

**THE MEDIA ECONOMICS AND CULTURAL POLITICS OF AL JAZEERA ENGLISH
IN THE UNITED STATES**

by

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Chapter 1

Introduction

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Overview

Since its foundation in 2006, Al Jazeera English (AJE) developed into a leading global news outlet, yet it has struggled to gain an audience in the United States. Given the centrality of American-Arab relations in international affairs and the historically one-way directionality of news and information flow between the United States and the Arab countries, AJE is a novel phenomenon. It represents the prospects of a historic shift in transnational news flow imbalances. For decades, Arab audiences consumed American media, from movies and music to the news and information produced by government broadcasting arms, such as Voice of America, and the private sector outlet CNN. Americans, on the other hand, had little to no exposure to Arab media. This concern with balance motivated much of the popular discourse and scholarship about Al Jazeera English, the first news media headquartered in the Arab Middle East to actively seek American news consumers. The two primary frameworks guiding global communication scholarship on AJE presume a reversal in the dominant pattern. First, as a new source of news outside of the western informational axis centered in the cities of Atlanta, Washington, DC, New York and London, AJE can challenge the grip of world powers on news and information, a counter-hegemonic potential, given the relationship between power and information (Boyd-Barrett & Xie, 2008; Al-Najjar, 2009; Gardner, 2009; Seib, 2005, 2008; Samuel-Azran, 2010; Sakr, 2007; Painter, 2008). Second, it offers the promise of conciliatory or bridge-building effects between peoples as a medium that expedites inter-cultural understanding

and awareness of others at the level of publics (Khamis, 2007; Tehranian, 2006; El-Nawawy and Powers, 2008, 2009, 2010).

Before scholarship can consider the greater implications of AJE's brand of reporting on world affairs, it is necessary to begin with a mapping of the actuality of AJE's circulation – the focus of this thesis. This immediately generates a problem. The United States is the key market implied in these theoretical approaches given its centrality in international communication. Yet, AJE is not reachable by the vast majority of Americans' remote controls. This necessarily dampens analysis of wider effects on power and inter-cultural conflict. Before considering impact, we must take an inventory of where and how AJE travels in the country – and why. There are distributional exceptions to its absence, including large centers, such as Washington, DC and parts of New York City, as well as limited cities such as Burlington, VT and Toledo, OH. While it is fully available online, an increasingly key avenue for American news viewership, Internet news consumption is still secondary to TV – one motivation for AJE's active pursuit of cable deals in the largest majority English-speaking news market. For AJE, distribution in the United States has been a primary goal and source of frustration, despite its easy availability via the Internet. AJE sees cable in particular as the best way to reach, and therefore influence, a wide American audience – which is one of the most vital news markets in the world, given the country's disproportionate role in world affairs. The primary question of interest is why has it failed to gain wide TV availability and therefore a large audience? A second question is, what does AJE's absence mean for international communication, US-Arab relations and the channel itself? This study seeks to identify and examine the factors and constraints that keep AJE largely off of American televisions and relate these to the larger theoretical questions posited in AJE and global communication scholarship. Also, there are key

junctures, such as the Arab Spring, which rejuvenated the network's reputation in key quarters of American society. These moments illuminate further how the factors work in explaining AJE's lack of distribution.

When AJE launched, it was available on TV in more than 80 million households worldwide. By early 2012, that number was closer to 250 million households, according to the network – which puts its distribution in close reach of CNN and the BBC¹. It can be seen on television sets in more than 100 countries and on six continents. Very few of its TV households are in the United States. At a very generous best, the number as of mid-2012 is 7 million, which is roughly 5% of the national market. This puts its American distribution as anomalously low. Oddly, American demand for AJE as expressed by website visits appears comparatively greater than its TV availability indicates. The channel's website attracted over 22 million visitors a month in early 2012. Roughly *half* of its website views came from the United States. This incongruence is the puzzle at this study's core.

B. Research Questions

AJE's exclusion drives the primary research questions:

First, and centrally, what are the key structural factors that enable or obstruct foreign news media from gaining access to audiences via distributors? The four main factors or sites of contestation this study considers are political culture; media economics; the larger national and international political context and; AJE's own agency as a market-seeking actor. These are the components of the study's framework and are further outlined in another section below.

Second, what are the international ramifications of AJE's lack of availability through traditional carriage means? Given that communication matters for international relations, for

¹ Actual audience estimates – as opposed to “availability” – are another issue, arguably more important, though much more difficult to measure reliably.

example by promoting inter-cultural understanding or motivating state actions (a la the CNN effect), it would seem to be important that a channel that includes international voices is not made available widely in the United States – even as American news media are widely accessible internationally. Research on AJE has examined whether it can serve as an antidote to the clash of civilizations (Huntington, 1996) or polarization (Khamis, 2007; El-Nawawy and Powers, 2008, 2010). This study imports the problem of poor distribution to this stream of research.

Third, how has online distribution figured into this exclusion? While its distribution is miniscule when it comes to American televisions, it has 100% penetration in American Internet homes. This presents possibilities for audience-building in a new media age. AJE’s planners do not see Internet availability as a substitute for cable, however. This may reflect an archaic belief in the possibility of a mass audience for international news in the United States. Still online access offers the only way to circumvent inhospitable distribution markets. Applying a network society thesis (Castells, 1996; 1997), we expect the Internet’s ability to de-center, link and integrate different national publics to give rise to audiences for AJE. New and online media could be expected to engender transnational viewing audiences. For now, this may be AJE’s best chance for gaining an American audience. What are these prospects and what other options does AJE have are two questions further explored in the concluding chapter.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Al Jazeera English is an important entrant into the world news media stage for several reasons. Its novelty as a non-Western, non-European outlet challenging the incumbent titans of

international news media, especially CNN International and the BBC, offers an important example of how international journalism and news are changing, becoming de-centered in comparison with previous eras. The emergence of AJE is linked to a shift in “the political, economic and technological contexts in which media are produced and consumed” in “an increasingly global” infrastructure enabling an “international flow of images and ideas” (Thussu, 2007a, p. 3). Affordable communication satellite use has long been credited with revolutionizing global media and communications, creating a world of complex and highly distributed information flow. After “the internationalization of media markets following deregulation and a worldwide integration of the media industry,” the digitization of media delivery has arguably fostered a new, even more greatly distributed era in media (Chalaby, 2005, p. 30). The once paradigmatic notion of a one-way flow from a global core to the periphery (Smith, 1980; Tunstall, 1977; Schiller, 1992; Galtung, 1971) is no longer apt. This promises a closer realization of a global public sphere through transnational media. Historic news producers like the United States are increasingly becoming receivers in the changing context of international communication flow (Tunstall, 2007). Their national media and the ideational orthodoxies about international issues are increasingly challenged on their home turf. Given that new flow is occurring between recent adversaries, and that communication can engender intercultural understanding, they would seem to offer promise for improving nations’ understanding and awareness of each other. Some of the early scholarship on Al Jazeera English suggests as much.

A. The United States and Transnational News Media

There are many reasons to expect AJE’s in-flow into the United States to be marked by difficulties. Historically, the country became independent from foreign news providers by the

early 1930's. It was the first to effectively defy the news agency cartel of Reuters (UK), Havas (France) and Wolff (Germany), which controlled international news production since 1840 (Boyd-Barrett and Thussu, 1992, p. 1). Breaking with the cartel and elevating the domestic, private, cooperative agency, the Associated Press, was an assertion of the country's sovereignty in news and information. In the post-Cold war, however, media sovereignty became paradoxical. It was both "a shield protecting" the citizenry from foreign control or undue influence, but also "an instrument" for the elite to secure the power in a given country while closing off a media space to foreign ideas (Nordenstreng, 1993, p. 461). A country's news media are important national symbols, and the provision of news is often a function or outcome of disproportionate power in the international realm (Smith, 1980, p. 73).

While entering any saturated market is never easy, critiques of the largest news providers in the United States imply an especially hostile terrain should be foreseeable for AJE. Media scholars long found major American media uncritically tied to elite discourse or the state, especially in times of war or foreign policy crisis (Entman, 2004; Zaller, 1992; Bennett, 1990; Hallin, 1989). Failing to meet the informational needs for a democracy (Bennett et al, 2007; Baker, 2002; Entman, 1989; Iyengar, 1994), it leaves Americans uninformed and uninterested in international affairs (Shanor, 2003; Curran et al, 2009). Could AJE, as part of a network vilified as an enemy in war by American political elite, really build an audience where a public was not only uninformed of but apparently uninterested in international news? AJE's unique content and "global south" mission, stemming from its non-American sponsor and perspective, appears to fall outside of the elite and the industry's range of views and sources. As a threat to U.S. elite influence and the American government-media interrelationship that privileges the government's framing of foreign affairs – in other words, the nation-state's communicative power (Castells,

2009) – wouldn't resistance be expected? Journalism is a politicized practice (Schudson, 1995) and news can set the agenda in matters of foreign policy (Cohen, 1963). At the very least, AJE's reporting offers the potential to disrupt the *status quo*, the "particular symbolic universe, a relatively stable and recognizable 'world of television news,'" that was for so long "self contained and coherent" (Dahlgren & Chakrapani, 1982, p.45). Given the tendency of states to pursue their interests and national sovereignty over the free flow of information and news (Price, 2002), one would expect AJE to meet resistance.

Another reason one expects AJE to struggle to gain access to the American news market is that it dramatically contrasts with the tendency of American news outlets to only cover certain regions of the world when there are "coups and earthquakes" (Rosenblum, 1979), leaving much of the world disproportionately under-reported (Adams, 1982; Adams, 1986). If AJE asserts a new "world-oriented journalism" (Smith, 1980, p. 173) with a unique sense of news values, follows different news-gathering routines (Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Tuchman, 1973, 1978), and operates according to different sorts of filters and institutional pressures (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996), does it not run contrary to the accumulated wisdom about the American public's news preferences? In a market economy for news, these preferences are determinant.

Yet another expectable hurdle to AJE is the state of media economics. Wide audience reach, given the gatekeeping power of distributors controlling distribution (Wax, 2007) and the market saturation of competing news oligopolies (Bagdikian, 2004), seems unlikely. The cable carriage industry is led by a few large multi-system operators (MSOs), which tend to be risk averse, and would be expected to be especially so with a potentially controversial Middle Eastern news service in the wake of the War on Terror. The channel would not seem likely to attract advertising revenue (Sakr, 2007, 123), especially among local and national businesses. Carriage

could translate into lost subscriptions from those who equate the network with Al-Qaeda. Also, as major news producers face crises in news revenues and TV news sees declining audience shares between 2008 and 2011 (Holcomb et al, 2011), distributors would be expected to shy from adding more news programming.

Foreign news services broadcasting in the English language are on the rise, yet none outside of the BBC have significant market shares in the United States. It is with little surprise that AJE has a minor presence on American televisions. The story of AJE's efforts to enter the country illustrates the origins and reasons for the low level of foreign sponsored news on the primary means of American news consumption, the television.

B. International Communication Flow

Scholarship based on anthropological approaches and informed by post-modern theory positions media globalization as an era of pluralism that undermines simplified models showing largely one-way or imbalanced international media flows. The notion that there is a multitude of media generated in and travelling between many different countries runs against the unsophisticated cultural assumptions of the media imperialism thesis, which sees media power as centered and forecasts a resultant cultural homogeneity and political-ideational domination. Research on media globalization that emphasized pluralism is still “slower to consider the changing role of journalism, compared to the attention devoted to financial and entertainment flow.” (Reese, 2010, p. 344). Globalization research has usefully de-centered the United States as a producer of media even if it retains a status as the leading national exporter of media in the world (though Europe as whole is a much greater exporter) (Thusu, 2007b, p. 16). At the same time, there is a greater tension between patterns of transnationalism (Chalaby, 2005; Appadurai, 1996) – embedded in the notion of the network society – and the nation-state's impulse to control

information (Price, 2002), including the Internet (Chadwick, 2006, p. 208), and continue a legacy of promoting national social identities through media (Scannell, 1990). Internet access makes it impossible for all but the most capable authoritarian states to hermetically seal their borders from foreign content.

At the same time, local, national and regional media centers in what was once termed the developing world are robust and growing even as journalism in advanced industrial countries is in perpetual financial and identity crisis. As western revenue streams for news media dry out, news organizations struggle to monetize their websites (Fuller, 2010) since once profitable mass media audiences have fragmented (Neuman, 1991). The spreading of online networks of “prosumers” (Toffler, 1980) or “mass self-communication” (Castells, 2007, p. 248), includes new news-gathering and reporting sources from citizen journalists to civil society and transnational advocates. The contours of journalism are themselves called into question by legions of amateurs. This further hastens the decline of the old international communication paradigms and is provoking a re-thinking of the boundaries of journalism as a profession. News as a field is more open as information moves with rapid multi-directionality. In such flux, challengers to the incumbents of journalism are expectable. In thinking about the United States as a receiver of global news, it is useful to consider the country’s reception to global media as a gauge of whether and how previous patterns of flows are reversing – an indication of how far the world has come from one-way flow of news and information. This study hints at the contours of global news media pluralism in the United States by looking at one emergent news media outlet.

C. Intercultural Communication

That such a news media outlet would arise from Qatar, a recently and still developing gas-rich monarchy in the Middle East, is something of a surprise, but also points to unique

contextual factors outside of the question of the shape of news flows and American receptivity to foreign news. AJE's status as news outlet sponsored by and based in an Arab, Muslim country is implicates US-Arab relations since the 2001 attacks, as well as the many modern instances of conflict between the United States and Arab leaders and popular movements (conflicts often waged in Arab countries, from Libya to Lebanon, Iraq, as well as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict). AJE research has gauged the channel as a means for subduing "the ongoing discourse of 'clash of civilizations' in favor of a new discourse of 'dialogue between civilizations'" (Khamis, 2007: 49). This research starts with Huntington's popular notion that global conflict after the cold war will increasingly fall along grand cultural-civilizational, as opposed to political-economic or ideological, lines. The West and Islam would be the two of the main adversaries (Huntington, 1996; Seib, 2004). This was controversial and inconsistent with current conflicts – considering the tendency of Muslim states and insurgents to ally with non-Muslim countries against other Muslim states – but it generated a tremendous amount of scholarship and popular consideration after the September, 2001 attacks.

Rather than a meaningful description of world power and conflict, "clash of civilizations" is useful here for characterizing the elite and popular ideational terrain at play in the circulation of AJE in the United States post-9/11. While this idea of deep cultural clash was a powerful frame in American media (Miladi, 2006, 956), it was also rampant in Arab news media (Seib, 2005, 605). Seeing the world in terms of inter-cultural conflict led many popular commentators and politicians to consider AJE an enemy combatant. Media scholars moved in a different direction, asking if AJE could be a communicative antidote to Huntington's vision (Khamis, 2007) as a form of inter-cultural or conciliatory media. In a somewhat prophetic speculation given the way AJE emerged as a news leader during the Arab Spring, Zayani asked whether AJE

would play “a useful role for Western publics particularly as it serves as a window on an important region during times when the thesis of the clash of civilizations (and often religions) has been getting credence” (2008, p. 220).

It is worth asking if AJE could be a useful mediator in intercultural communication (Gudykunst, 1988, 1994). El-Nawawy and Powers found that AJE is a conciliatory media source. Consistent with expected outcomes of peace journalism (Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005), they found that watching AJE moderates viewers’ attitudes towards other cultures (2008; 2010). Their reception study surveyed people already watching AJE, and saw correlates between their views on conflict with how long they have been watching. Those watching for longer amounts of time tended to exhibit less hostility towards other groups. For AJE to serve as a meaningful conciliatory medium, however, potential audiences – those who would not form self-selected audiences – must be willing to watch with an open eye. This study addresses this, but also raises the problem of how pre-reception opposition to AJE by members of the public threatens to limit AJE’s availability in the country – and therefore the possibility of it serving as a conciliatory medium in the United States.

III. FRAMEWORK, FORMAT, CHAPTERS, AND METHODS

The specific case at the center of this study is how AJE gained carriage and maintained it after long debate in one American community, Burlington, VT. The local, publicly funded municipal telecom company, Burlington Telecom, chose to carry the channel and was met by protest soon after. Its mere availability on local television sets became a topic of public contention. Eventually, the debate was resolved through townhall meetings and deliberation by

appointed committees – interestingly antiquated models of communal democracy in today’s era of e-governance and online deliberation. Such townhall meetings have always been the “central historical symbol of community participation in the United States” (Neuman, 1991, p. 9). Yet the question they debated, the presence of a foreign news channel on their municipal system was a novel one.

While such a public and deliberative process to decide local channel availability is exceptional, the meetings are primarily of interest for the substance they produced. How Americans in Burlington spoke about AJE and articulated the basic principles guiding whether or not it should be available reflected deeper cultural orientations and political sensibilities – from the anxieties of those fearing it gave voice to America’s enemies to hopes that it could enhance understanding of other peoples. These discourses interacted with the town’s unique political economy to produce a community decision about AJE’s continued availability.

The channel’s coverage of the Arab Spring, in particular, the Egyptian uprising, is a central moment on which the association turns from hostility to significant fanfare – a turn which has paradoxically not resulted in much greater market access for AJE in the year after the Egyptian uprising. To tell the story of AJE in the United States, this study examines the discourses of public mobilizations for and against AJE, which reflect both American political culture and the larger post-9/11 political context, the media economics of distribution, and how AJE itself made decisions as a strategic actor that bear on its performance. They reveal the prospects of the in-flow of AJE as an Arab and Muslim-owned, globalized media outfit in the decade after the largest terrorist attacks in modern American history.

Before outlining the chapters, this section presents a modified flow/contra-flow framework that structures the analysis. This framework's factors are elaborated here, in the opening chapter, to serve as a reference point for the rest of the study.

A. The Analytical Framework -- Modified Flow/Contra-Flow

1. Definition and Application of Flow/Contra-Flow

Flow/contra-flow is a spatial and economic framework for explaining the difficulties of media travelling in new transnational patterns, and the economics and politics of such mobility. The concept is attractive for “mapping” empirically how media move globally and gauging its “direction, volume and velocity” (Thussu, 2007b). It describes the balance sheet between “dominant” flow from historic media producers in certain media products (Thussu, 2007c) and “contra-flow” (Boyd-Barrett and Thussu, 1992) from upstart media and news producers in parts of the world that were not traditionally media exporters. The imbalance is a concern carried over from the media imperialism literature (Sreberny-Mohammadi, 2002; Mowlana, 1997). The prospects for contra-flow in the world are important because they can impact international affairs (Alleyne, 1997), identities and their expressions, and empower new groups by generating coalitional alliances and spaces for public discourse (Thussu, 2007a, p. 4). Despite a rapid growth in the movement from media in historic non-news producers, Thussu still finds that in economic terms companies headquartered in western countries produce most news media that move internationally and inter-regionally. However, “few media outlets in the global South demonstrate contra-flow in action as effectively as the Al-Jazeera satellite channel” (Sakr, 2007, p. 116). The question is whether the distributional challenges AJE faces in the United States limits its contra-flow potential. Contra-flow, I propose, can be studied productively by narrowing in on a case of foreign news media trying move into a new market. Often, aggregate

economic data (movie ticket, magazine and book sales, for example) is brought to bear in the contra-flow literature, which is useful for broad generalizations about the changing shape of flows. However, the story of AJE as contra-flow in the US shows various skews and heightened factors that make it only a partially realized reversal of past trends.

A common assumption is that contra-flow is increasing. This is especially prominent in research on culture and entertainment – trade in TV programs (Kunz, 2010), formats, films (Gray, 2011), magazines (Fritha and Feng, 2009), music and so on – as opposed to news. When news is studied as flow, often in global journalism studies, it is not in terms of distribution or circulation, but rather the sharing of content within incumbent national news organizations (Berger, 2009; Rao, 2009; Hanusch and Obijiofor, 2008; Wu, 1998). International news coverage by domestic news providers, for this category, is deemed flow; in these cases, information does move transnationally. However, the production and filtering of news is within a familiar institutional lens, thereby decreasing the chance of transformative effects. There is some research closer to this study's interest in transnational news media – in which broadcasters produce and distribute content across borders, presenting new sorts of sources and filters of news – as examples of flow (Brüggemann and Schulz-Forberg, 2009). In this sense, AJE typifies institutional contra-flow – the development of a multi-national news corporation originating in the global South and distributing news and information elsewhere. This presents something more fundamentally new and different into media environments. The proliferation of 24/7 news channels that aim at transnational audiences – Painter counts 100 since CNN launched in 1980 (2008, 9) – gives cause for thinking of flow in distributional terms rather than just as foreign-originated content processed through national news media. While an American news network's reliance on foreign media footage is something of a contra-flow, it is still mediated and re-

packaged in ways congruent with national biases (Samuel-Azran, 2010), within what Hallin termed the “sphere of consensus” (1989). As Reigert observed, “the genre of foreign news has been resistant to change because it draws on stable foreign policy traditions and cultural myths, and is rooted in a national-political culture” (2011, p. 1579). Carriage allows for direct, unmediated access between a foreign producer of information and a domestic audience, and is therefore more concretely an example of contra-flow. In terms of scope, this means shifting the end focus from content to an industry analysis of distribution and circulation.

AJE’s contra-flow into the United States is then better construed as the movement of its signal into the country’s TVs and Internet-enabled devices and the public’s consumption of its web viewing and social media. However, the study also considers its physical operations, from the bureaus and reporters to the marketing and distribution staff, inside the country, as part of the story. What flows are a broadcast signal sent from, and web content posted by, AJE’s headquarters in Doha. The directives, capital and personnel AJE invests in its American operations, which are centered in the Washington, DC broadcasting center, are related, but not directly constrained by, the distribution question.

The primary distributors of American television industries do not carry AJE’s broadcast signal: an inherent constraint on the channel’s contra-flow potential. The forces of network society (Castells, 1996; 1997) fragmentation and de-centered distribution, and the globalism they suggest, are coming against resistance in the shape of traditional media distribution systems and a public’s fear of the foreign. On the other hand, Internet-based, emerging new media livestreaming technologies and platforms offer AJE a route to circumvent the traditional gatekeepers and build its U.S. audience independently.

