "Arabness" that al-Jazeera's talk shows represent and the station's posturing as *the* Arab voice, rather than *an* Arab voice, for the world is a condition that culminated from its involvement in the reporting of global affairs

implicated in the Middle East. As it is depicted here, it is a monolithic notion that can only have currency in a particularly global context. Timothy Mitchell's argument helps us understand the way al-Jazeera, a media development outside the "West" was reorganized as part of its own history. Beginning with the September 11th attacks on the United States and subsequently the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, addressing the subject of al-Jazeera's "newness" or novelty as a global media organization became tied to the temporality of Western media developmental progression.

For example, the significance of al-Jazeera's democratic or democratizing practices, such as the slogan that represents the foundation of all its operation ("The opinion and the other opinion"), is an issue that acquires primary significance for the "West" at this particular historical moment. It does not seem to matter that al-Jazeera had been operating for a number of years prior to the decisive historical moment on September 11th, 2001 when its name entered into the Western lexicon, or that it had previously initiated what scholars have labeled a "revolution" in challenging the status quo of media operations in the region; for this regional development, daring by regional standards, appears irrelevant until it became directly implicated in the process of media globalization in relation to the West and reorganized as part of its own singular history, its own narrative. Hence, whatever "newness" that al-Jazeera seems to have offered the world, has not been particularly so on a regional level at that particular historical moment. On the contrary, the discourse of the talk shows reveals a typically familiar tone and language that unmistakably manifests an ongoing colonial and imperial dialectic between the Arab-Islamic regions and the "West."

It is premature to celebrate al-Jazeera as representing a bastion of counter-hegemony as much as those with counter-hegemonic politics or sensibility would like to believe. It is important to distinguish between al-Jazeera as a global media player and al-Jazeera as a regional media player. Globally, al-Jazeera's challenge to dominant Western media organizations consists of journalistic competition; for al-Jazeera's ability to secure exclusive coverage as well as footage placed it in these instances ahead of most of the world's dominant media. However, al-Jazeera has no previous record demonstrating its ability to maintain such competition in covering globally-significant events that extend beyond its regional purview. Questions regarding its economic sustainability prevail, highlighting the station's limited resources that pale in comparison to other prominent media networks like CNN or BBC and casting more doubt on its ability to extend itself beyond the Middle East. Because the Middle East is a hot spot in the "global war on terrorism" and events there are "news worthy," al-Jazeera's success remains somewhat overrated in the context of its alleged counter-hegemonic global influence because it is contained within the region. In other words, al-Jazeera is a global media player insofar as it is a prominent and influential media outlet of a region rendered globally-significant.

Nevertheless, al-Jazeera might provide a pioneering example of an emerging global media pattern. The new pan-Latin American news station, Telesur (Television of the South), which is currently being built, is being compared to al-Jazeera, or at least it is perceived to be performing a similar role that al-Jazeera is playing for the Latin American region (Marx 2005, July 17). As an alternative to CNN, Fox News and European news organizations, a "counter-

hegemonic project," "the network's goal is nothing short of changing the way Latin Americans view themselves and their news" and "furthering Latin American unity" (Marx 2005, July 17). It appears that Telesur will be joining prominent regional news stations, like al-Jazeera, in the "global struggle over how news is disseminated." In fact, Telesur's president, Andres Izarra, is considering a "strategic alliance" with al-Jazeera.[3] According to its general director, Aram Aharonian, the "key to Telesur's success is not going head-to-head against the giants of broadcasting but providing an alternative to them." Similarly, al-Jazeera provides such an alternative to its Arabic-speaking audiences, an alternative of choice but not necessarily of discourse. To what extent Telesur will compare to the al-Jazeera experience remains to be seen. If indeed a new global media pattern is in the making, then al-Jazeera and Telesur could be seen to constitute the necessary "outside" of the media narrative of global modernity. The difference between the two examples, emerging from different parts of the world, is regarded as such in relation to the underlying uniformity in the singularity of history, in which September 11th, 2001 is a focal point.

