

**Aljazeera between serving Qatar, an advocate of Arabism and Political Islam or democratic values. An examination of scholarly works on three models in contention.**

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## Content:

Abstract	5
Chapter one: Introduction	8
Justification of the study	10
Research questions	10
Thesis plan	11
Chapter two: Methodology	13
Introduction	13
Comparative media studies in the Arab world	13
Origins and definition of the concept ‘model’	14
Aljazeera: a distinct media model or just a different discourse	17
Sampling strategies	21
Lines of critical evaluation	22
Problems and difficulties	23
Chapter three: Global media theory, the Arab media scene and Aljazeera	24
Section one: Global media theory	24
Section two: Aljazeera and the Arab media scene	32
Arab satellite channels and a new civic society	33
The coming of Aljazeera	34
Aljazeera: anti-West, pan-Arab and pro political Islam	37
Aljazeera expressing Arab anger at the West	38
Aljazeera and anti-establishment	39
Aljazeera: a pro-democracy and pro-freedom agenda	40
Aljazeera and journalistic professionalism	40
Aljazeera and satellite democracy	41

Aljazeera: a propaganda tool for Qatar	41
Aljazeera as an instrument for Qatar's soft power	42
Chapter four: Aljazeera: A force for Arabism and political Islam	45
Aljazeera, pan-Arabism and political Islam	45
Aljazeera; anti-America, anti-Israel and anti-West	46
Pan-Arabism, pan-political Islam and the Qatari perspective	48
Historical criticism of the model	52
Empirical Criticism:	53
Conceptual criticism:	54
Methodological criticism:	57
Chapter five: Aljazeera: advocate of democracy/freedom/understanding	59
Aljazeera and the creation of free democratic space	59
Aljazeera: a credible and objective source of information	61
Historical criticism of the model	65
Empirical Criticism:	68
Conceptual criticism:	70
Methodological criticism:	72
Chapter six: Aljazeera: a propaganda tool for Qatar:	74
Aljazeera an instrument of Qatari survival	76
Aljazeera: the creation of Qatari media-space	78
Historical criticism of the model	80
Empirical Criticism:	82

Conceptual criticism:	84
Methodological criticism:	85
Chapter seven: Conclusions and discussion	88
Aljazeera: advancing Qatar's interests first and foremost	89
Aljazeera providing a unique Arab media model	92
Discussion	94
Further areas of research	96
Bibliography	98

## ABSTRACT

The Arabic television station Aljazeera started broadcasting in 1996, after the BBC's Arabic news channel venture with Saudi-backed network Orbit failed, following differences over editorial censorship and policy. A number of public debates and controversies, as well as academic arguments, have surrounded Aljazeera since its inception, but neither the station's critics nor its supporters can deny that the network has had a regional as well as a global impact. In this study, I will examine and critically evaluate scholarly works on the journalistic and political nature of Aljazeera, through a critical evaluation of three media models. I will focus my research upon two main points, the first being an analysis of the main models identified by academic works on Aljazeera, and the second being an examination of whether the concept of a 'model', as used in social sciences, applies to all Aljazeera programs.

The first model, 'Aljazeera: A Force for Arabism and Political Islam', regards the station as promoting Arabism and political Islam. The second model, 'Aljazeera: Advocate of Democratic Values and Journalistic Professionalism,' sees the station as a force for change, freedom, democracy and human rights. Professionally, it also incorporates a declared commitment to a form of objectivity and balanced reporting. The third model, 'Aljazeera: Propaganda Agent,' looks at Aljazeera as serving the interests and policies of the state of Qatar. My critical evaluation of the scholarly works on these three models is organised along four principal lines of analysis. The first assesses to what extent and in what way(s) each has taken into consideration the historical development of Aljazeera. This includes the ideological, political and cultural environment in which the network came into existence, and how this has influenced its operations. The second line of analysis sets out critically to appraise the models, using empirical evidence as utilised by various academic works on the station. The third line of analysis engages with the three models in terms of their key conceptual frameworks, outlining principal criticisms organised around Aljazeera's news-reporting stance, whether conceived in terms of news 'objectivity,' 'contextual objectivity', or 'propagandistic bias'. The final line of examination engages with the methodological approaches adopted by various scholarly works, analysing their strengths and weaknesses. My methodology comprises a close critical reading of studies on Aljazeera, the three models in contention, and a comparative analysis of academic work on the station.

The thesis concludes by arguing that there is a great deal of overlap between the scholarly works examined, that Aljazeera's primary purpose and aim is to serve the policies and strategic objectives of the state of Qatar, within the complexities of both the relationships within Qatar's ruling Al-Thani family, and its competing priorities with its neighbours, chiefly Saudi Arabia and Iran. There is, however, a great deal of difference between the studies examined in regard to whether in the process of carrying out this primary role, Aljazeera has not only changed the Arab and global media scene, but also changed its co-host Qatar. I have also concluded that there is a great deal of agreement amongst the works analysed, that Aljazeera provides a distinct media discourse, that if considered in its entirety and within the cultural, social and political context of the Arab world, could indeed qualify as a media model. One other area of overlap between the studies examined is that Aljazeera's

output can't be seen as a homogenous entity, as there are big differences between news, current affairs output and other programs.

### **Organisation:**

#### Chapter One: Introduction

- Justification for studying Aljazeera and its various models.
- Research problem.
- Aims of the study.
- Research questions.
- Plan of the study.

#### Chapter Two: Methodology

- Introduction
- Research questions
- Research plan
- Definition of the concept 'model'
- Potential difficulties and intended solutions/ameliorations
- Methods of evaluation and analysis

#### Chapter Three: Literature Review

- Part one:
  - Introduction
  - Global media theory
  - New outlook on the global media scene
- Part Two: The Arab media scene and Aljazeera
  - Introduction.
  - The Arab media scene before Aljazeera
  - Arab satellite channels and the creation of a new Arab public
  - The coming of Aljazeera
  - Challenging the status quo

#### Chapter Four: Review of scholarly work on: 'Aljazeera: a force for Arabism and political Islam'

- Aljazeera: anti-establishment, biased, anti-Western and anti-Israel
- Criticism of the model from an historical perspective
- Criticism from an audience studies perspective
- Criticism from a conceptual perspective
- Criticism from a methodological perspective

#### Chapter Five: Review of scholarly works on: 'Aljazeera: an advocate of democratic values and cultural dialogue and understanding'

- Aljazeera: a revolutionary, objective, libertarian and pro-democracy channel
- Criticism of the model from an historic perspective
- Criticism from an audience studies perspective
- Criticism from a conceptual perspective

- Criticism from a methodological perspective

Chapter Six: Review of scholarly works on: 'Aljazeera: a propaganda agent'

- Aljazeera: a tool serving the policies and strategic interests of Qatar
- Criticism of the model from an historic perspective
- Criticism from an audience studies perspective
- Criticism from a conceptual perspective
- Criticism from a methodological perspective

Chapter Seven: Conclusion and discussion

- Aggregate conclusions and discussion of scholarly works on the three models examined

Bibliography

## Chapter One: Introduction

Arab media, in particular satellite news broadcasting, have dramatically changed since the first attempts by the Middle East Broadcasting Centre (MBC) to broadcast news in a format that tried to emulate Western broadcasters such as the BBC, CNN and Sky News, during the early 1990s (Seib, 2008). There are now hundreds of satellite television stations serving the Middle East, dedicated to news and current affairs (Al-Theidi, 2003; Sakr, 2001, 2005; Sayid, 2007; Miladi, 2013; inter alia). The inception of Aljazeera, however, in November 1996, marked a significant development in the way news and current affairs were presented to audiences across the Arab world. Many controversial issues and subjects, that were beyond discussion before Aljazeera came into existence, became matters of daily discussion in Arab living rooms, coffee shops and public discussion forums (El-Nawawy and Iskandar, 2003; Al-Jaber, 2004; Zayani, 2005; Miles, 2005; Lynch, 2006; Miladi, 2013; inter alia). This has led researchers such as Lynch (2006) to argue that the station played an important role in developing an Arab public sphere. He notes that Aljazeera ushered in a new kind of open, contentious public politics in which plethora of competing voices clamoured for attention” (Lynch, 2006: 2). He also states that this new public, influenced by Aljazeera, “was highly self-aware of its own role in challenging the status quo, giving it a self-defined sense of mission that sometimes sat uneasily with the standards of objectivity of journalism, and challenged the status quo with a fierce drive toward internal reform and foreign policy changes” (Lynch, 2006: 3).

This interest in Aljazeera led to a large number of studies on the station, each one asking different questions about this new media phenomenon. Some of these works argue that Aljazeera has been a driving force in changing the region and challenging the traditional north-south flow of information (El-Nawawy and Iskander, (2003); Zayani, (2005, 2007); Qusaibaty, (2006); Zayani and Sahraoui, (2007); Seib, (2008); inter alia). For instance, Zayani and Sahroui (2007) note that “the very existence of Aljazeera is revolutionary...Aljazeera has brought noteworthy innovations to Arab broadcasting and reporting, airing hard-hitting programs, bold and uncensored news coverage” (2007: 23). Others credit the station with being one of the most important factors that led to the ‘Arab Spring’ (Dabashi, 2012; Seib, 2012; Khatib, 2012; Cherkaoui, 2010; inter alia). Doherty (2011), for instance, argues that “it was Aljazeera that first grasped the enormity of the Tunisia uprising and its implications for the region, and Aljazeera which latched onto - critics would say fuelled - subsequent rumblings in Egypt. And audiences around the world responded: the network's global audience has rocketed” (Doherty, 2011: 1).

Mahroum (2011) agrees, stating that Aljazeera coverage of the Arab spring was one of the key factors that led to its success in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. He concluded that “Aljazeera’s coverage was instrumental in toppling Arab regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen” (Mahroum, 2011: 3). This has led many researchers, e.g., Sakr (2001), Nawawy and Iskander (2003), Miles (2005), Zayani (2005), Lynch (2006), Qusaibaty (2006), Loory (2006), Rushing (2007) and Painter (2008), to regard Aljazeera as an agent of change, freedom, democracy and human rights. On a professional level they argue that the station is an



advocate of high journalistic standards that promote contextual objectivity, and balanced and fair reporting of events in the Arab world and beyond.

Others, however, such as Ajami (2001), Chafets (2001, 2002), Zakaria (2004), Hudson (2006), Khashoggi (2002) and Rinnawi (2006), and Cherribi (2006), to see Aljazeera as standing for values of Arabism, political Islam, and the aim of placing these centre stage in the Arab world. They regard the station's claims of professionalism as unrealistic and superficial and argue that the station advances these ideas by encouraging anti-American, anti-Western, anti-Israeli sentiments, and by appearing to be anti-establishment in the region. The station, while cultivating these sentiments, encourages audiences towards adopting the ideology of Arabism, which incorporates the values of political Islam. Contrary to this view, Hanson (2013), Dorsey (2013), Al-Sadi (2012), Anzawa (2011), Abu-Rab (2010), Azran (2010), Al-Tamimi (2012), Fandy (2007) and Kenana (2006), are amongst those who regard Aljazeera as a propaganda agent serving the interests of its host country, the state of Qatar. For them, Aljazeera might indeed appear to be anti-West or anti-Israel or pro-political Islam or pro-Arabism, but this is regarded as a deflection from the real motive, which is to serve the interests and policies of Qatar.

Thus, three clusters of ideas emerge here, which, taken together, could constitute a model that may provide some explanation of Aljazeera's nature, journalistic performance and practices (Al-Sadi, 2012; Azran, 2010; Anzawa, 2011; Fandy, 2007; Cherribi, 2006; *inter alia*). What these previous works have failed to provide, however, is a comprehensive analysis of these models in a wider context, taking into account historical, empirical, conceptual or methodological analyses. Furthermore, most of these works relied heavily on the collection of statements, declarations, interviews, personal experience and remarks, during visits to Aljazeera or encounters with its employees, without any attempt at building a coherent and systematic argument based on strong academic rigour. For instance, Al-Sadi (2012) was interested only in examining the argument that Aljazeera is subservient to Qatar's interests within a limited scope, without providing any clear and detailed outline of each of the three models, in an historic or conceptual context, or in any other relevant context.

Others, such as Miles (2005), Zayani (2005), Lynch (2006), and Powers and El-Nawawy (2009), amongst others, used available open source materials as well as interviews they conducted with Aljazeera employees or former employees, which rendered their own analysis lacking in any clear methodological framework and a strong systematic analysis. My study, however, will attempt to examine each model in a detailed, measured way, outlining the strengths and weaknesses of each within historic, conceptual, empirical and methodological contexts. I will do this through as comprehensive an analysis as possible of the most relevant scholarly works on Aljazeera that dealt with the different arguments involved in the three models identified in this study.

Al-Sadi (2012), Seib (2008), Sakr (2005), and Entman (2003) were probably the first to apply/refer the concept of the model to Aljazeera's nature and journalistic practices. While Al-Sadi (2012) referred to Aljazeera's practices within the context of a paradigm approach (referring to a model), Sakr (2001, 2005,) used the term in a much broader sense, while not

providing any specific grounds, methodological, or conceptual justifications for the use of the term ‘model’.

The concept of the model, however, had deep-rooted uses in natural sciences before it found its way into the social sciences. I will therefore analyse the concept as applied to Aljazeera in various scholarly works, and examine in later sections the extent to which it does or does not represent the station’s programs and output.

### **Justification for the study**

Examining the nature of Aljazeera and its professional performance, within the context of the three models identified through the examination and critical analysis of scholarly works on the station, is a very important endeavour. I would argue that such analysis can provide a significant contribution to the academic understanding of Aljazeera. It is also important because it will, through the examination and analysis of these studies; attempt to answer some of the questions about the nature of Aljazeera, the style of its journalistic performance, and its presumed influence in the Arab world and beyond.

The study will, however, also attempt to determine the nature of the relationship between the network, as it is now called, and its owners, the state of Qatar, as presented in various scholarly works. This is also important, because Aljazeera has become not only an Arab media phenomenon, but a major global player, broadcasting not only in Arabic, as when it started in 1996, but also broadcasting English-speaking channels - Aljazeera international and Aljazeera America. The network has also set up local channels in the Arab world, as well as in other parts of the world, such as Aljazeera Egypt, Aljazeera Balkans, and Aljazeera Turkish, and has many other services in development. The study also assumes Aljazeera’s importance also because it is centre stage in a region that is undergoing major changes and the media, in particular Aljazeera, are thought to play a key role in these changes (Abul-Nasr, 2013; Abdul-Jalil, 2012; Douga, 2011; Hijjawi, 2011; Cherkaoui, 2010; inter alia).

### **Research questions:**

This research aims to answer two main questions:

1. What are the main contending models of Aljazeera, and what are the attendant strengths and weaknesses of each of these models, as outlined in various scholarly works?
2. To what extent does the concept of the ‘model’, as examined in various academic works, represent the station's programs?

To answer these two main questions, there are other sub-questions which form integral parts of the analysis:

- What does each model say about Aljazeera, as examined in various scholarly works?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of each model?

- How important are scholarly works examined on Aljazeera, in relation to their contribution to understanding the station/network?
- Does Aljazeera, within the context of the three models identified, provide a unique model that is an alternative to existing perspectives, or is it just a different media discourse?
- How and when did the concept of a ‘model’ come to be utilised regarding Aljazeera?
- Does each model identified stand separately, or is there overlap between the identified models for Aljazeera, as examined by academic works?
- Does the concept ‘model’ fully or partially represent Aljazeera’s output?
- Is Aljazeera anti-American, anti-West, anti-establishment, while at the same time propagating an Islamist, pan-Arabism agenda, as examined by various scholarly works?
- Is Aljazeera a force for freedom, democracy, human rights and a contextually objective press? If so, doesn’t that contradict the stations claim to advance human rights, being a political campaigner and aiming to live by the values of objectivity in the media?
- What is the nature of the relationship between Aljazeera and its founders, the Qatari royal family?
- How does Aljazeera, as a media phenomenon, sit within the various works about global media theory?

### **Thesis plan:**

My research will be divided into seven main chapters. Chapter one will include an introduction with a brief outline of the aims of the study, the research problem and questions to be addressed, as well as the justification and argument for the importance of tackling the subject of Aljazeera through the examination of various scholarly works. Chapter two will explore the various methodological approaches I intend to follow in order to achieve the aims of the research, attempting to examine the concept of the model as it has developed, both in applied sciences as well as social sciences. I will also place special emphasis on a cross-comparative approach that tries to examine, compare and evaluate various scholarly works, and how they deal with the three models advanced here concerning Aljazeera.

Furthermore, I will outline lines of criticism of various approaches and works. Chapter three reviews the various literatures on Aljazeera and different theoretical frameworks for understanding media, with special focus on global media theory, and will also discuss the idea of Aljazeera media practices, and whether the station’s performance could indeed be regarded as a unique media model. I will also explore, in this chapter, the coming of Aljazeera onto the Arab media scene, its structures, financing, and its alleged political,

economic and social influence on Arab media in general. In chapters four, five and six I intend to examine and critically evaluate each of the three media models noted above that may apply to Aljazeera. Chapter seven will examine the conclusions drawn, discussion and final remarks of the study.

## **Chapter two: Methodology**

### **Introduction**

Conducting a study that attempts critically to examine a body of scholarly works on Aljazeera is not an easy task to undertake, as the amount of research materials published on Aljazeera at various universities in the Arab world, and from other universities and other sources is exceedingly vast. I have obtained a primary list from Aljazeera Studies Centre, which employs a number of people tasked with surveying various institutions, establishments, and bodies across the globe to gather all studies, theses, articles, and other materials, published or unpublished, on Aljazeera. It is worth noting here that this list does not map out all that has been written on Aljazeera, whether published or not. Although Aljazeera Studies Centre's ultimate aim is to publish one of the most comprehensive lists of studies about the station, it is currently far from doing so.

Furthermore, what the list presents is a brief description of these studies, some of which are still unfinished, which obliged me to consult the original source, or to get in touch with the researcher, where possible. In my study, I aim to go further than that, and to gather as much material as possible, including published and unpublished, complete and unfinished works. There are, however, limitations to what I can gather. My study thus does not claim to have surveyed the entire array of publications, materials, articles and other works published on Aljazeera, because of the huge resources that such a task would require, as well the time needed to accomplish such an endeavour. Having said that, I have been able to collect and sample what I consider to be the most useful and important works, articles, books and theses, for fulfilling the objectives of this study, and for helping to advance and guide any future research on Aljazeera. If my research provides a contribution in this wider endeavour, helping future research on the station, and clarifying some of the questions outlined in the previous chapter that would fulfil the aims of this research.

### **Comparative media studies in the Arab world:**

While there have been a large number of studies in the West that have attempted to compare various media (Hallin and Mancini, 2004; Aalberg, Aelsta and Curran, 2010; Baek, 2009; Curran, et al., 2012; inter alia), in the Arab world few comparative media studies have emerged in the past few decades. Among these early studies, Abdul-all (1994) examined journalistic performance across a number of Arab countries, and adherence to the legal frameworks in each of the countries studied, namely Egypt, Sudan, and Jordan. This study focused mainly on comparing media regulatory frameworks in these countries, with little attention to how journalists performed under these regulatory regimes. The study also failed to conduct any empirical or evidence-based examination. Its focus was on comparing these regulatory frameworks, although it drew conclusions regarding journalistic practices without any supportive evidence to substantiate these claims. It relied heavily on personal interviews with journalists and other media practitioners. It also lacked methodological design and rigour.

Hamzah (2002) compared the notions of privacy and freedom of the press in a number of Arab states, looking specifically at those that adopted a secular legal system, in contrast to those that adopted Islamic law. The analysis proved useful, though here again there was a lack of proper methodological design and rigour. Izzat, et al. (2006) explored the concept of media freedom in Egypt and the Arab world, comparing modes of ownership, legal frameworks, and journalistic practices. This study provides a clear mode of analysis, and description of different legal, ownership and journalistic practices, with special attention given to Egypt, as the largest Arab country, but lacks any comparative aspects with respect to other Arab countries. Like previous studies it lacked empirical evidence for some of its conclusions. The study's approach to Egypt's case could be described as extensive and, overall, useful. Al-Cheick (2012) compared various models concerning freedom of expression, in a number of Arab countries that adopted certain Islamic legal values, with Western and authoritarian models. This study lacked focus on historical analysis, as well as any empirical evidence to support its conclusions. A common theme amongst the above studies is the lack of any empirical evidence to support their conclusions, as well as a loose methodological grounding and lack of academic rigour.

In my study, however, I propose to examine scholarly work on Aljazeera's nature and journalistic performance, through the analysis of three models applied to the station. My line of analysis will explain the nature of these three models, and whether they qualify as models in their own right, or are just a different media discourse about the station. I aim qualitatively to interpret, guided by Cushion (2012), the overall direction of Aljazeera's journalism, as explored by a selected number of scholarly works, and hence identify the nature of the station by drawing on relevant sources concerning it. In my examination of relevant works, I will comprehensively review the empirical data based on analysing the key conclusions reached by these scholarly works, while paying special attention to certain of these works, as outlined later in my sampling strategies.

### **Origins and definition of the concept 'model':**

As a concept, the 'model' has its origins in mathematics and applied sciences. Giere (2004) notes:

'What is special about models is that they are designed so that elements of the model can be identified with features of the real world this is what makes it possible to use models to represent aspects of the world'

(Giere, 2004: 747)

He argues that such a representation of the real world through the concept of a model is done "by exploiting similarities between a model and that aspect of the world it is being used to represent" (Giere, 2004: 743). An example of this would be the model representing the solar system, which is an approximate representation of the actual solar system, but is not the solar system itself. Another example is the model that represents weather pattern changes over a set period of time, for better approximation and representation of real weather changes. The table that represents chemical elements (Ibid: 747-748) is another such example. Giere argues that:

‘models are constructed according to explicitly formulated principles. Physics is especially rich in such principles: Newton’s principles of mechanics, Maxwell’s principles of electrodynamics, the principles of thermodynamics, the principles of relativity, and the principles of quantum mechanics. But evolutionary biology also has its principle of natural selection and economics boasts various equilibrium principles’.

(Ibid: 744)

In line with this, the model construction process is accomplished as follows:

Real world  $\Leftrightarrow$  hypotheses and generalization  $\Leftrightarrow$  model  $\Leftrightarrow$  principles and specific conditions

Scientists arrive at this principle of the model representing aspects of the real world:

‘...by exploiting similarities between a model and that aspect of the world it is being used to represent. Note that I am not saying that the model itself represents an aspect of the world because it is similar to that aspect. There is no such representational relationship anything is similar to anything else in countless respects, but not anything represents anything else. It is not the model that is doing the representing; it is the scientist using the model who is doing the representing. One way scientists do this is by picking out some specific features of the model that are then claimed to be similar to features of the designated real system to some (perhaps fairly loosely indicated) degree of fit. It is the existence of the specified similarities that makes possible the use of the model to represent the real system in this way’.

(Ibid: 748)

Hence, for example, the model of a skyscraper is a representation of some of the features of the building, but not all of them... In other words models are constructed “in order to explain and appreciate the world, and sometimes we call our simplifications theories, paradigms, and hypothesis” (Ibid: 4).

In social sciences “a model is a simplified picture of a part of the real world, it has some of the characteristics of the real world, but not the entire world” (Lave and March, 1993: 3). Little (1998) explains that the concept, ‘model’, appears and is used in social sciences when there is no mathematics anywhere in sight. The model, he argues, in this instance bears the meaning of theory or:

‘a system of related concepts to describe an idea or phenomenon. Quite frequently, use model in this way too, particularly with people who are not mathematical model-builders. The word helps convey the tentative and incomplete nature of the theory’

(Little, 1998: 2)

Lave and March (1993) argue that there are four key stages in model-building: observation of some facts and looking at them as though they were the end product of some process, speculating about the possible process that might have produced these results, deducing other results (implications, consequences, predictions) from the model constructed, and finally questioning the validity of the outcome, the model, and going on to produce a new model if necessary (Lave and March, 1993: 19).

An example of a model could be the relationship between poverty/deprivation and low health outcomes, if I observe a family that lives in the slums in very bad hygiene, with an unhealthy food intake, and look at their general health and speculate that as a result of unhealthy living conditions, this particular family is more prone to certain illnesses than a comparable family living in wealthier conditions. In a similar fashion, researchers have also attempted to build models/paradigms/theoretical frameworks about a number of social interactions and relationships.

After the Second World War and the emergence of television, for instance, many scholars feared that extended periods of exposure to television violence, especially among children, would tend to translate into children being prone to more aggressive behaviour. Thus, a model is built around a cause/effect relationship between children's exposure to violence on television, and the impact that it might have on their overall behaviour (Abdelmoula, 2012; Cherkaoui, 2010; Lewis, 1991; inter alia). Speculation is central to the construction of models, and "models are created by speculating about processes that could have produced the observed facts. Models are evaluated in terms of their ability to predict correctly other new facts" (Lave and March, 1993: 19).

Little (1998) argues that problem solving is at the heart of models and model building. He explains that the model-building process goes through three key stages. The first is to write down what I want the model to look like, and if it is supposed to produce computer output, in which case I may sketch a list of output variables, or even a screen display in the form that I would like the results to take. In the second stage, I would examine the outputs and write down the inputs I think will be required; data, relationships, values for parameters, etc. Little (1998) points out that writing down the inputs implies that I have some sort of rough notions about key phenomena, and cause and effect relationships. He questions:

‘where do these come from? From past experience or general knowledge about the subject, often gathered by interviewing people who know about the problem and by reading background materials’.

(Little, 1998: 9).

The last stage, he states, is to work on the model - what assumptions are required to convert inputs into outputs, what functional relationships are needed (Little, 1998: 8-9). Lave and March (1998) devise three rules for building good models. The first is that a good model is a statement about a process that is taking place. For instance, consider a teacher coming into



class and forgetting to bring the students' exam papers. A good model asks why teachers forget students' test papers. This would be an attempt to uncover the process behind the teacher's action.

Building a model by supposing that teachers forget students' test papers, because during test time they have so much work pressure that they are bound to forget. The model would then attempt to develop implications or predictions of the process. For instance, in the example given above about the forgetful teacher, we might think of a way of helping the teacher forget less often, perhaps by getting one of the students to send those emails in advance in order to remind the teacher of the important things he/she has to bring to class. Finally, to generalise the model, we could devise a system of reminding teachers in advance what they should bring to their class, and it becoming standard policy. In this case we moved from a specific case study, to solving a wider problem, while at the same time uncovering the underlying process involved (Lave and March, 1998: 41-43).

### **Aljazeera: a distinct media model or just a different discourse?**

Al-Sadi (2012), Seib (2008), Lynch (2006), Zayani (2005), Miles (2005), and Sakr (2001, 2005) were probably the first researchers who used the concept of a 'model' with regard to Aljazeera, arguing that the station's journalistic practices strongly qualify as a distinct media model, that is being copied and followed by other broadcasters in the Arab world and beyond. Seib (2008), for instance, notes "Aljazeera's success, in this regard serves as a model in the Arab world and beyond, an example of a news organisations with regional and global reach that are certain to proliferate during the next decade" (2008: 23).

In the same vein, Franklin (2013) argued that Aljazeera provided a new media model in the Arab world, that everyone is trying to copy. This model, he argues, is characterised by breaking taboos that other television stations in the region dare not tackle (cf. Seib, 2008). The station, according to Seib (2008), also developed a unique journalistic practice within the context of Arab and Islamic culture. He notes "...satellite TV from the wider Arab world has forced Egyptian TV to get real and copy Aljazeera's model" (Seib, 2008: 38).

This new model that Aljazeera ushered in, although inspired by many of the good practices of Western broadcasters, has an indigenous flavour in its application of the norms of freedom of the media, objectivity, neutrality and balance, that emphasises what El-Nawawy and Iskandar (2003) termed "contextual objectivity", that takes into account the cultural and historic distinctions of the Arab and Islamic world. In the same vein, Al-Kandari and Haque (2008) argued that Aljazeera's journalistic style provides a unique media model in the Arab world. This model, they note "...might seriously provide impetus for change in the Arab world" (Al-Kandari and Haque, 2008: 145). Ayish (2002) argues that current Arabic television models can be split into three categories. The first describes the authoritarian, government-controlled television that broadcasts government messages, where television is employed to serve the interest of those running the country, such as the national television in Algeria or Syria.

The second model is semi-commercially owned, and run according to the tenets of liberal media, applying Western journalistic practices. In this model, stories and items to cover are

selected according to their newsworthiness within a regional and international context, while at the same time attempting to reflect pluralistic and critical views of society, with the aim of spreading the values of freedom of speech, democracy and transparency. Ayish (2002) cites Aljazeera as the best representation and embodiment of such a model. The third model is television that is fully controlled by government, while at the same time incorporating reformist elements, after certain Arab governments realized that audiences were deserting their broadcasting platforms to stations such as Aljazeera. Television stations such as Abu Dhabi television are a fair representation of this model (Ayish, 2002: 140-142).