Adapted for purposes of this study, this flow/contra-flow framework means looking at a particular global media in its places and times, and the conditions that enable or obstruct its availability; the conditional spatiality of media flow. The story of AJE in Burlington, VT (chapter four) is necessarily told through the various actors who came to influence the communal decision. Rather than deducing the obstacles from an overview of AJE's failure to gain a national audience, this study examines a locality where contra-flow occurred and the discourses around its availability found articulation. Beck urges that information flow be linked to the agents or actors who facilitate or oppose them to understand the proper place of power in contemporary network age communication (2006, p. 80). Identifying those who mobilize for and against AJE's availability serves this purpose. At the same time, understanding the local as part of a national political context is vital. Reese proposes a "global network perspective" to news globalization that centers the "local spaces and actors, and how they are positioned relative to a multitude of forces beyond the immediate locale" (2010, p. 349). Forces beyond the local can include the pressures and interests that form the channel itself, but also that impact how people at the local level interpret the channel – leaving room for analysis of national politics, large media economics and national-level political culture. The local is not isolated from larger levels of analysis then, even if its idiosyncrasies are necessary to the calculating how the different factors matter.

2. Factors

This study's framework isolates four main factors to account for AJE's contra-flow in the United States. These are alluded to throughout the study. The first two chapters following this one provide background to each factor, describing more fully how each relates to the question of AJE in America. The Burlington case study (chapter four) and Arab Spring analysis (chapter

five) are useful for letting us gauge the relative importance of the factors: political culture; media economics; the larger national and international political context (post-9/11 to the Arab uprisings of 2011) and; AJE's own agency as a market-seeking actor. These chapters present how the discourses around AJE in the US vary over space (in Burlington, VT in contrast with other parts of the country) and time (before and after the Arab Spring). The factors are described with more depth below.

i. *Political Culture*

Explicating a framework to study how global news from a Middle Eastern company travelled into the United States was talked about in a small American community marries to some degree cultural studies scholarship, which has focused more on entertainment media content, and journalism studies' interest in news production, content and reception (Zelizer, 2004). It is crucial not to take on a flattened, mechanistic view of culture. Critical scholars who emphasize power can too easily depict culture as static or unitary for empirical or analytical purposes. Comparativists interested in politics and media also tend to see political culture in discrete "national character" terms (Inglehart, 1988). International news is after all still "viewed mainly through national prisms" (Riegert, 2011, p. 1567). This study adds some nuance, by allowing division of national culture into heterogeneous parts, recognizing the unique political culture of Burlington, VT, and different strains within that small community. My conception of political culture sees it as subject to contestation, rather than unitary, and localized.

While Thussu measures the economics of dominant flow, this study proposes that there are culture(s) of news contra-flow. While "cultural proximity" (Straubhaar, 1991), and "social relevance" (Kraidy, 2005, p. 143) have been suggested to explain how and where media products travel, conceptual bridges for transnational news media flow are in short supply. During the

Cold War, state-funded international broadcasters played one-way “proxy” and “surrogate” functions in closed societies (Price, 2002). They fulfilled a role of supplanting prohibited news and views. But American communication efforts abroad were depicted both in informational and cultural terms – American culture was sold as a cool alternative through cultural diplomacy (Arndt, 2005). These functions are less apt since the end of the Cold war, when media have proliferated.

Treating political culture as “distinctive clusters of attitudes” and “subjective world orientations” (Jackman and Miller, 1996, p. 636) that bear on AJE’s distributional issues gives an empirical bearing, though it may not satisfy an ethnographic standard given its emphasis on cognition over lived practices around symbol formation and interpretation, for example. This study’s main data are discourses, expressions of attitudes and orientations that bear on the community’s decision rather than individuals’ meaning-making or my observations as a participant in the field. Still, the discourses are taken as signifiers of deeper cultural schemas that are pre-cognitive, calling on identity for example, and this allows for classifying the types of demographic and ideo-cultural groups that welcome or oppose AJE strongly. This usage of political culture builds upon two premises. The first is Kraidy’s use of “social relevance” to examine collective identities in relation to mobile media texts: flow hinges on “communal aspects of media consumption in its socio-politico economic context” (2005, p. 143). AJE’s entrance into Burlington, VT, as issue that brought out local, public deliberation, presents one such case where communal deliberation explicitly dictated the availability of a transnational media product, congruent with the political culture of New England townhall meetings. It forced articulation of competing subjective world orientations at the communal level, thus translating political culture into positions on a tangible and empirical question of communal relevance. The

second premise is that global news receptivity is indicative of an orientation that ties together similarly situated segments of different publics located in different places. International news products, for instance, can be said to largely flow between similarly situated cosmopolitan elite (Castells, 2007), meaning certain classes of people are inherently outward looking and they become more so with wider availability of such content. It is possible to speak of a “globalization from within the national societies” or “cosmopolitanization” (Beck, 2002, pp. 17-19; Beck, 2006). Of course, there is a risk of over-drawing from the experience of the privileged. As Hafez proposed, generalizations of news media globalization are often concluded from the limited observations of public thinkers and writers who circulate between international hotels that serve up similar media menus (2007, 61-2). He terms this the “hotel thesis.” Cosmopolitanism, however, is also located in the histories of working class activism, large urban centers, and, naturally, diasporic communities (Georgiou and Silversone, 2007). Rather than merely being put in class terms, it is better used as a category of political culture.

By bringing in cultural categories to the study of flow and contra-flow, which has largely focused on the scale and economics of media export/imports (Thussu, 2007b), this study challenges the way news audiences are frequently conceived. News consumption is still largely framed as a rational exercise with informational desires and needs being satisfied by motivated users playing out their roles as citizens. This is a highly individualized understanding, leaving it a function of personal preferences and ideologies, rather than one of interpretive communities or social movements with their own cultures of news-viewing. In other words, AJE interacts with and challenges pre-existing cultural dispositions in the United States. Finally, to the extent these locally-circulating discourses are about the role of the nation in international affairs, it becomes clear how the nation-state imaginary is still important.

ii. *Media Economics and Industries*

The story of circulation necessarily involves economics and law: from AJE's funding and ownership structure, to news media and distribution markets in the United States, to the unique political economy and policy structure of Burlington Telecom that allowed for public deliberation over AJE's availability in their community. This study draws on concepts in media economics, especially from political economy (Herman and Chomsky, 1988; McChesney, 2008), but does not aim to contribute substantially to that literature. Nor does this study hold economics as primarily determinant. It is an important factor however given the private ownership structure of the cable industry. The differential in principles underlying the economics of AJE and the American cable news market helps explain in part why AJE struggles to gain TV carriage in the United States. AJE's funding is provided by state subsidies, making it more like a state, public broadcaster than a private company, despite institutional buffers in place intended to secure editorial independence. This keeps it free from certain market pressures, including advertiser protests. This makes it vulnerable to the state sponsor's desires whether expressed formalistically by the governmental sponsor, as the BBC's mandate was in Great Britain (Scannell, 1990), or carried out in a more informal, *ad hoc* manner. For the most part, AJE's funding allows it to provide content on its own terms without needing to appeal to particular markets. This impairs its ability to succeed in competitive news markets, such as America's. Without a shared profit motive, it may not speak the same business language as commercial distributors looking to attract advertisers. In the United States, there are two markets to consider. The first market is for distribution, or where carriers select which programmers will be offered to viewers. The second market is for viewers, or building an audience. AJE's main struggle for

distribution involves the market among carriers. At the same time, it is seeking audiences through online and its scant carriage.

iii. *Political Context: Post-9/11 to the Arab uprisings*

After the 2001 Al Qaeda attacks on New York City and the Pentagon, many Americans held or expressed negative attitudes towards Arabs and Muslims and came to consider security from attacks a primary national issue. The country, under the leadership of President George W. Bush, declared a “war on terror.” This transformed both foreign and domestic policies. While it led to an invasion of Afghanistan and later, Iraq, it also resulted in low-level conflicts and assassination programs in Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia. A series of prison centers were opened from Bagram air force base in Afghanistan to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and allegations of torture spread. Domestically, the government undertook a massive bureaucratic overhaul to ensure the country was able to prevent such attacks from recurring in the future. It re-organized many law enforcement and security agencies and departments into a larger Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Congress passed the PATRIOT Act, which gave legal sanction to a wide array of measures aimed at furthering national security. Many of these proved controversial with civil liberties and other rights groups, and debates raged about the efficacy of these policy changes. This background is necessary to situate the discourses around AJE in Burlington, VT. More specifically, a particular “war on terror” politics around Al Jazeera emerged, and it arguably manifested in Burlington.

AJE came to the fore of public attention in the United States during the Egyptian uprisings in February, 2011. Then, elite-level discourse fully shifted. Pundits and policymakers raved about AJE. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton held AJE’s reporting up as model news in front of a congressional committee. News reports indicated that President Obama himself was

attuned to the channel as events in Egypt turned. More American officials and politicians began appearing on the network, and all evidence suggested AJE was no longer treated as the enemy that the parent network once was. In Washington, DC then, the political context transformed completely. In the rest of country, AJE received fanfare and website traffic, leading some to suggest that AJE's "moment" of mainstream acceptance arrived. Even as protests against the channel declined, it did not undergo the same wide transformation nationally, as previous associations with Al Qaeda lingered among many. Thus, the changing political context revealed only a partial opening for AJE among a limited number of communities. This "moment" did portend well for AJE's national cable distribution efforts, but as of early 2012, a year later, there were only scant gains. However, one could see in elite discourse a shift in viewing AJE from a "war on terror" frame to an "Arab Spring" one – along with heightened website traffic from Americans.

iv. *AJE's Agency*

Global news media can make an array of decisions with implications for their international distribution. These include product differentiation and customization by region, whether they launch distinct channels or tailor programming to coincide with prime viewing times in regional time zones (Shrikhande, 2001). AJE refuses such a "glocalization" approach. Instead it insists on one signal for the entire globe, and makes no clear, systematic effort to differentiate its programming on such a basis. It presumes what Shoemaker and Cohen (2006) find: people around the world share the basic criteria of newsworthiness. This differs from patterns of global media diversification, which often means that wider geographic reach entails wide product diversity (Chan-Olmstead and Chang, 2003, p. 228). This may be a luxury of the network's political economy as state-funded and therefore not necessarily profit-maximizing.

Their journalists enjoy not having to take guidance from marketing professionals pushing stories that do well according to audience research. AJE also exerts agency in how it markets and advertises its news product and in key distributional decisions (such as whether or not it would pay for carriage, a common practice for less popular and new channels in the United States). Its capacity for agency came out in AJE's engagement with the Burlington, VT public. The channel's main spokesman and managing director appeared on local television and in public meetings. How AJE depicts itself to American audiences is an element of its own agency. Its discourses about itself are important to consider. In thinking about its contra-flow potential, it is necessary to weigh AJE's own actions that may complement, exacerbate or militate against the other factors listed above.

As factors in AJE's circulation none of these are singularly determinant; they interact to produce the contingencies of contra-flow. Accounting for these as they changed in Burlington, VT and around the Arab Spring will shed light on the underlying reasons for AJE's distributional struggles, the prospects of online distribution to circumvent traditional gatekeepers, and the potential currency of global news from the Middle East in the United States – the prospects of AJE's contra-flow in the United States. This question is vital to the promise of AJE serving as a conciliatory medium or for altering the global power map, whether in counter-hegemonic terms or as pushing open a global public sphere (Habermas, 1989; Cottle, 2009).

This study attends to the localized circulation of AJE in the United States by centering on one place AJE was carried, Burlington, VT, and the controversy surrounding its availability there. By focusing on the exception to the general trend of non-carriage, this circulation provides some explanation, by contrast, for the failure in AJE's national distribution efforts.

Media flow, as Beck suggests, cannot “be so independent of national, transnational, and political-economic structures” (2006, p. 80). There is reason to suggest the theoretical applicability of frameworks such as flow/contra-flow is bound up in the dynamics of national politics, political culture and media economics – their variation in locales such as Burlington, VT highlight the key factors throughout the rest of the country. Unpacking these is necessary to explore the possibilities of the United States as a receiver of AJE’s brand of international news – a reversal in the traditional patterns of transnational informational flow. This circulation question is prerequisite to research on the conciliatory or dialogic possibilities of non-western news media in countries like the United States.

B. Chapter Outline

Chapters two and three provide basic background information about the Al Jazeera network, AJE and the US cable industry – and provide background to each of the factors. Chapter two answers the key questions that pertain to the network: What is Al Jazeera, and AJE, and the network’s history, how is it funded, where are its journalists, where is it watched/available, what are its notable moments and challenges in its development? The network’s history (and its linkage to development of satellite) and relationship with the US government are also essential background to describing how Al Jazeera was defined and framed pre and post-9/11 in the US – the key political context, one of the factors in the framework. Chapter three hones in on the industries of American TV distribution and media economics, strategies AJE employed (its agency), and overviews American political culture as a receiver of international news.

Chapter four, a case study of AJE’s carriage efforts in Burlington, VT, is the central focus of the study since it best illuminates the issues AJE faces in the United States. This chapter

narrates AJE's 2008 struggle to enter and stay in this one tiny market where a local debate ensued over its carriage on the municipally owned cable/telecom provider. It is a clear case of a news outlet embodying a contra-flow pattern of "globalization" travels within a particular local place marked by both idiosyncrasies but also part of a larger national fabric defined by a war on terror America. Burlington, VT is useful in that it reveals the challenges AJE faces in the United States. The debate indicated the channel's pre-Arab Spring challenges – namely perceptions that it was a mouthpiece for terrorists. The rich public deliberation, combined with reasoned study by official commissions, forced articulation of the underlying issues. It shows how different perceptions of the channel, the hopes and anxieties it primes, come to bear on the question of its availability in one community. At the same time, I note that this was an anomaly nationally in that many local cable systems are franchises of larger companies, while Burlington Telecom is one of the few public systems, highlighting the importance of political economy in shaping the possibilities of carriage.

Chapter five explores a potential disjuncture in this story of AJE's absence from American televisions. Its coverage of the 2011 Arab uprisings garnered significant attention, the highest viewership and accolades of any other episode in the channel's history. With extensive access, resources and regional connections, the channel became a primary source for English language publics trying to make sense of historic events in the region. With the coverage of the Egyptian revolution taking center stage, observers in the United States began to ask whether AJE's 'moment' arrived. The discourse around the network changed among official circles and the foreign policy establishment in Washington, DC as the channel came to be seen as an important player in global news. Also, visits to AJE's website and livestream viewers from the United States skyrocketed. This chapter reviews how AJE covered the Egyptian uprising and the

response in the United States – how it was received by Americans, particularly those in power and in the political elite. At the height of its popularity, Senator John McCain and House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, appeared together and spoke at an AJE banquet, for example. This was unimaginable in previous years. However, all the praise earned during the Arab Spring did not clearly boost AJE’s TV distribution and viewership in the United States. It weighs whether this opening resonated with the public and what factors in American political culture obstruct AJE’s reach into the country.

The conclusion is an assessment of future prospects. It considers trends in AJE’s reception, updates in its US efforts and explores the promise of online distribution as a substitute for cable and satellite carriage.

C. Methods

While the overall structure of the paper is a narrative chronicling AJE’s development and struggle for distribution in the United States, it is based on a mixed-methods approach to data collection. This section gives further justification and specification of the research procedures used. While the focal point of the study is not innovating or advancing methodological means, a final section explicates the use of mixed methods.

1. Interviews

The nearly 40 interviews I conducted with staff and officials of institutions, namely AJE, are entirely based on qualitative interviewing techniques that are semi-structured, and open-ended. They were individual and in-depth, often taking between 30 minutes and an hour, and took place at AJE offices in Doha and Washington, DC. My access to the organization was initially through their communication and international relations department, which typically

handles public relations and helps researchers arrange visits and interviews. Over time, I developed personal connections with staff and was able to set up my own appointments with Washington, DC-based personnel. The interviews in Doha started in October 2010, and were carried out on further trips, including March 2011 and February 2012. Interviews at the DC office were frequent but spread out between 2010 and 2012. I conducted interviews with industry observers and spokespersons, as well as public advocates, officials and telecom employees in Burlington, VT. These were conducted largely in the Fall, 2010 and Winter, 2012.

In conducting the interviews, I documented my process. I always identified myself as a researcher, informed interviewees that they can stop at any moment, and access the transcripts and manuscripts later on if they have any concerns. My research was described to them as emphasizing AJE in Burlington, VT and the United States in general, and that I was interested in also writing about the news organization itself as an essential part of the story. I have audio recordings or notes for the interviews in which participants preferred no recording. I approached the interactions with some prepared basic questions and topics, but treated the list as more of a flexible “interview guide,” rather than a rigid “schedule” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 194-5). I modified the questions and approach for particular staff in different departments to find out more about the work in which they engaged. My questions for AJE staff tended to focus on AJE’s mission, organization structure and culture, its performance, their assessment of its distribution and who they imagine the audience to be. When speaking with others, public advocates in Burlington, city officials, industry spokespeople, I also took a flexible approach to determine what was important to them. I was interested in their meaning-making, their interpretation of AJE, and the issues surrounding its distribution in the United States as well as their assessments of its prospects.

For the AJE interviews, some were repeats with previously interviewed participants – meaning there were in total three dozen informants. The reason for repeat interviews was to gauge changes in AJE over time. In 2011 and early, 2012, I followed up with many I spoke with in December, 2010, before the Arab Spring. They represented several departments and specializations, but most were journalists or editorial heads, others worked in programs, distribution, marketing, the website, and new media. Interviews with industry spokespeople and Burlington residents, officials and telecom employees are also drawn upon.

Two issues inherent to the use of interviews as a method concerned me: trustworthiness and determining that the number and sample of interviews were sufficient. Trustworthiness is a fundamental issue, especially given that my participants are strategic actors whose work could possibly be impacted by my study. I use this term to refer to the accuracy of information conveyed in interviews. I tried to address this problem by triangulating – or cross-checking – facts with other sources (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). While certain facts were very difficult to triangulate, given the sensitivities required by competition and the necessity of trade secrets, those few that were not are noted in this study. As for knowing that the number of interviews were sufficient, one test proposed by Means Coleman is that once the point of “redundancy is reached” in responses (2000, p. 269), continued, focused interviewing will unlikely produce more information.

Consistent with research ethics standards, I also provided interview subjects with a consent form, which stated their rights and my obligations as a researcher in order to ensure that no harm comes on any of my participants as a result of my research. Although most of my participants stated they do not mind being directly quoted, only the highest AJE and Burlington

officials and public spokespeople will be given personal attribution for their quotes, as will others when I cite their public remarks.

2. *Content Analysis*

Krippendorff defined content analysis as “the use of replicable and valid method for making specific inferences from text to other states or properties of its source” (1969, p.103). I conducted two content analysis studies of AJE’s videos. Both were designed in the vein of the quantitative tradition, which stresses frequencies as opposed to interpretation (George, 2008). The purposes of these were to help test certain propositions about AJE and its coverage. These were important since they tested AJE’s marketing identity.

One study provides descriptive data about AJE’s news coverage. Two coders went through 400 videos – news packages, programs and features – and gauged the regions/countries of coverage and the topics. This was intended to test to what extent AJE covers underrepresented regions and stories. The video samples were drawn from different time periods to lessen the impact of breaking news. During three different two-week periods in 2010, I gathered every video and coded them.

The second study analyzed all 211 news packages, features and programs AJE released online between January 25 and February 20, 2011, during the height and immediate aftermath of the Egyptian revolution. The videos were coded for how much they involved/mentioned, and were further circulated, via social and new media platforms. I have some general information about their popularity in the United States. I also gauge whether the journalism relied on non-traditional sources (non-governmental speakers or those outside of traditional policy establishments).

3. *Discourse Analysis*

Discourse analysis refers to an array of approaches that consider how social and cultural perspectives and identities transpire through the use of language. Some proponents of this approach contend it is not a method or procedure with clear steps (Fairclough, 2002, p. 121), while others have worked to outline what a discourse analysis method would entail (Gee, 2010; Wodak and Meyer, 2002). Its use varies greatly among different specialties: linguists hone in on the grammatical elements of language use (Gee, 2010). Sociologists and others employ it to describe content as it is embedded, situated and acted upon, in particular contexts. Unlike content or textual analysis, discourse analysis is useful for giving a deeper account of language and its impact on society. Critical discourse analysis centers on the role of power and the way that discourse both constitutes and is constituted by dominant forces in society. This approach was inspired by the Frankfurt school's critical theory and exhibits the same interest in ideological subtexts. This study is not about ideology, but focuses on the logics of audience preferences, marketing and brands – to put the issues in the same languages relied on by the social actors and institutions under study. This is consistent with various sub-fields of discourse analysis.

My approach draws on Mediated Discourse Analysis (MDA) (Scollon 1998, 2002; Norris and Jones 2005). It accounts for the “social and cultural contexts” of texts, but is ultimately interested in “the actions that individuals take with texts and the consequences of these actions” (Baker and Ellece, 2010, p. 70). Its central concepts – mediated action, site of engagement, mediational means, practice, nexus of practice (Scollon, 2002) and community of practice – indicate that it facilitates analysis in the material moments in which discourse produces actual action. This emerged as a response to the difficulty of showing such links through critical discourse analysis (Scollon, 2002, p. 140). I only suggest this approach informs my research, rather than serves as an explicit framework, because my case selection allows an easy bridge

between discourse and social action. The citizens of Burlington, VT actively debating whether AJE should be allowed in their community appears to be a clear case in which discourse is translated into very real material, action – letter-writing, speech-making, lobbying, and so on. In the chapter three, on the Burlington Telecom debates, I will integrate concepts integral to mediated discourse analysis, and apply its privileging of social action by studying not just what was said but how citizens of Burlington acted on their views and articulations of the issue at hand.

The case of Burlington Telecom is also well-suited to adaptation of the discourse-historical approach (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001). Scholars in this tradition seek to avoid politicization by triangulating their assessments and emphasizing the argumentative nature of discourse exchange, which in a sense means airing the different sides and exploring their strategies and rationales, as well as their institutional settings. The historical work implied by this approach means going to secondary sources to provide an understanding how the “social and political fields” came to embed discourses, how they originated and developed (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001: 35).

4. *Online Survey*

I set up an Internet-based experiment, which is presented in chapter five. A review of the method is presented in that chapter.