On a regional level, al-Jazeera's linguistic as well as cultural access to locations and events gives it an advantage that rivals other media networks in covering the Arab region. If this advantage poses any challenges in the interpretation of news, then it does so for the region's – not a global – audience. This challenge opposes the American public relations campaign attempting to

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[3] See "Telesur keen on Aljazeera link up" Retrieved August 1, 2005 from <http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/1209863D-B61F-4DB2-ACDD-87E4F587D5BC.htm>

influence Arab public opinion through American-sponsored media initiatives, such as *al-Hurra* television station and *Radio Sawa*, which are currently broadcasting in the Middle East, and an Arabic-language magazine. [4] Until al-Jazeera begins its new channel broadcasting in English, there is no indication that its Arabic broadcasts have had any effect on non-Arabic-speaking audiences around the world. Moreover, the attention that al-Jazeera's competitive journalism drew in North America and Western Europe coincided with a fierce anti-war campaign. As the credibility of the Bush administration and a complicit American media became questionable, some audiences in the West sought alternative sources of news and information. Except for its English website, al-Jazeera failed to offer non-Arabic-speaking audiences any alternative views of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, though the station represented a local symbol of opposition in the "public relations war" that accompanied the military action. The controversial subject of a questionable war has ostensibly contributed to the curiosity of Western audience in knowing more about the station that prompted the anger of the Bush administration. Interest in the station in this context explains the success of a few documentaries about al-Jazeera, of which the critically-acclaimed *Control Room* is the most well-known.

Under these global circumstances, al-Jazeera could be more accurately said to be locally opposing the dominant global discourse of war coverage for its own Arabic-speaking audience in the region. For better or worse, al-Jazeera was posed as the representative of the "Arab voice" on the global stage, a designation

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[4] According to Catherine Shoichet (2003, July 15), the magazine is subsidized by the U.S. State Department, and quoting a White House official, it is "America's newest weapon in the war on terrorism."

that superficially assumes the unity of such voice. Opinions of al-Jazeera's content and programming, in their variety, generally remained ideologically-based or politically-motivated opinions in the West. Because no academic discussion or consistent analysis specifically-addressing content was undertaken, the aim of the previous few chapters was to address this shortcoming. After all, these opinions of al-Jazeera tend to remain general without any recourse to specific references. In the context of the talk shows, the cultural discourse of identity that prevails across the talk shows examined here appears contingent upon the interplay between globalizing forces and local opposition and resistance. The new world order into which the Arab region is configured is perceived as an extension of colonial and imperial ambitions manifested in new ways. As such, the United States and Israel become necessary "Others" associated with neocolonial ventures and against which opposition must be maintained. Discursive opposition is contingent upon configuring "Arabness" as a discursive notion of identification in a binary that locks it into a permanent dialectical relationship with its "Others." Furthermore, Islam as a religious mode of identification becomes the means for infusing stability into an otherwise unstable notion of "Arabness," by strategically maintaining its coherence against all indications of difference. Consequently, as concern over 'culture' intensifies, criticism of foreign infiltration and colonization, notably of language, values and tradition, extends an ongoing historical struggle that is mutating in the new discursive context of globalization into different forms and practices.

Al-Jazeera's discourse is one that emerges out of the cultural, social, and political 'enunciations' that have existed prior to the station's emergence. Indeed,

it is a product of these conditions and arguably an "organic" consequence of a constantly evolving volatile region. It is shaped by these conditions even as it attempts to shape them. For this reason, the discourse is neither an alternative one, nor does it offer novel concepts or notions for Arabs in understanding themselves, or their identity. However, it does offer new means, a new forum and style for delivering, expressing, and interpreting these familiar notions; for it is difficult to disregard al-Jazeera's provocative invocations to critically interrogate these notions.

In the fast-changing world of Arab satellite media, operating in a region susceptible to the volatility of its political environment, al-Jazeera could at least claim credit for being the catalyst that sped the opening up of Arab media. It may well just be the beginning of a process that may with time develop newer, perhaps even alternative mediations of "Arabness." For its Arabic-speaking audience, it is an alternative medium through which "Arabs" see themselves through their own eyes. How "Arab" eyes continue to perceive their constructed 'Others' in self-identifying resistance remains an ongoing question. Meanwhile, what remains unquestionable is that "Arab" eyes gaze upon themselves in the process. In this precarious relationship lies the challenge for any future considerations of inter-cultural or inter-civilizational dialogue that may offer an alternative discourse of "Arabness."

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