The cascading model suggested by Entman (2003) in order to explain the process of influence as presented in news about foreign crises, public opinion, and elite thinking, provides a unique outlook to examine a global media outlet like Aljazeera. Although Entman's model was specifically designed in order to examine the power of interchange between the White House spin machine and the media, and U.S. government attempts to influence the framing of issues in the news, with the aim of influencing public opinion, this model provides useful applications in the case of Aljazeera, especially as it is becoming a global media player (cf. Cherribi, 2006: 134). This is why Cherribi (2006) attempted to adapt this model to the case of Aljazeera, arguing that such an application would be well suited to covering the role played by the Emir of Qatar (as an embodiment of the role played by the state of Qatar), and other Aljazeera structures, and provides a diagram to illustrate this idea in (Fig.1) as presented by Cherribi (2006: 135):

Administration  
Emir of Qatar

Other elites  
Arab League, Heads of  
State, Islamic Institutions,  
White House, Western  
officials

Al Jazeera  
Journalists, Al Qaradawi  
religious leader

News Frames  
Framing words,  
Framing images,  
Framing Fatwas

Arab Publics  
Polls,  
Other indicators

### Figure 1

Entman's (2003) Cascading Network Activation Model Applied to Al-Jazeera

Cherribi (2006) notes

...the first three boxes in Entman's model—Administration, Elites, Media—are modified in depiction of Al-Jazeera in Figure 1. What was the administration or the White House in Entman's first box is replaced by the Emir of Qatar, who is both the leader of the country and the one who permitted Al-Jazeera to come into existence and to continue to broadcast from the country. Elites in this case in the second level include the Arab League, Arab leaders, Islamic Institutions, and Western leaders including the White House and U.S. officials. Al-Jazeera and its journalists are in the next level, but with them is included a constant factor, Al Qaradawi, who is not a journalist but a religious leader who issues fatwas (religious edicts) and who is being given a major platform in Al-Jazeera's prime-time programming schedule. He functions like a judge who has ready religious and mental templates to classify and evaluate what is happening in the world. The next box, News Frames, remains as it is in Entman's model. The last box, which is public opinion in Entman's model, is in Al-Jazeera's case focused primarily on pan-Arab and Muslim public opinion.

(Cherribi, 2006: 135-137)

This, according to Cherribi (2006), is nothing new. It is rather a depiction of a medieval ruler who runs the media like any other state institution.

Zayani and Sahroui (2007) argue, however, that Aljazeera does not fit neatly in any of the models that cover the Arab world. They explain that although the station is financed by the State of Qatar, "Aljazeera's control system is loose and its integrated systems aren't up to the level of sophistication required" (Zayani and Sahraoui, 2007: 53). For Aljazeera to be a media model that is challenging the north-south flow, providing a real alternative, it has to fulfil many conditions.

In the same vein, Iskandar (2006) argues that despite Aljazeera's achievements, it cannot be seen as an alternative media model. He suggests that the station operates in much the same way as other mainstream institutions in the Arab world in terms of how the network plans and puts together its news stories. He also remarks that the station's ownership and financing, as well as structure, impose a great degree of restraint on it being a unique alternative media model in the region (Iskandar, 2006). Fandy (2007) agrees with Iskandar, especially concerning Aljazeera's ownership, financing and structure, adding that political oversight of the station's operation, by the Qatari ruling family, as well as the absence of transparency

over its operations, financing, and decision making, pose many questions about the station's independence, and thus casts further doubt as to whether or not it is a unique alternative media model.

Rinnawi (2006) goes further. He regards Aljazeera as a continuation of the authoritarian model that still dominates the Arab world, directly or indirectly. This restrictive model, he argues, survived until the late 1980s with no challenge emerging from within the Arab world. Sakr (2001), Seib (2008), Abu-Rab (2010), Qassim (2012) and Al-Tamimi (2012) are amongst those who argue, however, that Aljazeera is evolving into a more responsible organisation that is much more institutionalised into the mainstream in terms of the adoption of journalistic professional standards, while retaining its unique Arab identity. They suggest the station aims to provide a serious alternative media model, not just in the Arab world, but globally.

In agreement with this, Thussu (2007 cf. Wessler and Adolphsen, 2008: 439-46) suggests an analysis of media flows that sees Aljazeera among many channels that are challenging the traditional flow of news and current affairs from the West. He notes that "There is evidence that global media traffic is not just one way – from the West (with the USA at its core) to the rest of the world, even though it is disproportionately weighted in favour of the former" (cf. Wessler and Adolphsen, 2008: 439-46). Sakr (2007, cf. Wessler and Adolphsen, 2008: 439-46) extends Thussu's arguments by maintaining that the concept of contra-flow is not just about more production capacity of news and current affairs in non-core zones, but also about the interaction, cooperation and even possible challenges that go between the newly set up counter flow outlets such as Aljazeera, and more established ones in the West. We could cite here for instance various cooperation agreements that Aljazeera signed with CNN and the BBC to cooperate and collaborate in many areas, while each broadcaster and outlet maintained their independence and competitive edge. Abdelmoula (2012) elaborates on this, arguing that other major broadcasting organisations are entering into partnerships with Aljazeera, whether it is the BBC, CNN, ZDF, NHK or others, as they see that the station provides an output that is different, and at times challenging to what they do.

El-Nawawy and Iskandar (2003) agree with Sakr (2007), and suggest that the perspective given by Aljazeera and the other ASB (Arab Satellite Broadcasters) channels not only challenges Western views on current affairs, but can also create a bridge between the two worlds, enhancing the possibility of understanding and cultural exchange. More specifically, "with its bold independence, openness, and freedom, Aljazeera can improve the communication between the United States and the Middle East and achieve the ideals of Habermas (1984) theory of overcoming the residues of ignorance and misunderstanding through enlightened forms of public discourse" (El-Nawawy and Iskandar, 2003: 10). Zayani (2010) goes further. He argues that Aljazeera's journalistic practices introduced news norms and practices that became known among media professionals, as well as researchers in the region, as the 'Aljazeera model', leading, as he notes, "to the reinvigoration of the culture of news broadcasting in some established channels and, subsequently, to the rise of competing channels and the development of a competitive media environment... aspects of Aljazeera's

journalism and some of its program formats started to be copied among various outlets operating within a hitherto congested media-scape” (Zayani, 2010: 185).

He remarks for instance that Aljazeera’s formula and model for setting up the ground rules and practices for investigative journalism in the region “started to take root in a region that is not traditionally associated with free and democratic institutions” (Ibid: 185). He suggests that the station’s rise to prominence and acceptance among media professionals, as a model to be copied, has impacted the “prominence of the news genre itself”, with many of the newly-established channels having “more clout and freedom” (Ibid: 186).

In other words, Zayani regards Aljazeera’s model as challenging the current media practices and flow, not just in the Arab and Muslim world, but also beyond, hence the rush to set up competing channels broadcasting in Arabic, by the US government (Al-Hurra), France (France 24), in Germany (DW Arabic), in China (CCCP Arabic), UK (BBC Arabic) and Iran (AlAlam). Zayani (2010) notes “the rise of Aljazeera on the world media-scape represents a rupture in a hegemonic West-centric order controlled by multi-national corporations and aligned with Western view-points and interests, whether they are economic, ideological or geo-political” (188). In his view, Arab satellite channels are becoming a very serious threat not only to media monopolies in the West, but also to the dominant position of core nations, advocated by the global media theorists because the likes of Aljazeera “are infusing the global media scene with contra-flow, which untie some of the hegemonic dynamics global media have been locked in” (Ibid: 188).

### **Sampling strategies:**

In my sampling of studies on Aljazeera I have chosen a convenience sample as the best way to approach the study, because this method allows for a greater level of flexibility and ease of selection, and is appropriate to the limited time-scale available. Deacon et al, (1999) described convenience sampling “as less preconceived and direct, more the product of expediency, chance and opportunity than of deliberate intent” (Deacon et. al, 1999: 54). There are two types of convenience sample- weak and strong. The former could be defined as when “sample units or clusters are selected simply because they are nearest to hand. However, the strong where the sample units are focused around natural cluster of social groups and individuals who seem to present unexpected but potentially interesting opportunities for the research” (Ibid: 54). In my study, I have attempted to select my sample around the cluster of studies that Aljazeera Study Centre collected about the station, as the main sampling group.

The first version of the collection, which was published in 2011, had a total of 191 studies (61 PhD theses, 58 master’s theses, 49 books and 23 short studies). The latest version, published in 2012, had 214 studies (68 PhD, 59 masters, 51 books and 36 short studies and papers). I have divided the sources published in these into primary and secondary sources.

Primary sources included a number of studies that looked at various aspects of Aljazeera as their main area of study; these include El-Nawawy and Iskandar (2003), Ayish (2002, 2005, 2010), Alhassan (2004); Al-Jaber (2004), Abdel Rahim (2005), Miles (2005), Lynch (2006), Zayani (2005), Qusaibaty (2006), Zayani and Sahraoui (2007), Barkho (2007), Fandy (2007),

Seib (2008 (2012), Hammond (2007), Anzawa (2011), Al-Sadi (2012), Powers and El-Nawawy (2009), and Abdelmoula (2012). These studies were devoted almost in their entirety to Aljazeera, though they varied greatly in their approaches. Secondary sources were studies where Aljazeera was not the main area of focus, but a substantial section was devoted to the station, and include Sakr (2001), (2005), (2007), Miladi (2006), (2013), Cherribi (2006), Tatham (2006), Thai (2010), Azran (2010), Cooper and Momani (2011), Abdullah (2012), Al-Tamimi (2012), Hanson (2013), and Dorsey (2013). These studies' bibliographies proved to be a very useful source for accessing other studies. The third sample included studies that dealt with broader issues about the media in the Arab world, and other parts of the world, but touched on certain aspects of Aljazeera as a media phenomenon; these include Khatib (2013), Hroub (2013), Cushion (2012), Abdullah (2012), Kamrava (2011), McPhail (2010), and Hafez (2004), *inter alia*.

In selecting the sample to examine over the course of the study, I gave prominence to those studies that relied on multiple empirical tools to support the arguments and hypotheses of the study, especially the works selected within the primary group of studies. The reason for this is that many of the studies on Aljazeera are very descriptive in nature, and do not rely on strong empirical tools in order to answer the questions of the research or to test the hypotheses they put forward. Research that relies on strong, scholarly, empirical tools has thus been of importance in achieving the aims of the study.

Another aspect of the selection of works to examine is that the greater the contribution the research makes toward answering my research questions, the more prominence it is given. Some of the research on Aljazeera would be useful in the theoretical chapter on Aljazeera, and may serve as a useful tool to clarify some of the points along the way, but it would not be regarded as a primary source of data or evidence collection, from which conclusions could be drawn and generalized.

I have also collected a number of other materials from other open sources such as Google search and from various academic journals on media studies in general, as well as making extensive use of Cardiff University's internal and intra-university research facility. Using search words such as 'Aljazeera Arabism and political Islam' or 'Aljazeera and Islamists'; search engines revealed 188 studies and books. Of these I selected 23 which were not mentioned in Aljazeera's own studies book, and had the potential to contribute to the study as secondary sources. Furthermore, when using search terms such as 'Aljazeera, democracy and freedom', search engines revealed 63 books and academic studies of which 11 were selected as relevant secondary sources. On the other hand, when using words such as 'Aljazeera agent for Qatar' or 'Aljazeera and Qatar' or 'Aljazeera serving Qatari political agenda', search engines revealed 2000 materials, of which 34 had already been selected as either primary or secondary sources through previous sampling strategies..

### **Lines of critical evaluation:**

Guided by Cushion (2012) and Hallin and Mancini (2004), amongst others, I will critically examine the journalistic performance and nature of Aljazeera, and whether or not it fits as a

distinctive media model, as examined in various scholarly works, on four levels. First of all, the historical level will be examined to determine to what extent various scholarly works took into account historic context in their analysis of Aljazeera's nature and journalistic performance, as well as how relevant this context is. Secondly, at the conceptual level I will analyse to what degree various studies examined concepts such as contextual objectivity, impartiality, balance, pan-Arabism, pan-political Islam, hegemony and propaganda, and whether Aljazeera's journalism fits within the confines of the concept of a 'model' as defined in social sciences. Thirdly, I will critically evaluate scholarly works with regard to their empirical approaches to Aljazeera's nature and journalistic practices, and how robust they are in terms of supporting the claims advanced. I will also attempt to uncover the strengths, common areas, and differences in each model, and whether there are areas of overlap between the three different models identified. Finally, I will examine and critically assess the methodological approaches of various scholarly works on Aljazeera, identifying their strengths and weaknesses.

### **Problems and difficulties:**

One of the key problems I faced in doing this research is the short time available to me to fulfil the tasks required, and provide a comprehensive yet systematic mapping of various scholarly works on Aljazeera, across the globe. Another problem is that the multi-lingual variety of studies published on Aljazeera in different parts of the world and in different languages made difficult for me to examine/collect them all. I could speak only Arabic, English, and French fluently, which meant that many other pieces of research were beyond my reach. Some of the research published in Aljazeera's list was written in German or other languages in which I am not fluent. Attempting to translate these works was not an option, because of both time constraints and financial factors.

I would have preferred to have had more time in order to conduct a much more thorough mapping of scholarly works on Aljazeera across the globe, but this remains a task which others with more time and financial resources at their disposal may be able to carry out in the future. One further problem that I faced is that although this study aims to be as representative as possible of countries where Aljazeera was studied, it has tended to be dominated by the output of certain countries, namely the UK, U.S., Egypt, Jordan, and Algeria, with other countries largely beyond reach, either because of difficulty in accessing research materials, or because of the time constraints I outlined earlier. I have found that Aljazeera has become a global phenomenon, with studies having been conducted on the station in China, Japan, India, Russia, Europe, and the Americas, and in many different languages, which highlights further the importance of this study in attempting to uncover and examine the nature of this station. In the next chapter, however, I explore the global context in which Aljazeera came into being, and its inception and proliferation across the Arab world.

## **Chapter three:**

### **Global media theory, the Arab media scene and the coming of Aljazeera**

#### **Section one: Global media theory**

The aim of this study is to examine the nature and journalistic performance of Aljazeera from the perspective of three models, as analysed in various scholarly works. These are Aljazeera as an advocate of Arabism and political Islam, as a supporter of democracy, press freedom and cultural understanding, and as serving the interests of Qatar. I also aim to examine whether the three models identified each fit within the concept of a 'model' as outlined in social sciences. Before I proceed, however, it is necessary to identify the position of Aljazeera within a theoretical framework. Much debate has been going on about Aljazeera's identity and within which media model it best fits. Historically, the region to which Aljazeera belongs, the Arab world, has not featured at all in the early works of Siebert et al. (1956). They divided the world media system into four main theories. The free world of liberal democracies comprised the libertarian and social responsibility models, the Soviet and totalitarian sphere, the authoritarian societies, a mixture of countries that comprised most of the developing world, the fascist experience and the West before it adopted democratic norms and practices (Curren and Park, 2000: 4).

This approach tried to explain why the media take different forms and serve different purposes in different countries. It is founded on basic assumptions that all media behaviour can be understood in terms of two broadly defined social and political systems, i.e., liberal and authoritarian. According to Siebert et al. (1956), the media thus always takes on the shape and colour of the social and political system within which it exists and functions (Siebert et al. 1956). This attempt to explain media behaviour, however, has been described as having seen "...the universe only through Western eyes", creating the need to de-Westernize media studies (Curren and Park, 2000: 4). After the Second World War the world was divided into two ideologically distinct camps: free market capitalism in the West, and state socialism in the East. Theories of international communication thus became part of the war between these two camps. For the advocates of capitalism the main objective of media communication is to promote democracy, freedom of expression, and markets. For the advocates of socialism, however, there was a perceived need for greater state regulation and control of communication and media organizations.

The concept of the 'free flow of information' was adopted by the Western camp, especially in the U.S., which disapproved of communism's limits on media freedom, and its use of censorship and propaganda as tools (Thussu, 2000: 55). The 'free flow concept, again especially in the U.S., reflected a desire not only to advance capitalist ideas of democracy and freedom, but also to convince others not to impose trade barriers to their products (cultural or otherwise), or to make it difficult to gather news or make programs. This approach helped strengthen Western influence and dominance over global media markets and in the West's ideological battle with the Soviet Union (Ibid: 56). In defence of the 'free flow' theory,



researchers such as Lerner (1958) and Schramm (1964) argued that this approach can have an extra desired effect, especially in developing countries, leading eventually to the adoption of Western standards. They regarded the Western path of development as the most efficient way to shake off traditional ‘backwardness’, and as leading to increased urbanisation and literacy, in turn leading to increased media exposure, and eventually culminating in wider economic and political participation (cf. Thussu, 2000: 56-57). Schramm (1964) viewed the mass media as an important agent in spreading education and leading the social transformation needed for economic development (cf. Thussu, 2000: 57).

Consequently, by the late 1960s the modernization theorists started to measure general societal development depending on the level of media development. Both development and ‘free flow’ theories were, however, criticised for their perceived Western bias. Schiller (1969, 1976) regarded these two theories as attempts by American media to dominate the world media scene. In other words, as Schiller remarks, ‘the United States exercises mastery over global communication and culture’ (cf. Curren and Park, 2000: 5). This approach has, according to its critics, also been “used to restrict freedom of expression and to justify political indoctrination” especially in Third World countries (Ibid: 5). These approaches have also been criticised for their assumption that the modern and the traditional lifestyles, cultures, and norms outside the West are inherently backward or inferior in comparison to Western ones (cf. Thussu, 2000: 59).

By the late 1960s and early 1970s the dependency approach emerged, largely in Latin America, partly as a result of the U.S. continuing to support right-wing authoritarian governments in the region, and partly when educated elites in the continent realized that the development outlook on global media did not lead to the intended outcomes. The principal idea of the dependency approach was that transnational corporations, which are mostly based in the West, have great influence and power, with the support of Western governments. These corporations achieve this status by dominating markets, resources, production and labour (Thussu, 2000: 60-61). Schiller (1976) linked economic dominance and the pursuit of the commercial interests of U.S.-based corporations with their negative influence on the cultural autonomy of the countries in the South, and with thus creating dependency on both the hardware and software of communication and media, within developing countries. Because of this, researchers such as Barret (1977) started to speak of media imperialism, as ‘the process whereby the ownership, structure, distribution or content of the media in any one country are singly or together subject to substantial external pressures from the media interests of any other country or countries, without proportionate reciprocation of influence by the country so affected’ (cf. Thussu, 2000: 63).

By the late 1970s, globalization and its impact on politics, economics and the media had spread to an unprecedented degree. This created the need for a new approach to understanding the media and its interactions with the worlds of politics and economics. This has led to the emergence of new outlook on the development of global communication. It advocated that the new global communication revolution enhances what it describes as Western, mainly American, “electronic colonialism” (Kim and Barnett, 1996; Lynch, 2006; McPhail, 2010; Abdelmoula, 2012; inter alia). This perspective attempts to examine how the

mass media influence the mind, concentrating on its role and the consequences of its operations in relation to the mind, and to global consumer behaviour (McPhail, 2010: 23). As outlined earlier, with the onset of the global communication revolution, a new culture has emerged that is becoming a global phenomenon driven principally by large multimedia corporations who “control, reproduce and spread the global flow of words, images, and sounds ... seeking to impact the mind without regard to geography” (Ibid: 23). These companies are, in other words, the “foot soldiers of electronic colonialism” (Ibid: 24). Many of these corporations are U.S.-based, and are not driven just by the pursuit of profit or commercial dominance; it is also a question of cultural hegemony (McPhail, 2010: 24). In many developing countries, this notion of Western imperialism was used as a pretext by right- as well as left-leaning regimes in order to justify illiberal controls against their own peoples (Ibid: 5).

This notion of Western dominance was criticised, however, in the 1980s and 1990s, with reference to the complexities of global media interaction, flow of information, and the sometime counter-flow from the South to the North (cf. Curren and Park, 2000). The advocates of this approach also failed to account for the ability of local communities to resist American cultural messages and to develop inherent resistance, meaning that communities may watch American soap operas or movies, but that their interpretation is not as the original sender intended (Abdelmoula, 2012; McPhail, 2010; Herbert, 2001; Barker, 1997; Lewis, 1991; inter alia). In other words, there are more intervening variables and factors, apart from the message, that determine how audiences read American cultural products (cf. Liebes and Katz, 1994).

One of the perspectives that developed in parallel as a result of the spread of globalization is the ‘world system theory’, which argues that global economic expansion, and hence, communication expansion, form a small group of “...core zone nation states out to two other zones constitute prime export markets for multimedia firms...” (McPhail, 2010: 24). This theory divides the world into core nations that produce and export most of the cultural products, software as well as hardware items, to semi-peripheral and peripheral zones. Consequently, the core nations are the major industrialised nations. On the other hand, the semi-peripheral (which may include countries such as China, India, Brazil, Russia, Mexico, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and others) and peripheral nations (encompassing states such as Algeria, South Africa, Nigeria, Chile, Indonesia, the Philippines, and others) are dominated in their interactions with the core nations, which exercise control to their own benefit, and define the nature and extent of interactions with the two other areas (Ibid: 24).

This theory is supported by the empirical research conducted by Kim and Barnett (1996, 2008; cf. McPhail, 2010). They examined the international news flow in 132 countries and found empirical evidence to support the inequality in international news flow between the core and the semi-peripheral and peripheral nations, meaning that the core nations (the Western industrialised countries, US and EU), produce and sell international news to the semi-periphery and periphery, who are consumers and are dependent for their information on the core nations (McPhail, 2010: 29). Galtung (1971: 89-93) identified five types of exchanges through which the core nations exercise control and impose their imperialism on

the peripheral state: economic, political, military, communication and cultural. This means, according to Galtung, that the Southern nations know virtually nothing about events in their neighbouring countries that has not been filtered through the lenses of the developed media systems. He also suggested that peripheral states are tied to the core ones, and that information flows from different core states in different proportions, determined by capital and trade flows, as well as historical and colonial relations (Galtung, 1971, 64-91).

The critics of this approach argue, however, that many countries in the semi-periphery, and even in the periphery, attempted to develop national media industries that have managed at times to reverse the flow of information into a South-North flow, and to challenge the core's alleged dominance. The main examples of this are the soap operas and films of countries like China, India, Brazil, and Turkey. This approach has also been criticised because dominance of global communication markets does not necessarily translate into cultural dominance. Critics argue that interpretations of messages are a totally different matter, in which many factors are at play (Abdelmoula, 2012; McPhail, 2010; Barkho, 2007; Curren and Park, 2000; *inter alia*).

The core zone is also dominated by the U.S. model that treats media and culture as economic products, and is thus a view that encourages private ownership. By contrast, other countries within the core zone in Europe regard media and culture as tools to inform, educate, and entertain, rather than being driven by maximizing revenue, as is the case with the U.S. paradigm. This has led to tension within this core of dominating nations, with the French for instance seeking to protect their cultural industries from what they regard as the American hegemonic drive (McPhail, 2010, Curren and Park, 2000). These stresses within the core zone, the semi-periphery, and, most importantly, among peripheral areas, gave rise to new debates about the need for a more equitable form of disseminating information, and a more level playing field in terms of sharing the benefits of globalization.

Hence, in 1973, the Non- Aligned Movement (NAM) summit set out to safeguard national cultures and overcome global imbalances within information flows and communications, and to initiate a new international order in information. The New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) thus became a central issue within the ranks of UNESCO (Padovani and Nordenstreng, 2005: 264), which in the late 1970s adopted the principle of NWICO, with the aim of addressing the imbalances between the West and peripheral nations, not just in terms of production and exchange of information and knowledge, but intertwined with another UNESCO initiative, the New International Economic Order (NIEO), in order to address the imbalance in economic terms between the Western core nations and peripheral states. Western states, however, opposed NWICO, regarding it as an obstacle to media freedom and as increasing state control over the mass media.

The NWICO, however, came into being at the height of the Cold War, and, with the withdrawal of the U.S. and Britain from UNESCO after opposing many of the planned proposals under NWICO and NIEO at the UNESCO general assembly in 1989, a new communication strategy that focused on the Western principles of freedom of the press, freedom of expression, and the importance of an independent and pluralistic media, came

about, consigning NWICO to the history books (McPhail, 2010; Padovani and Nordenstreng, 2005). NWICO, however, despite its difficulties “...not only forced a reanalysis and reaffirmation of values, but it also accentuated the need for hard data and planning practical strategies in order to enhance communication development throughout the world” (McPhail, 2010: 81).

Other works that followed this approach by systematically linking media and politics include Blumer and Gurvitch (1995), and Hallin and Mancini (2004). Abdelmoula (2012) describes this approach as

...an act or a process which reflects a tendency to explain differences and put things in order according to a predefined system or rationale. The basic assumption of the systemic approach is that there are always some forms of organizing political principles according to which all kinds of media operate and can be understood.

(Abdelmoula, 2012: 128).

Unlike Siebert et al. (1956), who divided the media scene into liberal, socially responsible, and Soviet, authoritarian categories, Hallin and Mancini (2004) adopted a different division by which they identified three media models: the Mediterranean or polarised pluralist model, the North/Central European democratic corporatist model, and the North Atlantic or Liberal model, with each of the three models reflecting a particular political context.

The Mediterranean model is characterised as elite-oriented, with limited circulation, an emphasis on internal affairs, weak journalistic performance, and the state largely exercising ownership and regulation of the media. The North/Central European model, on the other hand, is marked by a strong tradition of press freedom, wide circulation, and strong journalistic practices and organisational structures. Within the confines of this model, commercial and public media co-exist in the corporatist model. The third model, the North Atlantic or Liberal, also has a strong press tradition as well as large circulation, but it is dominated by commercially and politically oriented media (Abdelmoula, 2012: 134-135).

There are a number of criticisms of this approach. Although it may still be a useful tool for analysis, most notably it tries to explain a changing phenomenon like the media as it interacts with other elements, such as political and economic ones, which may result in conditioning our interpretations and hampering our ability to reach a full understanding of the processes that are at play (Ibid: 137). In the same vein, Herman and Chomsky (1988) looked at the role of the mass media as an instrument of propaganda and state power. Utilising a number of case studies, they formulated their propaganda model, which examines how news in the mainstream U.S. media system goes through five key filters. The propaganda model's key assumptions are that the dominant media are deeply entrenched into the market system, seek only profit, are largely owned by wealthy business people, and rely by and large on advertising as their primary funding source. Herman and Chomsky also assumed that these media are dependent on government or government-related sources, or business, for information, and are largely constrained by the dominant ideology, which at the time was anti-communism. They note:

the five factors involved -- ownership, advertising, sourcing, flak, and anticommunist ideology -- work as 'filters' through which information must pass, and that individually and often in additive fashion they help shape media choices. We stressed that the filters work mainly by the independent action of many individuals and organizations; these frequently, but not always, share a common view of issues and similar interests. In short, the propaganda model describes a decentralized and non-conspiratorial market system of control and processing, although at times the government or one or more private actors may take initiatives and mobilize coordinated elite handling of an issue. Propaganda campaigns can occur only when consistent with the interests of those controlling and managing the filters.

(Herman, 1996: 5)

The propaganda model has, however, been criticised both on the grounds that it has a perceived conspiratorial nature, although its authors deny this, and in that it is allegedly too mechanical or functionalist, and ignores the existence of space, contestation, and interaction. It has also been criticised as attempting to provide a blanket explanation of media behaviour in the West without taking account, for example, of concepts such as journalistic professionalism, and public sector media that provide an alternative to commercial television (Hallin, 1994: 13). The authors of the propaganda model refuted their critics, however, arguing that:

we never claimed that the propaganda model explains everything or that it shows media omnipotence and complete effectiveness in manufacturing consent. It is a model of media behaviour and performance, not media effects. We explicitly pointed to alternative media, grass roots information sources, and public scepticism about media veracity as important limits on media effectiveness in propaganda service, and we urged the support and more effective use of these alternatives.

(Herman, 1996: 8)

On the issue of media professionalism, they also argued that it is not uniform among media, but that:

professionalism and objectivity rules are fuzzy, flexible, and superficial manifestations of deeper power and control relationships. Professionalism arose in journalism in the years when the newspaper business was becoming less competitive and more dependent on advertising. Professionalism was not an antagonistic movement by the workers against the press owners, but was actively encouraged by many of the latter. It gave a badge of legitimacy to journalism, ostensibly assuring readers that the news would not be influenced by the biases of owners, advertisers, or the journalists themselves.

(Herman, 1996: 12)

As stated by Walters (1995), however, globalization, especially with the proliferation of satellite television and of the internet, could be seen as the dominant feature of the 20th and 21st century (cf. Thussu, 2000). In the globalized world, the expansion of information and

communication technologies, combined with a simultaneous increase in the prevalence of market-led democracies, is leading to the creation of what Clark (1997) termed ‘global civil society’, in which “global homogenizing forces at play such as standardized communication networks (hardware and software) media forms and formats, influence cultural conciseness across the world” (Thussu, 2000: 76-78). This has led scholars such as Ritzer (1999) to speak of the ‘McDonaldization’ of global society (cf. Thussu, 2000, 78).

Consequently, as Hallin and Mancini (2010) concluded, “the liberal model has clearly become increasingly dominant across Europe as well as North America, as it has, no doubt, across much of the world, its structures, practices and values displacing, to a substantial degree, those of the other media systems” (Hallin and Mancini, 2010: 154).

On the other hand, they admit that there are forces at play that may limit the process of convergence towards the monolithic liberal model, because “differences among national political systems remain substantial and are likely to prevent complete homogenization of media systems for the foreseeable future and changes in media markets have created counter tendencies even in the liberal countries” (Ibid: 182). Such counter-flow dynamics move from the South to the North and others from the South to the South (Hallin and Mancini, 2010). Examples of such players could be the Indian film industry (Bollywood), the Latin American Telenovelas, the South Africa based pan-African network M-Net, the Russian network (RTTV), the Chinese international television network (CCTV) and the Qatari based Aljazeera Network (Thussu, 2010: 222-223). In this, Thussu (2010) remarks that “the global media landscape of the first decade of the 21st century represents a complex terrain of multi-vocal, multimedia and multi directional flows” (Thussu, 2010: 222).

The Arab world, through Aljazeera, has been at the heart of this trend as McPhail (2010) notes:

the balance of power in international media was shifting from the West to the Arab world, with its vast wealth and newly emergent media. A decade after launching Aljazeera, Qatar created an English-language sister channel, Aljazeera English, in the hopes of gaining the same kind of influence in the ‘global south’ that the Arabic channel had given it in the Arab world.