5. *Mixed Methods*

A mixed methods approach entails “collecting, analyzing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a study in order to understand a research problem” (Clark and Cresswell, 2008, p. 364). Some qualitative methods purists argued against methodological admixture, contending that “accommodation between paradigms is impossible” because they lead “to vastly

diverse, disparate, and totally antithetical ends” (Guba, 1990, p. 81). Quantitative methods purists tend to subscribe to hard positivism, or the notion that certainty in knowledge is fully attainable and testable, giving social science the methodological integrity of the natural sciences. This study surely will not try to resolve these differences, but will only point out that this polarity has arguably diminished recently as mixed method use in social science research becomes more common in multiple disciplines (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998, 2003; Dan and Kalof, 2008, p 136.).

Justifying why mixed methods are warranted in this study is necessary (Mertens, 2009, p. 306). This topic requires a multi-dimensional engagement with reception, distribution, production and larger themes of media globalization and U.S.-Arab relations. The questions that are generated in this study cannot be answered sufficiently by one method alone, and call on both limited causal claims and interpretive work. Whereas qualitative methods provide depth and texture to complicated and dynamic questions, they do not help me understand scope nor allow me to easily make generalizations about AJE’s coverage or how the American public feels. Such inferences can only be made cautiously, of course. Quantitative methods provide insight and raw data that can help justify key steps that require evidence of causality in the story and will help triangulate the other findings generated by the interviews. The content analysis and online survey are very limited in helping me understand “how” questions, which are at the core in this study and essential to the narrative format. Some researchers argue that early mixed methods research often relegated the qualitative part of the mixture to “a largely auxiliary role” (Howe 2004: 53– 54). In this study, the primary methods are qualitative. The content analysis and online survey add to the narrative at key turns, starting with the background information (chapter two), and continuing with a report on AJE’s Egypt coverage and how it changed American views

towards AJE (chapter five). The use of multiple, mixed methods will bolster the study's explanatory power.

Chapter 2

Al Jazeera English's Origins, Content and Identity

Al Jazeera English claims to cover stories and regions underrepresented by the primarily western international news outlets and agencies. By avowing a “global south” identity, it aimed to be a novelty among international news organizations, the first with an avowedly transnational *and* transregional perspective on the news, one that reported from the field firstly and in the voices of those who are often voiceless in other global news media. To be “global south” for AJE was both geographic and topical. It did not position itself as a channel representing a particular national lens on the world, as the BBC and CNN International do. Also, it was not claiming to be an Arab network merely broadcasting in English, making it something of an Arab version of Euronews, which espouses a European perspective. While it played up its geographic idiosyncrasy as the “world's first English language news channel to have its headquarters in the Middle East,” it stressed its “global” and outward outlook. Topically, the “global south” was equated with the voiceless, meaning the people of the world whose views were not well-represented by incumbent news titans CNN International and the BBC. AJE’s “voiceless” are those largely subjected to power with little chance for recourse, regardless of where they resided on the planet. Ibrahim Helal, who served as AJE’s deputy director of news early on, said that “the global south is everywhere. It is here in the Middle East, in the slums of Cairo, but also in the streets of Sacramento” (quoted in Powers, 2009, 234). This framework can be observed in different aspects of their work. For example, a program editor for ‘Witness,’ Flora Gregory, appeared at a documentary festival to commission European stories that centered local voices and took the perspective of people on the ground (Anderson, 2012). Even as an aspiration, or

marketing angle, this is novel for a major global news outlet.

This mission was operationalized through a four broadcasting center system that operated nearly seventy bureaus around the world, most of them in developing nations. This decentralized editorial power promised a multi-perspective news product. Its international staff of more than one thousand represented more than fifty national backgrounds. Competing in a crowded international news field required it grow its news-gathering reach. This is in stark contrast with patterns of retreating international field reporting among western news media suffering budgetary deflation. According to Tony Burman, AJE's former Managing Director:

The mainstream American networks have cut their bureaus to the bone.... They're basically only in London now. Even CNN has pulled back. I remember in the '80s when I covered these events there would be a truckload of American journalists and crews and editors, and now Al Jazeera outnumbers them all.... That's where, in the absence of alternatives, Al Jazeera English can fill a vacuum, simply because we're going in the opposite direction (Campbell, 2010).

Such a remarkable counter-movement against larger trends in news media coverage and the industry's conventional wisdom seems doomed to fail. Many ask whether there is an audience for coverage of under-reported places and from perspectives outside of traditional news-makers.

A global audience may be emerging to match its internationalized journalistic infrastructure, as well. AJE reaches upwards of 260 million households in more than one hundred countries all over the world: countries as diverse as Zambia, Vietnam, India, New Zealand, Israel and even the newest nations, such as South Sudan. The one glaring exception to its broad global distribution is the United States, the focus of this study. This is an exception worth studying because US-Qatar relations are vital to both countries, serving as an important backdrop to AJE's establishment and formation, and because the network has done more than any other news source to serve as a counter-hegemonic force (Sakr, 2007). The national contours around distribution, against AJE's efforts at a de-nationalized news through a "global south" perspective, highlight the prevailing stickiness of old dynamics – the power of states

versus the flow of information (Price, 2002) and the national perspectives people bring to interpreting news – even in a new media age. This is shown in the later part of the chapter, which looks at how official American antagonism to Al Jazeera set up the “war on terror” frame that made AJE’s market entry difficult.

To better analyze AJE’s circulation in the United States, it is useful to describe the channel and its content, and review its origins in light of the network’s beginnings and Qatar’s interests. In this chapter, I evaluate AJE’s claims about its reporting, asking how “global south” it really is, as opposed to “Arab” or centered on the advanced, industrialized countries, as most major global news outlets are. This identity can be traced to its tumultuous formative years, where it sought to strike a balance between being part of a network anchored by the Arabic language news service, yet palatable to western audiences – among other necessary and defining balances. AJE came after the Arabic news channel’s rise as a vibrant, critical news organization that sought to break taboos and rattle traditional regional powers, including the United States – especially after its invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. Becoming an enemy of the United States in the process, the network was also seen as controversial among the American public at-large, establishing a difficult American political climate for AJE to gain traction within. The background and political context presented in this chapter are crucial to understanding AJE’s obstacles in the US market. Other factors, such as the American market for international news, which I situate in its political culture, and the economics of TV distribution, are laid out in the next chapter.

I. AL JAZEERA'S ORIGINS

Al Jazeera's history is intimately tied to the development of Qatar, the sheikhdom that points into the Arabian or Persian Gulf from the larger Arabian Peninsula. The small, mostly desert country was for long sparsely populated. It was inhabited for millennia. Only a handful of tribes made up the population through the 19th century, and were under the rule of the Bahraini Al-Khalifa family until the British negotiated the termination of their rule in exchange for a regular tribute. That ended when Ottoman rule began in 1872, relatively late in the empire's history. Before WWI, when the Ottoman Empire collapsed, it left Qatar. The British recognized Sheikh Abdullah bin Jassim Al Thani as the head of the country. The Al Thanis were along with the Al Misnad clan, the most powerful. Qatar entered into a treaty with the United Kingdom, brokering a deal that resembled others between the British and other Gulf principalities. Under it, Qatar would give away no territory except to the British, nor would it form alliances with other foreign governments without British permission – a reflection of Britain's status as one of the most powerful global powers at the time. The British, for their part, promised to defend Qatar from foreign attack. In 1934, a subsequent treaty deepened the British commitment to Qatari defense. Around the same time, the Qatar Petroleum Company, which was owned by Anglo, Dutch, French and American entities, was awarded a seventy-five year oil and gas concession – signaling the rising geo-political value of Qatar and the region as a source of oil and natural gas for Europe and the United States. It was at the center of a strategically central region, making it a prized possession and ally for world powers. The revenues from these natural resources began to fund Qatar's nascent development in the 1950s. It brought great wealth to the small number of Qataris and attracted expatriate labor. While its relation to the

empire was by treaty, it remained under the British crown past the era of regional de-colonization, finally gaining independence peacefully in 1971.

The end of British colonialism, and indirect rule, did not bring about a new ruling family. The Al-Thani's continued their reign. In February, 1972, the heir to the throne, Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad Al-Thani, deposed the Emir, his cousin. The new emir accelerated development projects on a small scale and rather quietly, while boosting social spending and lowering the royal allowances – a modest harbinger of the later developmentalism.

In terms of external power, the British continued the post-WWII trend of diminishing their role on the international stage, as the United States emerged as a world superpower, first asserting itself in the Middle East prominently during the 1956 Suez crisis. President Dwight D. Eisenhower ordered the cessation of a joint British-French-Israeli assault on Egypt after its President Gamal Abdel-Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal. After the 1973 oil embargo, securing access to the region's petroleum was essentially a linchpin of American interests in the region, along with maintaining its support for Israel in its regional conflict – the cause of the oil embargo – and preventing the spread of Communism and Nasser's brand of pan-Arabism. By the early 1990s, Qatar was still a rather insignificant regional player, a secondary state within Saudi Arabia's immediate sphere of influence. American foreign policy up until 1979 rested on alliances with Iran, Israel, and Saudi Arabia, and then Egypt following the Camp David accords and the Iranian revolution, which drew Iran out of the American camp. After the 1991 Gulf War, in which the United States invaded Iraq to reverse the country's irredentist invasion of Kuwait, the United States pursued a Defense Cooperation Agreement with Qatar. This coincided with a drawing down of forces and facilities from Saudi Arabia out of fear that the large American military presence there de-stabilizes the Kingdom. The agreement later served as the basis for

Qatar's hosting American military bases and later the operational headquarters for the war in Afghanistan launched in 2001 and the second American invasion of Iraq in 2003.

The first major internal political juncture in Qatar occurred when the Emir's son, acting Deputy Emir, Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, removed his father from power peacefully in the mid-1990s. Saudi Arabia opposed this move. Its affiliated satellite news media framed the coup negatively. Qatar's powerful neighbor worked to restore the father to power. This inspired the new young leader, already bent on developing the country aggressively along with limited liberalization to advance a Qatar-based regional news media channel. As one of the world's richest countries, resources were certainly no barrier. With its new proximity to American defense forces, pursuing an independent foreign policy, and along with it, launching a critical media enterprise became possible.

Al Jazeera, then, came about as the result of two larger political developments. The first was that Qatar's new ruler wanted a counter-weight to the regional media power of Saudi Arabia. A Qatari media giant was used, therefore, to give the smaller, weaker country some leverage in the form of greater influence over public and elite opinion. A second reason was that the new Emir embarked on an accelerated developmental plan, which included limited liberalization, such as the abolition of the institution charged with media censorship, the Minister of Information, as well as a national referendum on a new constitution. In 2011, the Emir took the step of putting into place parliamentary elections despite the sparse public demand for them, possibly as a move to preempt external criticism of Qatari hypocrisy in supporting popular, pro-democracy, Arab uprisings. In practice then, the political context was ripe for Al Jazeera to develop and explains why it was given a relatively free hand to report critically, sometimes putting its leaders in uncomfortable positions.

The story of Al Jazeera's rise to fame and notoriety, just years after its 1996 launch, is well told (El-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003; Iskandar & El-Nawawy, 2002; Miles, 2005; Tatham, 2006; Rushing, 2007). Centrally important is its impact on the region's politics, from the status of global powers to the sustenance of repressive regimes, and journalism. It opened up a regional, mediated space for criticizing governments, bringing normally excluded views, such as those of dissidents and counter-publics, to the fore. Having real, unfiltered debate on issues long guarded as taboos was truly novel. At its height, it could be equated to an Arab public sphere, allowing for exchange and deliberation among a range of views not normally seen on Arab television (Lynch, 2006). This also made it deeply unpopular with the governments of the region. It represented nothing short of an earthquake in Arab news media and came to be seen by many, including American observers, as a force for reform. For its transformative influence, Lynch terms 1997 to 2003 the "Al Jazeera Era" in the Arab Middle East (2006, 22).

Why did the Arabic channel take off so quickly as a leading global news source? Powers (2012) offers three key factors, which I review and supplement. First, its "mission and financial support," including generous state backing to the tune of billions of dollars² between 1996 and 2012, along with the concomitant pledge of editorial independence, allowed for a channel that is both well-resourced and free enough from constraints to compete and attract viewers with something new (Powers, 2012, 8). Qatar was resource-rich and could easily afford to launch its own network. The channel's funding is therefore a direct outgrowth of a petro-economy. Bountiful resources gave the network license to function as a journalists' playground in a sense. Over time of course, many grew to question both the over-dependence on state funding and what that meant for its independence. The network projected repeatedly the "same three-to-five-year estimate of how long it would take to achieve self-sufficiency" from the regime's financing

² Precise figures are not publicly available.

(Tatham, 2005, 48). Financial independence is still a distant goal, as various advertisers have avoided the channel for fear of alienating its many powerful opponents, namely the governments of rich markets such as Saudi Arabia or the large one, Egypt. Saudi Arabia initiated a “de facto” advertiser boycott, thereby limiting the channel’s source of revenue (Kinninmont, 2005). The network, it should be noted, derives most of its revenues from its other products, its many movie, sports and children’s channels (Helman, 2009). With Al Jazeera’s sport channel aggressively vying for exclusive broadcast rights to Europe’s top football leagues in early 2012, its revenues could grow exponentially. If the network gains more independence, Al Jazeera could start to resemble the American broadcast networks that profited from entertainment and sports programs and funded news as a loss-leader as a public service – a dynamic that led to lower news budgets over time.

Second, its “commitment to hiring professional journalists with in-depth local knowledge,” many of whom were in turn attracted to the first free regional TV news organization in the region, was important in the channel’s take-off (Powers, 2012, 8). A key impetus in its rise was the serendipitous collapse of a joint Orbit-BBC attempt at a pan-Arab TV news organization in 1996. The initiative broke down over Saudi opposition to the journalistic freedom the BBC required. This was relatively late in the project, leaving many experienced Arab journalists, producers and technicians newly unemployed. Seizing the opportunity to staff their new endeavor, the Qataris corralled them to launch the new channel.

Third, there is an undeniably technological aspect to its origins. The channel’s “access to international communications infrastructure” such as the main satellite services in the world (Powers, 2012, 8) proved crucial. In fact, Al Jazeera’s success can singularly be traced to the flourishing of satellite distribution. This meant even more capacity for news channels to seek

global audiences, affordably. When it launched on November 1, 1996, it only broadcast terrestrially in Qatar for six hours daily. Its rise to prominence in the region was delayed. It struggled at first to gain access to Arab audiences via the primary satellites in the region. Claiming full capacity of C-band transponders, Arabsat had no room for Al Jazeera's signal in a coveted high frequency position, one that let the masses who owned small dishes receive the channel. Al Jazeera was relegated to a Ku-band position, requiring a large dish for TV viewers to receive the signal. Many Arab audiences relied on the small dishes since, being banned in several countries, they were easy to mount clandestinely and were less expensive. By happenstance, the network's fortune would soon change. In July, 1997, Canal France International (CFI) inadvertently aired pornography during programming usually reserved for schoolchildren (Miles, 2005, 35). Arabsat expelled the channel, and gave its position to Al Jazeera, which began broadcasting to a greatly enlarged footprint a year after it launched. By then, it was airing seventeen hours per day. Availability was a prerequisite to its success.

Al Jazeera's reporting quickly proved a major headache for Arab governments who controlled the domestic media environments through their own news and information outlets, while tightly de-limiting independent media. Satellite technology enabled new networks to undermine the assortment of the state media, which all appeared dull and predictable in comparison to this exciting new channel. As previously silenced dissidents, expatriate intelligentsia and controversial thinkers began appearing on the channel, the region's regimes grew even more antagonistic towards AJ, frequently banning its staff and jamming the signal. At the height of their animosity, they passed a compact through the Arab league called the "Arab media charter." It made clear the grounds for removing channels from Arab-owned satellite platforms – a clear threat to Al Jazeera. Of course, the news network had the benefit of wide

popularity, which put some constraints on regimes' punitive actions.

Al Jazeera also proved a headache for the American and Israeli governments. It was on the ground to capture some of the most important wars and uprisings in the region even before the US/NATO 2001 Afghanistan invasion. This coverage helped create a wide Arab news audience who followed and experienced events together, transcending the nation-state nationalism that imbued state media. Al Jazeera's first big scoop came during the 1998 Desert Fox operation, the United States' biggest attack on Iraq since the 1991 Gulf War. As was one of the only TV news outlets that reported the attack from Iraq, the young channel gained wide public attention. It was not until the Palestinian uprising in 2000 that Al Jazeera emerged as the regional news leader, however. Capturing video and stories of the violence attracted the attention of Arab viewers, as the channel vastly outpaced the state TV channels that dominated the domestic news environments. Critics accused it of trading in spectacle and arousing popular passions through over-dramatic coverage and glorification of Palestinian resistance, but it was enormously popular among Arab audiences – and severely undercut the Israeli strategic narrative. So effective was the network at re-shaping the expectations of Arab news audiences and the telling of regional events that that other states and media conglomerates launched competitors, such as Al-Arabiya (Saudi Arabia's Middle East Broadcasting Center, MBC, is majority owner). Every western power that engages in significant international broadcasting upgraded, launched or re-launched Arabic language services, as well. Al-Arabiya later launched an English language website with web video reports to compete with AJE, but have not invested in a broadcasting outfit.

II. THE IMPETUS FOR THE ENGLISH CHANNEL

Presenting AJE's origins and rationale attends to the element of AJE's agency in this study's analytical framework. Faced with a set of difficult balances in its identity, mandate and operations, the channel's earliest planners made decisions about the channel that would come to define it and thus bear on its ability to penetrate the American news market. These decisions were not straightforward but involved resolving difficult foundational questions, which provoked internal contestations: multiple actors within the network advanced their own views of what this new channel should be. Looking at its mission, organizational model, and content, this section investigates what AJE actually is: Is it private or public, Arab or global, news or a Qatari mouthpiece? While coming to terms with where the channel lands on these binaries – and how it stands out from American news channels – as it seeks American market entry can help us understand its maneuverings in the US news market and how American perceptions of the channel evolves.

A. The Rationale

Al Jazeera English was born out of the global popularity and impact of the Arabic channel. Its logo was well-recognized around the world, symbolizing a brand that marketing researchers placed near the top of global, commercial brands and household names like Nike, Coca-Cola and Disney. Many who do not understand Arabic still saw Al Jazeera as the answer to the highly unpopular Bush administration. Its efforts to discredit and vilify the channel likely made it even more adored internationally, especially among the many critics who voiced opposition to American war efforts in Iraq as well as their own governments' assistance in the invasion and occupation. Al Jazeera officials reported seeing the channel played publicly in

countries such as Indonesia where Arabic is not widely spoken because the images of war-torn Iraq and Afghanistan were powerful enough. Its content was re-transmitted and used in news broadcasts all over the world – revealing the potential for much larger audiences. As for planning and building the English channel, the idea began in 2001, found its first manifestation in a website, and then resulted in the TV channel in 2006 after many months of working out its identity, relationship to the network and operations.

While many could see a specific need for AJE given the Arabic channel's popularity, the basic logic behind the AJE's launch, according to the first managing director, Nigel Parsons, was that the station was "a high profile investment in the country's image abroad" (quoted in Powers, 2009, 161). He said AJE was "supposed to be the public face of Qatar in the West." At the same time, and seeming to strive to emulate the BBC, Parsons suggested that editorial control was not to lie in the state. AJE was to be empowered to report independently. For him, AJE's reporting would be based on decentralized news gathering that privileged the view from below:

We kind of reinvented the news gathering process. It's to allow people to see events from the eyes of the people of that region, rather than through foreign eyes, which has tended to be the case in the past. And that's a benefit to both, the viewer inside of the region and the viewer outside of the region. People are tired of seeing themselves through foreign eyes. We want Africans to tell us about Africa. We want Arabs to tell us about the Middle East and Asians to tell us about Asia (Powers, 2009, 161).

It is probable that addressing the gaping "global south" hole in English language news and information was conceived as a way to better Qatar's image and provide a novel news product.

The interest in, and perceived feasibility of, reaching English language audiences can be traced more directly to the September, 2001 airplane hijackings and strikes against the United States. Former Al Jazeera producer Imad Musa noted that after the attacks "we were fielding an average of 60 calls a day from American viewers wanting to know what Al Jazeera was saying!" (Quenqua, 2003). When the Arabic network was the main, independent source of news from the

ground in Afghanistan, curiosity about its reporting from English audiences picked up even more. Then with the invasion of Iraq, which many saw as a failure in news media reporting (Bennett, Lawrence, and Livingston, 2007), there seemed a prominent vacuum to fill in English language news media. Parsons later observed that with the Iraq invasion “the Fourth Estate had got into bed with the third estate and the rest of us had been left outside the bedroom.” He saw the new English channel as a “blank sheet of paper and a chance to make a difference, and to do things differently” (Manly, 2006). It also seemed a natural step for Qatar to take to build on the success of the Arabic channel, he also said (Pintak, 2005).

Given the inherently ambitious nature of a new 24-hour English channel, it was not the first proposal advanced with the intention of reaching a wider global audience. The initial response to the simultaneous pique in interest and vilification by powerful officials was a proposal to offer a translated version of the channel using subtitles and over-dubbing (Brech, 2002). However, the first implemented plan to reach new audiences was an English language news website, which went public in the week after US-led forces commenced the Iraq invasion. The BBC World Service worked with a team of young journalists to design the site, Al Jazeera Net, which was to reflect editorially the network’s agenda and style, yet operate independently (Powers, 2012, 13). The BBC’s role was the result of a *quid pro quo* arrangement it initiated to gain access to AJ’s facilities and uplink in Kabul (Miles, 2005, 222-3). In the site’s aims, one can see the early seeds of the channel’s identity. Its first managing editor, Joanne Tucker, said they aspired to build “a global citizen’s home page” as “idealistic and silly” as it sounded (St. John, 2003).

The vibrant opposition to Al Jazeera in the United States carried over to animosity towards the English website. The first day it went public, an orchestrated campaign of junk

requests to their servers, a “DNS poisoning” tactic, effectively a denial of service attack, sent the site offline for a day. After returning to service, a group of hackers, the “Freedom Cyber Force Militia” re-directed Arabic and English site visitors to pornographic websites and a page emblazoned with an American flag and the words “Let Freedom Ring.” Another re-directed page said, “God bless our troops,” with a sign-off by “Patriot.” The pages were hosted in Salt Lake City (“Al-Jazeera Web site hacked,” 2003). This campaign combined with what Tucker called “nonstop political pressure” on vendors not to work with the network forced them to take down the site and postpone its launch for later in the year (Powers, 2012, 13).