(McPhail, 2010: 302)

Others, however, disagree. Sabry (2005) suggests that it would not be wise to regard the Arab media as global, because “...the dominant oligopolistic media players..., who enjoy long history and more established market structures, are not regarded as global” (Ibid: 41). The criteria for global reach, he argues, are that the media have to “transcend nation state boundaries and language communities, use English, the language of globalization, and attract a cross section of international audiences that is not limited to the rich and influential...coupled with access to the resources and means of production necessary to compete at a global level” (Ibid: 42). When taking these conditions into account, Arab media hardly qualify as global, as they are bound by restrictive state policies that are largely directed towards national players, with both private and publicly owned media directly or

indirectly controlled by governments or circles of power that are loyal to the government or whoever is in charge (Sabry, 2005). He also argues that Arab media are technologically dependent on the West, with Western style and norms extensively followed by Arab stations “...for instance pop idol on MBC” or ‘who wants to be a millionaire’ on the same channel, and a large amount of Arab television production is imported from the West (Sabry, 2005). What he and others (Sakr, 2001, 2005; Fandy, 2007; inter alia) highlight is the same problem that many peripheral nations suffer from as a result of the core nations dominating the flow of information and communication. Furthermore, after the events of 9/11 the U.S. saw that its hegemonic approach to the Arab world had to evolve from the traditional ‘mind management’ into direct communication through the use of U.S.-sponsored radio (Radio Sawa) and television (Al-Hurra) stations (Sabry, 2005).

In the next section, I shall examine the contexts in which Aljazeera came into being, how it was conceived and organised, and how influential it has been in the Arab world and beyond.

## Section Two

### Aljazeera and the Arab media scene

Arab media, as outlined by McPhail (2010), came about in the aftermath of the German defeat in the First World War, and the splitting up of what was left of the Ottoman Empire between the Western powers, especially Britain and France (McPhail, 2010). The debate over Arab nationalism among a number of thinkers in the Arab world was heavily expressed by the newly emergent media, with the state and ideology key dominating players in the region (Sakr, 2001, 2007; McPhail, 2010; Dabashi, 2012; inter alia). Hafez (2001) described the Middle Eastern media system as “the most closed and controlled in the world with information control and censorship widespread” (Hafez, 2001: 4). Hafez's (2001) description does not only apply to media conditions in earlier decades, as such censorship and restrictions still apply today. Any advances that have been achieved as a result of the Arab spring are still in their early stages, and may have been reversed, as is the case in Egypt (Miladi, 2013).

This restrictive media environment is in line with the model identified by Rugh (1979), who divided the Middle Eastern media into three categories. The first is the mobilised press, which is controlled by the state. It exists in countries such as Algeria, Sudan and Morocco. The second is the loyalist press, in which the press or the media is owned by private investors but is indirectly controlled by the government or by people who are loyal to it. This model exists in countries such as Morocco, Tunisia and Jordan. The third group is the diverse press, where media are largely free from government control, as in countries such as Lebanon (Rugh, 1979, cf. Hafez, 2001: 5). The situation has changed slightly as of the mid-1990s, due largely to the coming of satellite channels which have the ability to cross borders, states, and continents. The relatively newly established television stations such as the Middle East Broadcasting Centre (MBC) and Arab Radio and Television (ART), despite their professional, Western news style, and critical approach to certain issues such as the Oslo Peace Accord between the Palestinians and Israelis, remain loyalist outlets, rarely touching anything critical of their respective supporting governments (Sakr 2001).

The changes that came with the foundation of MBC and RTA were influenced by three main factors, as identified by El-Nawawy and Iskandar (2003). First, the introduction of foreign media led to negotiations over a supposed standard of objectivity, independence, and fairness starting to be contested and articulated. The West first began influencing public opinion in the Arab world in 1934, when it was targeted by Italian radio. Nazi Germany followed suit shortly thereafter, as did the BBC in 1938. Since then many other nations have followed in these steps (El-Nawawy and Iskandar, 2003). The second major change started when a number of local broadcasters went on air using Arabic. Such attempts later helped make Egypt the leading Arab country in the television, cinema and theatre industries. It also helped to nourish the pan-Arab liberation movements and saw the establishment of the ‘Voice of the Arab’ radio station, which led to anti-colonial efforts across the region during the 1950s and 1960s. This happened, however, at a time when most Arab states still applied various degrees



of pressure and control over the media. Until the 1990s, most Arab countries had Ministries of Information acting as regulatory bodies and overseeing all monitoring and censoring of mass communication in their respective nations. That is why, according to El-Nawawy and Iskandar (2003), foreign broadcasters such as the BBC's World Service built large audiences in the Arab world, because of their presumed credibility in comparison with local broadcasters or media outlets. The coming of Arab satellite television would, however, soon displace Arabic-language foreign broadcasters (El-Nawawy and Iskandar, 2003).

The third major change occurred when Arab media reacted to CNN's coverage of the 1991 Gulf War by trying at least partially to imitate American success. This helped create the first attempts at real investigative reporting and war correspondence. The first Arab television station to emulate the CNN model was the Middle East Broadcasting Centre (MBC), which was based at the time in London. In November 1996, after the BBC Arabic television experiment came to an end over editorial differences between the BBC and its sponsors, the Saudi-owned Orbit, Aljazeera came into being. When it started, most of the staff came from the BBC Arabic television service (El-Nawawy and Iskandar, 2003).

In fact, Sakr (2001) and McPhail (2010) argue that the Iraq War and the resultant coverage that came from CNN were pivotal in planting the seeds of modern Arab television news, and of the adoption of many journalistic techniques and styles by many news channels across the region in later stages. Most importantly, the establishment of the BBC flagship Arabic television (1994-1996), in partnership with the Saudi backed Orbit, marked a turning point in the tightly-controlled media scene of the region, especially for the medium of television. The station, which closed as a result of attempts by Orbit to censor certain BBC Arabic programs that showed dissident political opponents of the Saudi ruling family, made many realise that their stranglehold on information flow and dissemination within their respective countries was being eroded (McPhail, 2010: 292).

### **Arab satellite channels and a new civic society:**

This trend of new satellite television broadcasters, Lynch (2006) argues, started a wave of change that few in the Arab world could anticipate. The changes that followed in terms of providing a transnational platform were immense for audiences not only in the Arab world, but also among the émigré population (Lynch, 2006). Likewise, Sakr (2001) argued that the emergence of these transnational television platforms to, from and within the Middle East seemed to offer new opportunities to challenge censorship and state media control. Satellite stations brought with them the hope of liberation from the government-controlled media monopolies and tight censorship of terrestrial television. Middle East Information Ministers had to face the possibility that satellite channels would provide viewers in their respective countries with news and commentary on local issues and affairs, outside their control. Political commentators from a wide spectrum of political persuasions had access to television without government surveillance (Sakr, 2001: 3-4).

Eickelman and Anderson (2003) argue that these new media outlets offer forums for alternative voices, with the aim to challenge or limit state power and influence in disseminating and controlling information. They also defied the conventional religious authorities, and contributed to the creation of a new kind of civil society (Eickelman and Anderson, 2003: 18). At the beginning the overwhelming currents of satellite channels in the region were generally aimed at the protection of vested interests and observance of editorial taboos. That, however, began to change when BBC Arabic started to broadcast to the Middle East and some of these issues started to be discussed. Although this trend did not have the time to mature and spread, due to the closure of BBC Arabic television, which occurred because its financial backers, Saudi owned Orbit, could not live with the appearance of Saudi dissidents such as Mohammed El Masarry and Saad El Faqeeh on air, discussing sensitive Saudi issues such as human rights violations in the Kingdom, political rights and the call for democracy.

### **The coming of Aljazeera:**

That, however, was about to change dramatically. Around the end of November 1996, Aljazeera started broadcasting to audiences across the Arab world. Miles (2005), Sakr (2007), Zayani (2005) and Lynch (2006), amongst others, have suggested that the station's coming onto the Arab media scene not only changed the region, but also for the first time, challenged the monopoly of Western media on the traditional North South flow of information. El-Nawawy and Powers (2008) argued that Aljazeera, as a broadcaster from the Arab world and a disseminator of news and political commentary, as well as of cultural, sports and children's programming, represents a profound reversal in the flow of information that was the source of great animosity towards the West for much of the twentieth century.

They argued that Aljazeera represents a critique of Western news and programming, while at the same time embodying a hybrid identity of Western technologies and formats adapted and evolved to meet the culturally and historically constructed expectations of Arab and Muslim societies (El-Nawawy and Powers, 2008). Seib (2008) also argued that, for the first time in the modern history of many independent Arab countries, there is a media organization that reflects the aspirations, hopes, and problems of many in the region. It is seen as a station that has managed not only to break regional taboos, but also to break the West's hold on the flow of information. The main question that Sakr, (2001), Miles (2005), Lynch (2006), Alhassan (2004), and others ask is why it happened at this particular time, and in Qatar.

In early 1995, when BBC Arabic television closed and most of its employees were made redundant, a close confidante of the Emir of Qatar suggested that he start up a news channel that emulated the model of the BBC in presenting news. The Emir Cheick Hamad Ben Khalifa Al-Thani, who had just taken over from his father in a peaceful coup d'état, embarked on an extensive program of modernizing Qatar. He abolished the Ministry of Information (1995), the only Arab state to have done so, and took other legal steps to increase media freedom in his country. After a short consultation period, the Emir agreed to the proposal and the process of recruiting all the former BBC Arabic television staff, as well as others from across the Arab world, began in earnest. In November 1996 the station went on

the air with a limited program schedule, which was later gradually extended. There were some initial problems, but the station became an instant hit among Arab viewers who, for the first time, could see opposition figures airing their views without censorship or limitations (Miles, 2005; Seib, 2008; Al-Tamimi, 2012; inter alia). Not only that, but audiences across the Arab world could see various conflicts live and direct in their homes, and interact with the station through its various programs. So, programs such as ‘The Opposite Direction,’ ‘More Than One Opinion,’ ‘Century Witness’, and many others became instant successes, and viewers copied them and passed them to each other. Many viewers who did not already have satellite dishes bought one in order to watch this new medium (Lynch, 2006). The station was also open to figures who were described by many Arab and Western governments as ‘terrorists’, such as Osama Bin Laden. It caused controversy when, for the first time in the history of the region, it opened its airwaves to Israeli officials (Miles, 2005).

One big question, however, has still not been answered fully, and that is why did Cheick Hamad Ben Khalifa, who in 2013 resigned as Emir of Qatar (a move which is historic in the Arab world, in the sense that no Arab ruler has done so before, in the absolute monarchies) and handed power to his son, Cheick Tamim Ben Hamad, set up Aljazeera? Al-Sadi (2012), McPhail (2010), Fandy (2007) and Qusaibaty (2006) are among those who have argued that Qatar did not set up Aljazeera in order to spread press freedom, democracy, and the rule of law, as its official line states. McPhail (2010) suggests that:

...the Emir of Qatar did not launch Aljazeera to save the Arab psyche or because he wanted a membership card at the local press club! He did it for the same reason he invited the US military to move its Gulf central command (from Saudi Arabia yet to become a bitter foe of Qatar) to Qatar, to make himself a player in the region...Al-Jazeera gave the Emir the power to drive public opinion.

(McPhail, 2010: 294)

Such a trend, he argues, was in opposition to the interests of Saudi Arabia, whose dominance of the region Qatar had long disputed, and whose politics Qatar wanted to challenge, in the Gulf and beyond. Furthermore, when Cheick Hamad Ben Khalifa, the late Emir of Qatar, staged a peaceful coup against his father, Saudi Arabia is alleged to have conspired to reinstate his father (McPhail, 2010).

Aljazeera started with a grant from the state of Qatar of \$150 million, to cover the setting up of the station and the running costs for the first 5 years, after which it was intended that it be self-sufficient (El-Nawawy and Iskandar, 2003; Al-Jaber, 2004; Alhassan, 2004; Miles, 2005; Tatham, 2006; inter alia). The new station was placed under the supervision of Qatar’s Foreign Ministry, and the powerful figure of the Emir’s cousin, Qatar’s late Prime and Foreign minister, Cheick Hamad Ben Jabr Al-Thani, the second most powerful person in Qatar, after the Emir himself. The channel’s budget came directly from Qatar’s Finance Ministry (and still does), and after three years of operation the station needed another injection of funds, which the Emir supplied (Al-Jaber, 2004; Miles, 2005; Zayani, 2005; Lynch, 2006; Tatham, 2006; Al-Tamimi, 2012; inter alia). Aljazeera's foundation followed

the structure adopted by many of Qatar's public organisations, although it was given a greater degree of independence and freedom in its running, as well as freedom to report on events without any of the restrictions that hampered much of the media in the Arab world at the time. Inside Qatar, the Emir had just abolished the Information Ministry in 1995, which many saw as a step towards liberalizing the media in the country (Alhassan, 2004; Miles, 2005). The station had an operational charter, with a board of directors, a chairman directly appointed by the Emir in coordination with those known in Qatar as the 'movers' (who are the small circle of people who influence the Emir, though the Emir retains absolute authority), such as his wife, Cheicka Moza Al-Musned, Cheick Hamad Ben Jassim Ben Jabr, the Prime and Foreign minister and the Emir's cousin, Cheick Hamad Ben Thamer Al-Thani (the Chairman of Aljazeera since 1996). The Emir appointed a Chairman of the board of directors, his cousin Cheick Hamad Ben Thamer Al-Thani, and the first Director General of the station, Adnan Al-Sherif, a Palestinian BBC veteran broadcaster, to be replaced months later by Qatari Mohammed Jassim Al-Ali, who stayed in this position until 2003 (Miles, 2005).

For many of these early years, Aljazeera was a source of controversy for many Arab regimes, who closed its offices, banned its reporters from operating within their borders, and even went as far as withdrawing their ambassadors from Qatar. Hence the station's success remained limited to the Arab world (Sakr, 2001; El-Nawawy and Iskandar, 2003; Alhassan, 2004; Miles, 2005; Lynch, 2006; *inter alia*). The Director General in these first few years had enormous decision-making powers, with direct access to the Chairman or to the Emir himself, and the station was centralised around him. This was positive in terms of quick decision making, but it also proved to be controversial as it exposed a lack of consultation and transparency, as well as lack of due process (Khanfar, 2009; Miles, 2005; Zayani and Sahraoui, 2007; *inter alia*).

The functions and roles of Aljazeera's board remain a mystery, and there were no published or declared outlines of how this supervisory role was to be exercised, with much left to the discretion of both the Chairman and the Director General (Miles, 2005). The station adopted the guiding principle of 'the opinion and other opinion', but there were no publicly published editorial guidelines, and editors were given the general task of implementing the station's principle, which meant adhering to standards of journalistic professionalism, objectivity, neutrality, and balance, as each editor defined them, and they remained very ambiguous (Miles, 2005; Zayani, 2005; Lynch, 2006; Fandy, 2007; *inter alia*).

The events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, and the events that followed marked a turning point in the history of Aljazeera and the region. The American invasion of Afghanistan (2001 to the time of writing), the invasion of Iraq (2003), and the war that followed, as well as Aljazeera's ability to broadcast an image that is not identical to what Western media broadcast, earned the station many admirers as well as foes (Seib, 2008). By 2003, immediately after the end of the second U.S. invasion of Iraq, Aljazeera's long-standing Director General, Mohammed Jassim Al-Ali, and the entire board apart from the Chairman, were sacked by the Emir, presumably because of major editorial mistakes in the coverage of the Iraq war (2003). Others regarded this change as an attempt by the Emir to move away from the staunch pan-Arab agenda

adopted by Al-Ali, which was claimed by the station's enemies (Al-Jaber, 2004; Miles, 2005; Lynch, 2006; Fandy, 2007; Khanfar, 2009; Anzawa, 2011; *inter alia*). The new board and Director General, Wadah Khanfar, had a pro-political Islam agenda. Khanfar was known for his membership and staunch support for the Palestinian Islamic movement Hamas, which has strong links to Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood movement (Miles, 2005; Cherribi, 2006; Fandy, 2007; *inter alia*). Months after his appointment, Khanfar published a mission statement for the station, setting out its nature and identity. He also put in place guiding principles for the station's journalistic practices and performance.

Thus in 2004 the station's 'code of ethics' came to be. The code was adopted after much criticism of the station's dealing with controversial issues, and as a result of the direct intervention of the station's board. It was an attempt to develop some kind of systematic approach to news coverage, especially when dealing with uprisings, political upheaval or wars. The application of the code of ethics and journalistic guide was, however, a contentious issue, and caused tension both inside and outside of Aljazeera. For instance, McPhail (2010) notes that "Aljazeera's code of ethics stated that its reporters distinguish between news material, opinion and analysis to avoid the pitfalls of speculation and propaganda. Yet its airwaves... were thick with opinion masquerading as reportage" (McPhail, 2010: 301).

The station continued to cause controversy despite attempts to adopt increasingly professional journalistic practices, and claims to be the most objective, impartial, and balanced news organisation in the Arab world and beyond. This has led to many different outlooks on its nature and journalistic practices, and to claims that it represents a unique model that is being copied not just in the Arab world by stations such as 'Al-Arabiya', 'Al-Hurra' and 'France 24 Arabic', but also in other parts of the world, such as with 'Telesur' in Latin America. Therefore, in the next chapter, I aim to examine a different perspective on Aljazeera as a media model that is challenging or reinforcing current trends and opinions, or that is providing an outlook that is unique to Arab and Muslim cultural identity.

### **Aljazeera: Media model or just a different discourse:**

Al-Sadi (2012), Azran (2010), and Abu-Rab (2010), amongst others, identified three models which they claimed apply to Aljazeera. Al-Sadi (2012) argues that Aljazeera is a radicalizing factor for the Arab street (cf. Ajami, 2001; Alt, 2004; Brumberg, 2005; Friedman, 2003; Chafets 2001, 2002; Khashoggi, 2002; Zakaria, 2004; *inter alia*). He states that these authors claim that Aljazeera, because of its anti-establishment rhetoric, feeds and eventually leads to 'radicalism' for the majority of the Arab populations. He argues, therefore, that the station is a radicalizing force and stirs up anti-American, anti-Israel and anti-Western sentiments (Al-Sadi, 2012: 2). They, (Cherribi, 2006; Ajami, 2001; Chafets, 2001, 2002) suggest that as the station adopts these views it directs and promotes pan-Arab/pan-political Islam ideas.

The second model regards Aljazeera as an advocate of democracy, press freedom, journalistic professionalism, objectivity and human rights (El-Nawawy and Iskandar, 2003; Al-Jaber, 2004; Alhassan, 2004; Miles, 2005; Zayani, 2005; Lynch, 2006; Miladi, 2006, 2013; Seib, 2008; Hroub, 2013; *inter alia*).

The third model argues that Aljazeera is serving the interests of its paymaster, the state of Qatar (Hanson, 2013; Dorsey, 2013; Al-Sadi, 2012; Qassim, 2012; Al-Tamimi, 2012; Anzawa, 2011; Azran, 2010; Zayani, 2005; El-Iryan, 2002; Al-Dajani, 2002, inter alia). The advocates of this perspective argue that the channel, despite its starkly anti-establishment rhetoric, is not a historical anomaly; as far as its establishment and objectives are concerned, Aljazeera is in fact not different from other media in the region. Al-Sadi (2012) notes that "...the station is in line with other state-sponsored Arab mass media that aim, first and foremost, at serving and defending the strategic interests of the host state, Qatar in the case of Aljazeera" (Al-Sadi, 2012: 3).

### **Aljazeera: anti-West, pan-Arab and pro-political Islam?**

The proponents of this model regard Aljazeera as encouraging anti-West, anti-Israel and anti-establishment sentiments, while at the same time advancing a pan-Arab and political Islamist agenda. Benjamin Gilman, the Republican Chair of the House International Relations committee sees Aljazeera as an organization stirring up "the fanatical anti-American and anti-Semitic incitement sweeping the Arab world." (Lynch, 2006; 20). He argues that such actions by Aljazeera "...constitute [sic] a real threat to long-term interest of the US in the region" (Ibid, 20).

The advocates of this model, see any attempts by the station to stand by its motto 'the opinion and the other opinion', in presenting various opinions, as inadequate. Chafets (2001) for instance, dismisses what he describes as "Aljazeera's token attention to presenting opposing views and balanced opinions" (2001: 1-3). He argues that with Aljazeera "it is occasional interviews with Western statesmen which are designed to provide it a fig leaf of objectivity." (Ibid: 1-3). Consequently, Chafets considers the station to be "the most potent weapon in the Islamic arsenal" (Ibid: 1-4). He goes on to describe the station as "an Islamist's propaganda machine that aims to spread hate against the US, Israel and the West in general by steering Arab feelings and amplifying them" (Ibid: 1-4). He writes that "Aljazeera is the great enabler of Arab hatred and self-deception. It propagates the views of Osama Bin Laden, It cheerleads for Palestinian suicide bombers, and it has become Saddam's voice" (Ibid: 3). Commenting on the station's exclusive coverage of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, he added that "...even a legitimate news organization shouldn't have monopoly coverage of a war; but Aljazeera is far from legitimate" (Ibid: 4). Aljazeera, according to Chafets, is

...an Arab propaganda outfit controlled by the medieval government of Qatar that masquerades as a real media company, for years it has inflamed the Arab world against the United States and its allies and its occasional interviews with Western statesmen, such as Secretary of State Powell, are designed to provide it with a fig leaf of objectivity.

(Ibid: 4).

Ajami (2001) goes further, claiming that the station is controlled by Islamic fundamentalists. He explains that Aljazeera reporters see themselves as 'anti-imperialists' (2001: 1). He argues that "...these men and women are convinced that the rulers of the Arab world have given in to

American might, these are broadcasters who play to an Arab gallery whose political bitterness they share and feed” (Ibid: 1). Ajami also accuses Aljazeera of inciting Arab radicalism and fuelling Arab and Muslim anger against the U.S. He claims that the station incites demonstrations and ignites the anger of fundamentalists, which can lead to more violence against Americans. Ajami (2001) uses the term “fans the flames of Muslim outrage.” He writes that:

...compared with other Arab media outlets, Aljazeera may be more independent -- but it is also more inflammatory, for the dark side of the pan-Arab worldview is an aggressive mix of anti-Americanism and anti-Zionism, and these hostilities drive the station's coverage, whether it is reporting on the upheaval in the West Bank or on the American raids on Kandahar

(Ajami, 2001: 2).

### **Aljazeera expresses Arab anger at the West:**

In the same vein, Khashoggi (2002) argues that Aljazeera is being led by the masses rather than leading them. He suggests that Aljazeera staff and editorial management “know the taste of the Arab street, and the Arab street is anti-American and anti-Israel” (cf. Lynch, 2006: 46). The newly outlined Aljazeera mission statement states clearly that “Aljazeera is an Arab broadcasting station presenting news from an Arab perspective” (cf. Qusaibaty, 2006: 113). On the other hand, Kessler (2012), Lynch (2006), Zayani (2005) and Tatham (2006) see the popularity of the station as expressing a sense of frustration with the biases of Western media in general, and American outlets in particular. Zayani (2005) states that the station represents a challenge to Western media, as it did for the first time in history break the Westward flow of information. Even if the images on Aljazeera may be far more expressive of the Palestinian 'Intifada' and the situation in Iraq or Afghanistan than those presented on Western media, many Arab viewers see Aljazeera as a viable alternative, offering coverage of the Middle East that hasn't been distorted by American news media.

### **Aljazeera as anti-establishment:**

Aljazeera has also been seen as an anti-establishment, anti-hegemony force in the Arab world and beyond. Al-Shahri (2012), Iskandar (2006), Seib (2008), Painter (2008) and Soueif (2001), amongst others, have argued that the station from its inception was an anti-establishment institution that aimed to challenge the establishment norms and concepts, whether political, economic or social. To this end, Soueif (2001) notes that “Aljazeera's challenge to perceived conventions and understandings in the Arab world has been nothing short of revolutionary” (Soueif, 2001: 3). Al-Shahri (2012) agrees with Soueif's assertion, arguing that since its foundation Aljazeera has played a crucial role in instigating and reinforcing the demise of taboos and conventions in the Arab world, as well as the current changes and revolutions sweeping the Arab world (Al-Shahri, 2012: 34). Painter (2008) acknowledges the role played by Aljazeera in challenging established conventions in the Arab world and in providing an alternative to hegemonic forces. He concluded that there is strong evidence that, in comparison with BBCW and CNNI, Aljazeera has more coverage of stories

from developing countries, and significantly less from Europe and the US, and that the station seeks reaction to international stories from developing countries rather than from the Western world (Painter, 2008).

### **Aljazeera: pro-democracy and pro-freedom**

The second model credits Aljazeera with creating a revolution not only in the Arab world but globally. To a certain extent, the station is the voice of the people and the platform through which they express their ideas, feelings, hopes and aspirations. Advocates of this model suggest that the station challenged current values and practices and led to change that was unthinkable before its establishment (Al-Sadi, 2012: 1-9). Lynch (2006) agrees with Sakr's analysis, stating that Aljazeera “ushered in a new kind of open, contentious public politics in which a number of competing voices competed for attention” (Lynch, 2006: 2). He argues that the new television stations, along with newspapers, internet sites, and many other channels of communication, encouraged Arabs to argue, to disagree, and to question their current situation. This argument suggests, at least on the face of it, that stations like Aljazeera might have helped create what Lynch calls “a new kind of Arab public” and a “new kind of Arab politics” (Lynch 2006: 2-3).

Qusaibaty (2006) takes a more positive view of the impact of Aljazeera, arguing that its editorial policy has helped the creation of a new public space for dialogue, and an alternative to other media organizations, such as the BBC, CNN and other Arab government-owned or semi-controlled channels in the region (Qusaibaty, 2006: 13). Lamloom (2004) also suggests that the station creates a space that allows for the growth of an alternative political culture in the Arab world. It shows the diversity of the Arab world in political, social and economic terms (Lamloom, 2004). Loory (2006) went further, arguing that democracy can be enhanced and the free flow of information encouraged, not only by fighting those who want to stifle a free press in their own countries, but also by guaranteeing access to news channels by organizations such as Aljazeera. He also accepts that such channels, like Aljazeera, would have their own different and distinct characters (Loory, 2006: 44).

Within the Arab world, Soueif (2001) argues that ‘Aljazeera has rendered censorship of news and opinion pointless. For us outside, it provides the one window through which we can breathe’ (Soueif, 2001: 5).

### **Aljazeera and journalistic professionalism:**

Valeriani (2008), Mazhar (2007), Lynch (2006) and Al-Mikhlafi (2006), and others, argue that Aljazeera has had a deep impact on journalistic practices in the Arab world, as it has set the ceiling of coverage and inspired journalists who aspire for the highest level of journalistic independence, and objective and balanced reporting of events and various issues. Al-Theidi (2003) argued that “Aljazeera has actively been successful in encouraging freedom of expression in the Arab world and brought a collective Arab public opinion into being” (Al-Theidi, 2003: 16).



The station's effect on Arab broadcasting has also stimulated governments in the region and beyond to set up alternative channels to compete directly with it. The Saudi-backed media group MBC set up Al-Arabiya, the United States government established Al-Hurra (the free), Russia launched its own Arabic news service (Russia Today), and even the BBC set up a rival Arabic service channel (Zayani, 2005: 1-6). From 1997 to 2007, many observers in the Middle East such as Al-Jaber (2004), Alhassan (2004), and Gafila (2011), termed it the 'Aljazeera era'. Lynch (2006) notes that Aljazeera, unlike earlier satellite stations, concentrated on politics and open debate and quickly assumed a dominant, near monopoly position within Arab public discourse. It was the one station that virtually everyone watched (Lynch, 2006: 22-23). This has led El-Nawawy and Iskandar (2003) to use the term 'contextual objectivity' in describing the nature of Aljazeera's journalism (El-Nawawy and Iskandar, 2003: 54).

### **Aljazeera and satellite democracy:**

Zayani (2005), Al-Hail (2004) and Miles (2005) add that to treat Arab media as the fourth estate and to say that television leads to political changes is to look at the issue from a narrow perspective. They contend that the perception of freedom enjoyed by media such as Aljazeera gives the impression that there is real democracy in the region, which is an impression which delays real democratic processes and changes. Miladi (2013), Lynch (2006), El-Nawawy and Iskandar (2003) and El-Nawawy (2010), are amongst those who disagree with such a notion, arguing instead that the margin of freedom enjoyed by Aljazeera, and others like it, would serve to hasten democratic change.

In the same vein, Ghareeb (2000: 57) noted that, 'since its inception, Aljazeera has been viewed as promoting debates on human rights and democracy, exposing political corruption, and to a large extent has 'raised the ceiling of political and social debate throughout the Arab world', Hence, Mahroum (2011) puts forward the idea that Aljazeera was one of the most important factors that led to the success of the Arab revolution in Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya. He argues that the station turned from a pure media outlet, carrying various opinions, into a force for change, and that it campaigned directly for democratic change. Aljazeera, he suggests, claims that its code of ethics makes it imperative for it to support human rights, democratic values, and freedom of speech (Seib, 2008; Miles, 2005). Alterman (2003) and El-Nawawy and Iskandar (2003) agree, stating that Aljazeera's code of ethics supports the idea that the station's aim is to play a positive role in moderating the attitude of the Arab street, supporting the values of democracy, respect for human rights, and freedom.

Hafez (2004) went further, arguing that the station has become a kind of de facto political party, in light of the absence of a well-established democratic political system, though he was writing before the Arab spring. He writes "Aljazeera has been considered as one of the most important 'Arab political parties'" (Hafez, 2004: 12-14). He goes on to say that since most Arab countries:

have not yet established functioning democracies, relevant institutions, such as political parties and a parliamentary opposition, are still non-existent or useless in their

functions. To many observers, Arab satellite television seems to have the potential to take over part of their designated role. As a voice of Arab peoples and 'the common man,' Arab satellite broadcasting seems able to mediate between the state and society.

(Hafez, 2004: 12-14)

### **Aljazeera: a propaganda tool for Qatar?**

The advocates of the third model claim that Aljazeera is a tool serving the national interests of the state of Qatar. Al-Sadi (2012), after conducting a contextual analysis of three of Aljazeera's most popular programs, 'the opposite direction', 'more than one opinion', and 'without bounds', concluded that Aljazeera's anti-establishment discourse is far from being an expression of a real, liberated, anti-establishment political rhetoric, that runs contrary to policies and political objectives and aims of the Qatari state. Rather, the discourse is an expression of a rhetorical strategy that allows Aljazeera to increase Qatari influence, and help boost Qatari interests in the region and beyond, on three fronts.

First, he superficially agrees with the audience's radicalism, whether it is anti-West, anti-Israel, or indeed anti-America, or anti-dictatorship in sentiment.

Second, he argues that the station aims to water down the radical ideologies of nationalism and jihadist Islamism, or any other radical program of action that they may inspire, by presenting views that are contrary in substance and rigour to these two most popular ideologies (i.e., pan-Arabism nationalism, and jihadist Islamism).

Third, he argues that the station directs audiences away from what are presented as 'radical ideologies outlined earlier', toward alternative notions and ideology, with a set of policies that is in line with the strategic and national interest of Qatar. Al-Sadi (2012) identifies this new policy and strategy with a new model of an Arab state, which Qatar represents and aims toward. It is a vision of a state that aspires to democratic values, and to be a self-reforming state that meets much of the expectations of the Arab masses and could, thus, replace both radical Arab regimes such as Syria and Iraq, and unpopular, moderate, pro-Western Arab regimes such as Jordan, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Thus, Aljazeera is a tool to reshape and reform Arab authoritarian regimes, instead of challenging them (Al-Sadi, 2012: 7-9).

### **Aljazeera as an instrument for Qatar's soft power:**

Souag (2012: 2), Managing Director of Aljazeera media network, argues plays a key role apart of Qatar's soft power strategy. He explains that

...in the media age it is all about soft power and if you are a small country like Qatar you want to be successful and drive through your policies and strategy in the region, you don't need warships or airplanes; you need soft power and that done through the media, science and culture.

He affirms that “I believe that the Emir was aware of this and I believe that's a great vision” (Souag, 2012: 3). Al-Tamimi (2012) agrees. He argues that Aljazeera has been instrumental “not only in serving the country’s foreign diplomacy, but also in designing and implementing these policies directly or indirectly” (Al-Tamimi, 2012: 84). Al-Tamimi (2012), however, goes further. He adds that Aljazeera had a direct and overwhelming influence on Qatari internal affairs, as “it helped to quicken the pace of change politically, economically and culturally” (Al-Tamimi, 2012: 83). In this Al-Tamimi (2012) is in total agreement with Hroub (2013), who suggested that Aljazeera, while instigating major changes across the Arab world within the framework of a Qatari vision, instigated the biggest changes to Qatari society and Qatari politics.

To come back to the main idea of Aljazeera as a tool of Qatari policy, Fandy (2007) argues that “even if not all Arab media are formally state owned, the state retains strict control over them. The media in the Arab world are therefore instruments of the regimes that fund them” (Fandy, 2007: 8-9). He also suggests that Aljazeera reports on other Arab states, which widely exposed certain regimes while praising others, and conceals the problems of Qatar, or seems willingly to forget about them. For example, while the station reported extensively on Saudi Princes being implicated in the bribery scandal surrounding British arms company BAE Systems, it ignored similar investigations implicating Qatar’s Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Hamad Bin Jassim Bin Jabr Al-Thani (Fandy, 2007: 9).

Sheriff (2012) argues that Qatar's popularity consequently seems to be on the rise, especially since the Arab Spring, as the country is perceived as being on the side of the Arab masses, and as doing something tangible to help them to achieve their goals. On the other hand, there are those in states like Syria, Tunisia and Libya who resent what they see as Qatar’s meddling in their internal affairs for the past few years, and, especially since the beginning of the Arab Spring, Qatar has perfected the art of 'punching above its weight' in regional and international affairs. The state uses its vast wealth and its media outlet, Aljazeera, to project soft power. Sheriff (2012) argues, however, that it is with the onset of the Arab Spring that Doha truly seems to have made major inroads into the region. He explains that it used Aljazeera directly in the Arab Spring, like Libya, Syria, Egypt and others, to advance its policy of change (Ibid.: 5).

Abdullah (2011) also acknowledges that in Qatar's rapid ascent in the region, there is no denying the central role played by the Aljazeera TV station, especially the Arabic version, which has become extremely popular amongst the Arab masses. He argues strongly that Qatar used Aljazeera as a tool to promote its agenda, and notes that Aljazeera:

...is a tool, and a very effective tool in Qatar's foreign policy. And there's nothing wrong with that. I think the BBC is a tool of British foreign policy, and CNN of American foreign policy and so on. Yes, Aljazeera is part of Qatar's soft power. And like any modern state, it is exercising it.

(Abdullah, 2011: 14)

Al Ezzi (2011) concurs pointing out that “As for the use of Aljazeera as a tool, this is a reality we see every day. But the station attained its present status well before the Arab revolts began; it was not only as a result of these revolutions” (Al Ezzi, 2011: 7).

Sheriff (2012: 71) goes further. He argues that “Qatar through Aljazeera has managed to become a major peace broker in the region”. He cites the example of the role it played in the Darfur, Lebanon, and inter-Palestinian peace talks (Sheriff, 2012: 71). Atrache (2010) gives the example of how Qatar, through Aljazeera, managed to increase its influence from virtually nothing to becoming a very important player within the space of a few years. She argues that in Lebanon, Qatar was able to develop and preserve very good relations with both the March 14 (political wing against the Shiite Hezbollah), and the March 8 (rival Shiite wing) coalitions, using Aljazeera and its huge financial clout in funding South Lebanon's reconstruction after the 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah (Atrache, 2010). She further explains that:

Qatar managed to attain this level of influence and emerges as the most dynamic Arab state in the Arab Spring because unlike the US, Saudi Arabia, Egypt under [Hosni] Mubarak, Syria or Iran, Qatar did not try to take sides or fall into the regional divisions.

(Atrache, 2010: 43-54)

In the following chapter, I will therefore examine and critically evaluate the claim that Aljazeera is an anti-West, anti-American, pro-Arabism and political Islam channel, in a detailed and systematic manner. I will also outline the strengths and weaknesses of the arguments advanced in this chapter.

## Chapter 4

### **Aljazeera: A Force for Arabism and Political Islam?**

In the previous chapter I examined in general terms the various models and approaches to Aljazeera's journalistic practices, and different media theories and their relevance to this study. In this chapter, I will critically analyse one of the media models applied to Aljazeera, namely Aljazeera as a force for Arabism and political Islam.

#### **Aljazeera, pan-Arabism and political Islam:**

Aljazeera has been described as encouraging Arab nationalism across the Middle East, and advancing an agenda that aims to combine political Islam and nationalist revival (Zakaria, 2004; Al-Zaidi, 2003; Khashoggi, 2002; Al-Ali, 2002; Cherribi, 2006; inter alia). It does this by encouraging anti-American and anti-Israel sentiments in order to unify Arabs and Muslims against a common enemy (Kessler, 2012; Hijjiwi, 2011; Chafets, 2001, 2002; Ajami, 2001; Abuzalma and Jarboua, 2002; Cherribi, 2006; inter alia). At first it would seem contradictory to encourage two ideologies which historically have been bitter foes in the Arab and Muslim worlds. For decades each of these ideologies tried to outdo the other in the most extreme of ways. Images of the struggle that occurred between Egypt's Nasser in the 1960s and 1970s and the Muslim Brotherhood movement are still vivid in many people's memories (Rayyis, 1987; Alewe, 2000; Dawisha, 2003; Azzam, 2005; inter alia).

Dawisha (2003) defines Arabism as "Arab cultural uniformity, combined with a strong desire for political unity in a specified demarcated territory" (Dawisha, 2003: 13). Dawisha (2003) also argues that Arabism started as a revolt against the Ottoman Empire, which ruled much of the Arab and Muslim world in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Alewe (2000), however, argues that the work of Muslim scholars such as Jamal Adeen Al-Afghani (1839-1897) planted the seeds that led to the rise of modern Arabism. He suggests that "Al-Afghani called for Muslim unification and for the Arabs to be centre stage in this process" (Alewe, 2000: 24-25). Likewise, he argues that the Egyptian scholar Mohamed Abdou (1849-1905) "enriched the ideas of Al-Afghani and elaborated on it, calling for the revival of Arab history and literature and the study of Arabic language" (Alewe, 2000: 26). These ideas were later used by Arab thinkers such as Nasif Alyaziji (1800-1871), Boutrous Al-Boustani (1819-1883), Ibrahim Alyaziji (1848-1906) and Sateh Alhusari (1879-1968), who combined Arab and Western cultures in their elaborate development of Arab nationalism. Hence, Alewe (2000) argued that because of the threats that many Arab countries faced from Western powers, "Islamic religion in Egypt during these times (late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century) and much of the Arab world was synonymous for Arabism, not in a racial sense, but rather in a cultural one"(Alewe, 2000: 141).

Aljazeera came into existence in circumstances similar to those that threatened Arab countries in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Iraq was the leading Arab country advocating Arab nationalism, while organisations such as Al Qaeda were calling on Arabs and Muslims to unite and overthrow their dictators (Dabashi, 2012; El-Baghdadi, 2007; Lynch, 2006; Miles, 2005; inter alia). Therefore, since its inception in November 1996, Aljazeera has been

regarded with suspicion, and been subject to constant criticism not only from within the Arab world, but also from various Western analysts and commentators (Sakr, 2001; El-Nawawy and Iskander, 2003; Al-Jaber, 2004; Miles, 2005; inter alia). This criticism peaked during the invasions of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003, as well as during the subsequent 'War on Terror.' The station faced various accusations ranging from being a "mouth-piece for terrorism" to a "friend of terrorists" to "Bin Laden's favourite station" (Abuzalma and Jarboua, 2002: 66-67). Other accusations against the station included "stirring hate" and "conspiring with terrorists" (Al-Zaidi, 2003: 12). Commentators and analysts who looked at Aljazeera's development and the way it covered issues such as 'terrorism,' 'Arabism' and 'political Islam' thought the station did not apply the values of objectivity, professionalism, neutrality and balance that it claimed to stand for through its motto 'the opinion and other opinion' (Abuzalma and Jarboua, 2002: 23).

This raises the question of whether or not the station advocates Arabism and political Islam. Additionally, there is the question of how it applies its founding motto, 'the opinion and other opinion'. Does the station galvanise support for its pro-Arabism, pro-political Islam agenda by encouraging anti-American, and anti-Israel and/or anti-Western sentiments? In the next section I will examine these questions.

### **Aljazeera; anti-America, anti-Israel and anti-West**

Matin Indyk, a leading Middle East policy-maker and a former US ambassador to Israel during the Clinton years, acknowledges that while Aljazeera may have possibly opened the airwaves to a variety of viewers and ideas in the Arab world and beyond, the majority of these were extreme in their anti-American and anti-Semitic sentiments. Consequently, he argues that there is no point in attempting to win the hearts and minds of the Arab world, because Arab leaders through the use of media outlets like Aljazeera find it beneficial to deflect hostility outward (Lynch, 2006).

Hoffman (2003) agrees with Indyk. He describes Arab news, particularly Aljazeera, as "anti-American and he calls for Arab states to rein in this kind of hate propaganda" (cf. Lynch, 2006; 20). Likewise, Zakaria (2004) claims that Aljazeera "...fills its screen with appeals to Arab nationalism with slogans and calls that lead to inflaming anti-American and anti-Semitic feelings. He also suggests the station goes out of its way to appeal to religious fundamentalism" (Zakaria, 2004: 3). Lynch (2006) has also noted that many Americans regard Aljazeera and the new media "as fundamentally hostile force generating anti-Americanism and complicating foreign policy objectives in Iraq, Israel, and the war on terror" (Lynch, 2006: 6).

Fandy (2007) traces the roots of anti-Americanism to the ideas of Arab nationalists and Islamic fundamentalists that developed as a result of US policy in the region. He notes that:

the particular brand of anti-Americanism we see is the result of actions by the American administration that earned the animosity of Arab nationalists, the radical Islamists and the ruling elite all at the same time. By attacking Iraq and undermining the Ba'ath

regime of Saddam Hussein, America angered Arab nationalists. By attacking the Taliban and Bin Laden, the administration angered the Islamists.

(Fandy, 2007: 89)

These feelings, he argues, are reflected within Arab media organisations such as Aljazeera. He argues that "...the people who operate these outlets are interested in stories that carry an anti-American rhetoric; American occupation of Iraq, the U.S.-backed Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories, along with the discourse of angry Islamists groups" (Ibid: 90). This, according to Fandy (2007), is not because of a lack of understanding of American or Western culture; since most of the famous Aljazeera producers of these anti-American or anti-Western shows "...are Western nationals...and have close cultural proximity to Western society" (Ibid: 90). He argues that "Arab journalists living on the border-line between the Arab world and the West have reacted to their experience in the West by turning against it" (Ibid: 91). Fandy (2007) argues that this is not too dissimilar to the experience of the godfather of modern political Islam, Said Kutub, who knew American and Western cultures very well yet rejected them outright (Ibid: 89-94). As stated by Miles (2005), when Aljazeera was set up the majority of its editorial as well as technical staff came from the failed BBC Arabic television service in London.

Aljazeera's claim of objectivity and balance, expressed through the application of its motto 'the opinion and other opinion,' is also dismissed by Chafets (2001). He describes the station's attempt to apply it as "superficial" (Chafets, 2001: 1-2). Consequently, Chafets considers the station to be "...the most potent weapon in the Islamic arsenal" (Chafets, 2001: 1-4). He goes on to describe the station as "...an Islamist's propaganda machine that aims to spread hate against the US, Israel and the West in general by steering Arab feelings and amplifying them"(Ibid: 1-4). He writes that "Aljazeera is the great enabler of Arab hatred and self-deception. It propagates the views of Osama Bin Laden, it cheerleads for Palestinian suicide bombers, and it has become Saddam's voice" (Ibid: 3).

Ajami (2001) goes further in his claims about Aljazeera. He asserts that it is controlled by Islamic fundamentalists: "Aljazeera reporters see themselves as anti-imperialists. These men and women are convinced that the rulers of the Arab world have given in to American might, these are broadcasters who play to an Arab gallery whose political bitterness they share - and feed" (Ibid: 1). For Ajami, Aljazeera is inciting Arab radicalism and fuelling Arab and Muslim anger against the US, and he states that it "...fans the flames of Muslim outrage" (Ibid: 3). Lamoum (2004) supports these ideas and argues that Aljazeera has become known for the anti-West ideologies that supposedly are widespread in the Arab world. She notes that it is "the channel which advocates all of the 'isms' which supposedly plague the Arab world, 'Islamism', 'populism', 'anti-Semitism' and so on" (Lamoum, 2004: 12).

In trying to explain why Aljazeera reports events in this manner, prominent Saudi writer Khashoggi (2002) argues that Aljazeera is being led by the masses rather than leading them. He suggests that Aljazeera's staff and editorial management "...know the taste of the Arab street, and the Arab street is anti-American" (Khashoggi, 2002: 46). Khanfar (2011), the

former DG of Aljazeera, counters Khashoggi's accusation that the station is populist, stating “we are an Arab television providing news from an Arab perspective” (2011: 3).

Along the same lines, Kessler (2012), Lynch (2006), Zayani (2005) and Tatham (2006) see the popularity of the station as reflecting a sense of frustration with the bias of Western media in general. Zayani (2005) states that the station represents a challenge to Western media, as for the first time in history it broke the Western flow of information. Even if the images on Aljazeera may be far more expressive of the Palestinian 'Intifada' and the situation in Iraq or Afghanistan than the version presented on Western media, many Arab viewers see Aljazeera as a viable alternative, offering coverage of the Middle East that hasn't been distorted by the American news media. Robert Fisk, a British journalist agrees, arguing that:

...it would be unfair to compare Aljazeera to the American media partly because the latter much like the society they serve, have their own specific nature. Certainly, the American media are more seasoned and more sophisticated and Aljazeera has a lot to learn from the American media experience. Indeed, as I have seen from my own experience the new look adopted by Aljazeera around the year 2005 looks much like the CNN Model.

(cf. Zayani, 2005: 29)

### **Pan-Arabism, Pan-Political Islam from a Qatari perspective:**

Aljazeera's adoption of a pan-Arab, pan-political Islam agenda has been strongly linked to its co-founder and sponsor, Qatar, within the framework of its struggle with its powerful neighbour, Saudi Arabia (Fandy, 2007). Although both countries adhere to the Wahabi, Salafi strand of Islam, Qatar's late ruler, Cheick Hamad Ben Khalifa Al-Thani, after he deposed his father and after Saudi Arabia is alleged to have attempted to support the deposed Emir, wanted to adopt a version of Islam that is more in line with the Muslim Brotherhood. Hence, he extended his welcome to one of the most prominent scholars of the Muslim Brotherhood, Cheick Youssef Al Qardawi, and offered him his own show, 'Al-Sharia and Life' or 'Islamic law and life', and opened the doors of his country and of Aljazeera to opponents of Al-Saud, the Saudi ruling family (Kamrava, 2013; Fandy, 2007, Cherribi, 2006; inter alia).

Hence, Aljazeera's relationship with and adoption of a pan-Arab, pan-political Islam agenda started in earnest, and Cherribi (2006); Fandy (2007); Rinnawi (2006); and others, argue that it was a strategy adopted by Qatar's Emir. Cherribi (2006) examined Aljazeera's coverage of France's banning of the Islamic veil between the years of 2002 and 2005. Using both qualitative and quantitative methods, he examined 282 current affairs stories and programs during these years. He argued that the station was also running advertising campaigns for the veil in between its programs, as well as that some of its most famous anchorwomen decided to wear the Islamic veil, and present the news and other shows with their hair fully veiled. Cherribi (2006) notes “...the tendency to wear the veil on some Arab channels is increasing...moreover, 95 per cent of schools of journalism are veiled” (Cherribi, 2006: 131).



According to Cherribi (2006), in light of its handling of the veil issue, and in light of the presence of a weekly show that deals directly with religious issues and has as a regular guest one of the most prominent political and spiritual leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood movement, Aljazeera is wholeheartedly pro-Arabism and political Islam. As for the station's claim of objectivity, impartiality, and balance, Cherribi (2006) notes that:

the patriotic and energetic on Aljazeera resemble Fox news, and the coverage is laden with opinion, but the similarities stop there. Unlike Aljazeera, the Fox Anchorwomen is not displaying her religious preferences with a cross or a veil, and the leading Fox current affairs program is not featuring a leading religious leader who directs 10 Million religious viewers on how to interpret religious laws, and who is often called upon as a religious authority to speak on world affairs on the daily evening news as in the case of Paris riots in 2005.

(Ibid: 133)

In the case of Aljazeera, Cherribi argues that many regard Aljazeera as pluralistic, adopting a free-media agenda within an Arab and Islamic context. He disagrees with this and notes that:

Aljazeera may on the surface, look as if it offers pluralism with its variety of programs and opinions. In the case of the veil, however, there is only one perspective, and Islamic perspective that is to encourage women to wear the veil. Every aspect of the coverage of the veil is framed to encourage the production and reproduction of this way of thinking.

(Ibid: 134)

Thus, Aljazeera is the Islamic version of the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN), because of the time it devotes to the views of Islamic religious leaders, and its promotion of Islamic practices and values as a way of life that needs to be adopted and applied. In other words, it is a channel that adopts and promotes political Islam with a distinctive Arab flavour, whether in dress, behaviour, or system of governance and politics (Cherribi, 2006).

Fandy (2007) partially agrees with Cherribi (2006). He, (Fandy, 2007) conducted a comparative analysis between Aljazeera and its close rival in the Arab world, Al-Arabiya, and found that the opinion that Aljazeera is a pluralistic source of free, unbiased news, objective, balanced and neutral, is far from the truth. While its rival Al-Arabiya is clear in its adoption of a pro-Saudi line (it is owned by a member of the Al-Saud family), Fandy pays close attention to Aljazeera on three main fronts. The first is the station's relationship with its owner, the state of Qatar, while the second is its relationship with and adoption of a pro-political Islam agenda that is contrary to its rival in the region, Saudi Arabia, i.e., the adoption of a moderate strand of Islam (Muslim Brotherhood), versus the Saudi ultra-orthodox interpretation of Islam (Wahabi Strand of Islam). Thirdly, he looks at the station's employees and their own personal convictions and affiliations (mostly to either political Islam or Arab nationalism), which he argues had a pivotal role in determining the station's outlook and coverage of various events (Fandy, 2007). As for the first, Fandy (2007) argues that the

station is controlled by the Emir of Qatar by various means. It is controlled in terms of appointments to senior positions, whether that means the Chairman of the board, the board members, or indeed the Managing Director of the station. It is also controlled directly by the Emir in terms of ownership and financing, as Aljazeera's budget (which remains unknown at the time of writing) comes directly from Qatar's Ministry of Finance and is managed jointly by Qatar's Foreign Ministry and the Diwan (the Emir's palace).

Another mechanism through which the Emir of Qatar retains overall control of the station is the Chairmanship of the station, which has not changed since the station's inception, and has always been a close ally of the Emir, and a member of the Al-Thani ruling family in Qatar. Cheick Hamad Ben Thamer Al-Thani is one of the closest allies of the Emir, and besides his role as Chairman of Aljazeera network, presides also over much of public television in Qatar, thus retaining multiple roles. He is also a person who, according to Al-Tamimi (2012), Abu-Rab (2010), Fandy (2007), and Miles (2005), amongst others, has regular contact and meetings with the Emir himself, and with other influential members of the Qatari royal family.

Fandy (2007) also examines the influence that Aljazeera employees have on the station's editorial and journalistic performance. He explains that the great majority of employees in the newsroom have strong beliefs either in Arabism or in other political Islam ideologies, and these influence the way they make their editorial and news coverage decisions. Fandy's (2007) arguments are supported by various surveys of Arab journalists in general. Pintak and Ginges (2008) point out that "Arab journalists draw a clear distinction between U.S. policy and the American people, reporting an overwhelmingly unfavourable view of the United States (77 percent) and its policies (89 percent) and a strongly favourable view of the American people (62 percent)" (Pintak and Ginges, 2008: 200).

Fandy (2007) points out that these three levels interact to direct and influence Aljazeera's coverage and journalistic practices, orienting them towards a pro-Arab, pro-political Islam agenda. Fandy (2007) provides examples of what he describes as Aljazeera's biased coverage of the Gaza war in 2006, and of the Israeli attack on Lebanon in the same year, and argues that the station's coverage was far from being objective, balanced and neutral as the station used emotionally driven images of damaged civilian homes, both in Gaza and Lebanon, and opened its airwaves to Hezbollah leader Hussein Nasrallah and the Islamic movement Hamas in Gaza, to convey their messages unchallenged.

On the other hand, the brief appearances of Israeli officials were designed to provide a face-saving impression of objectivity, were short and most of the time under-represented the Israeli side, in terms of number of occurrences and time allocation. Moreover, Nisbet, et al. (2004) have argued that since the Afghanistan war (2001) and the invasion of Iraq by the US (2003), policy makers and political commentators have aimed at tackling the anti-American sentiment in the Arab world, spread by television stations such as Aljazeera, through its promotion of a pan-Arab, pan-Islam discourse. They note that there is a "consensus among American policy-makers that Aljazeera was a major contributor to anti-American sentiment" (Nisbet, et al., 2004: 12). The group of researchers reviewed and

examined a number of polls and studies on how stations such as Aljazeera, through their adoption of a pan-Arab, pan-political Islam, can influence the way the public at large views not only the United States, but the West in general. They note

‘the evidence from our analysis indicates that TV news viewing has an important influence on anti-American attitudes among Muslims, above and beyond any macro-level or socio-demographic factors. TV news coverage in the Muslim world, as is the case in the West, confronts viewers with a torrent of information, and the typical Muslim viewer is unlikely to be able to spend a great deal of time weighing, assessing, and deliberating the content of the news, arriving at carefully considered judgments about the United States and its policy actions. Instead, the extreme anti-American predispositions that are endemic to individuals living in Muslim countries are likely to channel any opinion response, with these pre-existing views of the United States serving as perceptual screens, enabling individuals to select considerations from TV news that only confirm existing anti-American attitudes.’

(Nisbet, et al. 2004: 32)

The researchers outline the power of media organisations such as Aljazeera in shaping and driving anti-American and anti-Western sentiments in the Muslim and Arab world through the advancement of pan-Arabism and political Islam ideologies, as potential unifying calls across the region. They argue that this pattern of behaviour is politically driven by the station’s sponsors. Although, as outlined by Fandy (2007) and others, such a strategy is not clearly and publicly stated, the presence of a direct link between Aljazeera Chairman, as head of the board of Aljazeera, who retained his post since the inception of the station, a member of the Al-Thani ruling family and the Emir himself, is a clear indication, among other things, of this strategy (Fandy, 2007; Abu-Rab, 2010; Al-Tamimi, 2012; inter alia). Hence, Nisbet et al. (2004) recommend a new American strategy in dealing with this phenomenon.

Aljazeera and other emerging pan-Arab television news stations are powerful communication channels within the Muslim world. A more cost-effective strategy for the American government may be to continue to employ the previously-mentioned media agenda-building strategies designed to influence pan-Arab television portrayals of the United States and its policies. Increasing the amount of positive coverage of the United States reduces the ‘space’ available within Aljazeera broadcasts for critical content and, thus, the availability of negative considerations Muslim viewers can use to reinforce or bolster pre-existing anti-American attitudes.

(Nisbet, et al. 2004: 32-33)

Ayish (2002) agrees, arguing that Aljazeera’s pan-Arab/pan-political Islam push is driven by the station owners. He suggests that examination of the station’s coverage of various issues, especially controversial ones such as the Arab-Israeli conflict, the War on Terror, and the American invasions of Afghanistan (2001) or Iraq (2003), illustrates that “objectivity in the sense of balanced reporting of conflicting views seems to be virtually non-existent” (Ayish, 2002: 150). Ayish’s (2002) content analysis of Aljazeera’s reporting of coverage of various

contentious issues found the station's coverage to be sensational and heavily skewed towards pan-Arab and pan-Islamic issues and topics, while at the same time maintaining an anti-American, anti-Western agenda.

### **Historical criticism of the model:**

The arguments advanced in many of the works that regard Aljazeera as an advocate of Arabism and political Islam have been criticised for their lack of understanding of the historical and cultural contexts within which Aljazeera was established and operates (Seib, 2008; Lynch, 2006; Miles, 2005; Zayani, 2005; El-Nawawy and Iskandar, 2003; inter alia). Miles (2005) has argued that Aljazeera went through three main stages. The first started with the establishment of the station in 1996 and continued through to 11<sup>th</sup> September, 2001. During this stage he noted that the station aimed to set up its operations and consequently introduced both new norms and journalistic practices that were novel in the Arab world. It made its airwaves available to all opposition groups in the Arab world and dealt with issues that were taboo in the region. During this stage Khanfar (2011) accepts that the station took risks and made mistakes but, he argues, its guiding principle of 'the opinion and the other opinion' was its safeguard. Miles (2005), Zayani (2005), Lynch (2006), Zayani and Sahraoui (2007) and Seib (2008), are among those who agree with Khanfar with regard to the general trend during this period, in which Arab news reporting was still in its infancy and Aljazeera was seen as a pioneer. Further, they suggest, the political and social climate in which Aljazeera came into being was dominated by two key ideologies in the region: Arabism and Islamism.

Zayani and Sahraoui (2007), who spent considerable time analysing the culture of Aljazeera, concluded that it has a clear Islamic face, but that this is not a sign that the station adopts political Islam or pan-Arab ideology. They argue that this is superficial, because some of the prominent figures on its programs, such as the Brotherhood, Islamist leader Cheick Youssef Al Qardawi, or senior staff, have such Islamist ideological tendencies, but all this has to be viewed in the historic context in which the station came into existence and continued to operate (Zayani and Sahraoui, 2007). Al-Shahri (2012) adds that claims that Aljazeera is a pan-Arab, pro-political Islam channel were at their strongest during its second stage of development, especially between the years of 2001-2005. He argues that this period saw the peak of the War on Terror and the invasion of Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003) and that anyone who dared challenge official American policies during that period was labelled as anti-American or anti-Israel, and as advocating Arab nationalism and political Islam.

Thus Ajami (2001), Khashoggi (2002), Zakaria (2004), Al-Zaidi (2003), Cherribi (2006) and Fandy (2007), amongst others, could be seen as prejudicial and biased in their comments and remarks about Aljazeera. For instance, criticism of Aljazeera in Ajami (2001), Khashoggi (2002), and Zakaria (2004), is based on personal observations, and lacks any empirical evidence or data-set based on a clear methodology. They also fail to account for what Hallin and Mancini (2010) regard as the elements that shape any media model; the social, political and economic system in which it is set up and operates. On the other hand, critics of authors such as Cherribi (2006) and Fandy (2006) accuse them of having an 'anti-political Islam

agenda' (Khanfar, 2010, 2012; Miladi, 2013; O'Rourke 2012; inter alia). It is also worth noting the clear overlap between many of the scholarly works advocating this model and other works that regarded Aljazeera either as pro-democracy and freedom, or as an agent of Qatar, serving its interests. For instance, Nisbet, et al. (2004), Alhassan (2004), Fandy (2007), Anzawa (2011), Al-Sadi (2012), and others, advocate both that Aljazeera is an advocate of pan Arabism/political Islam, anti-American and the West, and that at the same time the station made considerable strides in pushing media boundaries in an area dominated by press censorship and restrictions. In the same vein, Al-Zaidi, (2003); Alhassan (2004); Fandy (2007); Al-Sadi (2012); and others, regard the station as serving the interests of Qatar. This clear overlap is especially apparent between regarding Aljazeera as a promoter of pan-Arabism/political Islam and as serving the interests of Qatar.