External pressure from the United States played an important role in AJE’s early planning. Steve Clark, the first head of news with AJE and a key planner, dates the earliest serious preparation to 2003. He suggested that tensions in US-Qatari relations framed to a large degree the path AJE took as it prepared for launch. He cited the Bush administration’s lobbying of Qatar to quell Al Jazeera’s reporting as having “profound implications for how the English-language initiatives were formed” (quoted in Powers, 2012, 13). This forced the network to balance foreign policy ramifications with a desire to maintain the critical edge of the channel’s reputation, fostered by the Arabic coverage and its staff who took great risks to generate its reputation for critical reporting. That such reporting flustered western powers – where many of the new channel’s potential audiences were – seemed to require assuaging viewers in the West while also representing the epistemic realities presented on the Arabic service, still the heart of the network. Parsons put the challenge as “getting the balance right” (Manly, 2006). This proved to be a greater struggle than it seemed. Nor was it the only balance that needed to be struck.

B. Seeking the Right Balance

The balance Parsons referred to is of central importance for AJE's formation and growth, but it was not the only balance. The tension between being part of the same network as the Arabic language service, with its critical journalistic style, quick rise, prominence, rambunctious debate programs, yet not alienating Qatar's allies to the point of being a liability for the government, was key in other ways. It had to uphold and advance the Al Jazeera brand. This meant providing the critical coverage many would expect, but it could not function as an equivalent given the inherent differences between the norms and shared meanings of pan-Arab audiences and global English language ones. That said, there were reasons for greater editorial similarity, such as brand consistency and also efficiencies in shared resources. Parsons recognized this, when he said the channels would "share some video and access," but he added, "there will be exclusive programming, on-air talent and some editorial differences" (Allam, 2006).

Other balances emerged as the channel launched. I've already referred to the tension between a global south perspective and detached, traditional journalism. This mirrored the debate over journalistic localism, or the preference for reporters with close local knowledge to cover the places they know best, which was often where they were from, and possessing language proficient. This was related to the common criticism that western news journalists are usually parachuted in with little background or language competence. However, some such as news director Saleh Negm felt that tilting towards the locally knowledgeable undermined the professionalism of the journalists (Interview, 2010). A professional journalist must be able to parachute in and put together a compelling, contextual and accurate report.

Like all state broadcasters, Al Jazeera English also faces a balance between working for the state sponsor and actually functioning as an independent journalistic enterprise, as they all

promise. AJE has covered some issues potentially embarrassing to the sponsor such as the state of the guest workers who outnumber citizens, yet enjoy little rights. However, Qatar is rarely the subject of the news, but for its public moves on the international stage, and programs about events such as the Doha film festival, art exhibits and significant concerts. Another balance would be with geographical and topical coverage. Claiming to bring attention to the underrepresented areas and stories of the world required it balance the hot breaking stories that attract wide audiences and this underlying mission. The question is to what degree would it deviate from the international news agenda to pursue underrepresented stories? Finally, there is a work and technology balance, between traditional broadcast news departments and the new media and Internet work, which tend to be staffed by younger workers who are not formally trained in journalism. All news media have struggled to adapt to technological innovation so the tension between old and new media mindsets is not unique to AJE. This last balance proved essential to developing digital distribution means in light of its exclusion from traditional TV carriers in the United States, I should note.

These balances are further investigated through a discussion of AJE's short history and elements important to the question, what is Al Jazeera English? The pursuit to reconcile some of these balances before launch caused several delays. One reason for the later delays was an addition of a former Al Jazeera journalist to the top management, which had been staffed by British nationals. In this case, differences in nationality signified debate about the channel's identity. These balances also played in the ever-evolving organizational structure, as well. Looking at its output, its content, I investigate whether the channel pursues a global south reporting agenda as it advertises.

1. *Station Identity and Staffing*

Delays in launching TV news operations are expectable, but AJE's reasons included both the mundane and the intriguing. AJE's launch was pushed back repeatedly, for over a year. The network cited technical and construction problems in actualizing its ambitious four broadcasting centers model, but others suggested that other forces and debates about its identity played a role. Miles quotes "an adviser to the Emir" who "was adamant the delay was the result of American political pressure" (2005, 406). Since the Arabic news service and the website had been sources of countervailing content on the Afghanistan and Iraq invasions, US officials were trying to shape the impending TV channel so as to prevent another source of dissent. If this was actually the case is difficult to corroborate. The evidence points to internal debates and differences around vision and decision-making that caused re-workings of the channel as the main reasons for delay. While the differences that put off launch were linked to American pressure and the politicization of the Arab channel's reporting, there is not clear proof of a direct intervention, as Miles' source suggests. If anything, the last delays were caused by measures to make sure AJE was consistent with the Arab news service, rather than functioning as a close imitation of the BBC – a debate that became intense and proved foundational. At best, there was an indirect connection between American anger at the way Al Jazeera covered the wars and how AJE manifested as a "global south" channel.

The earliest plans for AJE showed both lasting elements that would eventually come to define the network as well as aims that were tossed aside eventually. Perhaps one of the clearest differences was founding managing director Nigel Parson's pledge to keep staff small, roughly 300 – 400 total (Parsons, 2005). It has since swelled to three times that amount. Also, in 2005, he hoped the channel would be financially viable and independent of the emir's funding in three to five years (Tatham, 2005, 48). Seven years later, it still was not. Originally, the channel was

to be called Al Jazeera International. Early on, Parsons, pledged it would be “a credible, authoritative and balanced alternative to Western media” and target “anyone who speaks English” around the world (Tatham, 2005, 48). This proved a difficult challenge in implementing given the fuzziness of these concepts. To be a truly international channel, it was going to broadcast from four corners of the earth: Washington, DC, London, Doha and Kuala Lumpur. However, the four center model, which was initially controversial, was scaled back after a few years of trying it out. And right before the launch, they changed the name because the implication was that the Arabic channel was not international, even though its earliest motto was “Arab media service with a global orientation” (Pintak, 2006b). The change of interest for this study was in staffing and the managerial hierarchy, which was seen to reflect the channel’s identity.

AJE’s earliest planners, its top officials who worked to form its operations pre-launch, were uniformly of western, particularly British, background. The managing director and a key driver, Nigel Parsons, was the head of the Associated Press’s TV service. He began with AJE in August, 2004, more than two years before launch. The first head of news, Steve Clark, was previously the Director of News for ITN and Sky News, but also worked for the Arabic language network, Middle East Broadcasting Corporation (MBC). Both had early training and previous experience with the BBC. Paul Gibbs, the director of programming, came directly to AJE from a news and current affairs executive position with the BBC. The Doha-based trio were referred to as the “British Boys Network,” reflecting their nationality as well as the clear influence of “UK business practices and journalism” in their planning (Powers, 2012, 19). The domination of westerners at the top positions seemingly reflected a strategy to assuage western concerns, to show the content was safe for homeland consumption. Staffing the highest levels with known

western executives and journalists was seen as attempt to put to rest concerns that the channel would be anti-American propaganda, as the Arabic news service was accused of being. Clark considered this direction, and possibly the true motive behind the English channel, rooted in America's direct pressures around Al Jazeera coverage in 2003. It, he said, had "profound implications for how the English-language initiatives were formed." For Clark, this was "a formative year for Qatari-US relations, Al Jazeera's first real attempt to penetrate the American market" with its website (Powers, 2012, 13). If being palatable to the Americans was a goal, however, why didn't AJE recruit American news executives? Aiming for American digestibility was internally controversial, it should be noted. Perhaps British style journalism and perspective were the closest to a middle ground.

Western observers with intimate knowledge of the channel were not convinced that placating perceived western preferences for a safe channel – meaning unlike the Arabic side – was effective or wise. Marc Lynch told Nigel Parsons that with the name Al Jazeera in their title, controversy was inevitable, no matter how many western celebrity journalists they hire, a reference to the addition of legendary TV personality David Frost (Ackerman, 2006). As an aside, Frost took the position only after clearing the channel with the American and British governments, asking them whether Al Jazeera engaged in terrorist activity (El Amrani, 2006) – an indication of how strong perceptions had tilted during the war on terror decade. Lynch instead suggested they actually function more like a direct translation of the Arabic service, which he argued would really fill a niche in western news markets and let Americans begin to understand Arab perspectives on current affairs (Ackerman, 2006). This was in contrast to the perception that AJE would be a BBC Lite. Pintak (2006) argued that a global, de-centered, cosmopolitan journalism that theorists discussed, and seemed to be implemented in the channel's

four broadcasting center model, was going to prove impractical. It was also internally controversial and was met by resistance from the many Arabic journalists who believed the English channel should reflect Arab perspectives.

The largest change from the early planning stages was due to an internal uproar about the channel's identity in practice. Internally, an overreliance on British management worried Al Jazeera Arabic's staff, who saw their leadership as a distancing from the Arabic news service. One AJ Arabic journalist described the response anonymously: "[t]he feeling is that they've built this brand with their blood and sweat and tears for 10 years, and now someone's going to come along and destroy it, jeopardize it, water it down" and that this causes "a lot of anxiety and resentment" (Allam, 2006). Given the scale of hostilities outlined in the preceding section, one could see how there might be resentment at the English channel taking a different, softer editorial course. Samir Al Khader, a program editor, was worried the new channel "doesn't have an Arab identity." He felt "it should represent the new face of the Arab world. CNN is American, BBC is British. Why can't we have an Arab channel?" (El Imrani, 2006). A well-known presenter said that with a "different editorial policy, it will be a disaster." Spencer Ackerman, writing in *The New Republic*, charted the growth of this anxiety, by comparing what was being said at the 2004 and 2006 Al Jazeera Forums (2006). The forum is an Al Jazeera-sponsored conference that brings together journalists, politicians, leaders, activists and so on from around the world. In 2004, he reported an excitement among Arab journalists about the English channel as fulfilling "their desire to talk back to Western media about the Middle East." By the 2006 forum, however, they were dreading the possibility that the channel would be de-Arabized, and aspire to be just another global news outlet (Ackerman, 2006).

Though there was a strict order by management against internal criticism of the international channel, dissent was expressed publicly. An anonymous blog, Friends of Al Jazeera³, poured scorn on the new channel's western heads and depicted them as ill qualified and under-experienced in the region. The stereotype among many Arabs working in Qatar is that there tends to be an over-valuing of western professional talent, generally. These criticisms were based on the politicized expectation that the new channel would essentially mirror the Arabic channel. This standpoint was much closer to the vision of a counter-hegemonic medium than what eventually actualized, a "global south" identity.

Parsons' public statements about the relationship between the English and Arabic channels soon went from "ambiguous" (El Imrani, 2006) to having a bit more clarity. He pointed out they would share resources and video and rely on some crossover talent, but maintained they would be editorially independent. He acknowledged increasingly the Arabic channel's successes: "We are here to build on the heritage of Al-Jazeera and bring their brand of fearless journalism to a much wider audience. We are not completely divorced from one another" (Allam, 2006). He recognized the power of the brand was defined by the Arabic side and claimed the English channel would contribute to this. Far from disavowing an Arab perspective, Parsons insisted that Arab reporters would work in Cairo, Beirut, Doha, Baghdad and the Palestinian territories (Allam, 2006). Later on, the network named 2008 the year of integration and dedicated personnel to improving the inter-connection between the news divisions (Figenschou, 2011).

The network – or as rumors suggested, the network's chairman, Sheikh Hamad bin Thamer Al Thani – was favorable towards the protests and wanted to re-assert the Arab over the global. It responded through staffing decisions and began a process of correcting the over-

³ The now-defunct blog's writers identified as outsider observers, stating they were not employees.

correction in the balance between western digestibility and Arabism. In May, 2006, one of the earlier announced launch dates, the network brought back former Arabic staffer, Ibrahim Helal, to head the Middle East desk. He served as a deputy managing editor but also made sure they were closely coordinated with the Arabic-language news channel. Managing director Nigel Parsons said Helal's addition "solidifies us as a family built around the core spirit of al-Jazeera. Ibrahim will ensure that news content across the channels is consistent - and consistently good" (Day, 2006). At the same time, the channel increased its hiring of Arab journalists and on-air talent (Pintak, 2006). Ultimately, however, it came down to who was in charge. That March, Al Jazeera Managing Director, Wadah Khanfar, a veteran journalist, was given the new post of network director-general, putting him in charge of the British managers. Khanfar noted in the past that AJ was not seen as just a news channel by its viewers but as an "authentic reflection of Arab identity" (Ackerman, 2006). Pintak saw this move as a re-affirmation of the network's Arab identity (2006), though it just as easily could have been to placate detractors. Nevertheless, he suggested that "[b]orderless journalism may have to wait."

The balance in the channel's identity was largely defined by two poles, one being an expression of the network's Arab identity translated into English and one being a purely professional, second BBC. At the middle was a conception of the global, in support of the world's marginalized, which seemed a bit compromise since it was simultaneously wholly neither and inclusive of both – it would be professional journalism from an espoused vantage point in pursuit of a new news agenda – quite a bold claim. But it seemed not to please those concerned that the network was selling out its Arab roots, and was still accused of representing a form of "activist" or advocacy journalism. The concept of doing global journalism, as Pintak pointed out, was abstract and nebulous. That is why it failed to please both those who wanted it

to speak back to the west and those who merely wanted it to be an equitable alternative to the BBC and CNN. What we see in reviewing the organizational structure and technologies of its news-gathering and production, as well as in its content, is that AJE's conception of being global is not without skews towards and away from certain regions and issues. However, on balance, as other content analyses demonstrated, it does offer novel content. Part of this is latent in its organizationally idiosyncratic structure, a news-gathering infrastructure that was initially ambitious in its de-centralization.

2. The Four Broadcasting Centers Model

The channel employs 1,000 staff members, representing over 50 nationalities, which AJE claims makes it one of the most diverse news personnel in the world. In the first few years, they worked in nearly 65 bureaus, with broadcasting originally emanating from four centers – Doha, Kuala Lumpur, London and Washington, DC – in a novel attempt at de-centered production processes. The centers functioned as hubs to which regional bureaus were connected as nodes. This de-centralization among four hubs gets at the balance between being global and being embedded in a particular place and its epistemic orientation. Parsons pointed to the centers as what ensures AJE isn't simply a translation of the Arabic channel, suggesting, "We'd just do it out of Doha if it was going to be a mirror" (Pintak, 2005). The structure then seemed to suggest a global orientation as each center was given some degree of editorial autonomy.

With the four broadcasting centers, AJE disavowed having a broadcasting day centered around one domestic, national prime-time audience. Rather it sought to de-center news production as much as possible such that its output had no single prime-time in mind. First, it must be noted that the four centers each broadcast via AJE's single global signal. While their reporting functions were meant to center on certain regions, the broadcast signal only loosely

related to the times of viewing. The broadcast day started off with 9 AM in Kuala Lumpur, after the Washington, DC center signed off marking the end of the day before (8 PM in Washington, DC and 5 PM in California). Kuala Lumpur's center broadcasted for four hours before handing off to Doha, at its local time of 8 AM. The bulk of the day's programming and news content, 11 hours, would come from the headquarters in Doha. Then, the London center would go on for five hours, starting at its local time, 4 PM. Peak-time for adult TV viewing, as it is called in the UK, is 8 PM to 10:30 PM. At 9 PM in the UK, AJE's main signal would move from London to the US as the site of production. Starting at 4 PM Eastern Standard Time, Washington DC's center broadcasts for four hours. This overlaps with 6 PM evening news viewing, but misses when Americans are most settled in for TV viewing. The prime time for television in the United States is 8 PM to 11 PM on most days, meaning AJE's US center went on before prime time, landing thoroughly in the country's fringe viewing hours. While there was some attempt to line up broadcasting centers with their local prime times, the overlap was not perfect and missed completely in the market AJE claimed to value so highly, the American one, showing it was not exclusively committed to gaining access there.

Of the hubs, the most important was Doha, which is why it had the most broadcasting hours. Also, it was the center for the distribution of signals. The four broadcasting centers are connected via a large fiber network, but the master control room (MCR) that sets the final output signal is in the Doha headquarters, on the first floor next to the rows of producers, bookers, and news desks that surround the face of the center, the anchor's desk. The desk stands against one of the largest video screen backgrounds in television. If the presenter's desk is one of AJE's faces, the MCR is the entire body's nervous system. Overseeing such a geographically distributed infrastructure, it handles all the coordination necessary to make sure the right video is

showing with the right overlay graphics, at the right time. It controls the “ad hoc, occasional and recurring satellite, fiber, and broadband global area network (BGAN) ftp feeds” from the centers, bureaus, other contracted studios and vans and devices for on-location shots (ScheduALL, 2008, 4). The MCR tracks editorial requests for live feeds from the other centers’ studios and producers, or correspondents in the field. It allows operators to automatically handle the booking of bandwidth to secure the requested feeds. Besides ensuring the availability and quality of the feeds, and switching to them when requested, the MCR collects rushes, and places them in the library for producers and others to access. It channels the feeds to the studios’ control rooms and producer’s workstations via the media library. In the studio control rooms, the actual production of news takes place, and they coordinate the main news signal, including switching between live coverage, presenters reading the news and the airing of packages and programs. They send the completed signal, *sans* graphic overlays, back to the MCR, which adds the top-level graphics, such as the logo, and sends the final signal out to the satellites and the Internet for distribution. The MCR’s work can be especially fast paced during breaking news, which can require quick turnover in requests and switching in feeds, but generally it serves other important functions. Their documentation through these requests and feed-switching is essential for later auditing and gauging expenditures. Such “financial reconciliation” can be challenging but is necessary for budgeting (ScheduALL, 2008, 8). The inventory of work the MCR logs is further analyzed for planning purposes.

Even though the MCR handled the in and out signals centrally, in Doha, the fragmentation of news production between the four centers eventually proved inefficient and often redundant. Due to cost overruns, the second managing director, former Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) editor in chief and executive Tony Burman initiated a project

called the “Next Frontier.” In a February, 2009 email published by the Guardian, Burman said the project would actually result in “the expansion of our newsgathering” while also entailing “the gradual reshaping of our regional broadcast centres” (Tryhorn, 2009). Citing a budget review, AJE found that excessive resources went into redundant processes between the centers, from hardware acquisition to transmission costs. Real estate was also expensive. Also, editorially, there were many coordination problems that resulted in different centers covering the same stories and sending reporters from one center to the other accidentally. Burman wrote that these inefficiencies meant higher costs, thereby limiting on-the-ground news-gathering. Staff consultations were part of the Next Frontier initiative.

The network eventually phased out the Kuala Lumpur site and scaled down London and DC’s centers considerably, moving staff members to Doha. It re-centered editorial processes in its Doha headquarters, while simultaneously announcing plans to increase the number of bureaus and reporters on the ground with the savings. Currently, news presenters occasionally appear on air from London and Washington DC, but their screen-time is less than it used to be under the four broadcasting centers model. Most of their operations are as regular bureaus, though they also have marketing functions and staff that work on programs based at each location as well. For example, in the lead-up to the 2012 U.S. presidential elections, AJE produced a regular, special “Inside Story” segment hour of Washington. However, in the same year, AJE decreased the DC center’s operations by 75%.

One question worth exploring is whether Parsons was correct that centering news production in Doha would indicate that AJE better reflect editorially the network’s Arab identity. The result of the Next Frontier initiative was precisely that a re-centering was on order, in terms of moving away from the centers, but increasing the number of bureaus. It began as a model of

four hubs – one main one and three substantial ones getting roughly four broadcasting hours daily – with regionally-divided nodes connected to each hub. It dropped one of the hubs and made the main one even more significant, yet also increased the number of nodes. This would suggest centralization and an expectable impact on content, at least geographically and possibly topically, at least if Parsons was correct that location of production matters. He noted that western global news outlets “are coming out of these powerful countries and they absolutely naturally reflect the agendas of those countries” (Pintak, 2005).

When AJE reporters and staff are asked about the change, there is disagreement in how much centralization in Doha matters. For one correspondent based in South America, one continent AJE expanded in after the Next Frontier initiative, AJE’s news is largely driven by the field, at least for much of the world. He sees the reporters as the main force behind the news agenda, which he considers a unique dynamic among today’s news reporting organizations (Interview, 2011). This may be due to his own location however, in an area that editorial directors in Doha know less about. When it comes to coverage of places closer to home, it is possible that centralization matters more. This could be at play in how the Arab uprisings in 2011 were covered. This is further explored in chapter five. However, the question to ask is whether AJE maintained a “global south” news agenda after the change, or if other changes in coverage transpired.