Other critics of this model point out one of the main overlaps between these works. They argue that the advocates of this model have inherent political and ideological biases which not only view Aljazeera through Western eyes, but also with an anti-Arab, anti-Muslim, right-wing agenda (e.g., Bishara, 2009; El-Baghdadi, 2007; Atwan, 2008). The proponents of this model dare not see or accept the existence of an Arab media organization that is breaking the Western monopoly on media and information flow. This, they suggest, would be too much to bear, especially when it touches on sensitive issues such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, or presents the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq differently from Western media organizations. Sakr (2001) argues that the problem with many of the arguments advanced by the pan-Arab, pan-political Islam model amplify the misconceptions about media effects theories, and the idea that viewers are vulnerable to propaganda whether or not its content fits with their lifetime's accumulation of experience, knowledge and beliefs. Her argument is supported by Al-khazendar and Ali (2013); Hijjawi (2011); and Boyd Barret and Xie (2008); amongst others, who suggest that the success of Aljazeera has been too much to bear in the West.

### **Empirical Criticism:**

The model that regards Aljazeera as an advocate of Arabism and political Islam can also be criticised empirically. A number of studies have looked at Aljazeera's coverage of the Iraq war of 2003. Awwad (2005) examined three Aljazeera programs ('For Women Only,' 'Without Bound' and 'Opposite Direction'), and found no evidence that the station advances a pan-Arab and pro-political Islam agenda. The study argued, however, that the station offers audiences across the Arab world an oppositional discourse that does not lead to challenging the hegemony of Western media discourse. This, according to Awwad (2005), challenges many of the arguments of the scholarly works which advocate this model. Awwad's analysis, although limited in sample and method, serves as a useful tool in this respect. Similarly, Al-Jaber (2004) looked at the credibility of Aljazeera among Arab audiences in the US. He found that "...respondents who viewed Aljazeera tended to perceive it as a credible source of information and balanced news"(Al-Jaber, 2004: 93). Furthermore, Telhami (2004) has argued that statistical evidence refutes the idea of Aljazeera as an advocate of Arabism and political Islam. He conducted a survey in five Arab countries and found that the deep, personal preoccupation for many ordinary Arabs with the treatment of Palestinians had nothing to do with Aljazeera. His study showed greater concern for Palestinians among those

who do not watch Aljazeera than among those who do. He concluded that anti-American or anti-Israel sentiments did not result from watching Aljazeera. In other words, anti-American, anti-Western, pro-Arabism, and pro-political Islam feelings are not the result of Aljazeera's coverage of issues. In the same vein, Iskandar (2003) does not see any evidence to support the notion of an intentional drive by Aljazeera to advance any particular ideology in the Arab world. He notes that:

Aljazeera doesn't appear to align itself with any social movement directly. Conversely, there are no definitive signs of an ongoing, coherent, and cohesive relationship between Aljazeera and any one issue, ideology, or group in the Arab world or beyond...Aljazeera, in fact, does not appear to have internalised or adopted the ideologies of any specific social movement in its coverage.

(Iskandar, 2003: 2)

Furthermore, Soueif (2001) argues that most scholars, observers and other parties (Arab or foreign) who advance this view were unsympathetic to the Palestinian Second Intifada of 2000, zealously supported and advocated the 2003 invasion of Iraq and, more recently, took either a sceptical or overtly hostile stance towards the current Arab revolutions and uprisings. In contrast, other Arab or foreign scholars and commentators such as Tatham (2006), Al-Jaber (2004), Seib (2008), Rinnawi (2006), Miladi (2013) and McPhail (2010), who took the opposite stance on the same issues, praised Aljazeera's professionalism and its use of Western journalistic values and practices, which many Western media outlets have abandoned in their coverage, especially during times of war and conflict.

### **Conceptual criticism:**

Another element that casts doubt on this model is the exclusion of a key element in the culture of Arab political communication, namely the calculated ambiguity of Arab political discourse, regardless of the political identity of the speaker (Abdul-Raof, 2006). Abdul-Raof (2006) argues that pro-establishment figures inject a degree of ambiguity into their discourse in order to bridge the gap between an unpopular political establishment and the disenfranchised population. He adds that anti-establishment speakers, on the other hand, use the same tactic to avoid prosecution, or even persecution, by their tyrannical regimes. Thus, in the context of political communication, to read Aljazeera's discourses literally is, generally speaking, to misread them. Therefore, as argued by the advocates of this model, Aljazeera promotes anti-American, anti-Israel, anti-establishment and counter-hegemonic sentiments, while at the same time providing audiences with alternatives in the form of Arabism and political Islam. Azran (2010) argues that:

the arrival of Aljazeera into the global news scene in the wake of September 11 and its ability to challenge Western news domination in terms of values and scope is nothing short of revolution in the global information order...the global spread of Aljazeera reports has gradually been eroding Western dominance and promoting a counter hegemonic news perspective among audiences worldwide on a variety of platforms.

(Azran, 2010: 18)

In the same vein, Iskandar (2003) sees this as speculative, as outlined earlier; simply because Aljazeera may show pro-political Islam messages or take a pro-Arabism position, does not necessarily mean that it associates itself with any of these ideologies. Thus, Aljazeera is regarded as an alternative to the mainstream media in the Arab world or in the West (Iskandar, 2003: 3). Iskandar (2003), however, does not think that Aljazeera fits within the definition of alternative media, because of its nature. He notes that:

alternative media are democratic in terms of access and political aims, distancing themselves from the 'elitist professional' ideals of the mainstream press. This characteristic of alternative media cannot be met by Aljazeera, as the station functions much the same way as most mainstream institutions function -- it is a non-collective media enterprise...Aljazeera is in fact structurally on-par with its Western mainstream counterparts in terms of organization and planning. The station's operations are no more collective than network television stations in the US. In fact, Aljazeera's reporters and editors have years of experience in the industry. They possess extensive training from some of the world's leading news agencies. Therefore, the image of an amateur staff operating an alternative medium is not applicable to Aljazeera...Aljazeera is owned by an undemocratic, autocratic state.

(Ibid: 3)

Iskandar (2003) sees Aljazeera's counter-hegemonic approach and news agenda as one of the key distinctions of its being alternative media. He argues that it falls short and could in no way be considered as counter-hegemonic or anti-establishment, as the advocates of this model claim. This notion is what defines alternative media and sets them apart from mainstream media. He notes that "...alternative media could be defined distinctly as those that provide representations of issues and events that are in opposition to the portrayals of the same issues and events in the mainstream media" (Ibid: 4). Consequently, Iskandar (2003) concludes that "Aljazeera is instead situated in the mainstream media realm... because it does not represent a movement of any kind. Furthermore, since the station's inception in 1996, the broadcast of such dissent has been emulated by other satellite broadcasters in the region, thereby mainstreaming most of the station's news discourses" (Ibid: 4). Iskandar (2003) regards the argument of those who see Aljazeera as anti-establishment and counter-hegemonic, through the promotion of pan-Arabism and political Islam ideologies, as inaccurate. He argues that the station's motto, 'the opinion and other opinion', balances its coverage. He explains that:

the station's news coverage of opposition groups and dissident currents regionally and international are widespread and reflect a substantial concentration on counter-hegemonic discourses. However, because of the station's motto 'the opinion and the other opinion,' these discourses are often balanced with establishmentarian narratives that affirm and reflect the status quo in each respective case. These attempts to strike equilibrium between mainstream and subaltern messages affirm the station's distance

from the ambitions of any particular social or political movement. Like most mainstream media, disconfirming any perceived political or social loyalties ensures immunity from criticism.

(Ibid, 4)

In this we note an overlap between Iskandar (2003), Abdul-Raof (2006) and Azran (2010), amongst others, in how the station is actually far from being anti-establishment.

Furthermore, as outlined by Nafi (2008), Aysani (2007), Rayan (2005), Madini (1996) and Dahir (1994), and others, argued that political Islam and Arab nationalism have been bitter foes and conflicting concepts in modern Arab and Islamic history. Nafi (2008) argues that the nationalist Arab leaders that seized power in Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Algeria and Libya in the 1950s and 1960s turned these states into military dictatorships and lacked political legitimacy. Nonetheless, he notes ‘the military background of the ruling forces, their fragile base of legitimacy, and the sweeping programmes of modernisation and centralisation they pursued, turned the Arab nationalist entity into an authoritarian state. One of the major results of this development was the eruption of a series of confrontations between the Arab nationalist regimes and the Islamic political forces, in which questions of power, identity and legitimacy were, intertwined’ (Nafi, 2008: 2).

Hence, the criticism of Aljazeera by advocates of this model such as Alhassan (2004), Cherribi (2006), Rinnawi (2006), Fandy (2007), Ajami (2001) and Chafets (2002), does not hold from a conceptual viewpoint as well. For instance, Cherribi (2006) argues that he uses the keyword ‘veil’ to mean ‘hijab’ in Arabic, (Ibid: 126) which is not an accurate description. The ‘veil’ in Arabic means the face cover; however, the ‘hijab’ means the whole garment that covers the body from the head to the toes, with the exception of the face and hands. Thus, his arguments and conclusion are based on a major conceptual error. Ahmad (2012), Hamzah (2012) and Bullock (2002) are among those who have argued that many writers in the West confuse the concept of ‘veil’ and ‘hijab’, thinking that they have the same meaning, whereas in reality they are totally different in religious as well as cultural significance and meaning. The veil, for instance, which can sometimes be referred to as the ‘Burkha’ or ‘niqab’, is synonymous with the Salafi school of Islamic thought, whereas ‘hijab’ is the general dress accepted by the majority of Islamic schools. Even the author himself admits that, apart from Aljazeera’s religious programs (there is only one program, accounting for less than 1 per cent of the total output); the station could be regarded as any other Western media. Cherribi (2006) notes ‘if it was not for its religious programs, Aljazeera would easily fit in to the North Atlantic or liberal model in Britain and would be comparable to CNN or any other U.S network, if one were to remove the religious broadcasting on the Arabic channel’ (Cherribi, 2006; 132).

It is thus possible to argue that drawing the conclusion from analysis of one, two or three sets of programs, as Alhassan, (2004), Cherribi (2006), Fandy (2007), Rinnawi (2006) and others did, that Aljazeera is indeed biased towards Arabism and political Islam, is flawed and unrepresentative.



### **Methodological criticism:**

One of the key criticisms of the studies examined in this chapter is the weakness of their methodologies, both in terms of choice of method and of sample size. Cherribi (2006) notes that:

‘in this study, I aim to show the variety of ways the veil comes onto the screen on Al-Jazeera. I draw upon qualitative case studies of the most important examples of the veil, as well as my discussions with scholars and observers, and my own interpretation of discourse and visuals appearing on Al-Jazeera’.

(Cherribi, 2006: 125)

Cherribi (2006) selects his sample from a number of Aljazeera current affairs programs, noting that “Between December 2002 and April 2005, the veil was the subject of no less than 282 current affairs programs and longer news stories on Al-Jazeera. I read the transcripts of each of these and identified the most important examples of coverage of the veil in Al-Jazeera’s current affairs programming” (Ibid: 126). The problem is that Cherribi's selection of current affairs programs is too small to draw any significant generalisation. He specifically cites the example of ‘For Women Only,’ ‘The Opposite Direction,’ and ‘Shari’aa And Life’, which the author describes as biased in their coverage of the ‘veil’ issue. These significant programs, however, are regarded by the author as ‘objective’, such as ‘More Than One Opinion’, ‘Matters Of The Hour’, ‘Hassad Al Yawum’ and ‘Muntasaf Al Yawum’, which makes the selection less impartial (Ibid: 128-129). Along the same lines, Fandy's (2007) conclusions lack the support of a clear methodological framework. His argument is not based on any clear quantitative or qualitative method to justify the results, conclusions and implications of his overall study.

With regard to his conclusion that Aljazeera is a tool for Qatari foreign policy in its competition with Saudi Arabia, he did not provide any qualitative, quantitative and/or comprehensive evidence to support this idea; rather he relied on his personal observations, notes, and a collection of widely-available sources. Furthermore, he seems to suggest that Aljazeera promotes pan-Arabism and/or pan-political Islam in some of its programs. This might imply that the station’s news output, which is over 60% of its overall output, could be regarded as adhering to the values of objectivity, impartiality and balance. In the same line, Ayish (2002), Alhassan (2004), Rinnawi (2006), Fandy (2007), and others, claim to have provided evidence-based analyses of Aljazeera as a pro-Arabism/pro-political Islam channel. Ayish's (2010) work seems to be much more reliable as a source, though the sample could have been made much more representative of Aljazeera’s coverage by extending the time and nature of the study in order to cover longer broadcasting periods, as well as extending the range of programs. Thus the claim that Aljazeera advances two seemingly contradictory ideologies, as argued by the proponents of this model, is not supported by the historic evidence or by the clear disparity between and conflicting nature of these two concepts, and their respective development. A much broader context, taking into account internal Qatari factors, regional geopolitical variables, and global context, would have produced much better

arguments and resulted in stronger, evidence-based conclusions. Overall, most of the studies listed lacked solid empirical evidence to substantiate their claims that Aljazeera is pan-Arab/pan-political Islam, and whatever evidence they have put forward (Alhassan, 2004; Al-Jaber, 2004; Rinnawi, 2006; Cherribi, 2006; Fandy, 2007, Al-Sadi, 2012; inter alia) is limited, and could not be the basis for generalizable claims. They do, however, provide a useful guide, and point toward future studies on the subject.

In chapter five I shall examine the second model applied to Aljazeera, considering it as an advocate of democracy, cultural dialogue and understanding. I shall also examine the station's journalistic practices and its claim that it stands for objectivity, impartiality, and freedom of the press.

## Chapter 5

### **Aljazeera: an advocate of democracy, cultural dialogue and understanding**

In this chapter, I shall examine the various claims that Aljazeera has contributed to the advancement of democracy, freedom, cultural dialogue and greater understanding, both in the Arab world and beyond. I will also look at the station's claim of objectivity, impartiality, and advancing a free press agenda in the Arab world.

#### **Aljazeera and the creation of free democratic space:**

The second model claims that Aljazeera created a revolution in terms of freedom of expression and people's rights and aspirations. Lynch (2006) argues that Aljazeera "...ushered in a new kind of open, contentious public politics in which a number of competing voices competed for attention" (Lynch, 2006: 2). Lynch (2006) examined Aljazeera's practices and ethos, and the political, social and economic context in which it came into existence, and concluded that a station such as Aljazeera might have helped create what he calls "a new kind of Arab public" and a "new kind of Arab politics" (Lynch 2006: 2-3).

Qusaibaty (2006) follows the same line as Lynch's analysis, and argues that Aljazeera's editorial policy has aided in the creation of a new public space for dialogue, and of an alternative to other media organizations such as the BBC, CNN, and other Arab government-owned or semi-controlled channels in the region. She suggests, however, that the channel's "...policy of expressing various opposing views poses a fundamental challenge as it does not maintain a permanent frame, although it represents and gives more weight to Arab opinion" (Qusaibaty, 2006: 13). Lamloom (2004) agrees with Lynch (2006) and Qusaibaty (2006), and suggests that the station creates a space which allows for the growth of an alternative political culture in the Arab world. It, the network, shows the diversity of the Arab world in political, social and economic terms (Lamloom, 2004).

In this the arguments of Lynch (2006), Qusaibaty (2006), and Lamloom (2004) have much in common with those of Miles (2005), El-Nawawy and Iskandar (2003), and Iskandar (2006), who considered Aljazeera's role as advancing a democratic and free-press agenda that is an alternative to existing media outlets, both inside and outside of the Arab world. There are clear differences, however, in terms of depth of analysis and methodological rigour, as well as reliance on empirical evidence. Qusaibaty's (2006) study seems to be grounded in a limited reliance on content analysis as a primary method of analysis, whereas Lynch (2006) relied on historical data as well as interviews as the basis for his conclusions. Loory (2006) goes further, arguing that democracy can be strengthened and the free flow of information encouraged, not only by fighting those who want to stifle a free press in their own countries, but also by guaranteeing access to news channels by organizations such as Aljazeera, and others.

SouEIF (2001) argues that within the Arab world, "Aljazeera has rendered censorship of news and opinion pointless. For us outside, it provides the one window through which we can breathe. It also provides reassurance against the negative or partial image of ourselves

constantly beamed at us every day from the media of whatever country we happen to find ourselves in” (Soueif, 2001: 5).

Zayani and Sahraoui (2007), argue that it would be difficult to quantify with any certainty the changes brought about in the Middle East media scene by Aljazeera, but that such changes are real, and clear for all to see. Alhassan (2004) argues that Aljazeera challenged assumptions and encouraged free debate about all matters that relate to the future of Arabs. He notes that “Aljazeera played a pivotal role in unprecedented shaking of the region” (Alhassan, 2004: 114). What is more important, according to Walton (2003), is that Aljazeera has been able to break the Western monopoly on the interpretation of events and issues and, for the first time, has given viewers across the Arab world an Arabic version of events that is nearer to their concerns and, most importantly of all, to their culture. He notes that:

the West has dominated information transfer and delivery for over 150 years. But, for the first time, we have a view that is different from ours, and this view is a strong one. Aljazeera is truly the first channel that transmits information from the south to the north, and thus changed a flow that should have changed a long time ago. Through Aljazeera, the East transmits to the West. In the past Arabs needed to go to BBC or CNN or FOX to get their news, from now on they have similar output in their own mother tongue, and in a way that is in line with their Arab and Islamic heritage.

(cf. Alhassan, 2004: 119)

The station’s effect on Arab broadcasting was to stimulate governments in the region and beyond it to set up alternative channels to compete directly with it. Saudi-backed media group MBC set up Al-Arabiya, the United States government established Al-Hurra ('the free'), Russia launched its own Arabic news service (Russia Today), and the BBC set up a rival Arabic service channel (Zayani, 2005: 1-6).

I should note here that many of the advocates of this model have touched on common issues, i.e., the idea of Aljazeera as a force for change and for the creation of a space for ideas to develop, with the ultimate aim of creating a much more free and democratic society (El-Nawawy and Iskandar, 2003; Iskandar, 2003; Miles, 2005; Zayani, 2005; Lynch, 2006; *inter alia*). Zayani (2005) argues that Aljazeera fills a political void in the region and precipitates change. Through its various programs and special coverage of various events, it provides a pan-Arab opposition and a forum of resistance against the forces of tyranny, human rights violations, oppression etc. He raises a note of caution, however, regarding the station’s claim to be neutral, objective and balanced, and its campaigning stance in many issues especially in its programs. A clear contradiction may seem apparent here, however, Khanfar (2011) does not see any conflict between objectivity and presenting news from an Arab and Islamic perspective. He notes that “Aljazeera is an Arab television station that defends press freedom and aims to spread the values of democracy, and human rights” (Khanfar, 2011: 5).

In the same vein, Miladi (2013), Lynch (2006), El-Nawawy and Iskandar (2003) and El-Nawawy (2010), are amongst those who argue that the margin of freedom enjoyed by Aljazeera and others like it would serve to hasten democratic change in the region. Sakr

(2001), Cervi (2005), Miladi (2006) and Al-Zaidi (2003), amongst others, describe this phenomenon as satellite democracy.

Hafez (2004) goes further. He argues that the station has become a kind of de facto political party in light of the absence of a well-established democratic political system. He writes that “Aljazeera has been considered as one of the most important ‘Arab political parties’” (Hafez, 2004: 12-14). Since most Arab countries have not yet established functioning democracies, relevant institutions such as political parties and a parliamentary opposition are still rudimentary. To many observers, Arab satellite television seems to have the potential to take over part of their designated role. As a mouthpiece of Arab peoples and ‘the common man’, Arab satellite broadcasting seems able to mediate between the state and society. Abdelmoula (2012) examined how Aljazeera contributed dramatically to changing the democratic landscape in the Arab world. He notes that “the first noticeable success Aljazeera has achieved in this regard, since its early days, was that Arab governments lost the power to impose on their subjects a particular reading on events or explanations concerning internal matters and foreign policies” (cf, Abdelmoula, 2012: 147). He goes on to suggest that Aljazeera’s effect went beyond this and resulted in deep political and economic changes, that led to the changes that are under-way in the Arab world and even beyond (Ibid: 264). This is what Pintak (2011) called “the revolution of Aljazeera”, whose sweeping changes led to the Arab Spring, and are spreading across the Middle East, with wider regional, as well as global, implications (Pintak, 2011).

### **Aljazeera: a Credible and Objective Source of Information:**

Alterman (2000) and El-Nawawy and Iskandar (2003) state that Aljazeera’s code of ethics (adopted in 2006 after much criticism of the station) is strong evidence that the station aims to play a positive role in moderating the Arab street. Similarly, Atwan (2011: 1) suggests that Aljazeera went too far in its attempt to spread values that are described as moderate, while professing to exercise and practice the values of objectivity and impartiality in reporting events in the Arab world. He criticized the station, for example, for giving a platform to Israeli officials during what he regards as a clear-cut case of Israeli aggression against Palestinian rights, during the Gaza war of 2009. Lynch (2006) adds that the station has also played an important role in Arab self-criticism, and has managed to highlight issues that have caused the Arab population to ask serious questions about what it means to be an Arab or a Muslim, and whether someone can be a Muslim and still accommodate the values of democracy, freedom, tolerance and plurality. Programs such as ‘More Than One Opinion’, ‘The Opposite Direction’, ‘century witness’ and others have delved into issues that Aljazeera itself did not dare touch when it was first established but which have now become common themes. Lynch (2006) argues that the station provided the platform for open and frank debate, which may eventually lead to change. In the same vein, Fagih (2002), Al-Jaber (2004), Atiyya (2005) and El-Baghdadi (2007), are amongst those who argue that one of the main strengths of Aljazeera is that it is popular among Arab audiences, not only because it touches on sensitive issues and provides public space for debate and criticism, but also most importantly because it is a free, credible, and trusted source. They also suggest that many Arabs have seen

in Aljazeera something which they have missed in traditional Arab media, or in Western news organizations.

In their study of the coverage of the Iraq war of 2003 by the main American networks, Aday et al. (2005) found that the overwhelming majority of stories aired during the war, both on American networks and on Aljazeera -with the exception of Fox News- were neutral at the story level, but that the general picture of the war presented by the news focused primarily on its whizz-bang aspects, at the expense of other important story-lines. Put another way, the press may not have covered the entire story; though in general what they covered they covered well. Furthermore, at both the macro and story levels, important differences between the networks based on cultural origin and broadcast format became apparent (Aday et al., 2005: 15).

Aday et al. (2005) compared US networks ABC, NBC, and CBS, with Aljazeera's coverage of the Iraq war between the period of 20 March and 20 April 2003, and explored "whether the tone, balance and agenda were different" (Aday et al. 2005: 15-16). In other words, the study's aim was to examine whether these television stations stuck to their declared principles of objectivity, neutrality, and balance. Aljazeera's motto states that the station must be an impartial, balanced and objective news source, informing and educating audiences, while at the same time sympathising with people's aspirations for freedom, democracy, and human rights. Many researchers argue that this is contradictory, as it would be impossible to be objective, impartial, balanced, and neutral, and yet adopt a campaigning tone in the coverage of various news stories, or set up a centre for human rights, as is the case with Aljazeera (Seib, 2008; Lynch, 2006; Al-Bashri, 2007; Fandy, 2007; Ammar, 2010; inter alia). To come back to Aday et al. (2005), in their analysis of the tone of the coverage, the study found Aljazeera's tone which scored (89.2%) was almost as neutral as other American networks, in comparison with 95.6% for ABC, 95.4% for CBS, 94.4% for NBC, and 91.6% for CNN. The lowest neutrality rate, however, was registered with Fox News (62.1%). The results also show that the Fox News coverage was the most supportive of the US military campaign in Iraq, while Aljazeera and ABC were the least supportive of this campaign.

The study also found that Aljazeera devoted more coverage to diplomatic initiatives related to the US campaign in Iraq (12.8%), in comparison with 6.2% for Fox News, 5.1% for NBC, 2.3% for CBS, and 1.8% for ABC. Aljazeera also provided the most coverage of protests against the US campaign (6.4%), in comparison with 3% for NBC, 2.6% for ABC, 1.6% for CBS, and 1.2% for CNN, while Fox News provided no coverage of the protests at all.

Kolmer and Semetko (2009) examined television coverage of the Iraq war crises between the period of 20 March and 16 April in the UK, US, the Czech Republic, Germany, South Africa and on Qatar's Aljazeera. They found that although all networks focused on the military operations in the first two weeks of the conflict, media organisations like Aljazeera focused on the broader aspects of the war, such as the civilian cost, more than other networks in the UK, US, and other countries covered in the study (cf. Cushion, 2012: 138). They also found that media in countries such as Germany, the Czech Republic and South Africa, as well as Aljazeera in Qatar, included other voices on the conflict, apart from the coalition, such as the

UN or national governments not taking part. The researchers remarked that the US media are more likely to present a positive image of the coalition in comparison to media in other countries. Other findings of the study showed that US media (27.3%), and Aljazeera (29%), were the least likely to present the Iraqi side of the conflict, in comparison to Czech media (38.1%), UK media (35.4%), South African media (32.8%), and German media (29.3%). This is important because Aljazeera has been accused by the U.S. administration of being a propaganda tool for the Iraqi government, while at the same time advocating a biased, anti-American position (Miles, 2005; Lynch, 2006; Snow, 2007; Seib, 2008, 2012; Azran, 2010; inter alia). The study also found that Aljazeera was more likely to present the coalition's position on the conflict (59.6%), than the UK media (56.4%), German media (50.6%), Czech Republic media (44.6%) or South African media (40.8%).

The study also revealed that Aljazeera's coverage of the war could not be clearly defined as positive or negative. In the case of presenting the coalition view, it was judged to be 81.6%, in comparison with 83.2% for UK media, 82.2% for Czech media, 68.3% for South African media, and 60.5% for U.S. media. In the case of presenting the Iraqi side of the conflict there was no clear difference as Aljazeera scored 86.4%, in comparison with 76.8% for UK media, 71.9% for German media, 71% for Czech media, 60.5% for South African media, and 35.5% for U.S. media. With regard to Aljazeera's coverage of the coalition in the Iraq war, the study found it to be with no clear difference from UK media (83.2%), Czech TV (82.4%) to Aljazeera's (81.6%), with the highest negative level of coverage on South African TV (26.9%). They also found that Aljazeera provided the lowest rate of positive coverage of the allies.

The study shows that U.S. media are more likely to present a more positive view of the coalition than other media. Media in the UK and Germany, however, as well as Aljazeera, would seem to be presenting relatively neutral coverage of the war, in order to present a balanced view from both sides of the conflict. The study's overall conclusion, however, is that the reporting of the war was conditioned by the national political context (cf. Cushion, 2012: 139).

Cushion (2012) examined how various media outlets across the world provided a Middle Eastern perspective to events while the U.S. was engaged in the Afghanistan war (2001-2012). He found that while Japanese broadcaster NHK, "did not feature any Arab voice, but its US focus was not viewed as pro-American or pro-war... Aljazeera, however, was the most explicit critic and framed coverage from a Middle Eastern perspective" (Cushion, 2012: 132).

Ayish (2010) examined Aljazeera's coverage of the Gaza war of late December 2008, between Israel and Hamas in the besieged Palestinian territory of Gaza. The study aimed "to show how a leading 24 hours television network, driven by Western style journalism conventions framed the disproportionate bloody conflict already billed by the UN appointed fact finding team as amounting to a war crime and a crime against humanity" (Ayish, 2010: 222). The study found that a third of Aljazeera's coverage of the war framed 'popular reactions to the crises (33%), while official reactions accounted for roughly half that amount (17%). It also found that just over a quarter of the coverage (28%) was dedicated to

humanitarian issues. Throughout Aljazeera's coverage of the crisis, Palestinian civilians "received the highest level of occurrences both as primary and secondary actors in news reporters" (Ayish, 2010: 226). On the other hand, the Israeli government received the second highest rate of occurrences as a primary actor (12%), followed by non-Arab-state actors, such as NGOs and others (11%), then non-state international actors (8%), followed by the Islamic movement Hamas (7%) and the Palestinian authority (5%) (Ibid: 227). The study concluded that Aljazeera's coverage of the Gaza conflict "not only featured Palestinians more frequently than Israelis, but that also presented the former in more favourable contexts" (Ibid: 230). Ayish (2010) argues that given the nature of the Gaza conflict, the fact that it was between unequal parties, and that the higher number of civilian casualties was among the Palestinian population. He notes "it was natural to show large number of dead civilians, including children, and massive devastation of residential areas, simply because that was the reality Aljazeera was expected to cover" (Ibid: 230). Aljazeera's coverage of conflicts in this manner is what El-Nawawy and Iskandar (2003), Seib (2008), and Azran (2010), amongst others, regard as contextual objectivity, which takes cultural and regional context and characteristics into consideration.