3. *Content: Is it "Global South"?*

Researchers hold AJE out as a significant, novel departure in perspective on and coverage of international news. Its claim to emphasize “global south” countries in its news coverage is supported in the literature, and is held out as unique for English language TV news (el-Nawawy and Powers, 2008; Painter, 2008; al-Najjar, 2009; Figenschou 2010). Content analysis studies

of AJE have been comparative, holding the network up to prime global news competitors, such as the BBC (Painter, 2008), as well as the sister Arabic channel (al-Najjar, 2009; Feuilherade, 2006), and have found it to feature greater variety in terms of regions covered. Still, even though it did cover the “global south” more, the Arab world was generally given a significant proportion of news time (al-Najjar, 2009; Figenschou 2010). Kraidy observed “the English channel has had difficulties spreading coverage equally around the world” (2008b, 25). Overall, the research suggests that AJE presents a significant contrast from its primary English, global news competition, even if there are some imbalances. Much of the research took place before the Next Frontier initiative. It raises the question whether the centralization of production in Qatar resulted in a significant emphasis on MENA coverage. A limited content analysis here investigates two questions. First, what is the scope of its “global south” focus, in relation to both a global north one, the norm among global news media, as well as coverage of the Middle East and North Africa – which one would expect from a Doha-based outlet. Since the central question in this study is about distribution in the United States, it is worth considering how AJE’s content compares to those of the major US cable news networks. The second line of inquiry in the content analysis is, how does the mix of AJE’s areas of reporting compare with those of American news channels?

i. *Methods*

To gauge just how “global south” AJE’s reporting output is, I undertook a content analysis of 407 AJE news packages. The sample was drawn from its YouTube channel, which posts most of the news packages, programs, promotional videos and some web-only content, such as raw footage, web producers’ videos and occasional animations. The sample (n=407) draws on news packages for two-week periods in 2010 during the months of May (n=129),

August (n=132) and December (n=146) (which goes into early January, 2011). The sample was spread out to minimize the impact of big news events. A news package is shown during a news hour, and usually introduced by the in-studio presenter. It is a pre-produced story involving an edited series of videos, graphs, and images accompanied by a reporter’s voice-over, which ends with a signing off. Coding treated the video as the unit of analysis and documented each video’s story title, date, length, country of focus, topical subjects, number of YouTube views, and whether it is Middle East and North Africa-related⁴, US-related, or covers a country that is part of the global north. This last one was measured by membership in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)⁵. This analysis only used one coder given that the primary focus – covered country – was fairly obvious, not requiring much interpretation.

ii. *Findings – Global South and MENA focus.*

As for the balance in coverage of “global south” countries in contrast to “global north”

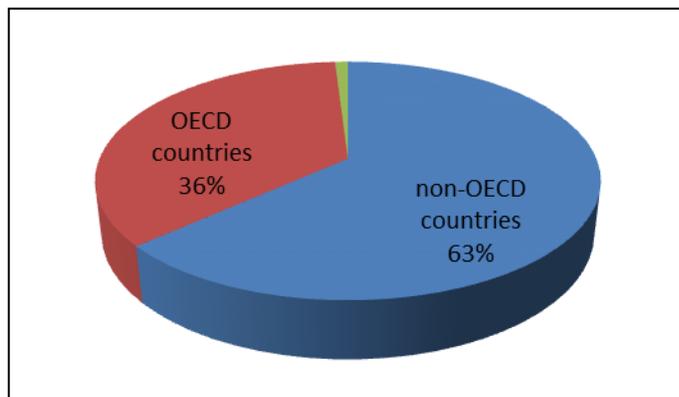


Chart 2.1 News Packages: OECD

and MENA countries in the sample news packages, we can report there are important differences (chart 2.1). Gauging how much of the coverage was about the global north, as determined by

membership in the OECD, the sample

showed 36% or a bit more than one-third of the news packages related to the richest, industrialized countries. One could argue this was still over-representation. In population terms,

⁴ The 22 Arab League members, plus Turkey, Israel and Iran. It did not include Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Armenia or Azerbaijan.

⁵ Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States.

OECD members only make up 9% of the world. However, given the tendency for global news media to over-report the richest states, which also tend to have the most active foreign affairs agendas, least restrictions on reporting and very active press outreach mechanisms, AJE still exhibits a predominant emphasis on global south countries. This shows the same mix found in Figenschou’s content analysis from several months in 2007 and 2008, in which 61% of

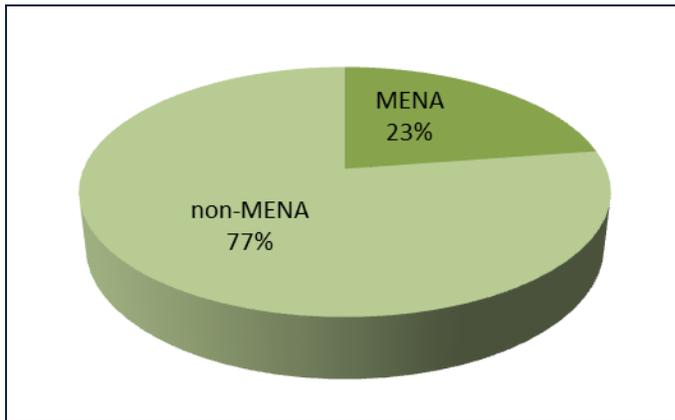


Chart 2.2 News Packages: MENA

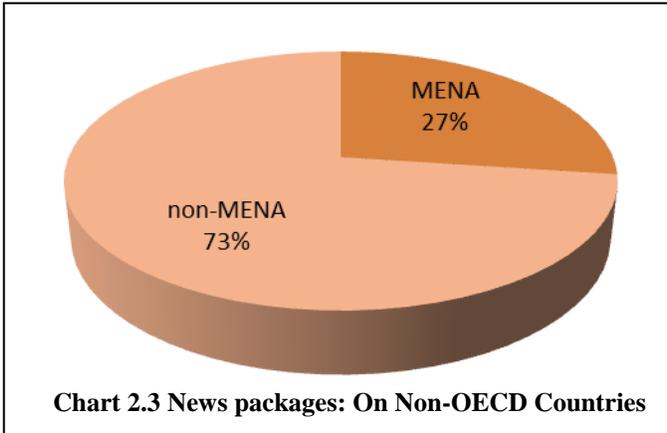
stories covered the “global south” (2010). There is support for its “global south” identity as gauged by content output even after the editorial functions were centralized in Doha.

How many of the stories, after the re-centralization of news production in

Doha, reported on the Middle East and North Africa? The findings (chart 2.2) show that only 23% of the stories were about the MENA region. While this could also be a bit of an overrepresentation in population terms, the MENA region tends to be a large focus of news given wars, invasions, conflict, its centrality in world religions and supply of vital natural resources – which give much of the world an interest in the region’s events. Given the perception of AJE as a Middle Eastern news organization, these findings suggest it is less so than expected. They show that a healthy majority 77%, or more than three-fourths of the stories, were about countries outside of the Middle East and North Africa.

Given the lower than expected finding about MENA-related stories in 2010, it is still worth checking to see how the non-OECD stories stack up in terms of MENA vs. non-MENA coverage. This shows whether the “global south” coverage is driven by MENA countries, since

all but two of them are not OECD member-states. The findings (chart 2.3) show that of the “global south” countries, MENA countries are a smaller percentage than they are of the whole sample: 27%. This suggests a wider distribution in the geographic focus and bolsters the channel’s contention to have a “global south” reporting agenda, at least in terms of content.



We can get a better sense of that distribution by categorizing the news packages by continent. We see how much each continent gets covered proportionately: Africa (14%), Asia (45%), Australia and Oceania (3%), Europe (14%), North America (18%), and South America (6%).

Interestingly, the coverage actually fits pretty closely

News Package % = inner ring

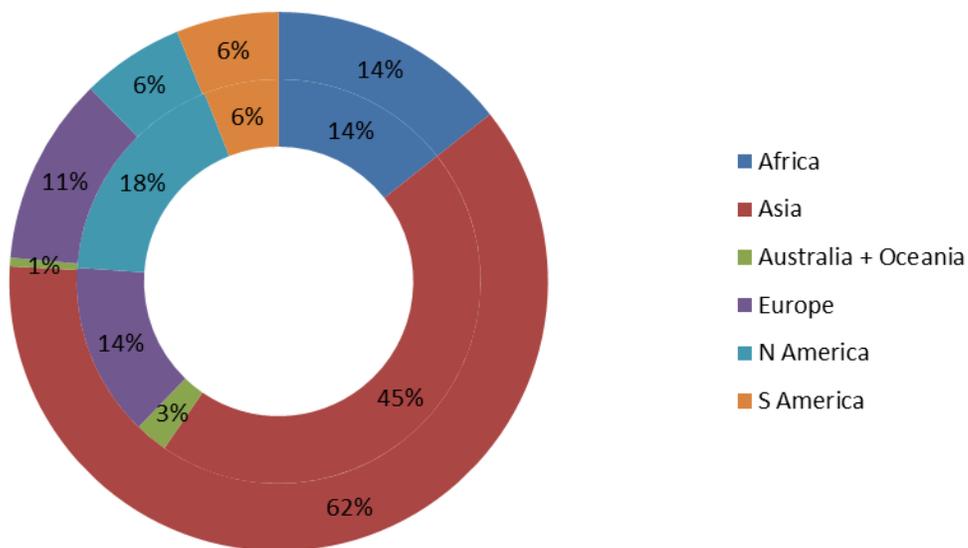


Chart 2.4 News Packages vs. Population by Continent

with population distribution (chart 2.4). Africa and South America both fit exactly, though North America would be over-represented and Asia under-represented by this standard. Most news channels dedicate significant coverage to the United States given its power in world affairs (Wu, 2000). Europe’s difference – between news package and population proportion – is only about 3%, while Australia and Oceania’s is 2%. This is not to suggest that population size is the best standard for determining which news to cover, but it makes some sense to use for a channel that claims its own agenda-setting principle is based on de-centered, geographically distributed, globalized reporting rather than the agenda set by western news media. The distribution of news coverage in geographic terms was fairly spread out, then, in 2010. On balance, these findings show some credence for the claim that the channel reports the “global south,” though as we can see, this is not an absolute statement given the over-coverage of North America.

iii. *Findings – AJE’s vs. American news channels.*

Given that the central interest here is AJE in the US news market, we should consider how AJE’s coverage differs with the main American news channels. These are not AJE’s primary global competitors, but they help us understand AJE’s identity by contrast and also its comparative advantage in the American news media landscape. The clearest difference is in coverage of international news, which the

US channels have been scaling back for some time. This can be seen in the stark difference in domestic (USA) vs. foreign bureaus in 2010 (chart 2.5). Though AJE

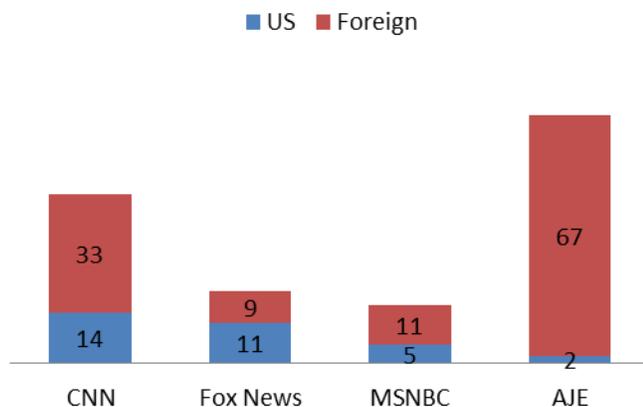


Chart 2.5 Bureaus

opened more bureaus in the US after 2010, it clearly has the fewest, compared with CNN, MSNBC and Fox News. As for foreign bureaus, only CNN’s 33 approaches AJE’s 67, and it’s half the number. The three channels combined only have 53 total, still considerably less than AJE. This supports Dave Marash’s point that the difference between AJE and the US cable channels is that they “concentrate 80% of their news-gathering, 80% of their reporters, crews, producers, bureaus, and attention on North America and Western Europe.” AJE, on the other hand, concentrates “80% of our news resources and attention everywhere else” (Marash, 2007, 47).

This would suggest that AJE offers far more international news than do the American channels. The Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism releases an annual report on the state of the news media. Their content analysis (2.6) showed that international news took up a respective 23% of CNN’s, 18% of Fox News’s, and 13% of MSNBC’s newsholes. This starkly contrasts with AJE’s figure of 89% of news about countries other than the United States, as determined by my content analysis. However, those figures for US cable news channels overstate the case a bit, as Pew reports. Looking at

international news stories not directly related to the US, the percentages drop considerably. The average of foreign news not related to the US is 3% among the three main cable news channels. This is compared to 80% of AJE’s. While Pew found

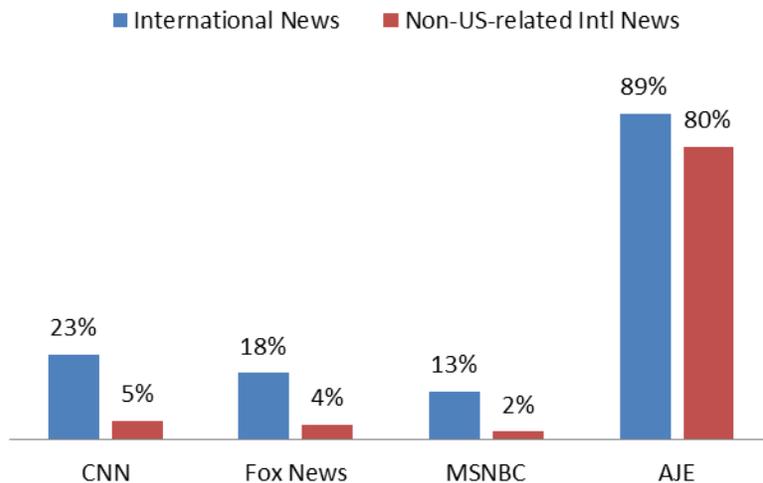


Chart 2.6 News Networks Compared. SOURCE: Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism

that international news coverage is least common on cable TV news, the decline in US international news reporting has been widely measured for decades (Adams, 1982; Utley, 1997; Ricchiardi, 2008).

iv. *Qualitative differences and topics*

These content analyses admittedly do not capture the qualitative differences. For example, the channel claims a reporting advantage expressed in the idiom of rejecting “parachute” journalism for locally knowledgeable, in-depth reporting (Marash, 2007, 47). Given its wide reporting presence and diverse personnel, many of the reporters are language and culture competent, and show a deep understanding of the places they cover. Unlike national news media in the United States, AJE reporters do not attend to audience preferences as determined by marketing research. There are other key dissimilarities:

our pace is slower, closer to what I like to call ‘news at the speed of thought.’ We do fewer stories in our bulletins, which allow us to do reports each half-hour of greater length, and, we hope, greater depth as well. And, as our division of news resources indicates, we look at the world from a variety of perspectives (Marash, 2007, 47).

This differentiation could be seen as a liability for marketing and distribution purposes in the United States because it is so far from the norm. However, it could be a source of strength, showing AJE has a comparative advantage and can attract a niche audience – those who are highly attentive to international news. The quandary is that such a niche may not be large enough to justify wide cable carriage in the United States. Thus, AJE’s agency, in planning to be a global news source, actually resulted in an identity that precludes wide availability in the country. Would the channel be willing to alter its reporting to gain such an audience? This speaks to another balance, between pursuing the American market and firming up more globally-oriented audiences.

In terms of the subjects covered, the gap between AJE and the standards of the TV news

industry widen. Looking at the kinds of topics featured in AJE news packages (chart 2.7), we can see that the most common topics include hard politics, local conflicts, economics, social movement protests, human rights and natural and man-made disasters. The least common topics included science/technology, sports and celebrities. Roughly 85% of these topics lend themselves better to the “hard news” category, which Baum (2003) defined vaguely as stories with a public policy import, while soft news is sensationalized, driven by human-interest and drama. Baum (2003) showed that Americans increasingly rely on soft news to learn about current events. If so, this further distinguishes AJE from larger trends in the American news environment.

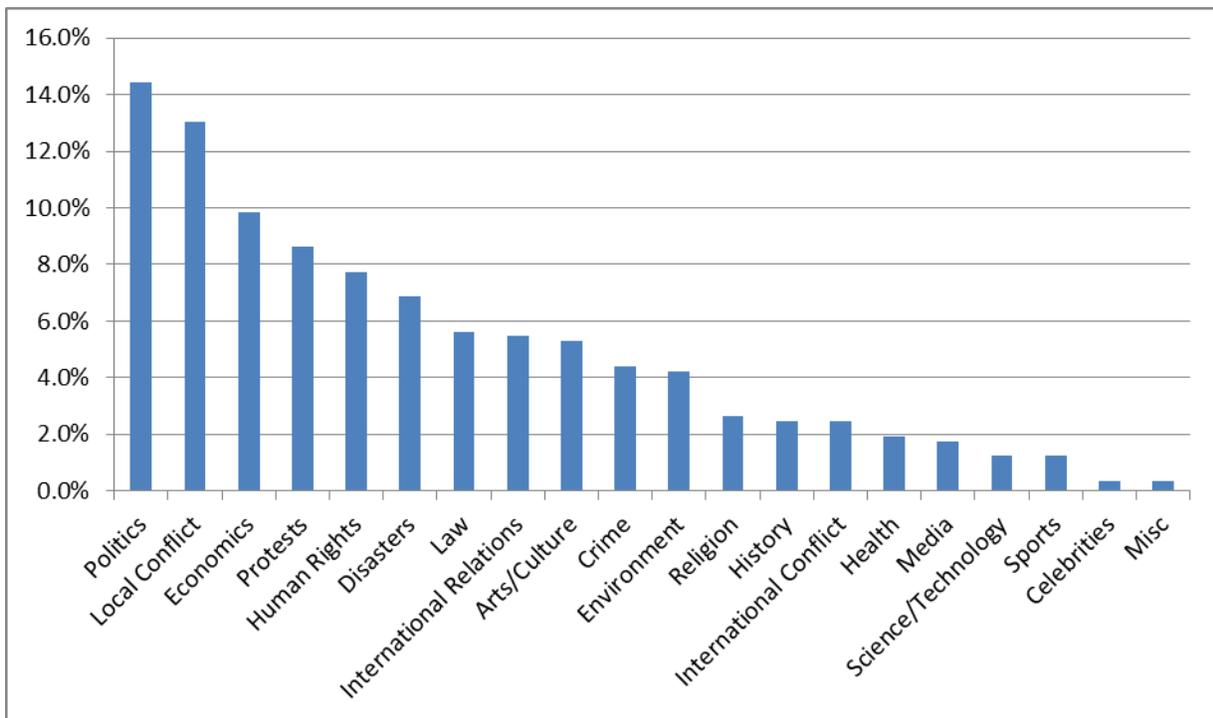


Chart 2.7. News packages by topic.

C. What is AJE?

In asking if AJE is well-positioned to compete in the US TV market, we must first get a grasp of what it is exactly. Since AJE has not been interested in differentiating itself for various regional markets, we can speak of a single output defined by one signal. This is true even if there is plurality and diversity at the stage of inputs – for example, staff suggested that who the executive producer on shift at the time is can determine which stories lead and are given more time. Production processes are not homogeneous or consistent necessarily. It is after all, operated by a highly diverse staff who bring their own backgrounds, biases and ways of working to the place. Like any complex organization, it is not of one mind and can show signs of change and contradiction while editorial management seek to impose consistency. There are certain balances that AJE wrestles with consistently: Is it private or public, Arab or global, news or Qatari international broadcasting/ propaganda? Its identity is the function of the balances struck between these different poles.

Is Al Jazeera English an example of public service broadcasting (PSB)? While it functions informally with a mission to enhance global communication, it does not have the clear, legalistic charter of a PSB, or a defined public service mandate, making it something of a hybrid that possesses the spirit of a public service outlet. This question is difficult because treating the private and the public as binaries is somewhat of a culturally loaded assumption. In Qatar, as a sheikhdom, public goods are the private property of the emir. The natural resources of the country are effectively managed by the regime, as personal property, yet distributed to citizens and used to develop infrastructure and all public services. Public bodies, organizations, institutions, and agencies that serve the people are ultimately more accountable to the regime than to the citizens, however. While there are useful feedback mechanisms, such as a *shura* (council), and a parliament in development, there is not a legal formalism that keeps what would

be regarded as public institutions in the West, state-funded universities, for example, protected from intervention by the government, or in Qatar's case, the royal family. The Al Jazeera network's independence was not the result of legal prohibitions against interference, independent public funding mechanisms or other structural arrangements, but was the result of estimation by the heads of the regime that it would prosper best as such. It also allowed them plausible deniability when the coverage angered other leaders. Also, Al Jazeera came out of a failed BBC project, and drew on talent trained in PSB outlets around the world. This lack of formalism arguably makes its independence tenuous and conditional. While it should be added that legal formalism itself would not be a guaranteed protection from political pressure, its absence makes applying PSB standards a challenge. Therefore, AJE struggles for the independence and competitiveness of a private sector outfit, yet has the mission and less reliance on profitability typifying the public sector.

This private-public confusion was exemplified during the height of tensions with the American government. US officials lobbied for Qatar to fully privatize Al Jazeera. It was believed that this would expose them to market and advertiser pressures, and therefore moderate their stances – however, Qatar claimed it always wanted the network to be independent and commercially viable (Vedantam, 2005), or private in theory. In 2005, the Ernst and Young consultancy firm was contracted to explore privatization models (Kinninmont, 2005). There has been some movement on this front, as some vague reports indicate that Qatar approved the channel's transition to becoming a “private organisation devoted to public interest” (Toumi, 2011), as confusing as that may be. However, by early 2012, little has changed since the owners appear to be the same and the structures of governance still have at the head government officials, and members of the royal family.

Also, as of 2011, AJE was not aggressively pursuing advertisers, as would be expected of a privatizing organization. Adrian Smith, international account director at Mediacom U.K., tried to buy ads on AJE for Shell. He said, “They don't go out very hard—they're not sending fliers out or coming around knocking on the door saying you should be advertising on Al-Jazeera” (Hampp, 2011). They do carry nominal ads, mostly by Qatari-funded companies, such as Qatar Airways and Qatar Petrochemical Company (Qapco). The other network channels gain more revenues from sponsors. Of the \$650 million dollars of ad spending on Al-Jazeera's channels, just \$29 million was from Al-Jazeera English, according to Ipsos (Hampp, 2011). AJE staff implied the pursuit of advertisers was debated. Many were resistant to dependence on advertisers, which they thought could result in pressures and limit their independence. One interviewee argued for advertising from global corporations would give AJE legitimacy in the eyes of viewers and that advertisements from Qatari state companies harmed the channel's image, making it appear more as a Qatari, rather than global, channel (Interview, 2011). The dependence of the state's coffers resembles PSB, arguably, and is welcomed by many at AJE, even as this is a model in decline in traditional PSB states and outsiders question whether AJE reflected Qatari foreign policy too strongly. There is also the question of what happens if the emir's largesse ends.

AJE's marketed identity as a “global south” news channel that gives “voice to the voiceless” was a function of its own agency, planned by design, and carried out consciously by its journalists, editors and producers. However, the internal debate and discourses during development were intertwined with contextual factors, such as the on-going adversarial stance of the United States and a sense among many internally that the Arabs needed a venue for speaking back to Americans. For the western management brought in earlier, the emphasis was on

offering an alternative to the global news giants, rather than operating within US-Arab relations or as a mere expression of Arab priorities. By 2010, we can see that AJE is not really what one would expect of an Arab news channel per se – an implied regional and perspectival focus – and that it does give coverage to the “global south” as promised by the motto. At the same time, it reports on the MENA countries and the United States disproportionately, suggesting that it tends towards both its Arab world position and covers the powerful as all other news channels are prone. While striving to be global, it is undeniable that its place in an Arab country in an Arabic TV network, influences its reporting. But one cannot argue it is consistently more Arab than it is global. In chapter five, this is challenged by how AJE covered the Arab Spring series of uprisings – so extensively and with the perspective that emphasized AJE’s Arab positionality.