Ayish (2010) comments "Aljazeera's focus on the humanitarian aspects of the Gaza crises seemed also to demonstrate the asymmetrical nature of the conflict in which innocent civilians were prime casualties" (Ibid: 232). Ayish's (2010) conclusions about Aljazeera's coverage of conflicts and wars are supported by a number of studies, especially regarding the human focus. El-Ibiyary (2006) examined the visual representation of war and how it shapes public opinion in a study comparing Aljazeera's and CNN's coverage of the Iraq war in 2003. The study found that the coalition's media message was challenged by Aljazeera's coverage, which was controversial in nature and provided a different perspective from that provided by CNN. The study also suggests that the style and nature of Aljazeera's coverage challenges Western interpretations of concepts such as objectivity, balance, and impartiality (El-Ibiyary, 2006). Al-khazendar and Ali (2013) attempted to examine Aljazeera's professional practice, and whether the station is objective and professional. They surveyed 611 students and found that the majority of them (63.5%) regarded the station as highly objective, while (77.9%) credited the station as highly professional.

The common theme of the above studies is that Aljazeera tends to present the human aspect of stories, especially during times of conflict. The studies also overlap in terms of Aljazeera's interpretation of objectivity, which tends to be slightly different from that adopted by Western media. They differ, however, regarding the level of difference between Aljazeera's outlook on events in comparison with other media organisations, in the West.

Abul-Makarem (2014), however, disagrees. He argues that Aljazeera's perceived objectivity, impartiality and balance changed dramatically after the removal of former Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi from power, on the 30th of June 2013. He notes that:

Aljazeera's credibility has declined since 2011 because of its paradoxical coverage and interpretations of the transformation in the political situation in Egypt and



Syria...Aljazeera's ostensible political agenda raises scepticism about its hidden identity and provokes an inquiry into its political mask.

(Abul-Makarem, 2014: 1)

He examined Aljazeera's coverage of the political situation from July to November 2013, and found that "Aljazeera is a mouth-piece of the Muslim brotherhood...the station does not represent the views of all Arabs...with the presentation of political Islam as the dominant ideology with superficial tokenism when it come to objectivity, impartiality and balance" (Ibid: 3-4). On the other hand, Al-Jaber (2004) examines the credibility of Aljazeera in the context of media broadcasting in the Arab world, and as a unique news broadcaster that adopted Western news values and journalistic values, while at the same time adapting to the special character of Arab and Muslim society and culture. He set out to examine whether Aljazeera adopted the norms of objectivity, impartiality, balance and neutrality in its coverage of various news stories in the Arab world and beyond in the same way as Western broadcasters do. He also set out to examine whether Aljazeera was regarded as a source of news information among audiences. He found that Aljazeera was the most credible news source among audiences in the Arab world, while at the same time adopting Western news values and journalistic practices, in line with Arab and Muslim society and culture.

His analysis of the station's performance focused on a survey of around 500 members of the Arab Diaspora in the U.S. He found that Aljazeera is the most credible source of news among audiences, and that people trust its reporting because it's neutral, informative, authoritative and trustworthy. He notes that "the respondents believe that Aljazeera employees who present the news are trustworthy, Aljazeera presents all sides of issues, and Aljazeera gets its facts right...these findings indicate that the respondents who viewed Aljazeera tended to perceive it as a credible source of information and balanced news" (Al-Jaber, 2004: 90-92).

### **Historic criticism of the Second Model**

What is noticeable about the above works is the level of overlap regarding Aljazeera's ushering in of a new era in the Arab world and beyond, and that it provides a serious attempt at reporting on the Arab world and, later, on the world from an Arab perspective, hence providing an alternative (Cushion, 2012; Ayish, 2010; El-Nawawy and Iskandar 2003; Seib 2008; Lawati 2008; Azran 2010; inter alia). There are, however, clear distinctions between these different works in terms of taking account of the historic context in which Aljazeera came into existence, as well as in terms of conceptual grounding, empirical evidence and methodological rigour. I will examine these in the next sections.

This model has fallen into the same trap as the model which claimed that Aljazeera is an advocate of Arabism and political Islam. It assumes that Aljazeera has an unlimited effect on audiences and that audiences are sitting in their living rooms, passively absorbing and acting upon the station's messages. The model's advocates also treated all the different Aljazeera programs as though they were in the same category, whereas evidence suggests that there are clear differences, especially when it comes to historical perspectives and the evolutionary pattern that the station's programs have followed since its inception. We have seen programs

appear, make a strong showing within certain historic, social and political circumstances, only to be replaced later by other programs and formats that best fit the new period. For instance, one of the most influential programs since the station's inception, 'More Than One Opinion', disappeared because the historical conditions that led to the creation of this program changed in early 2010. Another program that followed suit is 'Top Secret', since the proliferation of internet and social-networking sites in the Arab world meant that what was top secret when the program started in 1996 was no longer so in 2004. Qassim (2012), while accepting that Aljazeera has been an important phenomenon in the Arab and world media scenes, doubts whether it had the effect on audiences that many of this model's supporters claim. He argues that the station does not have the power to impact the audience's views or beliefs. In this, Qassim (2012) has much in common with the likes of Sakr (2001), Zayani (2005), Zayani and Sahraoui (2007), Khanfar (2011), Hijjawi (2011), and others, who although accepting that Aljazeera had an effect on the political and social scene in the region, concede it only a limited role, and one which has to be considered within a much wider historic context.

Hijjawi (2011) also argues that the claims that Aljazeera changed the Arab media scene dramatically, influenced the outcome of the Arab Spring, toppled some regimes and installed others are exaggerated. The station, he suggests, does not create awareness or solid political culture. Instead, it allows viewers to believe in their own thoughts and their own ability to carry out change. For Tunisians, Aljazeera's coverage of the revolution was like a mirror in which they saw themselves reflected, and this helped them believe in their revolution, and carry it through to its successful end. As for the Egyptian revolution, Hijjawi (2011) argues that the station had a minimal effect in mobilizing the Egyptian street.

Al-Zubaidi (2004) goes further when she argues that Aljazeera's claim of campaigning for democratic change and values does not go beyond tokenism. In her study of Aljazeera's output she has much in common with Fandy (2007), Cherribi (2006), Al-Sadi (2012), and others who argue that Aljazeera does not advance a pro-democracy or pro-freedom agenda, and that it does not apply the values of journalistic professionalism, objectivity, balance and neutrality in the same way as more established Western media organisations such as the BBC or CNN.

Another factor that weakens this model, as outlined by Al-Sadi (2012), is the tendency to dismiss the norms, beliefs, and objectives that govern the Arab audience's interactions with any particular mass medium, and the historic, political and social factors that influence them. He argues that:

...historically the popularity of a given mass medium in the Arab world (e.g. the BBC, or the Voice of Arabs radio) says more about the needs and expectations of the Arab audiences than it does about the medium itself. In other words, the relationship between the popularity of a mass medium like Aljazeera and its possible impacts on the Arab audience is more complex than presumed by the proponents of this model.

(Al-Sadi, 2012: 2-4)

It is thus clear that other factors such as historical context, cultural, social, economic and personal elements have to be taken into account if we are to have a complete and comprehensive understanding of this relationship. This is what Lewis (1991) has described as the process of meaning construction that occurs between the viewer and television (i.e., Aljazeera) with the multiple factors that come into play (Lewis, 1991; Hafez, 2004; Zingerali, 2010; inter alia).

El-Nawawy and Iskandar (2003), Al-Jaber (2004), Lynch (2006), and Seib (2008) are amongst those who have argued that Aljazeera started broadcasting in an environment in which the majority of television stations was either directly or indirectly controlled by Arab governments. Dissenting voices were unheard of. El-Nawawy and Iskandar (2003) described Arab television in the year when Aljazeera came into existence, saying that "...they broadcast mostly propaganda...the news programs in many of these networks broadcast protocol news, that is, items in government news bulletins about official's activities, visits and announcements' (El-Nawawy and Iskandar, 2003: 39). The coming of Aljazeera, however, changed all of that. El-Nawawy and Iskandar (2003) note that:

...today, there is one exception to the rule of Arab state ownership of satellite news networks, and it is Aljazeera...only Aljazeera has dared to challenge Arabic traditions and political restraints by airing programs open to all opinions...Aljazeera staff prioritize stories according to their newsworthiness, not their acceptability to local politics.

(Ibid: 42)

Ayish (2010) touched indirectly on the importance of historical and cultural contexts when studying media organisations such as Aljazeera, though I would argue that he could have given it more prominence in his study, especially in his concluding remarks about Aljazeera's humanizing of the bloody conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Islamic organisation Hamas. He could have addressed the difficulty organisations such as Aljazeera face when covering such issues as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a highly emotive issue, and the almost impossible task of being objective, neutral and balanced within the Western definition of these concepts. Ayish (2010) notes that:

Aljazeera journalists were firm in advocating their coverage as mirroring rather than constructing miserable and unbalanced realities on the ground. Hence, it was natural to show large number of dead civilians, including children...because that was the reality Aljazeera was expected to cover.

(Ayish, 2010: 230)

He failed to relate this to the station's motto and code of ethics, which describes Aljazeera as a pan-Arab television news network that covers events, news and developments from an Arab perspective, while standing for and promoting people's aspirations for freedom, democracy and human rights (Cherkaoui, 2010; Seib, 2008; Miles, 2005; inter alia). Cherkaoui (2010) argues that one cannot examine media organisations in the Arab world without taking into

consideration the historical, social, and cultural contexts within which such media outlets came to exist and operate. He also explains that these historical, cultural, and social influences are part and parcel of Arab media operations and activity. These historical contexts include influences and ideologies such as pan-Arabism and political Islam, as well as regional and global geopolitical factors (Cherkaoui, 2010). He argues that pan-Arabism and pan-political Islam constructed an image of the West in the Arab and Muslim mind that presents them as ‘invaders’ or the ‘others’, and that media organisations such as Aljazeera tended to reflect this mood among the Arab masses (Ibid: 206). He thus notes with regard to Aljazeera’s coverage of the Iraq war, in comparison to that of the American network CNN, that:

Aljazeera focused on the horrors expected from the bombing campaign. This contributed to the general sense of refusal against a war the Qatari-based channel considered illegal from day one. The illegality of the war was an important meta-frame for Aljazeera’s entire coverage. In this context, the notion of resistance was articulated by the behaviour and rhetoric of Aljazeera’s journalists.

(Ibid: 206)

These journalistic practices are embedded in the context of pan-Arabism and pan-political Islam, as he further states, in that “...it is clear that Aljazeera anchors could not bear to watch Baghdad being bombed so intensively. They and their reporters were imbued with deep pan-Arabism sensibilities, which tended to equate the bombing and invasion of Baghdad with the desecration of sacral body” (Ibid: 206).

### **Empirical criticism:**

Critics of this model (such as Bashri, 2008; Fandy, 2007; Kenane, 2006; Qusaibaty, 2006; Alhassan, 2004; inter alia) have cited a number of empirical studies to support their arguments. Fandy (2007) argues that Aljazeera has had a limited impact on agenda-setting or forcing change in the Arab world. Al-Sadi (2012) conducted a contextual analysis of three Aljazeera programs, ('More Than One Opinion,' 'The Opposite Direction' and 'Without Bounds') and found that “...the channel’s anti-establishment discourse is far from being a manifestation of a substantive, liberational, anti-establishment political rhetoric that undercuts the policies and political perspective of the Qatari state” (Al-Sadi, 2012: 3).

Bashri (2008) conducted a content analysis of two Aljazeera programs, 'The Opposite Direction' and 'More Than One Opinion', during the years 2004 and 2005. She also conducted a survey in a number of Arab countries, about Aljazeera’s ability to set the news agenda. She concluded that Aljazeera has had a limited impact on audiences across the region, in terms of agenda-setting. The station, according to Bashri (2008), has certain influences on the public of the region, as it does stress certain topics more than others, but it does not influence how people think or feel about these themes. She notes that “...public opinion in the Arab and Muslim worlds is far more complex than its counterpart in other parts of the world” (Bashri, 2008: 29). Similarly, Al-Tijani (2011) looked at the role played by Aljazeera in forming public opinion about the issue of Darfur. The study used a survey as well as in-depth interviews in order to examine the extent to which Aljazeera’s news coverage informs and

shapes public opinion in Sudan. He concluded that the station did not cover the event as it should have, in terms of duration and scope. He also noted that the station's coverage lacked impartiality and objectivity in presenting various sides of the story.

Furthermore, Qusaibaty (2006) suggests that Aljazeera's earlier, well-intentioned reporting and ground-breaking style has been damaged as a result of its coverage of various controversial issues. She notes that "Aljazeera's motto has brought both success and failure to the channel as it stresses integration and differentiation on an equal plane. Rather than observe coherence, the viewer watches cacophony, an orchestra" (Qusaibaty, 2006: 45). In her study of a number of the station's programs, Qusaibaty remarked about Aljazeera's program, 'For Women Only', that "Aljazeera programs revealed a tendency to present programs in a dichotomous manner, often caught between an imagined West and Arab world" (Qusaibaty, 2006; 45). This tendency, according to Qusaibaty, means that the "...overall discourse therefore presents strong tendencies towards particular biases" (Ibid: 46). She went on to conclude that "...the channel presents the current status, enforces it, and criticises it. While providing an illusion of democracy on the airwaves, Aljazeera does not, however, provide for significant actual change" (Ibid: 46).

Fandy (2007) regards Aljazeera as a biased organization that claims to be objective and balanced. He notes that "...any content analysis of Aljazeera will reveal that it is a channel that represents the viewpoint of the new alliance in the Middle East, namely the Ba'thistis or Arab nationalists and the Islamists" (Fandy, 2007: 130). Fandy cites the example of the prominent Islamic figures that have two regular shows on Aljazeera. The first, Youssef Al Qardawi, is one of the spiritual leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood, and has a weekly show called 'Islamic Law and Life.' The second person is Ahmad Mansour, who has two shows, 'Without Bounds' and 'Century Witnesses' (Ibid: 130). In the same vein, Aday et al. (2005), finding that Aljazeera was as likely as American CNN to provide neutral coverage of the Iraq war, has been criticised as not reflecting the reality of the station's coverage. These results are in line with a number of other studies, though Cherkaoui (2010), Awwad (2005), Atiya (2005), El-Ibiyary (2006), and others, argue that Aljazeera's coverage of issues such as the Iraq war of 2003 and the Palestinian issue is skewed more towards the views held among the Arab masses, and these have tended to be anti-American or anti-Western

Kolmer and Semetko's (2009) study of Aljazeera's coverage of the Iraq war, in comparison with coverage by other media networks in the US and other parts of the world, has been criticised for its findings, which showed that US media (27.3%) and Aljazeera (29%) were least likely to present the Iraqi side of the conflict, in comparison to Czech media (38.1%), UK media (35.4%), South African media (32.8%) and German media (29.3%). This finding goes against many other studies which showed that Aljazeera's coverage was perceived to be either neutral (Seib, 2008; Lynch, 2006; Zayani, 2005; Aday et al. 2005; Al-Jaber, 2004; inter alia), or slightly biased towards the Iraqi position, as a manifestation of pan-Arab ideology and aspiration (Ayish, 2005; Cherkaoui, 2010; Zayani and Sahraoui, 2007; inter alia). That the study also focused on Aljazeera as compared to other media in the US, Britain, Germany, the Czech Republic, and South Africa assumes that Aljazeera represents the entire Arab and Muslim media landscape, which is far from accurate. It would have been more representative

had it included media from a different Arab country, such as Egypt or the Maghreb region, and another from a non-Arab Muslim state such as Malaysia or Pakistan.

In the same line, Schenk and Ahmed (2011) compared the Aljazeera and CNN International framing of the Iranian election 2009, and found that Aljazeera stuck to its guiding professional principles of focusing on the aspiration of the general population while at the same time striving to provide balanced coverage of both sides of the story. They note: 'Al Jazeera thus fulfilled its own mission as a news broadcaster including criticism of existing governments in the Middle East region - in this specific case of the Iranian regime' (Schenk and Ahmed, 2011; 18). They also found strong evidence to support the assumption of Aljazeera being a serious counter flow. In this they also note 'our analysis revealed a stronger engagement on the part of AlJazeera with the Iranian people, whereas CNNI's framing of the election aftermath took more of a Western view and focused more on election fraud, disregard of human rights, and those in the West affected by the outcome. This underlines the specific role of AlJazeera compared to other international news channels – covering the same issues but in a different framing'. (Ibid, 19).

### **Conceptual criticism:**

Alhassan (2004) has argued that Aljazeera's marketing of itself as an agent of democratic change, freedom, the rule of law and human rights cannot be reconciled with its claim of journalistic objectivity, impartiality and neutrality. He argues that these terms are also subject to interpretation, especially when it comes to applying them to an Arab media environment dominated, directly or indirectly, by undemocratic governments. Alhassan's (2004) examination of Aljazeera's coverage of African issues finds that the station provides a blurred image of the African continent, with its focus concentrated on the Arabic-speaking nations, and misrepresenting other parts of the continent. He also argues that the station's application of its motto 'the opinion and other opinion' has not been evenly applied, especially with regard to the conflict in South Sudan, the dispute in Chad, or other areas of political strife in Africa. It would be unfair, however, to expect Aljazeera Arabic, whose audience base is mainly in the Arabic-speaking North African countries of Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Sudan, to focus on countries that neither receive the station, nor understand the language in which it broadcasts. The definition of concepts such as objectivity, balance and neutrality used by Aljazeera is clearly influenced by cultural, social, and most importantly, historical factors.

Alhassan (2004) also remarks that the version of democracy, freedom and liberty that Aljazeera advocates is highly influenced by the vision of its host and sponsoring state, Qatar. Alhassan (2004), however, conflates Arabic-speaking countries with the rest of Africa in his study, and fails to consider the cultural, conceptual, and historic differences between them. In the same vein, Hafez (2004) doubts whether media such as Aljazeera can play a significant and influential role in introducing or hastening democratic change in the Arab and Muslim world, in an environment dominated by state-operated or semi-controlled media organizations. He argues that the general situation of Arab media and organizations such as Aljazeera specifically renders approaches such as mainstream transformation theory not

suitable for analysis in this case (Hafez, 2004: 2). He notes that the transformation theory stressed the role played by the:

... elite, who in the case of political parties, design political programs and finally create governments and recruit political personnel for leadership. In summary, according to democratic transformation theory (non-revolutionary) political reform and democratization always has been the privilege of political counter-elites and oppositional parties. Mass media has played no role in the process.

(Ibid: 2)

Thus for television to play any role in democratic society there has to be a democratic system in place. In line with this perspective, Hafez remarks that:

It is only after systemic changes to democracy occur and electoral democracy is established that television is considered important for formulating the public agenda and representing civil society in a functioning democracy. Transformation theoreticians stipulate that the mass media, television and the big press, are not as crucial in the authoritarian phase as certain dissidents, artists and other freedom fighters might be, and that it is only in the phase of consolidation of democratic institutions that the media are effective'

(Ibid: 3)

He argues that for a media organization in the Arab world to be relevant and an effective player in democratic transformation:

...the news media must not only mirror the people, but should inform them, correct them and also educate them. If they do not, there is an inherent danger that a political culture that has never experienced democracy will merely reproduce itself, and that the old populism of the regime will merely be replaced by a techno-populism.

(Ibid: 5)

He does not see the media playing this role as compromising the concepts of objectivity, neutrality and balance "...as long as it seeks to compensate for the lack of articulation people suffer under authoritarian rule. But it conflicts with objectivity if it does not reflect all or, at least, a significantly broad spectrum of the important voices of the opposition as much as the government" (Ibid: 5). This is the shortcoming that many ascribe to Aljazeera, especially in its coverage of the Arab spring, and in terms of the contradictory nature of its messages. Aljazeera's public message regards these contradictions as errors of judgement by its employees during the course of carrying out their duties in a very fast-moving news environment, especially during the events leading to the revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. The station's defence is centred on the notion that in times of crisis, conflict and unrest, media organisations make news judgements in line with their editorial policies and guidelines. These decisions are correct most of the time, but errors happen whether in the coverage of the Iraq war of 2003, or the Israeli/Palestinian conflict of 2009, or the Arab

Spring (Khanfar, 2011; Cherkaoui, 2010; Pintak and Ginges, 2008; Nisbet et al., 2004; inter alia). Khanfar (2011) notes that:

we made mistakes in the application of our motto not because it was wrong, but because it is not enough and we are working on expanding our editorial horizon with new guiding principles. Despite these, I think Aljazeera has always remained balanced, fair and objective applying professionalism as we see it from our Arab and Islamic perspective; we are after all an Arab and Muslim network broadcasting from within an Arab and Muslim country, within a region that lives according to certain cultural, social and historic values. It is there that we have our audiences and it is to them that we are accountable at the end.

(Khanfar, 2011: 11)

This process has been described by El-Nawawy and Iskandar (2003) as “contextual objectivity” (2003: 54). Regarding Aljazeera’s drive to fulfil its audience’s presumed needs, which leads it to exaggerate stories, they note that “...it would seem that the theory of contextual objectivity – the necessity of television and the media to present in a fashion that is both somewhat impartial and yet sensitive to local sensibilities – is at work” (2003: 54). They argue that many Arabs who watch Western media regard it as lacking in objectivity (El-Nawawy and Iskandar, 2003). Many Arab viewers who watch CNN believe that American television is biased against Arabs. They have argued, for example, that the word 'assassination' is seldom used in the U.S. media when describing the Israeli policy of assassinating anti-Israeli political activists who belong to various Palestinian factions. Such events are instead referred to as 'targeted killings'. This often feeds into a belief in much of the Arab world that the Western media skew coverage in ways that Israel would prefer, preventing Palestinians and Arabs from airing their positions as often as the Israelis (Ibid: 53).

El-Nawawy and Iskandar (2003) explain that many Arab Palestinians who are killed in conflict with Israel are described as ‘martyrs’ because, to many Arabs, they are defending their right to live in their own homeland (Ibid: 53). El-Nawawy and Iskandar (2003) state that this “...runs contrary to much of the tone that is broadcast by Western TV media, yet it reflects more accurately the nature of the Arab view of the Middle East events” (Ibid: 53). They conclude that every single media organization struggles with the application of objectivity as it covers events for its specific audience, meaning that “...contextual objectivity can be seen in every broadcast in every media outlet in the world, not just Aljazeera and the US networks” (Ibid: 202).

### **Methodological criticism:**

One of the key studies in this section is Ayish (2010), and it would appear to be well-researched and backed up with supporting data. It would have been better still, however, if the research had drawn a comparison between before the start, during, and after the Gaza war of 2009, in order to provide a full test of the hypothesis. Ayish (2010) based his findings on a total of 144 video reports broadcast on Aljazeera between 27<sup>th</sup> December 2008 and 18<sup>th</sup>



January 2009. The reports were taken from Aljazeera's website as well as from YouTube. The major problem with this is that Aljazeera put only a selected sample of its total coverage of the crisis on its website. This tended to include only the most prominent stories, and they would hardly provide a comprehensive, representative sample of the station's coverage of the conflict. It would have been better to request video from the station's library. The researcher used framing analysis according to issue, actor occurrence rank, and presentation mode. This would seem appropriate for the aims of the study, however the data gathered were not fully analysed, especially regarding the presentation of Hamas, Palestinian civilians, and Palestinian authorities, who were ranked bottom in actors' primary and secondary occurrences, well below Palestinian civilians, the Israeli government, non-state Arab actors, international actors, Hamas, Egypt, other Arab governments and the UN. Ayish's (2010) study nonetheless provides a useful analysis of Aljazeera's coverage of conflict, and its application of ideas of objectivity, neutrality, and balance within the context of Arab and Islamic culture, politics, and other social factors.

In the same vein, Zayani's (2010) analysis of the changing face of Arab news media, with special focus on Aljazeera, provides an examination of literature on the subject. The researcher makes use of his own observation of the changing nature of the Arab media scene, and of the impact of Aljazeera. The study, however, lacks a clear methodology, and thus the researcher does not make any claims of generalizability for his study. There is no clear sample, since although he mentions 'Aljazeera', generally there is no specific program sample, clearly identified. The study is, however, a very useful guide and source with regards the changes happening in the Arab media scene. El-Ibiyary's (2006) examination of the television representation of the War on Terror through comparing CNN's and Aljazeera's coverage of the Iraq war in 2003 uses content and discourse analysis. The study's conclusion that military power has the ability to control media presentation of war images, however, draws attention to the limitations of such power in the case of television stations such as Aljazeera, suggesting that CNN and Aljazeera provided two different images of the war.

Qusaibaty (2006) used framing analysis to examine Aljazeera's ability to provide an alternative to other Western as well as Arab media as news source, and to create public space for dialogue, free of censorship. The study covered January to March 2005, and 7 to 8 programs were transcribed, with a total sample size of 24 programs. This sample is too small to develop any meaningful conclusions. Additionally, these three programs, although popular, do not represent the whole output of Aljazeera. It would have been much more useful to have extended the time-span of the study and select news items, as well as other programs beside the ones chosen. It would have also been better to have added another method, in order to have complemented the findings of the study.

In Chapter Six, I will examine the third model applied to Aljazeera, considering the station as a propaganda agent for the state of Qatar. I will critically examine this claim and whether it has any bearing on the station's journalistic practices.

## Chapter 6

### Aljazeera: a propaganda tool for Qatar:

In this chapter, I will critically evaluate the third model applied to Aljazeera and examine whether the station is actually a propaganda tool for the state of Qatar. I will examine whether the station's journalistic practices reflect this claim, and explore the process of formulating editorial policy by decision-makers from the station.

Proponents of the third model argue that Aljazeera is a tool serving the national interests of the state of Qatar, within the Middle East and beyond. Al-Sadi (2012), Anzawa (2011), Azran (2010), Powers (2009), Fandy (2007), Jreij (2006) and Alhassan (2004) are amongst those who argue that Aljazeera is a propaganda tool for Qatar, both on the political and the strategic levels. They suggest that the station was set up as part of Qatar's drive to modernise its internal, regional politics, and to increase its influence in the Arab and Muslim world and beyond. Al-Sadi (2012) conducted a contextual analysis of three of Aljazeera's most popular programs, 'The Opposite Direction,' 'More Than One Opinion,' and 'Without Bounds,' and concluded that Aljazeera's anti-establishment discourse is far from being an expression of a real, liberational or anti-establishment political rhetoric that is contrary to the policies and political perspective of Qatar. Rather, the discourse is an expression of a rhetorical strategy that allows Aljazeera to increase Qatari influence and help boost Qatari policies in the region and beyond. He states that this is done in three main areas and in three ways:

...based on the findings of my textual analysis, I argue that the channel's anti-establishment discourse is far from being a manifestation of a substantive, liberational, anti-establishment political rhetoric that undercuts the policies and political perspective of the Qatari state. Rather, the discourse is a manifestation of a rhetorical strategy that allows Aljazeera to bolster Qatari policies in three ways: a) by initially identifying itself superficially with the viewers' 'radicalism,' in order to b) subtly deflect from itself the radical precepts of the two most popular ideologies—Arab nationalism and jihadist Islamism, or from any radical program of action that they may inspire—and c) by creating a need for, and orienting the audiences' 'radicalism' towards, an alternative political ideology that fits with the policies and strategic interests of the Qatari government...

(Al-Sadi, 2012: 3)

Al-Sadi's (2012) argument is based on the notion that Aljazeera's perceived pan-Arab, pro-political Islam agenda is a deception maintained in order to hide the real motives of the station in serving and advancing the policies of Qatar. He also regards the station's claims of objectivity, professionalism and advancing a democratic agenda as limited. He states that "Aljazeera becomes a means of reinventing, not challenging, Arab autocracy" (Al-Sadi, 2012: 4).

Al-Sadi (2012) explains that Aljazeera aims to promote Qatar as:

...an Arab state that aspires to democratic values, a self-reforming state that meets much of the expectations of the Arab masses and could, thus, replace both radical Arab regimes, such as Syria and Iraq, and unpopular moderate, pro-Western Arab regimes, such as Jordan, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and so on.

(Ibid: 5)

He thus concludes that Aljazeera "...is a tool to reshape, reform Arab authoritarian regimes instead of challenging them" (Al-Sadi, 2012: 1-2). Within this context, Sakr (2007) agrees that is difficult to consider the messages that Aljazeera carries as anything other than an "...attempt by Qatar's ruler to burnish his Arab nationalist credentials as a way of cushioning the highly controversial policies of his government on key issues such as relations with the United States and Israel" (Sakr, 2007: 125). In the same vein, Powers (2009) accepts that Aljazeera has served Qatar well and enabled the tiny Gulf country to become a force to be reckoned with, not only in the Arab world, but also globally. He notes that:

Qatar has emerged as a regional force, a model for economic growth and Arab political modernization that just 10 years ago didn't exist. Yet, essential to Al-Jazeera's popularity and, thus, to Qatar's rise in influence was the perception that the tiny Gulf peninsula had little strategic ambition in the region, a perception that is rapidly changing. As Qatar's geopolitical ambitions grow, it will be important to see how they are reflected in Al-Jazeera's programming, as well as viewer perceptions of the Network.

(Powers, 2009: 133)

Souag (2012), managing director of Aljazeera Arabic, argues persuasively for the importance of Qatari wealth and influence. He explains that "...in the media age it is all about soft power and if you are a small country like Qatar you want to be successful and drive through your policies and strategy in the region, you don't need warships or airplanes; you need soft power and is done through the media, science and culture" (Souag, 2012: 2-3). He affirms that "I believe that the Emir was aware of this and I believe that's a great vision" (Ibid, 2-3). Al-Tamimi (2012) agrees, arguing that Aljazeera has been instrumental "...not only in serving the country's foreign diplomacy (Qatar's), but also in designing and implementing these policies directly or indirectly" (Al-Tamimi, 2012: 84). Al-Tamimi (2012) adds, however, that Aljazeera had a direct and overwhelming influence on Qatari internal affairs, as "...it helped to quicken the pace of change politically, economically and culturally" (Al-Tamimi, 2012: 83).