To what degree is it Qatari, or more specifically, does it reflect Qatar’s foreign policy? Being headquartered there and funded by the Qatari regime, it seems somewhat obvious. And whenever there is convergence between AJE’s reporting and Qatari foreign policy, such as in AJE’s aggressive reporting in Libya, which included journalists embedded with insurgents, critics claim it is a Qatari foreign policy tool, or propaganda. However, in broad terms, as the content breakdown shows, it cannot just be that. So much of its content is about places where Qatar appears not to have a specific foreign policy interest. It may simply be a prop to boost Qatar’s global reputation, much like the BBC was meant to do for Great Britain. Its goal was to be both credible news and to improve Great Britain’s image abroad for providing a news service to the world. This is not completely contradictory, as the BBC’s undeniably British outlook on events does not prevent it from being esteemed by many around the world. This is hardly controversial. At worst it seems, AJE reflects the same sort of bias on issues of close proximity to Qatari national interests. Its spotty treatment of Bahrain, where Qatar helped put down

protests, was as compelling as proof of bias for critics as was its Libya coverage, which many saw as unabashedly pro-rebel. While it was criticized for Bahrain's absence in coverage by observers, including Bahraini activists, it also released one of the most powerful reports on the crushed reform movement, a lengthy program shot secretly called "Shouting in the Dark," which later won a Foreign Press Association Documentary of the Year award in London and a 2012 Polk Award in the category of Television Documentary. It also won over many Bahraini dissidents (Interview, Bahraini activist, 2011). Showing that political control still mattered, the documentary was broadcast only once after Bahrain protested. It seems the red lines are not necessarily hardened but the channel's pressure points – issues too close to Qatar's sphere of influence and national interest – are made apparent by incidents such as this. These appear to be more the exception than the rule since so much of AJE's content is about regions and issues that Qatar has no overt interest in. If this is the case, it at best contributes to positive "nation branding" or public diplomacy for the small state. In this regard, one can ask how different it is than the BBC. The Arabic service may be a different story all together, as its regional political implications raise the stakes of its coverage for the regime. Some contend that the Arabic coverage is even more politicized, which could be a function of differences in editorial tone and style. The Arabic channel appears more opinion-driven generally.

This question of AJE's identity is incomplete, and like every organization, it is subject to contestation and flux, reflecting staffing changes and organization structure among other factors. As of early 2012, just months after the long-time director-general of the network, Wadah Khanfar, resigned, its identity was still in flux. His replacement by Sheikh Ahmad bin Jassim al-Thani, raised many questions, such as, whether the regime was re-asserting control over news outlets that were seen as being out in front of the government on touchy regional issues, such as

the Syrian uprising. Syria was a Qatar ally, yet the two broke ways over the Al-Assad's harsh repression of the protests. The counter-narrative is that the new director-general is there to discipline its finances and has no real editorial agenda. His background is in business not politics. The degree to which profitability and political significance represent a new balance for AJE to face represents just another balance the channel has to strike.

These tensions in what AJE is are not without consequences for the channel's ambitions in the American market. One's intuition is that acting as a public sector organization, showing less regard for revenue-seeking, representing an Arab perspective or Qatari propaganda would lessen the channel's ability to succeed in the United States. This is true only so much as AJE's agency actually matters in all of this. In some ways, it could be the preferences and perceptions of American audiences that matter more. While those are filtered and digested by cable companies that ultimately decide whether AJE gains carriage or not, if audiences for international news unrelated to the United States are tiny, why would carriage be expected – especially given the active opposition by some Americans? At any rate, AJE's balances were struck only partially with appealing to western audiences in mind. There were many other considerations that when added up, suggest AJE is not willing to do whatever it takes to gain wide American carriage. After all, it's not an easy market to break into for any foreign, let alone non-US-conglomerate-owned, channel.

If AJE is indeed offering a more internationalist news agenda and not directly engaged in undermining American foreign policy, why has it had such a difficult time entering the American TV market? The first factor this study examines is the political context – namely the lingering reputation of the Arabic channel in the United States and the association of the brand with the

country's adversaries in the war on terror (the "war on terror frame"). When Al Jazeera's coverage countered directly the American government's foreign policy in the region and did not play according to rules of the war on terror – namely by airing Osama bin Laden's video messages – the channel quickly earned official and then popular enmity in the US. These flash points proved formative in the English channel's test in America.

III. THE UNITED STATES AND AL JAZEERA

The challenge that Al Jazeera posed for the United States during the Afghanistan and Iraq invasions set the stage for the political context of AJE's efforts to enter the American market – one element of this study's explanatory framework. The obvious way is that it set American elite against the network, despite a previous but limited admiration for the channel's regional impact. Concerns around AJE's presence in the United States in its earliest years were predicated on the "war on terror" concerns established during the Bush administration.

As difficult as Al Jazeera proved to be for Israeli and western officials, they embraced it in the years before the 2001 Al-Qaeda attacks for a number of reasons. For one, it was the first Arabic satellite news station that had on air Israeli spokespeople. It also was highly critical of Arab regimes, some of which were not allied with the United States and Israel (Sakr, 2003; Alterman, 1998). Finally, it was considered by many to open up the first real pan-Arab mediated public sphere, a space for debate and exchange of ideas across a region long dominated by state news agencies and information ministries and thereby encouraged democratization (Hudson, 2002; Lynch, 2006) – and avowed tenet of American policy. The appearance of Israeli spokespeople, combined with its criticism of regimes antagonists to the West, such as Syria,

fueled rumors that the news channel was a project of western intelligence agencies in some Arab circles. For the channel's heads, it was merely living up to its motto, "the opinion and the other opinion." When it first launched, Washington and "the chattering classes" that influence American policy welcomed the "advent of an Arab media venture based on a Western model (the BBC) that was prepared to challenge existing political orthodoxies in the region" (Hudson, 2005, 122-23). The one-time US ambassador to Syria and State Department official for public diplomacy, Christopher Ross, remarked that since Al Jazeera's launch, the "US administration has been a great admirer of the channel" (El-Nawawy and Iskandar, 2002, 95). It was recognized as being both novel and important for the region. For example, Thomas Friedman, the *New York Times* columnist, wrote that it was "not only the biggest media phenomenon to hit the Arab world since the advent of television, it also is the biggest political phenomenon" (Friedman, 2001). The embrace largely came to an end, however, with Al Jazeera's coverage following the September 11, 2001 Al-Qaeda strike on the United States.

When the United States, with much of the world governments' support, led the NATO invasion of Afghanistan, very few reporters were present on the ground in Kabul, or anywhere else in the country that had been under strict Taliban rule for nearly a decade. Al Jazeera was one of the only in-country reporting outlets, meaning it was in place to cover the war outside of the American-devised press control system by which reporters were embedded within fighting forces. It was the only news channel with a constant satellite link from Kabul. Its video clips from events in Afghanistan sold for premium rates. Being there when the earliest bombs started dropping, Al Jazeera's coverage, from the start, presented problems for military planners and officials who sought to control the war's narrative. The channel's reporting on bombed sites and civilian victims, as well as Taliban battle successes, threatened to turn public opinion against war

efforts, as its reporting and powerful images were re-transmitted globally. Of greater concern was the network's willingness to air videos provided by Osama bin Laden and his allies. The videos contained calls for attacks within them, which naturally raised fears in western capitals of further violence; many associated this message with the messenger, Al Jazeera.

With the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the animosity between the United States and Al Jazeera reached its highest point. The gap between the narratives being advanced by both sides seemed wider than ever. Al Jazeera framed "US involvement in the region as a form of imperialism and domination" while Washington saw itself as "a benign world power without ulterior motives seeking to reform the region for its own good and America's" (Hudson, 2005, 121). On numerous occasions, public spats between Al Jazeera and American officials took place over specific reports. In March, 2003, the network re-transmitted Iraqi television interviews with five captured American soldiers. American Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld condemned it as a blatant breach of the Geneva Convention. Network spokesman Jihad Ballout retorted, "Look who's talking about international law and regulations," a reference to the charge that the Bush administration's "preemptive strike" on Iraq violated principles and treaties of international law. He added less combatively that "It's a facet of the war. Our duty is to show the war from all angles" (Whitaker, 2003). The channel's use of graphic images of bombing victims, a practice less common in western news media, was also a frequent source of tension. The circulation of such images in the American public, made easier with e-mail and the World Wide Web, was one pronounced difference from the 1991 Gulf War, in which tightly controlled use of the Pentagon's images defined the war's visual representation at home.

The channel that was once seen as a proponent of reform was soon collapsed with Al Qaeda and treated as an enemy of the allied forces in US officials' public pronouncements.

Secretary of State Colin Powell lobbied Qatar's emir to reign in the channel's anti-Americanism in late 2001 (Sullivan, 2001). In 2004, he told the Qatari foreign minister that AJ "intruded" on relations between the two countries (Hudson, 2005). President George W. Bush mentioned the network in his 2004 State of the Union Speech, calling it "hateful propaganda." Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld frequently criticized the channel along these lines, as "propaganda," "inexcusably biased," and "vicious" (Kessler, 2012, 48). This was largely in response to the channel's coverage of the 2004 Fallujah insurgent assault on US contractors and then the later failed battle to capture the city (Samuel-Azran, 2010, 86). Rumsfeld's response was that the reporters seemed "surprisingly close" to these events and said it possessed evidence of collaboration between fighters and the channel's reporters. He would repeat his criticisms of Al Jazeera in his published memoirs (Rumsfeld, 2011). In 2003, Assistant Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz claimed the channel was "inciting violence" and "endangering the lives of American troops" in Iraq. He also claimed it "ran a totally false report that American troops had gone and detained one of the key imams in this holy city of Najaf, Muqtad (sic) al-Sadr." These claims elicited detailed rebuttals from the Baghdad bureau chief and the director-general (Fisk, 2003). Al Jazeera's coverage itself was a subject of contention in the ensuing information war.

The tension was not limited to the verbal. It entailed actual violence. Though officially declared accidents, allied forces bombed both of Al Jazeera's Kabul and Baghdad bureaus, in 2001 and 2003, respectively, killing Iraqi correspondent Tareq Ayyoub in the second incident. The Americans claimed it was unintentional and that the Kabul bureau was near a known Taliban facility. To avoid another strike, AJ officials provided the U.S. with the coordinates of the Baghdad bureau, yet it was still hit – an incident an American official went on-air to apologize for and call a "tragic accident." The State Department's Nabil Khoury claimed there

were insurgents firing from near the site of the bureau (Miles, 2005, 268). There were other instances. Previously in 2003, allied forces bombed a hotel, the Sheraton, in Basra, Iraq after the network alerted them they were staying there. This followed other incidents in which American soldiers shot up a car with an AJ journalist at a checkpoint after he provided identification, and an embedded reporter was threatened with death. A commander said there was nothing he could do to stop the threats (Massing, 2003, 307). Al Jazeera, was not the only news source to face allied attack, but when matched with the detention and arrest of some of its journalists, it is not hard to believe that the discourse of Al Jazeera as siding with the enemy did not also include actual coercion despite official claims to the contrary.

While claims of intentionality are circumstantial and debatable, various reports only add to the speculation. A leaked document from a meeting between UK Prime Minister Tony Blair and President Bush stimulated perceptions that the U.S. deliberately targeted the channel. The minutes showed Bush suggesting a possible military operation against Al Jazeera headquarters in Doha. Blair quickly responded that Qatar is an ally. After the leak, officials on both sides of the Atlantic dismissed it as a joke. Al Jazeera's head at the time, Wadah Khanfar, later wrote an op-ed declaring that a high US official admitted the discussion took place in earnest, and added that to a list of grievances against the Bush administration (2010). While the evidence of the US targeting AJ is scant, it is worth noting that in NATO's campaign in Serbia in the late 1990s, US-led forces bombed media facilities it accused of operating as President Slobodan Milosevic's propaganda outlets. In other words, there would be precedent for violence against hostile media, though such a proposition that the campaign was intentional is still impossible to prove. That this has many believers is testament to the level of American official hostility against the channel.

It was not only the government that opposed Al Jazeera. Private sector firms and organizations took punitive measures against the network. In late March, 2003, the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) revoked two reporters' press credentials, and NASDAQ refused to grant them access (Kolodzy and Ricks, 2003). Professional journalist associations and freedom of the press advocacy groups quickly repudiated the two exchanges, helping to get the bans dropped weeks later. The *New York Times* defended the network, calling it "real journalism" and "the only uncensored TV network in the Arab world." AOL and Yahoo! pulled advertisements from Al Jazeera's website, Internet hosting companies cancelled contracts without cause, and the network had problems obtaining and maintaining facility lease agreements in Washington, DC and New York (Miles, 2005, 261-2). The public vilification and Bush administration pressure also discouraged American news networks from re-transmitting AJ footage and bin Laden videos (Sullivan, 2002).

As volatile as relations were, it should be noted that they were in flux over the course of the administration's tenure. Secretaries Rumsfeld and Condoleezza Rice, and numerous other government officials appeared on the channel as guests. One staffer in DC reported within the span of a few days Secretary of State Powell called the channel's coverage "horrible" and then approached it for an interview (Hudson, 2005, 128). To some degree then, the public vilification was intended as "flak," or "negative responses to a media statement or [TV or radio] program" in the hope that these "modes of complaint, threat and punitive action" change the content (Herman and Chomsky, 2002, 26). The administration certainly could have done more to silence Al Jazeera. For example, the government never deployed hard legal instruments to ban Al Jazeera from the United States, as it did with Al-Manar, Hizbollah's channel. The Lebanese militia and political party's channel was banned under provisions of the USA

PATRIOT Act's material support clause, which forbids all American entities from providing any resources or financially beneficial services to groups officially designated as terrorists. It would be strange to apply such a measure given the network's sponsor is an American ally and host to a bases and Centcom, the central command of the Iraq invasion and occupation forces. If the administration was that adamant about the dangers of Al Jazeera, it could have argued that the channel's transmission of Al Qaeda videos was a form of free advertising and therefore an in-kind donation, or material support, to Al Qaeda. The government could have sought punitive measures against its US bureaus and assets. That it did not showed its power was constrained, potentially by the backlash that would have occurred but also by some realization that the channel was not as squarely antagonistic as official rhetoric assumed. Nevertheless, government pressure was deployed in various and not always overt ways.

The Bush administration's Al Jazeera strategy was not all about coercion, flak, lobbying and appearing on-air. The United States also sought to stymie its influence by launching a TV competitor, Al-Hurra ("the free one"), a form of positive response, meaning it offered an alternative. A congressional emergency supplemental appropriations bill, passed April 16, 2003 (P.L. 108-11), set aside \$30.5 million for the Middle East Television Network (METN), which would manage Al-Hurra. Norman Pattiz, the founder and chairman of the commercially successful Westwood One Radio Network and a member of the US Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), expressed the rationale: "as most people in the region get their news and information from TV, we need to be on TV so we can explain America and its policies, its people, and its culture from our own lips rather than have it described by the indigenous media" (Shapiro, 2005). The larger sentiment motivating Al Hurra was that American informational activities should go in a softer direction, calling for public engagement, listening and promotion

of shared values between peoples. They warned that “spin” and ideational combat – sheer advocacy of inflexible foreign policies – would likely only backfire. There was some acknowledgement later that the approach of a war on Al Jazeera was ultimately counter-productive, though the resentment that came of those days proved robust for years.

In the middle of this crucible was Hafez al-Mirazi, a veteran journalist and head of the channel’s Washington, DC bureau. He articulated the channel’s response to concerns that Al Jazeera was poisoning Arab public opinion against the U.S. in a 2004 Congressional hearing on public diplomacy in the region. Citing public opinion poll drops in non-Arabic speaking countries, he argued that Al Jazeera cannot be the problem. Blaming them, he reasoned, was a distraction from acknowledging that American foreign policy is deeply unpopular and simply cannot be sold. As for Al Hurra’s launch, he noted how ironic it was that the hearing was entitled, “Defending Ideals and Defining the Message,” yet government-funded news media are contrary to American values. Citing a failed experiment by Israel to launch an Arabic language competitor to AJ, he advised Americans instead appear more frequently on Al Jazeera to explain their views to Arab publics. Through the course of the hearing, he extended invitations for more American officials to make guest appearances on the channel (al-Mirazi 2004, 199-219).

While al-Mirazi would prefer fewer challengers to Al Jazeera, one could point to the launch of Saudi-backed Al Arabiya as evidence of the possibilities of competing with the network. The channel is more politically moderate and almost as successful in terms of market share. New entrants into the Arabic news landscape are manifold. Notably, the major international broadcasters, from the BBC, to France 24, Deutsche Welle, Russia Today and the Chinese CCTV, have launched Arabic channels. Rupert Murdoch’s Sky News announced it will do that same in a joint venture with investment firm Abu Dhabi Media Investment Corp

(ADMIC) – signaling the intention of Abu Dhabi to compete for media influence in the region. The new channel, planners are promising, will be impartial and independent. The Arabic news market is highly saturated, largely by mixed private-public organizations vying more for public opinion influence than revenues, given the challenges of measuring Arab audiences and their political import (Sakr, 2007b).

Having the bureau chief speak at a Congressional hearing showed that Al Jazeera, while severely critiqued and subject to strong criticism, never rose to the status of actual, named enemy, as much of the public discourse would make it seem. The channel had its defenders in the government, according to staff who reported being privately complimented in numerous interactions with government analysts specializing in foreign affairs. Those supporting Al Jazeera from within the US government argued that officials should embrace it as a fixture in the Arab media landscape and as the best possible means to reach Arab audiences. Some took the network as a chance to learn about the perspectives of others. During a March 27, 2003 CNN appearance, Gen. Hugh Shelton said he was outraged by the showing of American prisoners of war (POWs) on Al Jazeera,

But on the other hand I think it helps sometimes to listen to the way the news is being reported by others around the world, and that gives you a perspective of how maybe the other side, maybe the Iraqis are viewing the actions of the United States (cited in Kolodzy and Ricks, 2003, 17).

During the Bush administration, however, this was clearly the minority position. A “clash of civilizations” logic was predominant. Its neoconservative thinkers saw the region as consisting of “mostly poor people whose highest priority is to be ‘free’” – only “their aspirations are perpetually thwarted by authoritarian and inefficient governments” and “‘Islamist terrorism’ organizations” (Hudson, 2005, 136). Within this framework, Al Jazeera only furthered antagonism, and entrenching ancient prejudices, rather than encouraging Washington’s vision of progress towards freedom.

As the wars on Iraq and Afghanistan became more unpopular and the perception that the Iraq invasion was pursued under false pretenses, resulting in a quagmire, the image of Al Jazeera among the foreign policy establishment in the United States was somewhat resuscitated (Miles, 2005b). It took a changing of administrations, which ended the nomenclature of the “war on terror” – though not all the policies – to reset official relations with Al Jazeera. With the coming of the Obama administration, US-Al Jazeera relations thawed somewhat. For former managing director Tony Burman, ‘The transition from the Bush era to the Obama era has changed the game dramatically’ (Helman, 2009). Al Jazeera staffers felt the channel’s reputation was renewed: “It used to be Al Jazeera, the voice of Osama. The fact is, we’ve gone way past that now. People who watch us know what we do,” said Riz Khan, the long-time CNN International anchor who hosted a talk program on Al Jazeera English (Ambinder, 2009). It was not entirely clear that the American public’s associations have completely changed, which is an explanation for the channel’s distribution struggles in the United States. One reason for the English channel’s formation and 2006 launch was to create a communicative bridge between western publics and the Middle East. The political context outlined above demonstrates why its planning and development of an operational identity were such delicate endeavors. Al Jazeera English was spawned within this conflict-ridden climate, and then needed to overcome it to gain traction in the United States.

IV. CONCLUSION

How does this chapter relate to the analytical framework presented in the introductory chapter? The essential background into Al Jazeera English started with a review of the

network's origins and the decision for launching AJE. To advance the agency factor, this chapter described broadly AJE's formation and what the channel *is* exactly. A content analysis affirmed that a "global south" agenda drove its reporting. Further qualifying what is meant by "global news" reveals an operational perspective that seeks to cover traditionally underreported places and people, particularly those seen as being "powerless." The various balances it had to strike in its identity formation and earliest operations were the first instances of its agency, a broader factor in its carriage efforts: it made decisions about its identity, subsequent marketing strategies and what it was willing and not willing to do to enter the American cable market – but these were bound within internal contestations over what AJE should be. The network's rocky relationship with the US formed American perceptions of the channel. This defined the key political context – another one of this study's framework elements – for AJE's distribution efforts in the country. The next chapter further explores its efforts to find carriage on American televisions, which implicates the political economy of TV distribution and political culture factors. The following chapter adds further to understanding of AJE's agency as a global, yet foreign, news source seeking wider availability in the United States.

Chapter 3

The Problems and Prospects of Accessing American Televisions.

In March, 2011, AJE star correspondent Ayman Mohyeldin, who had recently become famous for his thorough and highly insightful reports from revolutionary Egypt, appeared as a guest on the popular satirical Comedy Central program, the Colbert Report (“The Colbert Report,” 2011). Besides being a sign of the times – the changing receptivity to the channel post-Arab Spring – this appearance is worth recounting because the issue of cable distribution came up. Stephen Colbert, the show’s boisterous host, asked him in his typically ambiguously layered, tongue-in-cheek way:

We’ve got like 17 Showtimes and a channel for pets, how come, if you guys aren’t dangerous, you’re not on any of our channels here?

Colbert’s question on its face implied AJE was dangerous, but since it simultaneously mocked the frivolity of American TV choices, it, along with his choice in guest, suggested otherwise.

Mohyeldin’s response was smooth:

People come to Al Jazeera because they get good international news. The reality of it is these cable companies, which are not carrying Al Jazeera, are sadly helping contribute to the misinformation that is happening in this country.

The first sentence was consistent with the company line. His second resonated with the liberal audience drawn to Colbert as a critique of American cable news. Mohyeldin linked the channel’s draw as a source of international news, and its lack of availability, to

wider public misinformation and implicates cable companies for their contribution to the sorry state of American knowledge of the world. This interestingly resonates with research on political knowledge and media consumption that finds cross-national differences (Iyengar et al., 2009; Bennett et al., 1996).

Two factors bolster yet complicate Mohyeldin's explanation. First, American television carriers fundamentally do not bear the burden of public education beyond the few legacy public interest obligations regulators left in place. This is a function of these industries' political economy and the history of deregulation that makes them profit-maximizing firms. Their lack of contribution is therefore structural *and* expectable. Unsurprisingly, most of AJE's carriage and re-transmission in the United States has benefitted from rare public sector, non-profit and independent elements within the industry, as well as from some of the carry-over obligations on cable and satellite providers, particularly with regards to localism and Public, Education and Government (PEG) channels. Second, there is potentially a deeper problem for AJE in the political culture of Americans, a source that lies deeper than cable companies' profit-maximizing political economy. Attributing the unpopularity of international news in the United States to deeper currents of both neglect of and hostility towards international affairs suggests a more foundational challenge. At the same time, American political culture is far from unified, and there are those who are globally-oriented, who take an interest in things foreign, and it is among sectors of the American polity that AJE circulates. But can they support the economics of AJE's carriage via mass TV distribution systems, particularly when those adamantly against the channel present counter-risk?

I. THE CHALLENGE OF THE AMERICAN TV MARKET

American TV distribution is controlled by a few large, private sector multi-system operators (MSOs), such as Comcast and Time-Warner, though there are thousands of small cable carriers throughout the country and several satellite providers. Cable remains king, as the saying goes, despite indication that some people are “cord-cutting” and moving to online distributors for their tele-visual services. AJE considers cable the primary means to build an American audience. The vast majority of cable operators have so far not signed any deals with AJE even in local markets where demand has been demonstrated. It is doubtful they see adding AJE as a way to enhance their two revenue streams: advertising and subscriber fees. Given the potential controversy of carriage, as shown in the Burlington case, showing AJE poses risk to companies’ bottom line.

Cable programming markets heavily favor incumbents who have the advantage of an established turf, which also pushes new entrants to niche markets (Caves, 2005, p. 133). The major TV news media are owned by a few large conglomerates (Bagdikian, 2004). Some argue that concentrated ownership of news media does not restrict diversity in content (Einstein, 2004; Noam, 2009). However, conglomerate-owned news channels, even new ones, have a large advantage in distribution markets because they are often bundled with high demand channels. Cable carriers are faced by constraints in capacity, or so they argue. They see carriage as real estate and want to protect profitability by maximizing the advertising and subscription revenues per-channel. One option is for programmers to pay carriers, but this is very difficult for new entrants who already face high start-up and overhead costs (Caves, 2005, p. 121). AJE is unwilling to pay carriage fees, however.

In the market for audiences, AJE competes with other news providers. American cable and broadcasting news, however, have declined tremendously their investments in international news reporting. There would seem to be market advantage for state-sponsored broadcasters as progenitors of foreign subsidized information then, giving them some leverage as a possible niche in the marketplace. In cable news, the niche market can be large, as Fox News proved by gaining the largest news market share through an appeal to conservative viewers. Cable news newcomers, such as AJE, are seen as threatening the news audiences and therefore profitability of the main news channels, Fox News, CNN and MSNBC, not to mention the legacy broadcasters who still air nightly news programs. MSNBC and CNN have shown instability and decline in audience ratings. At the same time, declining budgets for international news have created a void for international broadcasters such as the BBC and AJE to compete to fill – as long as there proves to be unmet demand for international news by foreign providers. There could also be a challenge in the vertical integration between Comcast and NBC, which brings a 24 hour news channel, MSNBC, under the ownership of the largest cable TV operator. The FCC conditioned Comcast's acquisition on avoiding anti-competitive programming choices. As of early 2012, this benefited BBC World News, however, not AJE. Comcast signed its first multi-city carriage deal directly with a foreign broadcaster in late 2011.

The large cable carriers offer the best chance for AJE to gain a national TV market, but the United States, is composed of hundreds of “smaller, geographically defined local audience markets” (Napoli, 2003. p 16). Looking at where AJE has gained carriage, most of AJE's direct distribution deals are with local, independent telecom providers, such as Burlington Telecom and Buckeye Cable in Toledo, OH. Its programs, such as its news bulletins, are shown on local PBS affiliates and community TV channels. A few of AJE's major market deals, such as Washington,

DC and New York City, happened through third party educational and local channels with pre-existing distribution deals. The New York city channel that airs AJE for 23 hours a day is on the Time-Warner system as an artifact of the old the old public, educational, government (PEG) channel rule that required cable carriers to include local channels in the public's interest. These distinctions in political economy are important in that publicly-oriented carriers and channels have shown more interest in broadcasting AJE than have commercial broadcasters. The process and debate in Burlington, VT reveals some of the pressures and discourses likely at play in the private cable companies' decision-making. The fact of carriage in only some localities shows why a framework of flow/contra-flow must look at instances of distribution at the local level, getting beyond its nation-state focus (Kavoori, 2007; Georgiou and Silverstone, 2007). Not all countries have unitary media distribution systems, though geographically smaller ones are more likely.

The potential for online distribution disrupting the traditional industries is a necessary part of the equation, however. It puts AJE in the market for audiences directly. With Internet enabled televisions, the possible entry of tech firms into TV carriage – Google TV and Apple TV, for example – and the increase in mobile and tablet television viewing, we have to consider whether the opportunities for AJE circumventing cable and satellite operators are growing. In other words, while AJE may be excluded now, it could be ahead of the curve in some ways. Its leading YouTube channel, for example, one of the most popular news channels, demonstrates this potential. However, traditional television is still the dominant means for news consumption in the United States. It offers AJE the best chance at contra-flow to wide audiences.

Comparing AJE distribution in the United States to other countries with similarly liberal press systems, English language usage, and other common denominators, reveals just how

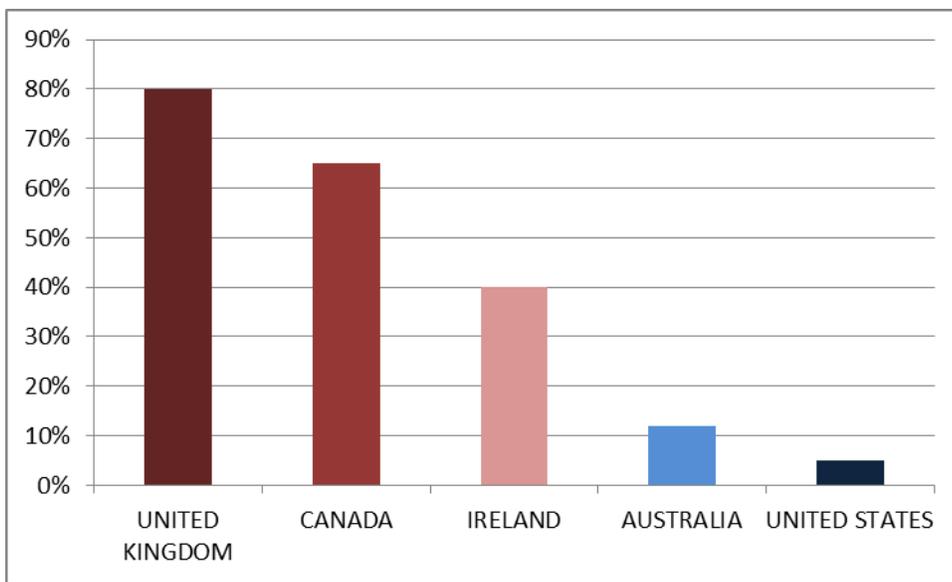
uniquely low AJE's market entry in the United States is in relative terms. AJE's under-performance in the American market is anomalous. The media economics of the cable industry, an element of the analytical framework, is one possible explanation for why AJE faces distributional hurdles. It is not a system based on public interest, but on private profit, a result of decades of de-regulation and a deeper commitment to free enterprise and faith in markets to best allocate resources and derive efficiencies to fuel economic growth. Is the story so simple of corporate, capitalist gatekeepers working to exclude foreign news media? In some ways, it is a simple function of what political economy-focused critics of the US media system have been saying for decades – that private ownership constrains the diversity of content in media (McChesney, 2008). However, it is worth examining to what degree is AJE's exclusion demand-driven, and if so, what is it about the demand-side, American audiences, that gives AJE trouble. This requires further elaborating the basic tenets of the cable industry, the king of American televisual distributors, by contrast with other systems in similar English-speaking countries.

A. Comparative Distribution

The scale of AJE's absence from American televisions is highlighted in contrast with countries that have some pertinent commonalities: the United Kingdom, Ireland, Canada, and Australia. Along with the United States, the first three were all classified as Liberal media systems by Hallin and Mancini (2004). They mention that Australia could have been included as an example, as well (7). Being liberal systems, there is a formal separation between the political and media fields, a high valuation of press independence, journalistic professionalization, weak state role in media, pluralism and a well-developed rational-legal authority. They are allied countries that find much overlap in their foreign policies, including military involvement in the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. Of the five, however, Ireland

and Canada were not part of the Iraqi invasion forces, the “Coalition of the Willing.” They share the English common law tradition, were or are members of the British Commonwealth or Empire (though not always willfully), and therefore have some degree of shared cultural or political lineage with England. Finally, they are historically not significant foreign news importers, meaning they have domestic news media that are capable of producing international news, presenting AJE with already competitive TV news markets. The United States had the big three cable channels and the broadcast networks. The United Kingdom is home to one of the giants, the BBC, as well as a major international private sector broadcaster, Sky News. It also airs many international news outlets, from France 24 to Euronews, CNN International, and so on. In Canada, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, and in Australia, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, are two strong public service broadcasters that provide international news. Finally, the Irish depend on the bilingual, semi-state-funded Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTE, or Radio and Television of Ireland), as well as the BBC for international news. They all have mature, relatively saturated news media markets.

Despite the similarities, these countries differ noticeably in AJE’s distribution, as



measured by household availability (chart 3.1). The United States has AJE showing on the smallest percentage of televisions, at the most 5 percent, or roughly

Chart 3.1 Cross-national comparison of AJE Distribution (% Households)

6-7 million households (Interview, distribution staffer, 2012). This is markedly less than the next lowest penetration country, Australia, in which slightly more than ten percent of the households have access to AJE via their television sets.

This is tied to several interlinked factors, all of which differentiate the United States from the other countries to varying degrees. The political context, the first factor, was outlined above in the review of American antagonism towards the network. The second is the highly privatized economics of TV distribution industries. Below is a review of AJE's performance in American TV news markets, followed by a discussion of the prospects of and problems with online distribution. Within this section is a consideration of the third factor, AJE's agency as a strategic actor seeking entry into a particular market. Considering the decisions it makes, from the news organization mission and identity to its marketing messages and outlays helps us understand the scope of AJE's control over its distributional outcome. In the following next section, there is an overview of American political culture, the final factor, as it relates to the presence of international news from a potentially critical source that signifies for many an enemy force and for others, a bridge to another culture and a potential change agent.

B. AJE in the American TV Market

Each of the countries in the comparison above is a mixed public-private media economy (Raboy 1998). However, the United States is the most private sector-based and free market-driven of them (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Sparks, 1998). It tends towards lesser degrees of media regulation in the public's interest and exhibits a lower commitment to public broadcasting. This is connected to the supply of news and information in the country. Generally, the "difference between market-based and public service-oriented media systems is the level of coverage accorded international news" because a profit-motive incentivizes soft news and entertainment

over foreign, hard news (Iyengar et al., 2009, 2). Phil Lawrie, AJE's former director of distribution, formerly of CNN, pointed out that

Not just Al Jazeera English, but any international news channels have historically found it difficult to catch the eye of the cable executive that might need to demonstrate a hard-core return on investment numbers. When you are an international news channel against an MTV channel, it's a hard call (Hagey, 2009).

The relationship between channel offerings and consumer demand is arguably circular: not only do popular tastes shape what kinds of news are made available, but the news offering impacts audience preferences, and the citizenry's political knowledge and attitudes. In a demand-based system that rarely mandates content provisions, programming is skewed towards pleasing popular tastes rather than shaping them toward some notion of the public good, including an informed citizenry. Media markets that have regulations requiring public interest programming, for example, skews towards some ideal-type envisioned by state officials and elite, which some deride as paternalism – something principally at odds with American political culture. The other states are relatively less free-market-driven, but still far from the continental European brand of strong state media regulations. Whether circular or not, the lack of American interest in international news has congealed as conventional wisdom among both programmers and distributors. Both the carriage market and the market for audiences that puts programmers content before the public then appear predisposed against AJE's type of niche content. Following this explanation, and the broad outline of media economics and industries in the first chapter (pp. 30-34), we can see why AJE has struggled to gain entry into the US market in contrast with the United Kingdom, Ireland and Canada.

1. *Where AJE is Carried and How.*

While AJE is only fully available in a handful of American towns and cities, it can be widely seen on television in two major markets, Washington, DC and New York City, and some

smaller ones, such as Toledo, OH and Burlington, VT. Its news bulletin and certain programs are re-transmitted a few hours a day via PBS affiliates, local independent channels and community television stations in dozens of smaller markets. However, the vast majority of American households do not have AJE as one of the channels available on their televisions. Where it can be seen in full can be categorized according to a few certain types of carriers and deals, which tells us about patterns of carriage so far.

The first type of carriers that took on AJE were local and federal government systems. Two of the first to carry AJE were the State Department and the Department of Defense's closed circuit cable systems. The federal government, therefore, provided some access for purposes of monitoring by area and issue specialists. It also signed a direct deal with a publicly-owned, municipal system in Burlington, VT. These types of carriers are certainly rare in the American market. While there was a debate around carriage in Burlington, VT, the focus of the next chapter, its presence on federal government systems was without public or notable official controversy. AJE staff share anecdotes about being welcome by specialists and analysts in both departments (Marash, 2007).

The second type of company to distribute AJE is local, independent, boutique and family-run. Buckeye cable in the Toledo, OH area is owned by the Block family, which also possesses the *Toledo Blade* newspaper. They began carrying AJE in 2007. Though it met with some controversy and a few dropped subscriptions, there was no sustained protest movement and the company received signs of appreciation from many. It cited the Arab-American and Muslim community as one reason for offering the channel (however, Arab-American communities have not been vocally active in demanding AJE). It does not offer AJE on its standard service, only

its digital basic package. Later, in 2011, Full Channel, a small family operator serving Rhode Island's East Bay began offering the channel in one of its premium packages.

The third type is a re-broadcast deal with a pre-existing channel that already has cable or satellite carriage. This is an indirect access route in which AJE essentially sublets a channel. This is how AJE gained access to its largest markets, Washington, DC and New York City. In both cases, an educational or local broadcaster, MHz network, in DC, and RISE in New York City, had pre-existing carriage in major local cable systems as a result of must-carry rules requiring cable companies to carry certain types of locally licensed stations. MHz started as a public alternative to PBS affiliation that promoted world news and views in Washington, DC. For RISE, a cable channel belonging to the broadcast station WRNN, to maintain its local status with cable companies, it shows AJE 23 hours a day and has one hour of local programming (Stelter, 2011). AJE can be seen, then, by New York City's Time Warner Cable and Verizon FiOS customers. Similarly, the MHz deal put AJE on Comcast, Cox cable, and Verizon FiOS in Washington, DC, as well as terrestrially in parts of northern Virginia, DC and Maryland. It was initially on mid-sized, multi-market cable provider RCN as channel 34, but was later replaced by Ethiopian TV without public explanation.

Fourth, AJE's news hour or bulletins, and some programs, are shown for 30 minutes to several hours a day on public broadcasting affiliates, college and community cable channels, and independent stations in various locations around the country. One public radio network, Pacifica radio, plays an audio version of the news hour through its affiliates in Berkeley, CA, Los Angeles, Houston, and New York City. MHz's Worldview, a separate channel, airs AJE's news bulletins, 30 minutes in the morning, 8:00AM to 8:30 AM, and an hour in the evening, 7:00 to 8:00 PM, along-side news from other international channels. It is available on DirecTV satellite

but also broadcast over-the-air and through cable systems in dozens of markets of all sizes, such as Chicago, Cleveland, Seattle, Las Vegas, Miami and others. It is also shown on some college systems, such as Stanford University and George Mason University. Its documentary program “Witness” is said to reach 40 million-plus homes through Link TV, a non-profit channel aimed at bringing global perspectives to Americans (Hampp, 2011). It is available on the major satellite operators. Other independent stations, such as KCET, a former PBS affiliate in Los Angeles, show 30 minutes of AJE’s news bulletin in the morning and the evening daily. Cambridge Community TV, a public access stations in Massachusetts, also shows AJE’s news in the late evenings. Free Speech TV also shows AJE news hour to its limited audience. These piece-meal bits of broadcast time and programming are a small step towards being seen but also make measuring and defining the American TV audience particularly difficult.

Most of the carriage deals then, including those giving AJE access to DC and New York, were the result of public systems, nonprofit and independent media, or holdouts from the legacy of regulation promoting localism. The two examples that could be defined as private sector deals were with small, family-run systems, of which there are thousands throughout the country. Notably absent is what AJE has expended most of its resources and energy seeking, a direct deal with one of the large national carriers, such as Comcast or Time Warner, or even a large-scale telecom digital TV providers, like Verizon FiOS or AT&T’s U-verse, and satellite distributors, such as DirecTV and Dish Network – which incidentally is the only national carrier that shows Al Jazeera Arabic. Therefore, even within the United States, public sector or interest mandates benefit AJE’s distribution efforts, and demand-driven private sector carriers are not interested. This is congruent with the cross-national comparison where we see AJE finding greater distribution in countries with stronger regulatory guidance. The overarching logic is that AJE is

good for the informed citizenry standards of democracy but not necessarily in high demand, either as a function of low entertainment value, or as we will see, an aversion to a brand long associated with Al Qaeda.

2. Understanding AJE's TV Absence in the United States

Why the resistance from the largest TV carriers? There is a basic tension between the view that AJE is facing a “blackout,” implying political motivation, and the notion that the failure to gain wide carriage is strictly a business decision. An AJE staff member who works on distribution said the companies were initially concerned with AJE’s brand, namely its negative reputation in the United States. After the Arab Spring coverage and its accolades from observers, they were focused more squarely on the bottom-line, whether AJE could offer the revenue potential of the next best option not currently being carried (Interview, distribution staffer, 2012). When one looks closely at the basic business model and key industrial facts and trends, it seems apparent the business logic is a dominant one – or at least the determinant one as AJE gets less controversial (“Al Jazeera Meets...” 2006). As Frederick Thomas, chief executive officer of MHz Networks, observed, “cable operators tend to look at something that's 'foreign' and say 'show me the audience that wants to watch that'" (Hagey, 2009). While there may be some political calculus it is likely secondary. The more interesting dynamics are on the demand-side, with the public and how it reacts, which is reviewed in the next section. The structure of decision-making by private enterprise carriage systems is necessary to review. As we shall see below, it structures how groups mobilize to impact AJE’s availability in their communities.

There is the line of reasoning that cable TV distribution is just hard to crack because of its inherently anti-competitive nature, making it uniquely closed off to experimentation and novelty because these entail risk-taking, which for highly concentrated industries is generally

avoided. That is why America's most watched TV news channel, Fox News, spent an estimated 300 million dollars in fees – payments to carriers – to gain access to audiences after it launched in 1996 (Levine, 2011). The fear of alienating subscribers, who already tend to have many reasons to hate cable TV companies, encourages the companies to avoid taking measures without a clear pay-off. This is natural in business, but is exacerbated by the structure of TV markets, which tend to be led by a few large companies despite the very high number of systems nationally, numbering in the thousands.

There is some debate over whether cable companies are monopolies in the provision of televisual services. Historically, they operated more like utilities, given explicit, though rarely exclusive, franchises within local areas of operation (Picard, 1989, 32). Because of the infrastructural outlays needed to lay down the physical cables, they operated as *de facto* monopolies. Early in cable's development, it challenged broadcasting, but did not come to deliver signal to a majority of TV households until the 1980s. Even today, with increased competition from satellite providers starting in the 1990s and telecommunication companies more recently, most large cable providers control more than 70% of the televisual markets in most local communities (Ammori, 2010, 38). Locally, they are monopolies in many places or at least behave like monopolies, the sole provider of a product or service. The national cable industry can be said to be oligopolistic, meaning a few firms control the largest share of the market (Shepard, 2005). In the early, 2000s, concentration among mass media firms, including cable, increased (Noam, 2009). Large cable companies have more than recouped the costs of their initial investments, and wage a tit-for-tat battle with regulators over opening up to further competition. They stave off regulation by claiming new competition sources, most recently from online TV, after successfully defeating old regulations that protected competition from other

sectors. For example, satellite television needed the government to protect from cable companies seeking exclusivity from programmers in their terms of agreement (Wu, 2004, 303). This, importantly, shows how cable will use its power in the market for programming to protect its position in the market for audiences. Recall that the TV distribution market is dual, though the two are connected. The largest cable companies can exercise strong leverage in the market for programming – in which carriers decide which channels to air – because they control the market for audiences – how people get to see the programming content. They use their leverage over content providers to firm up their position vis-à-vis audiences, and vice versa. They have been doing this to limit programmers’ direct online distribution. Powerful cable companies use their positions as gatekeepers to proscribe their provision of online video (Ammori, 2010, 18).

Speaking of the relations between the two markets, there is a concern of anti-competitive behavior given the recent moves towards vertical integration with Comcast’s acquisition of NBC and its properties. It is worth raising the question of whether market foreclosure, or the excluding of rivals, presents another barrier. Would Comcast be less inclined to carry a channel that could eat away at MSNBC’s liberal-left audience? Economic research on the cable industry found evidence of foreclosure when Time Warner Cable and Turner Broadcasting merged in the mid-1990s (though the content and distribution divisions separated in 2009). Economists, however, balance the costs of foreclosure against the efficiency gains of vertical integration, looking at costs to consumer as the primary measure of whether or not it harms consumers (Chipty, 2001; Waterman and Weiss, 1996). In terms of content diversity, and the supply of countervailing news and information, if integrated operators are less likely to carry competing programming, it suggests a loss for citizens. Still, this might not be a deciding factor in AJE’s absence though. While one distribution staff member told me that Comcast seemed the least

interested (Interview, 2012), other major cable carriers are also not carrying AJE directly. Nevertheless, Bollinger argued that government regulators should use regulators' conditions on the Comcast-NBC merger to press for AJE's carriage as way to promote American interest in and understanding of international affairs, which he sees as being in the national and public interest (2011). No one I spoke with at AJE considered appealing to regulators to examine the applicability of these merger conditions to the channel's unsuccessful distribution efforts.