Fandy (2007) also argues that Aljazeera did not bring any real change to the Arab media scene. He states that the change the station advocates is superficial, and does not address the lack of democracy, or of a real civic society capable of instigating debate and mounting a challenge to existing institutions in the Arab world. He explains that, despite Aljazeera's claim of independence and contributions to social change, the fact remains that it is the state and not market forces that shape Arab media and Arab politics. The state has a great deal of impact on programming and the general direction of Aljazeera, and many other so-called

independent satellite channels in the region. So, Fandy (2007) argues, even if not all Arab media are formally state-owned, the state retains strict control over them. The media in the Arab world are therefore instruments of the regimes that fund them (Fandy, 2007: 8-9). He also suggests that Aljazeera reports on other Arab states, criticising certain regimes while praising others, but conceals the problems of Qatar or seems willingly to forget about them. For example, while the station reported extensively on Saudi princes having been implicated in the bribery scandal surrounding the British arms company BAE Systems, it ignored similar investigations implicating Qatar's Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Hamad Bin Jassim Bin Jabr Al-Thani (Fandy, 2007: 9).

In the same vein, Anzawa (2011) has argued that from the day it was set up, Qatar set out to use Aljazeera to promote the small country, and to help it become an important regional player. He notes that "without any doubt, Aljazeera helps project a significant image of Qatar not only in the Middle East but also all over the world. Just as none has been more visible than Aljazeera, the network has been inextricably connected to Qatar" (Anzawa, 2011: 60). Hroub (2013), Khatib (2013), Dorsey (2013) and Hanson (2013) are amongst those who agree with Anzawa in this regard, adding that Qatar's use of Aljazeera to serve its national interests tries to counter two major threats that the small country faces: Saudi Arabia on one side, and Iran on the other. They argue that Qatar invited the US to have a military base on its soil in order to counter these two dangers, while at the same time allowing Aljazeera to appear anti-American, as a way of acting on behalf of the U.S. as a regional broker. Khatib (2013) argues that the Arab Spring was a great example of how Qatar used Aljazeera extensively to advance its political and strategic objectives, in support of certain groups over others. In Libya, she notes that "Qatar acted as an interlocutor for the Arab league and Arab states that were pushing for international intervention in Libya, not only through formal diplomatic channels, but also by means of public diplomacy through the Aljazeera network" (Khatib, 2013: 421).

### **Aljazeera an instrument of Qatari survival:**

Qatar, a tiny country with a population of around 1 million, of whom 80 per cent are migrant workers, is faced with two imposing neighbours in Saudi Arabia and Iran (Al-Tamimi, 2012). The father of Cheick Hamad Ben Khalifa, who set up Aljazeera, Cheick Khalifa Al-Thani, followed a policy of almost complete submission to Saudi Arabia (Kamrava, 2013). His son, Cheick Hamad, however, sought to build a modern state that strives to be different from its neighbours, and in this, founding Aljazeera was one of the first steps he undertook, perhaps motivated especially by the alleged attempt to re-instate his father with Saudi Arabia's help (Miles, 2005). This later led Qatar to strip some 6,000 members of the Al-Gufran clan of their Qatari citizenship, because they had patrolled the border on behalf of Saudi Arabia (Dorsey, 2013: 13). The Qatari citizenship with these two neighbours, Saudi Arabia and Iran, had deteriorated, especially when Saudi Arabia blocked a multi-billion dollar deal for Qatar to supply gas to Kuwait via pipelines going through Saudi territory. This led Qatar's Energy Minister to declare "we have not received clearance from Saudi Arabia hence it is not feasible" (cf. Dorsey, 2013: 13). Anzawa (2011) argues, therefore, that Aljazeera was the most important tool in the strategy of the new Emir against both Iranian, and especially Saudi

Arabian influences. The success of Aljazeera was not guaranteed, however, as its owners admitted on several occasions. When the station started to provide a platform that no other broadcaster in the region would or could provide, however, Saudi Arabia started to take notice. Anzawa (2011) notes that “Qatar challenges to Saudi hegemony, struggling for supremacy of Arab media (scene) is particularly distinguished. Saudi Arabia had sensed that its dominance of regional news was weakened by the growing popularity of Aljazeera. Under these pressures, Al-Arabiya was launched in March 2003” (Ibid: 22). Saudi King Abdullah, while still Crown Prince, “accused Aljazeera of being a disgrace to the Gulf Corporation Council (GCC), of defaming the members of the Saudi royal family, of threatening the stability of the Arab world and of encouraging terrorism’ (Anzawa, 2011: 23).

Beyond that, Anzawa concludes that Aljazeera “became the viable news channel to compete with Western hegemony, captivating millions of Arab viewers” (Ibid: 72). He regards Aljazeera as vital for the survival of the state of Qatar, and thus argues that “Qatar has no other choice but to differentiate itself from other Arab countries, especially Saudi Arabia, for the sake of survival in the region” (Ibid: 72). In this regard, Hroub (2013) argues that Aljazeera is such an important instrument for the survival of Qatar as a state that the Emir takes personal interest in its running and affairs, because it has allowed the country to become a player not only on the Arab scene, but also on the world stage. This was particularly the case during the international campaign in Libya, and the revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen, much to the dismay of Saudi Arabia. He notes that “Aljazeera allowed Qatar to circumvent some of its conventional geopolitical shortcomings” (Hroub, 2013: 2). Aljazeera has also contributed, however, to societal change in Qatar itself, and exposed some of the contradictions of its society. Hroub remarks:

when conventional media evolve into geo-media they create their own autonomous dynamics, affecting politics and on occasions compelling their patrons to adopt positions that they otherwise might not necessarily have adopted. Thus, in a process of reversal, the media that were supposedly formed by the foreign policy of their creators become so influential that they are able to affect that same foreign policy.

(Ibid: 2)

Hanson (2013) goes further, arguing that Aljazeera's first and, to date, only Chairman, is a trusted member of the Qatari royal family, someone who meets with the Emir every morning, and sits in what he describes as the group of ‘movers’ within the Qatar decision-making class. These include Cheick Hamad Ben Khalifa Al-Thani, the former Emir, the current Emir, Cheick Tamim Ben Hamad, Cheicka Moza Bint Nasser Al-Missned, the mother of the current Emir and wife of the previous Emir, Cheick Hamad Ben Jassim Ben Jaber, the former Prime Minister of Qatar, Cheick Khalid Al-Atiya, the current Foreign Affairs Minister and Cheick Hamad Ben Thamer, the Chairman of Aljazeera. He describes these people as “individuals who have a strong influence on the Emir, who are able to influence decisions directly” (Hanson, 2013: 2). Dorsey (2013) argues, however, that the deployment of Aljazeera as a pivotal instrument of Qatar’s foreign policy may have managed to instigate internal changes, but they have been limited and superficial. He notes that “Hamad (the former Emir of Qatar)

created institutions and government offices that were populated with loyalists as well as his offspring and bore the characteristics of autocracy, centralised and personalized decision-making, reliance on patronage networks and an absence of transparency and accountability” (Dorsey, 2013: 16). He argues that this applied also to Aljazeera, with appointment decisions being made directly by the royal palace, and the network's budget and expenditure a closely guarded secret (Dorsey, 2013). This lack of good governance and transparency, and the prevalence of secrecy, whether in the case of Aljazeera or of state affairs, led to major setbacks for the country's internal as well as external policies. Dorsey (2013) notes that:

Qatari foreign policy setbacks are paralleled by Aljazeera's mounting problems resulting from perceptions that it is promoting the brotherhood and changes in the pan-Arab in television-market. The Aljazeera experienced a boom as primary news source in the heyday of the Arab revolt that toppled the leaders in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Yemen, but has since seen its viewership numbers decline with Arabs turning increasingly to a plethora of newly established local news broadcasters. Market research Company Sigma consul reported that Aljazeera market share in Tunisia has dropped from 10.7 per cent in 2011 to 4.8 per cent in 2012 and that the Qatari network was no longer among Egypt's ten most watched channels.

(Ibid: 20)

Others (Anzawa, 2011; Kamrava, 2013; Hanson, 2013; inter alia) argue, however, that the station continued to be a chief operator for Qatar's foreign policy objectives beyond the Arab world, as it expanded by setting up Aljazeera America, Aljazeera Balkan, and Aljazeera English.

### **Aljazeera: Qatar and the creation of Qatari media-space:**

In his comparative study of Aljazeera and Al-Arabiya, Fandy (2007) concluded that such stations have been established, and operate, in order to advance political goals. He notes that “...both channels are used by their respective governments as part of their bid for regional hegemony” (Fandy, 2007: 140). Anzawa (2011), Dorsey (2013), Hanson (2013), and Al-Tamimi (2012) are amongst those who have also argued that the Aljazeera media empire is extending, and becoming a serious threat to Saudi dominance in the region. This threat, they argue, has become most apparent since Aljazeera Sports acquired the Saudi-owned ART group's sports rights.

Lynch (2006), after analysing a number of Aljazeera programs over a five-year period (1999-2004), concluded that Qatar realised the trends dominating the Arab public, especially regarding the Palestinian issue, thus directing Aljazeera to present Qatar as the defender of Palestinian rights. He notes that:

the issue of Palestine was, without question, the area of the widest consensus in the new Arab public sphere. Support for the Palestinians against Israel was rarely, if ever contested... Palestine served as a unifying focal point, one which diverse political groups could use as a common front, rather than as a point of meaningful debates.

(Lynch, 2006: 10)

In the same vein, Shariff (2012) notes that Qatar's popularity seems to be on the rise, especially since the Arab Spring, as the country is perceived as being on the side of the Arab masses, and as doing something tangible to help them to achieve their goals. On the other hand, there are those in states like Syria, Tunisia and Libya who resent what they see as Qatar's meddling in their internal affairs for the past few years, and especially since the beginning of the Arab Spring, perceiving that Qatar has perfected the art of punching above its weight in regional and international affairs. The state uses its vast wealth and its media outlet, Aljazeera, to project soft power, but it is with the onset of the Arab Spring that Doha truly seems to have made major inroads into the region. Shariff states that it used Aljazeera directly in the Arab Spring, like Libya, Syria, Egypt and others, to advance its policy of change (Shariff, 2012: 5).

Abdullah (2011) also acknowledges that, with Qatar's rapid ascent in the region, there is no denying the central role played by Aljazeera, and especially the Arabic version, which has become exceedingly popular. Abdullah states that the station:

...is a tool, and a very effective tool in Qatar's foreign policy. And there's nothing wrong with that. I think the BBC is a tool of British foreign policy, and CNN of American foreign policy and so on. Yes, Aljazeera is part of Qatar's soft power. And like any modern state, it is exercising it.

(Abdullah, 2011: 14)

Al Ezzi (2011) concurs, stating that, "As for the use of Aljazeera as a tool, this is a reality we see every day. But the station attained its present status well before the Arab revolts began; it was not only as a result of these revolutions" (Al Ezzi, 2011: 7). Tabarani (2011) argues that in 2010 even those most optimistic about Qatar's potential could not predict that the Gulf state would one day be leading the Arab League and speaking on its behalf. He noted that the year of the Arab Spring brought political change to several Arab countries. These changes, he argued, have seen a state like Qatar stepping in as a force in Middle East politics (Tabarani, 2011: 17).

This trend of Qatar using Aljazeera to achieve its political and strategic objectives and policies is welcomed by many people in the Arab world. Abdullah (2011) acknowledged this policy by Qatar; even though it may discredit Aljazeera, it has its merits and admirers in the Arab and Muslim world. He described Doha's role as "mind-boggling", observing that:

Qatar has played a constructive and positive role ... in [the] Afghanistan [talks], in Yemen, Lebanon ... sometimes on behalf of bigger powers in the region. By default or by design, Doha today is the political capital of the Arab world. And there's a lot of investment that has gone into this. (Abdullah, 2011: 13)

Powers (2010) examined the relationship between Qatar and Aljazeera and how the latter helped the former emerge from the dominating influence of Saudi Arabia/ Iran and become a regional as well as an international player, through the deployment of Aljazeera as soft power.

He concluded that, right from its inception, Aljazeera's primary aim was to be the chief defendant and promoter of Qatar's regional and international interests, although the network, in doing so, changed the regional and global media environment, challenging dominant perceptions and trends. Pintak (2007) agrees, suggesting that Qatar's territorial disputes with its neighbours, particularly with Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Iran, as well as its desire to become a regional as well as a world player, was behind the deployment of Aljazeera as one of its most potent weapons. This venture, however, was a big gamble, without any guarantee of success. The Saudi threat to Qatar's existence, attacking border posts and straying into Qatar's territory, was of major concern to the new Emir when he took over in 1995. His ultimate and primary aim was to use Aljazeera to influence regional as well as global politics so as to serve the country's interests (cf. Ruhing, 2007). Pintak (2007) notes that:

the Emir didn't set up Aljazeera to get a membership card at the press club. It's about power. This has allowed him to, if not checkmate, and then at least occasionally checks the Saudis. He did it for the same reason he brought Central Command to Qatar. It made him a player in the region. (cf. Rushing, 2007: 134).

Similarly, Power (2010) concludes that:

today, Qatar has emerged as a regional force, a model for economic growth and Arab political modernization that just 10 years ago didn't exist. Yet, essential to Aljazeera's popularity and, thus, to Qatar's rise in influence was the perception that the tiny Gulf peninsula had little strategic ambition in the region, a perception that is rapidly changing. As Qatar's geopolitical ambitions grow, it will be important to see how they are reflected in Aljazeera's programming, as well as viewer perceptions of the Network... Qatar relied primarily on Aljazeera to defend itself from attacks from regional rivals such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

(Power, 2010: 122)

### **Historical criticism of the third model:**

In the above paragraph, it is noticeable that there is a large overlap between Fandy (2007), Powers (2009), Anzawa (2011), Al-Tamimi (2012), Al-Sadi (2012), Khatib (2013), Hroub (2013), and others, when they argue that Aljazeera is serving the foreign and national interests of Qatar. There are, however, clear differences in terms of the relative strength of arguments, and of providing empirical evidence to support the various arguments presented. Fandy (2007), Al-Sadi (2012) and Anzawa (2011) provided the strongest cases in support of their assumptions. In the following sections, I shall discuss some of these issues.

The claims that Aljazeera is a propaganda tool used by Qatar to achieve its strategic as well as foreign policy objectives may seem strong at first. An examination of each of these reveals, however, a lack of understanding of the historical contexts in which the station came into being. They also fail to understand the development of Aljazeera since its inception in 1996.



Fandy (2007), Anzawa (2011), Hanson (2013), and Al-Sadi (2012) have much in common in their criticisms of Aljazeera as a tool of Qatar. They criticise the way Aljazeera covered the Lebanese crises, however, and other controversial issues in the region, and conclude that Aljazeera was established in order to serve the foreign policy aims of Qatar. I would argue, however, that the picture is much more complex than that. Miles (2005), Zayani (2005), Lynch (2006), and Zayani and Sahraoui (2007), are amongst those who have argued that the level of independence afforded to Aljazeera in its day-to-day running was unrivalled in the entire Arab world. Fandy (2007) also touched on other historic realities regarding Qatar's relationship with Saudi Arabia, and Qatar's internal politics, though here again he fails to take account of historical events. Aljazeera has openly addressed these concerns, with the country's Foreign Minister, Cheick Hamad Ben Jabr, appearing on 'Without Bounds' and answering all questions that were put to him, whether on the tribe of 'Murra', who were stripped of their Qatari citizenship, or on Qatari relations with Saudi Arabia, or indeed on the American bases in Qatar, and many other issues (Without Bounds, 15/11/2000, 16/10/2002, 31/12/2003, 22/6/2005, 28/6/2006, 24/6/2009, and 28/3/2011). Al-Sadi (2012), who conducted a textual analysis of three Aljazeera programs, failed to understand the historical context in which these programs developed.

He also failed to take into account the wider variation offered in the station's coverage, which counters the perception of pro-Qatari bias in the agenda of the programs analysed. He argues that the stations aims were an ...effort by Aljazeera to make Arab viewers identify with a new paradigm of an Arab state that Qatar epitomizes—a democratizing, self-reforming state that meets much of the expectations of the Arab masses and could, thus, replace both radical Arab regimes, such as Syria and Iraq, and unpopular moderate, pro-Western Arab regimes, such as Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia' (Al-Sadi, 2012: 3).

What Al-Sadi fails to consider is that Qatar as a nation is still formulating its strategic outlook, and that the country, according to Dorsey (2013), Hanson (2013), Hroub (2013), and Miladi (2013), amongst others, has not yet established its strategic objectives and aims, meaning that these are subject to change and alterations. This is in line with what Al-Tamimi (2012) regards as the 2030 strategy that is constantly changing and adapting to national, regional, and global challenges. In the same vein, Qassim (2012) suggests that Qatar is a relatively new country, and to assume that the country uses Aljazeera in order to orient Arab audiences towards an ideology that is still unclear, as argued by Al-Sadi, undercuts the latter's arguments.

Therefore, as stated by Tabarani (2011), Qatar's use of Aljazeera as a tool to achieve its strategic objectives, as claimed by the proponents of this model, is in doubt. He argues that Qatar's intentions remain unclear and ambiguous, in that while some say Qatar has a Napoleon complex, others say it has an Islamist agenda. Qatar was very active diplomatically even before the Arab Spring, but I cannot argue that there is any specific interest that the country is pursuing through its expanding role. Qatar has no interests at stake. What is obvious, according to Tabarani (2011), is that Qatar's policy seems to be policy for policy's sake. He suggests, however, that a Sunni revival, through supporting mainstream Islamist

groups (e.g. the Muslim Brotherhood) in the countries that are witnessing change, could make sense from a GCC security perspective, in order to confront Iran (Tabarani, 2011).

Souaiaia (2011) supports the above arguments. He sees Qatar's engaging in too many political and non-political initiatives, on too many sides, as ad hoc diplomacy. He explains that their wide networks of military, political, and diplomatic relations make their strategy seem contradictory and unprincipled (Souaiaia, 2011).

Al-Tamimi (2012), Abu-Rab (2010), Seib (2008), and Rushing (2007) are amongst those who have argued that, far from influencing Aljazeera, Qatar has been influenced by the station. They suggest that the Emir's drive to reform his country, and to introduce democracy in a region that is still dominated by autocratic regimes, owes much to the culture that has been instilled by Aljazeera. Al-Tamimi (2012), Khanfar (2009), Qassim (2012), and others all acknowledge that Aljazeera has had a profound impact on Qatar as a country. It serves not only to inform and instil awareness among Arab populations, but especially within the boundaries of its host country. They argue that many of the advocates of this model failed to study Qatari society and to understand its religious, tribal, and cultural roots. They argue, for instance, that before the advent of Aljazeera, it was a rarity to see Qatari women working in any sector let alone the media. Now, more than a decade after it was set up, there are hundreds of Qatari men and women working for Aljazeera.

Khanfar (2009) argues that it has become a dream of Qatari men and women to get a job at Aljazeera. In other words, Qatar has changed beyond recognition and that, they argue, is a sign of the changing nature of the relationship between Aljazeera and its co-sponsor, the Qatari government. Others who advocated this model (Dorsey, 2013; Hanson, 2013; Anzawa, 2011; inter alia), although they presented a detailed analysis of Qatari political history, and of its interaction with its most imposing neighbours, Saudi Arabia and Iran, failed to provide any broader perspective on the interaction of historic links and relationships between Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Iran. They failed, for instance, to account for the fact that many of Qatar's clans and tribes are an extension of their counterparts in Saudi Arabia, or that many of Qatar's elites, including influential and prominent business families, have an ancestral relationship with Iran (Kamrava, 2013).

### **Empirical criticism:**

Al-Sadi (2012) conducted a textual analysis of three programs on Aljazeera that represent less than 5 per cent of the total station output. The three programs have a different style and approach to dealing with various issues and, therefore, it would be not correct to generalise based on these programs. His analysis also seems to be lacking in statistical rigour. Other studies (Ayish, 2010; Zingarelli, 2010; El-Nawawy and Powers, 2008; Aday, et. al, 2005; El-Nawawy and Iskandar, 2003; inter alia) have found no evidence of Aljazeera being biased towards Qatari policy, or on any other particular issue. Jreij (2006) studied the relationship between Aljazeera and Qatar, and whether the station is a tool for Qatar's overall strategy. She concluded that the premise that Aljazeera is part of Qatar's propaganda machine is

difficult to prove because the relationship between Qatar and Aljazeera is very complex. She explains that, although Qatar maintains control over Aljazeera through financing its activities and through the overall supervisory role exercised by the Aljazeera Chairman, who is a member of the Qatari royal family, Aljazeera "...has a large margin of freedom...and fights to preserve the professionalism of journalism" (Jreij, 2006: 23).

Their motto was described by Al-Ali (2002), the former director of Aljazeera, as the soul of the station, and the philosophy that underpins its operation and vision (Miles, 2005). It is clearly visible in almost all Aljazeera bulletins and on-air promos, and is posted on many walls in the station (Miles, 2005; Al-Jaber, 2004). It is also this motto that differentiates Aljazeera from all other stations, be they privately or government owned. Yet my study reveals that a number of respondents who prefer Aljazeera are less likely to think that the station stands by its own motto when compared with respondents who watch other Arab news or non-Arab news channels. It is worth mentioning here that many writers (Lynch, 2006; Sakr, 2007; Fandy, 2007; Qassim, 2012; inter alia) believe that what the Emir of Qatar has done should be applauded and admired.

Sensitive Qatari issues such as the relationship between Doha and Riyadh were discussed openly on a number of Aljazeera programs which were broadcast live, without any limits being placed on the discussions by the country's Prime Minister, Cheick Hamad Ben Jaber Al-thani. Other issues such as the American bases in Qatar, human rights issues in Qatar, and the strained relationships between Qatar and other Arab countries, were also openly discussed (see *Without Bounds*, 15/11/2000, 16/10/2002, 31/12/2003, 22/6/2005, 28/6/2006, 24/6/2009, and 28/3/2011). Ayish (2010), Zayani and Sahraoui (2007), Fandy (2007), Lynch (2006) and others, regard this, however, as reinforcing the view that Aljazeera is being used by Qatar. In the same vein, Anzawa (2011) sets out his aim to argue that:

‘Aljazeera is not merely an international media giant, but also a powerful player in contemporary Arab politics...in order to understand how the Qatari government and the Emir of Qatar have manipulated the so-called ‘independent’ Aljazeera satellite network as an effective political instrument’

(Anzawa, 2011: 1-2)

In his introductory chapter, however, there is not a single word about any strong evidence the researcher is providing in order to substantiate his claims, or about how he intends to collect evidence to support his assumptions. The claims advanced about Aljazeera being a political tool of Qatar thus rely on a series of statements and quotes taken from other scholarly research. The researcher does not provide a single piece of empirical data to support his claims about Aljazeera and Qatar. Nonetheless, this research is useful in providing a collection of views about the relationship between Qatar and Aljazeera, particularly considering the lack of studies in this area. Similarly, Dorsey (2013) also analyses different scholarly works on Qatari internal and external politics, and the country's interactions with Saudi Arabia, Iran and the U.S., without a single piece of empirical evidence to support the claims he puts forward. Anzawa (2011) and Dorsey (2013) would be described as historic

studies, that describe the advent of Aljazeera, and the claims that accompanied it along the way. In the same vein, Hanson's (2013) attempt at analysing Qatari policy and the role of Aljazeera did provide some evidence from case studies and examples of Qatari policy engagement, though these could be seen as analysis of various scholarly works, articles, and public and media pronouncements by Qatari officials. The study, however, provides an insight into the circles of power within the state of Qatar, and the proximity of the Aljazeera Chairman to the circle of decision-makers in the country.

### **Conceptual criticism:**

The central argument is that Aljazeera is a propaganda tool for the state of Qatar, and that it uses the station in this respect (Alhassan, 2004; Al-Hail, 2004; Fandy, 2007; Al-Sadi, 2012; inter alia). Noe and Raad (2012) have argued that Qatar has been very clever in using Aljazeera in order to advance its political and strategic objectives. They note that “Qatar has gone overnight from being an active member of the rejectionist and resistance axis to the spearhead of imperialism aimed at destroying the resistance and at dividing the Arab world on sectarian lines” (Noe and Raad, 2012: 4). Herman and Chomsky (1988), Herman (1996), Chomsky (2004), Elridge, et al. (1997), Philo (1982) and Khaeler (2009) have developed the argument that media is a tool for manufacturing consent, and acts as a hegemonizing tool. They examined the political economy of the media, especially in terms of how ownership and control of the media impacts its behaviour (cf. Murdock and Golding, 1977; Curran and Seaton, 1991). The central argument of Herman and Chomsky (1988), as explained by Herman (2003), states that:

dominant media are firmly imbedded in the market system. They are profit-seeking businesses, owned by very wealthy people (or other companies); and they are funded largely by advertisers who are also profit-seeking entities, and who want their ads to appear in a supportive selling environment. The media also lean heavily on government and major business firms as information sources, and both efficiency and political considerations, and, frequently, overlapping interests, cause a certain degree of solidarity to prevail among the government, major media, and other corporate businesses. Government and large non-media business firms are also best positioned (and sufficiently wealthy) to be able to pressure the media with threats of withdrawal of advertising or TV licenses, libel suits, and other direct and indirect modes of attack. The media are also constrained by the dominant ideology, which heavily featured anticommunism before and during the Cold War era, and was mobilized often to induce the media to support (or refrain from criticizing) U.S. attacks on small states that were labelled communist.

(Herman, 2003: 3)

To apply the central tenets of the propaganda model to Aljazeera and its relationship with Qatar would be difficult. Zayani and Sahraoui (2007), Lynch (2006), Zayani (2005), El-Nawawy and Iskandar (2003), amongst others, described Aljazeera coming onto the media scene in the Arab world as nothing short of “revolutionary” (Zayani and Sahraoui, 2007: 23).

They further state that “Aljazeera has come to represent the pioneer, the dissident, the maverick, the oppositional, the anti-establishment, and the eccentric. It takes risks, does things differently, and ignores the culture of political restraints and media practices in the region” (Ibid: 25). Fandy (2007), however, disagrees and regards Aljazeera as a political tool in the hands of its founder, Qatar, and thus as implementing one of the key preconditions of the propaganda model: ‘media ownership’. He notes that “Aljazeera and Al-Arabiya are not in reality privately owned channels; they are controlled by the States of Qatar and Saudi Arabia respectively” (Fandy, 2007: 66). What is missing is empirical evidence to determine with any degree of certainty whether Aljazeera is directly operated and used by Qatar as a propaganda tool in order to exercise control over the masses in the Arab world. It is worth noting that Herman and Chomsky (1988) never claimed that their model explains everything. Herman (2003) states that they “...explicitly pointed to the existence of alternative media, grassroots information sources, and public scepticism about media truthfulness as important limits on media effectiveness in propaganda service and we urged the support and more vigorous use of the existing alternatives” (Herman, 2003: 5).

There are clearly key differences in the applicability of the propaganda model to Aljazeera, and indeed to any other media organisation in the Arab world. The model was designed initially to look at the way the U.S. media were used within the context of the political economy of the media, and how they may be used as an agent of social control. Television stations such as Aljazeera are still in their infancy, and therefore it would be overly simplistic to assume that they have the same complex relationship to their ownership that exists in the U.S. It would also be difficult to assume that advertising has any bearing on media organisations such as Aljazeera, because advertising in the Arab world has not developed sufficiently for it to be an important source of income for television stations. Aljazeera and many other Arab broadcasters are still dependent to a large extent on their sponsoring governments. As argued by El-Nawawy and Iskandar (2003), however, the government of Qatar has tried to avoid interfering in the affairs or operations of Aljazeera, including the way it covers various events.

In the same vein, Dorsey (2013), Hanson (2013) and Al-Sadi (2012) are amongst those who assume, with regard to concepts such as Saudi hegemony or Qatari hegemony, the presence of a national project in both these countries that has all the components of a comprehensive national model, which is not the case. The use of the term hegemony with respect to Qatar, or indeed Saudi Arabia, as argued by Miladi (2013), Zingarelli (2010), Seib (2008), Zayani and Sahraoui (2007), Lynch (2006), and others, disputes the existence of such a project either in Saudi Arabia or in Qatar. Such a use is also, as argued by both Sakr (2001) and Curren and Park (2000), reminiscent of the dominance of Western thinking when looking at media phenomena such as Aljazeera. In the same line, Al-Sadi (2012), Anzawa (2011), and Fandy's (2007) studies of Aljazeera as being an instrument of Qatari policy, and exploring the idea that the station is used as a propaganda tool, do not provide an illustrative conceptual analysis to justify the use of this term.

### **Methodological criticism of the third model:**

The proponents of this model have also been criticized for their methodological weaknesses. Al-Sadi (2012) sets out to “offer a close reading of the channel’s political discourse on issues that sharply divide the Arab public from the Qatari government and other Arab regimes” (Al-Sadi, 2012: 1). To carry this out he chose to use contextual analysis of five of Aljazeera's most popular programs.

over a five-year period, 1999 through 2003, I closely read the channel’s political discourse on three key political issues (the Arab-Israeli conflict, the 2003 invasion of Iraq, and the question of Arab unification) as covered primarily by three of the channels’ most popular programs, Faisal Al-Qasim’s ‘The Opposite Direction,’ Ahmad Mansour’s ‘Without Bounds,’ and Sami Haddad’s ‘More Than One Opinion’. At other points in my analysis of Aljazeera’s political discourse, I also examined the coverage of the same political issues in two other popular programs, Yusuf al-Qaradawi’s ‘Religion and Life’ and ‘Aljazeera Pulpit’.

(Ibid: 3)

Al-Sadi's sampling is flawed because he chooses programs which are by their nature populist and, on the basis of their analysis, draws a conclusion to apply to the whole of the station’s output, regardless of differences in the nature of news programs and talk shows. Furthermore, the period covered meant that on many occasions these programs were dedicated to specific issues such as the Gaza war of 2009, or the Iraqi war of 2003, for much shorter periods, while the news items dominated the station’s overall output. Thus, even the sample of programs chosen is not representative. It would have been much better to have chosen a much more varied sample that combines news broadcasts, pre-recorded programs, and live coverage slots that are a combination of news and such programs. The study does, however, provide very useful empirical evidence, despite its methodological weaknesses, that could guide future research into the relationship between Aljazeera and Qatar, within a limited range. The researcher concludes that:

Aljazeera falls in line with other state-sponsored Arab media, whose main objective is to defend the legitimacy of the state in order to perpetuate the existing political order. In the Qatari case, the existing political order epitomizes a reformed, self-democratizing Arab autocracy, but an autocracy nonetheless,

(Ibid: 17)

This position would need further study in order to ascertain with a much higher level of certainty the veracity of the claims advanced by the researcher. The researcher’s reliance on a single method to test his claims also limits the validity of his conclusions. The use of content analysis, and perhaps focus groups, would have provided a combination of qualitative as well as quantitative data to strengthen the broader arguments made in his research.

Equally, Alhassan's (2004) study of Aljazeera’s coverage of African issues, and his subsequent conclusions that the station is a political tool for Qatar, do not stand on a strong methodological rationale. He chose to study around 400 university students at the Universal

African University, which he claims represents around 14 nations of the continent, which still leaves 30 countries unrepresented in his sample. He chose also to have closed questions or semi-closed ones, which limited the nature of the data gathered. His content analysis of 500 Aljazeera programs between the years 2000 and 2002 is also not representative of the station's output, especially in terms of news, which accounts for more than 60 per cent of the station's programming. He chose to interview six people at the station in order to add a qualitative aspect to his study but this number of interviewees is too small to reveal any statistically significant data. His choice of interviews is too narrow, and focused on journalists or presenters in Doha, without a single representative from senior management with responsibility for key strategic or editorial decisions. This also limited the range of data gathered from the interviews. It would have been better to interview a much wider spectrum of people from Aljazeera, especially people in Doha and in outside offices, if not in person then on the phone. His content analysis could have benefited greatly from a comprehensive sample strategy, that could have covered news bulletins, other programs and other fillers that the station uses, and which many of its opponents argue are value-laden, subjective, and show the real mobilization effect of the station (Ajami, 2001; Chafets, 2001, 2002; Cherribi, 2006; Fandy, 2007; inter alia).

Having analysed Aljazeera in the context of all three models I shall move to the overall conclusion of this study, and answer the questions I asked at the beginning of this research.

## Chapter 7

### Conclusions and discussion

In this final chapter, I shall present the key findings of this research, as well as further exploring, to some extent, their significance for academic research about Aljazeera. I shall end with a discussion as well as outlining some of the difficulties I encountered as a researcher, while I was at the same time working for Aljazeera. I will delineate some research areas that require further exploration in any future academic endeavour.

When I began this study I wanted to identify the most prominent models applied to Aljazeera nature and journalistic practice, in terms of their strengths and weaknesses, as examined in various scholarly works. I also aimed to examine, through these studies, the extent to which the concept of a 'model' might apply to Aljazeera's programmes.

After examining a selected sample of the most important works on Aljazeera, I concluded that a large body of research supports the idea that Aljazeera is, to a large extent, serving the interests and policies of the state of Qatar, intrinsically related to the complexities that these interests and policies entail. This is the case internally, within the bounds of Qatar itself, and regionally, in terms of its competing interests with Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and, lately, the UAE. The role that the Aljazeera network, as it has become known, plays for Qatar, globally, is entangled with these interests as the tiny country, after its success on national and regional levels, aims to take its ambitions to the global stage. (See Hanson (2013), Hroub (2013), Qassim (2012), Al-Tamimi (2012), Al-Sadi (2012), Anzawa (2011), and Fandy (2007), amongst others).

Despite what has been said about Aljazeera's impact on the spread of freedom, democratic values, journalistic professionalism, and the drive to usher in a new era in the Arab world and beyond, by challenging traditional information flow from the North to the South, this role has to be taken within the context of Aljazeera's primary objective, which is to advance Qatari interests and policies. This primary function played by Aljazeera is greatly enhanced by its non-news programs, such as, 'Al-Itijah Al Muakees', 'The Opposite Direction'/ 'Bila Houdoud', 'Without Bound'/ 'Shahid AlA al Asar'/'Century Witness' and many others. Although the station's news and current affairs programs attempt to present objective, balanced and impartial coverage, most of the literature examined agree that the overall trend of serving the interests and policies of Qatar extends to these news and current affairs programs, especially at times of war and conflict, or when dealing with controversial issues such as the Arab-Israeli conflict, or the War on Terror.

The research also suggests that the station had an effect on Qatari society itself, although it would be difficult to quantify such an influence, or determine if it was a direct consequence of Aljazeera's perceived role, or if it was part and parcel of the network's primary purpose to serve, defend and advance the Qatari Emir's reformist agenda, nationally, regionally and/or globally. In other words, a number of works argue that one of the aims of Aljazeera -within the context of serving the country's interests as primary objective- is not only to challenge traditional norms and practices in the rest of the Arab world alone, but to change Qatari



society itself from within (See Al-Jaber, 2004; Miles, 2005, Al-Tamimi, 2012; Hroub, 2013; among others). Any visitor familiar with Qatar before Aljazeera came into being in 1996 would today notice the enormous transformation that the country has gone through, not only in terms of infrastructure, but also in social, political, cultural and economic terms. To cite but one example, the sight of Qatari women, before the time of Aljazeera, working and interacting with male colleagues, was almost non-existent. It was Aljazeera that opened the door for Qatari women to work and to develop a career, and this opened the door for women in other sectors within the country to follow Aljazeera's example. These were enormous changes that were introduced into Qatari society –which is deeply conservative in nature as it follows the Wahabi strand of Islam- leading many scholars to credit Aljazeera with this transformation (Dorsey, 2013; Hroub, 2013; Al-Tamimi, 2012; Qassim, 2012; inter alia).

I have also found that many scholars (Rugh, 1979; Sakr, 2001; Hafez, 2004; Miles, 2005; Lynch, 2006, Ayish, 2010; and Hallin and Mancini, 2010; inter alia) agree that Aljazeera, since its inception, has provided somewhat different, revolutionary media practices, that may constitute a media model in their own right, bearing in mind that media practice in the region is still dominated by a classically authoritarian model.

I have found that many scholarly works examined agree that the hybrid model is probably the best suited to encapsulating Aljazeera's nature and journalistic practices. In other words, a model that combines loose state control mechanisms trying to emulate public service ethos with values such as, contextual-objectivity/impartiality at the heart of the network. The station also attempts to adopt certain libertarian, free-market approach within a limited scope. Many scholarly works (for instance Sakr, 2001, 2005, 2007; El-Nawawy and Iskadar, 2003; Miles, 2005; Seib, 2008; Miladi, 2006; inter alia) have argued that this has been most obvious during Aljazeera early years, and become more evident, especially after the station transformed itself into a network, adopting many of the attendant free-market norms, practices, systems and organisational structures, and thus, as argued by Al-Tamimi (2012), limiting political interference.

I have also found agreement between scholars concerning the importance of taking into account historic, social and political factors when attempting to examine Aljazeera's nature and journalistic practices. These factors were not adequately addressed or were sometimes completely ignored by many of the studies that examined Aljazeera.

I shall now turn to a detailed examination and analysis of my research findings regarding each of the three models. My presenting of these findings will not adhere to the same order I adopted in my initial chapters of analysis within the thesis's main body; rather I will present these findings in order of importance.

### **Aljazeera: advancing Qatar's interest first and foremost**

The model, 'Aljazeera: propaganda agent for Qatar,' looks at Aljazeera as serving the interests and policies of the state of Qatar. This is the key finding of this study. However, the picture is not as simple as might seem. Aljazeera's role as subservient to Qatar happens in a number of ways.

Firstly, research stresses the political economy of Aljazeera as a state-funded institution. In short, there is no obvious reason why a small state like Qatar should set up a television station, spending billions of dollars in expanding its global reach (current estimated spending on all Aljazeera channels exceeds one billion dollars a year), without the prospect of its investments being returned at some stage in the future in the form of political gains and the advancement of the country's national interests, whether in terms of the nation, becoming a regional or a global player. Scholars such as Fandy (2007), Hanson (2013) and Hroub (2013) are amongst those who have argued that the Emir of Qatar exercises direct control over Aljazeera via his financing of the station, through a direct grant from the Ministry of Finance since the station was established in 1996, and/or indirectly, through the appointment of the network's board of directors and Chairman, and through the drafting of its charter.

The influence of the Emir on the station's day-to-day running is well-documented, shown by both the Emir's daily contact with the Chairman, and the fact that the Emir takes the network Chairman with him on almost every official trip abroad, all of which serves to indicate the Emir's direct and indirect influence on the station. It is also evident that in its long history Aljazeera has gone through many changes in terms of its management and board membership, but the only person who has remained in his post is the Chairman, who is a member of the Qatari royal family and a trusted member of the small circle of decision-makers in Qatar. Through the Chairman, the Emir and the state exercise control and influence over the network's direction. Such control is also exercised through key appointments to Aljazeera's board of directors, and to other key positions in the network, such as the Director General and the head of news and current affairs. This influence is also apparent through the financing of the station, which still comes directly through the Qatari Finance Minister to this date.

Secondly, this premise is supported by empirical data derived from a number of sources (Dorsey, 2013; Hanson, 2013; Noe and Raad, 2012; Al-Sadi, 2012; Al-Tamimi, 2012; Ayish, 2002, 2005, 2010; *inter alia*), which indicate that the primary purpose and objective behind Aljazeera is to serve the national interest of Qatar. These works found some evidence of a correlative link between Aljazeera's coverage and take on events, especially in its programming about Qatar's policies and objectives.

Zingarelli (2010), Ayish (2010), El-Nawawy and Powers (2008), Zayani and Sahraoui (2007), Fandy (2007), Aday et al. (2005) and El-Nawawy and Iskandar (2003), are amongst those who have cited the example of Aljazeera's coverage of Saudi Arabian and Qatari relations, and concluded that Aljazeera's critical coverage of Saudi Arabia tended to correlate directly with the ups and downs of Saudi/Qatari relations.. They also cited the examples of the station's coverage of the Iraq war of 2003 and of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in order to illustrate the correlation between the station's coverage of these issues and Qatari policies and positions. Although these sources did not always look directly and specifically at these issues, they present useful data that provides evidence of this correlative relationship.

Perhaps, the strongest indicator of this correlation between Aljazeera take on events and Qatari policy comes from the station/network, coverage of what is known as the Arab Spring,

especially in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. Here we notice strong agreement between scholars such as Hijjawi (2011), Al-Zayat (2012), Al-Sadi (2012), Hanson (2013) and Dorsey (2013), amongst others, in detecting a direct link between Qatar's support and direct involvement in revolutions in these countries, and the zeal with which Aljazeera presented its coverage (especially between 2011-2013). For instance, Al-Zayat (2012), who looked at the correlation between Aljazeera's coverage of the Arab Spring in Libya, Tunisia and Egypt, and the official Qatari position, found that the stronger the Qatari position was in support of these revolutions, the stronger the coverage dedicated to these revolutions by Aljazeera (bordering at times on direct involvement such as campaigning on behalf of one side of the divide).

In the same vein, the model that sees Aljazeera as advancing of a pan-Arab, pro-political Islam agenda and the use of anti-Western, anti-Israel, anti-American discourses and rhetoric as a deflection in order to direct audiences towards adopting pan-Arab/pro-political Islam ideologies compatible with Qatari interests and vision. This model can be combined with the model that sees Aljazeera as serving the interests and policies of Qatar for a number of reasons.

First, because these two ideologies (pan-Arab/pro-political Islam) are not apparent as being evidently adopted by the ruling family in Qatar and there is no empirical evidence to support this. However, there is correlative evidence suggesting that they (the Qataris) have adopted one or both of these ideologies at times of heightened tension with neighbouring countries, notably Saudi Arabia, Iran and Egypt. So, there is no consistency in adopting these ideologies and It could be argued that they have been adopted as a pragmatic measure from the Qataris.

For instance, from 1997 to 2003 and conflict between Saddam Hussein and the West, Qatar seemed to have strongly adopted a supportive stance of Iraqi regime and consequently Aljazeera's tone and coverage seemed to take a strong and somewhat evident Arab nationalism coloration. However, between 2003 to around 2013 Qatari policy and interests seem to have shifted towards adopting a policy in support of political Islam in line with political changes in the region –notice here again the competing tendencies between Qatar and the trio of Saudi Arabia/Iran/Egypt- and hence Aljazeera's tone and coverage seemed to be more sympathetic/supportive to political Islam. Hence, from Scholarly works examined Qatar's adoption of pan-Arab/pro-political Islam is subservient to its national interest's policies. These two ideologies are apparent in many of Aljazeera's programs encouraging audiences to adopt a Qatari version of pan-Arabism/political Islam, and hosted by pan-Arab thinkers such as Azmi Bishara, and pro political Islam figures such as Cheick Youssef AlQardawi and others. Aljazeera being pan-Arab/pro-political Islam serves the interests of Qatar as ideologies that allow it to challenge Saudi/Iranian version of Islam, while at the same time claiming to provide a moderate alternative (combining Arabism/political Islam) across the entire Arab and Muslim world.

Second, a number of advocates of Aljazeera as an advocate of pan-Arabism and pro-political Islam have argued that the former Emir of Qatar, Cheick Hamad Ben Khalifa Al-Thani, himself (abdicated to his son Cheick Tamim Ben Hamad in 2013) may harbour pan-Arab/pro-political Islam inclinations. However, this view is not supported by any empirical data.

Nonetheless, the general trend and the link between Qatar's interests and its interchanging adoption of pan-Arabism/pro-political Islam stance are strongly supported by empirical data as provided by a number of scholarly works examined in this study. For example, Fandy (2007) concludes in his comparative research looking at Aljazeera and Al-Arabiya that Aljazeera represents a new type of alliance between nationalists and Islamists in the Arab world (cf. Hafez, 2004: 9). Fandy (2007) goes further, arguing from his examination of certain Aljazeera programs that the pro-Arabism and pro-political Islam agenda can be seen as remarkably obvious, especially the political Islam of the Muslim Brotherhood. Dorsey (2013), Kamrava (2013), Hanson (2013), Powers (2009) and Hafez (2004) are amongst those who agree with this idea. Dorsey (2013) remarks, regarding this relationship between Qatar, Aljazeera, and the Muslim Brotherhood movement, that they (the Qataris) regard this relationship as driven by their desire to differentiate themselves from its powerful neighbour, Saudi Arabia. Another example of this combination of pan-Arabism and political Islam is given by Hafez (2004), who argues that Aljazeera's coverage of controversial issues in the Arab world, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, is deeply influenced by the dominance of pan-Arab ideology, with a deep inclination towards a political strand of Islam in the form of the Islamic movement Hamas (the Palestinian wing of the Muslim Brotherhood movement). In other words, as explained by Powers (2010), Arabism in combination with political Islam are ideological trends that the Qataris noticed could be used as driving forces in pursuing their national interests.

To sum up, Qatar's interests and policies influence very strongly Aljazeera's nature and journalistic performance and ensure that the network is subservient to their national interests and policy aims. Aljazeera's pan-Arabism/pro-political Islam is also a result of Qatari policy that regards the adoption of these ideologies as serving its interests as it battles to assert itself regionally and globally. The Qataris ensure Aljazeera adopt these ideological positions through a number of control mechanisms, i.e., ownership, finance and appointment of the networks board members, senior managers and editorial auditing policies.

### **Aljazeera: providing a unique Arab media model**

I have established, during the course of this study, that the concept of a 'model' is used in social sciences as "a simplified picture of a part of the real world that has some of the characteristics of the real world, but not the entire world" (Lave and March, 1993: 3). In this sense the model, according to Little (1998), is a system of connected, related concepts to describe an idea or phenomenon. I have concluded that Aljazeera's nature and journalistic practices could be seen as constituting a unique media model within the socio-political context of the region from which it originated. What this means is that Aljazeera is indeed subservient to Qatari political and other interests, but at the same time it is allowed a much higher level of operational freedom which makes it seem, in a region that is dominated by media censorship and restrictions, as a beacon of press freedom and advocate of democratic values. This freedom has also allowed Aljazeera to develop a unique tradition of Arab journalistic practices that established itself across the Arab world, initially based on public service ethos brought in the station founders from their experience at the BBC Arabic television. This tradition has been proliferating across the region encompassing the values of

contextual objectivity, neutrality and balanced reporting of events and news. In other words, we may indeed have with Aljazeera a unique media model and practice that is evolving beyond and above the hybrid paradigm, although within its current practice the hybrid model with much adaption seems an accurate representation of Aljazeera. The network is also attempting to become financially more self sufficient through constant restructuring and adoption of certain market driven practices. Hence, as suggested by Ayish (2002, 2005, 2010), El-Nawawy and Iskandar (2003), Sakr, (2001, 2005, 2007), Al-Jaber (2004), Hafez (2004), Iskandar (2006), Qusaibaty (2006), Lynch (2006), Seib (2008, 2011), Powers (2009), Abdelmoula (2012), and Miladi (2013) agree that the nearest model encapsulating Aljazeera's nature and journalistic performance is the hybrid model, with much adaptation taking into account cultural, political, social and historic factors that impacted the setting up and development of Aljazeera. It is a model that combines loose state control/ ownership with some level of private sector practices, while at the same time enjoying a margin of freedom within the complexities and contradictions of Qatari policy and objectives.

Furthermore, as a direct consequence of this margin of operational freedom enjoyed by Aljazeera, it had profound effect on the Arab media landscape. The precise nature of this effect remains to be determined, but from the research examined in this study it can't be ignored or denied. Many researchers strongly agree that Aljazeera has, since its inception, revolutionized the media's role and practices in the Arab world, and accelerated the process of change, including within Qatar itself, and also, for the first time in modern media history, may have seriously challenged the traditional North-South flow of information. Scholars such as El-Nawawy and Iskandar (2003), Hafez (2004), Zayani (2005), Miles (2005), Lynch (2006), Zayani and Sahraoui (2007) and Powers (2010) are amongst those who agree that Aljazeera's journalistic style, combining Western practices with Arab cultural and religious contexts, in what El-Nawawy and Iskandar call 'contextual objectivity' (El-Nawawy and Iskandar, 2003: 53), may have developed a media model that is being copied by others, in the Arab world and beyond. In other words, this is what Powers (2010) terms "the integration of this 'Arab' approach...into Western technological news formats and media that is the key to Aljazeera's success" (Powers, 2010: 153).

Zayani and Ayish (2008) agree, arguing that despite Aljazeera's questionable relationship with Qatar, "it is still safe to say that the channel has enjoyed an amount of editorial independence that is unusual for the region" (Zayani and Ayish, 2008: 442). To illustrate this point further, Aday et al. (2005), after comparing Aljazeera and American news channels, concluded that the station provided an alternative view that challenges existing assumptions and previously held views. Other scholars such as Abdullah (2012), Abdelmoula (2012), Miladi (2013), Thai (2010), and Seib (2008) have gone further. They argue that Aljazeera started a revolution in the Arab world which is driving change and providing a real alternative public space, despite the station's weaknesses, especially in planting the seeds of what is called the 'Arab Spring'.

Other research suggests (e.g., Al-Hail, 2004; Seib, 2008; Al-Tamimi, 2012; Qassim, 2012; Hroub, 2013; inter alia) that this presumed effect extends to influencing and changing its host country, Qatar. This suggests that the station has matured during its years of development,

and has evolved to a level where it is now influencing not only the Arab world, but more specifically the Qatari government. In terms of this effect, Hroub (2013) accepts that Aljazeera has evolved into a position where it has become more powerful and imposing even on its patrons, the Qataris (Hroub, 2013: 2). Al-Kuda and Khamees (2008) argue that Qatar before Aljazeera and Qatar after Aljazeera are completely different countries.

In the same vein, Galander (2013) argues that although Aljazeera's coverage does not comply with norms of objective reporting as defined by the West, this does not render its take on events unacceptable or objectionable. He suggests that the station is a model of advocacy media that is unique in the region (Galander, 2013: 14). Such an advocacy role, Al-khazendar and Ali (2013) argue, has been successful in proliferating change within Arab society and media practice (Al-khazendar and Ali, 2013: p78).

To sum up, while Aljazeera is clearly projecting Qatar's political vision of the world and advancing its interest regionally and globally, the Qataris, especially as the station became a global network; have adopted a hands off approach, by which they exercise overall control through an administrative/financing mechanism, while at the same time allowing Aljazeera freedom to operate. For instance, Aljazeera American output and programming is completely different from that of Aljazeera Arabic, which may lead many to think that they are indeed two different channels and yet both channels are owned by Qatar. This has led scholars such as Hroub (2013) to argue that Aljazeera, as it evolved into a much bigger entity, has assumed a greater level of autonomy than when it was first established in 1996.

It could also be argued that the concept of national Qatari interests has become expanded as the network and indeed Qatar became a much bigger player regionally and globally. While in the early years of Aljazeera, this concept could have been to spread the values of democracy, freedom, human rights...etc, while at the same time adopting ideologies such as pan-Arabism to contrast Qatar with its powerful neighbours Saudi Arabia, Iran and Egypt. In later years especially after the start of Arab Spring, and the proliferation of freedom of expression in many Arab countries, limited success of certain democratic experiences, e.g. Tunisia, the adoption of Political Islam became the norm. However, in recent years and especially after 2013 it is noticeable that Qatar is again switching in a much more balanced position in its adoption of either ideologies, while at the same time continue to advance values of democracy, human right and freedom of expression. This is clearly expressed in Aljazeera's coverage and programming.

The key point here is the clear correlation between Qatari national interests/policies and the way Aljazeera reflects these interests through its coverage and programming. This (Qatari policy and interests) would seem a maze of contradictions, giving the impression that the models identified are un-compatible or un-reconcilable? However, a closer examination of how Qatar defines its interests and policies would reveal a clear pattern with the ultimate aim for Qatar to become a regional and global player with a clear policies/ambitions distinct from its regional rivals, Saudi Arabia/Iran and later on Egypt (See Anzawa, 2011; Qassim, 2012; Al-Tamimi; 2012; Dorsey, 2013; Hanson, 2013; among others). In the same line, if one

follows the political changes in the Arab world, the relationship between Qatar its neighbouring countries, and the shifting regional and global alliances, a clear pattern emerges that establish a clear link between these changing political, economic, social scene and Qatari definition of national interests/policies. Aljazeera reflects these changes through its coverage of events and various programs. Consequently, Aljazeera advancing pan-Arabism/political Islam or advancing democracy/freedom of expression are integral part of Aljazeera serving Qatari interests/policies. Hence, none of the three models can operate nor exist without the other. They are a reflection of a complex/interchanging Qatari politics and interests in a region that is equally changing beyond recognition.

### **Discussion:**

On a much broader level, the issue of media control through finance and management structures as well as ownership, considered in relation to supporting national interests and achieving strategic policy objectives (as I have been discussing with regard to Aljazeera) has been examined at great length and depth by Murdock and Golding (1977), Herman and Chomsky (1988), Murdock (1991), Herman (1996, 2003), and Curran and Seaton (2010), amongst others. Herman (2003) for instance, argues that two of the filters of the propaganda model, ownership and advertising, have become more relevant in modern times, especially with the weakening of public broadcasting, greater levels of media concentration, and the weakening of journalistic professionalism (Herman, 2003: 14). These two filters can be considered as applying to Aljazeera with both positive and negative effects. On the positive side, the fact that Aljazeera is a media organisation owned by a so-called Third World country, and therefore not having to rely on conventional sources of funding, puts it in a position to challenge conventional broadcasting norms and practices (Zayani, 2005; Lynch, 2006; Seib, 2008; Alhassan, 2004; inter alia). Reliance on financing from a non-democratic state, however, may render the station prone to manipulation, to serve the interests of its sponsor state.

The other question that deserves great consideration is how much effect Aljazeera is having in reversing the North-South information flow, as suggested by Miladi (2013), Seib (2008), Lynch (2006), Zayani (2005), and Miles (2005), amongst others. This notion of dominant flows of information from the West's core, discussed in an earlier chapter, is regarded by many, especially in the developing world, as cultural imperialism (Curran and Park, 2000; Barker, 1997; Murdock and Golding, 1977; inter alia). Barker (1997: 183), for instance, notes that "cultural imperialism is understood in terms of the imposition of one national culture upon another and the media are seen as central to this process as carriers of cultural meanings which penetrate and dominate the culture of the subordinate nation". He argues that there is a link between cultural and economic imperialism resulting in the reproduction of "global capitalism" as the dominant ideology (Ibid: 183).

This is what Hall (1981, quoted in Barker, 1997) describes, in that "...television messages carry multiple meanings and can be interpreted in different ways. That is not to say all meanings are equal among themselves, rather, the text will be structured in dominance leading to a preferred meaning" (cf. Barker, 1997: 117). In other words, the meaning

preferred by the Western dominant ideology. Hence, Seib (2008) argues that Aljazeera has been able to compete with this process of meaning-construction and provide audiences with a competitive and credible alternative reading that challenges the Western one. This is an area that deserves a detailed examination as a possible avenue toward testing the theory of the 'Aljazeera effect', based on robust empirical data. It is a task that this study has attempted to answer within a limited range and within the overall aims of the research. However, I have to say that it was a difficult task to undertake, for a number of reasons.

First, there are very few comparative media studies in the Arab world to serve as a guide in outlining the parameters of this work. The research that I managed to collect and review suffered from a number of weaknesses and drawbacks. They tended to suffer from a lack of methodological rigour, a lack of empirical evidence to substantiate any claims advanced, and were often of an essentially descriptive nature. Furthermore, the field of comparative media studies within the Arab world is still at the beginning of its development, and has a long way to go before it reaches maturity, especially among scholars in the Arab world and among Arab academics residing in the region.

Second, time constraints meant that not enough time was spent drawing up general patterns for the purposes of determining Aljazeera's nature and journalistic practices, alongside the models identified in this study distilled from a much broader range of resources. If I had had more time available to me, I would have collected a much bigger and more varied sample, and spent more time sifting and examining its contents.

Third, even the most insightful of the works on Aljazeera, considered in terms of academic rigour, depth of analysis and methodological clarity and design, could not escape from certain ideological biases, although not declared, as is the case with many of the advocates of the model, Aljazeera as an advocate of Arabism/political Islam (Fandy, 2007; Cherribi, 2006; Ajami, 2001; Chafets, 2001; inter alia), or an undeclared hostility to political Islam/Arabism.

I have also to acknowledge that my position as an employee of Aljazeera helped me greatly, but at the same time was a source of great difficulty. It helped me because during the course of my work for the station, from the day it was set up to the completion of this work, I have been aware of many of the debates, arguments, and controversies about Aljazeera, in considerable depth. This was of great help, because over the years I have managed to collate an array of personal documents and other information that helped guide my research. It also made the task of making sense of such differing views, within the limitation outlined above, much easier. Enjoying such a privileged position, however, impaired to a certain extent my endeavour to conduct my research in a purely impartial and objective manner.

First of all, my position within the organisation imposed a heavier burden on me constantly to ensure that I retain a greater level of neutrality and objectivity, and only follow the evidence and empirical data, wherever that may have led me.

Second, being an employee of the station meant that I am bound by confidentiality clauses, and I found myself not at liberty to divulge information or pieces of documents or other data that may have served to enhance this piece of research. The greatest difficulty I found was



the intense nature of my job, which meant spending much of my time on assignments abroad, and also meant that despite repeatedly taking time off to work on my research, I still found it very difficult to re-focus after each time I engaged with my day-to-day job duties and tasks. Nonetheless, I have made strenuous efforts to maintain a continuous level of concerted effort to compose this thesis, while at the same time attempting to remain neutral, objective and balanced, within the bounds of human nature. I think, however, that I have managed to present a comprehensive view of Aljazeera's nature and journalistic practices, from a unique 'insider' perspective, and have helped to advance the academic understanding of this organisation. I think I have also managed to open up new avenues which prompt further research in future, concerning, for instance, the nature of Aljazeera's influence on Qatari society. I will touch on some of these areas in later sections. I think my inner knowledge of Aljazeera and of Qatari politics/personalities served me well in formulating a broader understanding of the relationship between Aljazeera and Qatar and making sense of the vast array of materials on the subject. However, much remains to be done on this subject, which I hope others will find the time and the resources to undertake. I shall mention in the next section some of the areas that I think still warrant further exploration.

#### **Further areas of research:**

Furthermore, the relationship between Qatar and Aljazeera and the use of Aljazeera by Qatar to advance its political as well as strategic objectives remain an area that requires further research to develop strong empirical data to explore the nature of this relationship. In the same vein, the presumed impact that Aljazeera had on Qatari society and the enormous changes that took place in this tiny Gulf state, many within Qatar and outside it attribute to large extent to Aljazeera not only because of its journalistic practices, but also because it challenged certain Qatari taboos and conceptions, as it opened its door for example to Qatari women. This area could be tackled in through a number of topics, looking at the station impact on freedom of expression, legal and journalistic frameworks and social and economic change. One other area of research that need further exploring is the assumed role of the station in the Arab spring and the claim that it played an important role in toppling many of the Arab rulers. Academic research based on clear and strong empirical analysis is needed to establish the existence of this relationship or its absence. This is very important, especially after the change of leadership in Qatar and setbacks that the country's foreign policy faced in Egypt after the Muslim Brotherhood President Mohammed Morsi was deposed, and much of what has been achieved as a result of the Egyptian revolution has been revoked by the military.

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