Another explanation is that the market for programming is saturated. There are just more programmers than there are channel slots. Colin Lawrence, BBC World News's commercial director, said that "with a 200-channel universe and the limited available capacity that brings, not to mention the numerous US news channels, the United States is a particularly tough market" (Hagey, 2009). There is a scarcity in capacity, cable companies have long argued. They have to manage the limited real estate of channel menus to maximize revenues, which is after all their fiduciary duty to shareholders. The next best non-offered option for carriage, whether the Oprah channel or another reality TV channel, tends to promise larger audiences than does an English language news channel based on the Middle East. Derek Baine, a cable analyst, said if AJE got carried, "I would see it more as a channel block," meaning it's "pretty unlikely they'll get a 24-hour feed in the U.S." (Hampp, 2011). Such partial carriage is not AJE's primary aim, but in the end, they may have little choice.

Two counterfactuals suggest that the political economy of cable TV distribution is important. First, one can imagine that in a situation of pure competition in TV offering – the absence of monopolistic or oligopolistic markets – customers' television menus would look very different. Customers would only pay for the channels they watched, rather than being forced to pay for bundled channels they do not want in their packages. AJE and hundreds of other niche

channels, which show online, would likely be available. Second, in a different situation, government regulations on cable companies would require the airing of international news to advance the public's knowledge and awareness of international affairs. In either case, AJE still wouldn't achieve a mass audience, but at least it would be available for incidental exposure and easier for many to access. At a basic level, then, one can see it is a function of the political economy of media distribution. In other words, we cannot purely say that AJE's lack of success is purely demand-driven though on balance the lack of interest in international news and animosity by some are likely more significant. It is at least somewhat an artifact of a cable system that does not purely reflect public demand, and therefore falls short of the free market ideals of the country, not to mention the free marketplace of ideas while also failing to advance the ideals of bountiful news and information central to democratic theory. Overall, there is too little incentive for a closed system of distribution to take such a risk when the threats of alienating some likely outweigh the benefit of added revenues. Thus, the industry structure interacts with people's tastes and preferences. The more promising area is where there is greater freedom of choice in media diets: online, and in alternative modes of distribution, such as mobile technologies. AJE's greatest success has been there, where gatekeeping forces are minimal. They also indicate the strength of demand for AJE, which we can see is growing, but far from the overwhelming level needed to demonstrate that the cable industry, given its structure and logic, is imprudent in keeping AJE off its lineups.

C. Online and Mobile Distribution Patterns

When it comes to online distribution, AJE's availability in American homes with Internet access is 100%. Almost every American can watch AJE. Since 2000, Americans accessing the Internet doubled from 132.2 million to 274 million by late 2011 (Nielsen, 2012). Out of those

with access, not everyone is using the Internet to access news. A Pew survey in 2009 found that 43% watched news videos online (Purcell, 2010, 5). Some studies suggest that of online news viewers, about half will consume international news (Tewksbury, 2003). Outside of big news events, this number is likely dramatically lower. Pew’s News Interest Index conducts regular surveys about what news Americans are attentive to and called 2011 a peak year for foreign news interest. Still, it reports that “since the start of 2009, interest in international news cumulatively has rarely made up a high percentage of the index” (“Public Stays Focused...” 2011). Even in the year of the Arab Spring, the Japanese earthquake, the Osama bin Laden assassination, international news gained only a small number of viewers. An even smaller subset includes those watching AJE. This section describes their online and mobile distribution, mapping functions and providing data to flesh out the scope of its online popularity – from its website to social media and mobile applications.

1. *Website*

For those without TV access to AJE, the website is the primary face of the organization. It was originally developed more than two years before the channel began broadcasting. Managed by a separate team, it features unique content, articles and opinion pieces, as well as blogs written by AJE

correspondents. It also houses the news department and program’s videos for on-demand viewing as well as a

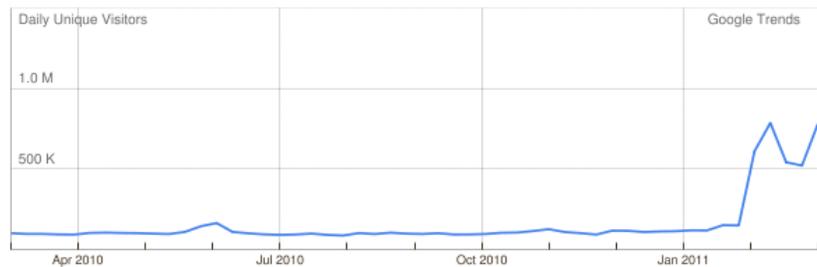


Chart 3.2 AJE daily website visits. SOURCE: Google.

livestream media player that lets web users watch the channel on their computers. Absent reliable audience data globally, the website statistics are used in public statements to reveal

demand. For example, in many public statements, AJE announced a 2500% increase in website traffic during the Egyptian revolution, with more than half the traffic from the United States.

Chart 3.2 corroborates the claimed overall increase. Using Google Trends data, we can see a significant rise in daily visits during the Egyptian revolution, surpassing 500,000 thousand daily visits, compared to less than 100,000 daily hits previously. Google data also indicates that much of the traffic was from the United States.

However, we can also see that AJE's website daily visits waned in the months after the Egypt story. It reduced to roughly 300,000 per day in early 2012 –

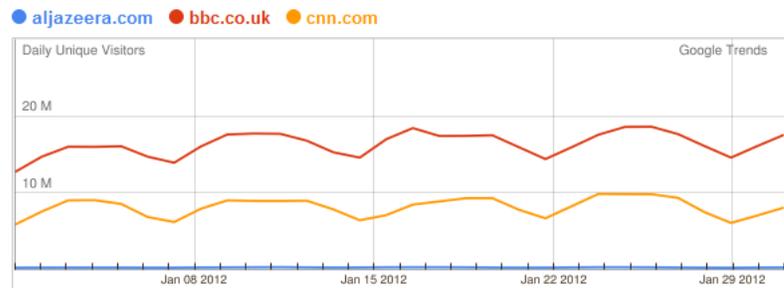


Chart 3.3 AJE, CNN, BBC daily website visits. SOURCE: Google.

a level still higher than before the Arab Spring. Comparing it with the BBC and CNN's websites (chart 3.3), one can plainly see AJE's website is far behind. In the United States, the proportions are roughly the same, though CNN is ahead of BBC, which is many times more popular than AJE's website among Americans. The performance of the website as a gauge of respective demand ultimately does not work in AJE's favor. This could change in the future. AJE's website is much younger, and has actually posted significant growth, an estimated 300%, from early 2011 to early 2012 – a year in which CNN and BBC's have not.

2. YouTube

AJE launched a YouTube channel on November 23, 2006 soon after it began broadcasting. It was an early adapter to the now-Google-owned video sharing website. As one of the first channels to post videos frequently, AJE relied heavily on YouTube to reach new audiences. It uses YouTube to post news packages, short bulletins, some of the shorter programs

and other supplementary content that is not broadcast, such as user generated content, animations, photo slideshows or video shot by web producers. It is a popular channel, ranking number 45 of the most viewed accounts of all time, with over 350 million video views. More than 250,000 YouTube users are subscribers, meaning they get access to updates from the channel, including notices when videos are posted. Any American with Internet access can get to the channel's page. Also, subscribers and others can comment on the videos and in a dialog box next to the livestream, creating a very interesting, lively, though not always intelligible, forum for public exchange.

At the height of the Egyptian revolution it became the single most viewed channel. This was aided by YouTube's decision to offer a livestream of the channel on its homepage, briefly. Since then, YouTube users can access AJE's livestream on its channel page. This function was something of a harbinger of YouTube's later announced intent to provide live channels of professionally produced, often celebrity-run, channels, a possible online video competitor to cable TV and satellite (Bond and Szalai, 2011). Many YouTube viewers and website visitors watched AJE in real-time. During the Egypt story, the livestream was significantly more viewed than were its short video reports (Nanabhay, 2011, 80-81).

While AJE's website fares not-so-well against global news competitors, its YouTube page is relatively stronger. Chart 3.4 shows how active it is comparatively, in terms of video uploads weekly, and how popular, as measured by subscribers and video views. While less popular than the AP and Russia Today's (RT) accounts, it's significantly more visited and followed than Reuters and CNN's. It uploads fewer videos than all but CNN, which does not usually feature timely or top draw content (likely, this is to avoid taking away from its cable

viewership). The surprising success of RT can likely be traced to its explicit strategy to gain as many views on YouTube as possible. The BBC notably does not have a news YouTube page.

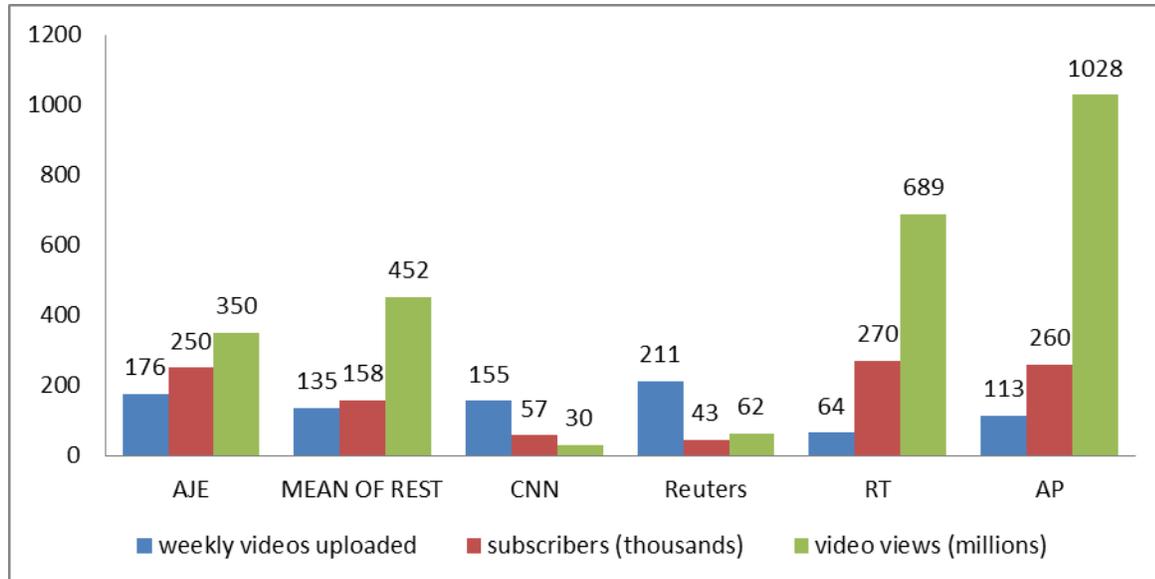


Chart 3.4 YouTube Statistics of AJE and Other News Media.

3. *Social media*

Social media platforms are used for sharing content among networks of other account-holders. AJE aggressively employs social media sites not just for news-gathering but for distribution and advertising. Its many social media accounts are managed by the new media team, which approaches its tasks as a combination of developing content designed to promote AJE’s broadcast videos and website, but also to engage in the conversations as they happen in the particular platforms. The head of social media at Al Jazeera English, Riyaad Minty, said the new media team functions like a “news desk” in many ways, because social media reporting has become a unique work process. For purposes of this paper, social media are important for finding new avenues of distribution. In the American context, they offer a chance to get around

the problem of AJE's absence from American television sets by linking with Americans directly (Ellis, 2011).

AJE maintains several Twitter accounts, but its primary one is @AJEnglish⁶. The social media platform functions as a sort of messaging service between account holders and their followers and is therefore used to post links to articles and videos. Twitter is often called a "micro-blogging" site because of how short the messages are – a maximum 140 characters. By early 2012, AJE posted 53,000 tweets, or short messages, to more than 845,000 followers. This is a smaller following and less activity than can be seen on major US news media Twitter accounts. CNN, for instance, has more than four times as many followers. And BBC World has 1.6 million followers, or nearly double. However, AJE's followers are uniquely "active in terms of publishing and retweeting content on Twitter" (Lotan et al., 2011). AJE's use of Twitter in attracting audiences was apparent during one of the highest points of the channel's online audience, when Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak's resignation was finally announced on Friday, February 11, 2011. AJE let its real-time web analysis tool, Chartbeat, publish its web data from that day (Borthwick, 2011). Of the many people who read the website's article about Egypt's head stepping down, 70% of them came from social media sites, mostly Twitter. Social media therefore drove a good deal of the 2500% increase in web visits during the Egyptian revolt.

AJE tracks how Twitter users discuss AJE through the use of a real-time sentiment analysis platform, Forsight. Reviewing 2011, it shows that AJE was mentioned 1.6 million times on Twitter. Three times as many mentions were judged "positive" (15%) as compared to "negative" (5%) in nature. Most, about 80%, of the mentions were neutral – likely just sharing an AJE tweet or pointing out some of its web content or videos. The application also showed how

⁶ www.twitter.com/#!/AJEnglish

many of the mentions were coming from American states, giving a picture of where Americans are more tuned into AJE through social media. The most tweets about AJE came from users in California and New York. Being engaged with new communication technologies allows AJE a level of engagement with Americans that would otherwise be impossible.

Facebook identified the top growing Facebook pages for news organizations, reporting that Al Jazeera was sixth behind CNN, Fox News, NPR, *the New York Times* and *the Onion* (Sonderman, 2011). The AJE page has 950,000 followers and is quite active on a daily basis. One of the values of the Facebook page is that it is powerful for linking AJE videos and content, driving traffic back to other AJE accounts and sites. For example, 3.5 shows that among the more than 110,000 people who watched an early news package about the Egyptian uprising on

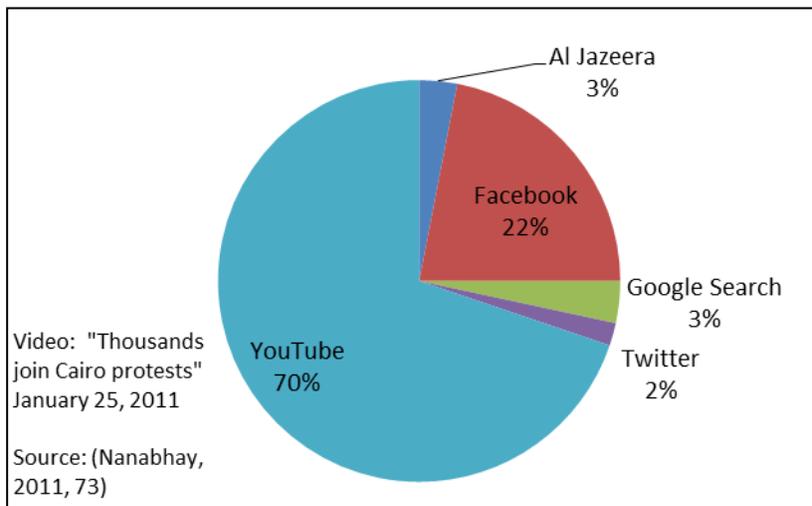


Chart 3.5 Link Sources for one AJE YouTube Video

YouTube, one-fifth were referred to the video via Facebook. The social media giant was second only YouTube itself, where links in came from elsewhere on the site: its search engine, the channel's account and other related videos. By contrast,

Google searches, Al Jazeera's website and Twitter provided one-third of the links that the Facebook page provided. This suggests that social media links are a significant force in the circulation of AJE's content – perhaps even more important than its website and older Internet tools such as Google's search engine. Seeing the advantage of social media, AJE has also

developed other social media accounts to help it reach new audiences. It uses Google +, Google's Facebook competitor, Reddit, a social bookmarking site, and Tumblr, another micro-blogging service.

The dynamics of social media are seen as extra beneficial to AJE because they let the news organization engage with audiences on a very different basis. Rather than a one-way communication as with broadcasting, social media allows for interaction. New media staff listen in on social media conversations and react to some of the inquiries and comments they receive. They occasionally tip-off the news department to emerging stories. They also systematically track how social media users are talking about AJE, which lets them respond, an important public relations function. It lets them gauge if people are feeling positive or negative towards the channel and where account users are. Interactivity through social media can be especially beneficial, according to AJE staff, for giving those who may be suspicious of the channel a chance to get to know who the channel is much better (Ellis, 2011). In this regard, social media is not just about distribution but is a key to public relations work. However, as a distribution means, it seems to resemble more a concept of narrow-casting, at least compared with the broader audience AJE presumes would exist in wide cable distribution. If this is the inevitable direction of news and information availability and consumption, then AJE has little choice but to narrowcast.

4. *Mobile, TV and tablet apps*

AJE's distribution strategy is to be as widely available through as many means as possible. It takes cues from its audience and social media networks to figure out the best ways to reach them. According to Safdar Mustafa, head of mobile media, "There's been a huge demand from our audience to make applications available on these popular mobile platforms." (Hawkes,

2011). Aiming for “easy to use” software applications (“apps”) and keeping up with the proliferation of new devices keeps Mustafa’s team busy. Mobile distribution is a thriving area in constant flux. Market penetration of smartphones is growing rapidly in the United States; by 2010, half of all mobile contracts included data plans (“Deloitte's State of the Media...” 2010). Tablet computer sales are also way up as of 2012, far surpassing laptop and PCs. Staying caught up with the rapidly changing technological affordances in mobile, Internet-connected TV (and Internet Protocol TV) and tablets, or small, flat personal computers, is a perpetual race that requires not only technical development customized for each device, but also deciding which content is best distributed on which – an editorial task. For example, mobile phones, with their small screens, are better for short videos and texts. Tablets, where people are increasingly watching online video, fit well with watching programs and longer texts. Still, AJE is attentive to non-mobile online opportunities: it developed applications for particular Internet browsers, such as Google’s Chrome. Different operating systems, such as the Apple’s iOS and its main competitor, Google’s Android series, may also host different applications for news viewing or website perusing, which also require special attention from distribution and new media staff. Multi-platform applications, such as newsreaders Flipboard and Pulse, involve special syndication, putting AJE’s content stream into a special format for users.

AJE has developed an array of platforms for these devices. It launched both unique apps for livestreaming as well as mobile phone-optimized website apps for text and still images, as well as video on demand (VOD). These special website apps make accessing the web content and information about AJE easier than if one goes through the phone’s browser to the website. Even then, phone browsers go to a specially designed mobile website, which has a slower and less smooth functionality than does the app. It differs from the main website in that it has a

special navigation menu and smaller layout, but its color scheme and style resembles the full site. The apps are available in the companies' markets, whether hosted by Android, Samsung, Nokia or Blackberry. Apple's iTunes and iPad app market both offer AJE's products. Through iTunes, Apple customers can also download AJE videos.

Some of the apps are hosted by third party companies. The iPhone mobile website app, as of early 2012, is on a Livestation-branded application, and is notably less navigable than the Android version, which was developed later. Livestation hosts AJE's streaming for other phones, but also Tablets and Internet Protocol TV such as Roku, which connects television sets to the Internet. For Symbian and Windows mobile phones, AJE's livestream and video on demand is operated through Mobiclip. For low-end devices that are not Internet-connected, AJE can send SMS and MMS messages about news topics of interest to users. As newer televisions are coming out with direct Internet connectivity, they are offering their own apps markets where users can select which channels they would like available on their screens. The apps they choose will appear as the choices in a menu. AJE will be available to Internet-enabled TV owners either directly or through a third-party, such as Livestation.

All of these cutting edge delivery mechanisms will increase AJE's availability tremendously, yet not as dramatically as would a cable deal. Obtaining aggregate numbers on usage through these devices was not possible as they are well-protected secrets. While they significantly boost availability – one platform such as Pulse has millions of American users – there is also a huge range of competing content providers. It is even more competitive than is being on digital cable. The trade-off for wider availability is audience fragmentation. AJE will only attract the self-selected, those who search out AJE through these means. There are still means of incidental exposure, by which viewers unintentionally discover new sources. Delivery

platforms, such as Roku, can choose to feature and therefore push certain content providers on their landing pages. YouTube, for instance, pushed AJE's stream to the front page during the Egyptian uprising. Also, people learn about new sources from those in their social networks. For AJE, developing good relations with these new and mobile media sponsors presents something of an alternative to American cable, then. Still, it is unlikely a substitute for what AJE sees in cable distribution – access to living rooms, the American public at-large.

5. What AJE Would and Would Not Do to Enter the US Market.

Despite the barriers to entry AJE faces in the US TV distribution market, it is not a one-way street. AJE has agency in this matter. It can deploy strategies to improve its chances at carriage, it can adjust its negotiating position to facilitate deals and alter its product to better attract American audiences. Even if on balance, the distributors are more powerful than are independent programmers when it comes to carriage decisions, AJE could cater more to American audiences and seek to generate demand, which would be more likely to attract cable companies. This of course would entail several trade-offs that AJE is not willing to make. Reviewing what AJE is willing and unwilling to do to gain wider penetration, we can see why its agency is a factor in its failure to find a place on American televisions.

There is quite an easy way to gain cable carriage in the United States: pay for it. Russia Today, a Russian government sponsored network that competes with AJE, most likely paid a carriage fee to get its English channel into New York City area markets and other Time-Warner systems. Fox News did the same to break into new markets (Levine, 2011), until it became popular enough to start demanding fees from carriers. This could be a sort of insurance against cancelled subscriptions or negative publicity, but could be extremely expensive, taking away from the news and programming budgets if Qatar was not willing to foot the bill. However,

AJE's position is that it will not pay nor charge a fee, making it free to carry, and that this should be sufficient in principle (Interview, Anstey, 2011). Clearly, it is not sufficient for the biggest cable companies and the vast majority of the smaller ones in the United States. As MHZ chief said, AJE found out that "in the U.S. market you have to pay to play" (Helman, 2009).

A related strategy, in terms of shelling out money for carriage, also could involve the pricey option of the network purchasing smaller cable systems or channels with pre-existing carriage deals of broadcasting means. While this idea may seem extraordinary, the network launched a Balkans channel in 2011 by purchasing a Sarajevo-based broadcaster with its own tower. While this is likely a less expensive endeavor than in the United States, Al Jazeera bought the means to reach an initial, toehold audience. Another option is buying a small cable system in a promising market. This would obviously present Al Jazeera with the difficulties of entering a brand new business and could backfire if it elicited the same sort of response that the squashed Dubai port deal in New York did in 2007, which many framed as an Islamic assault on American homeland security. With the weight of the Qatari purse, such desperate ideas would be entertained if the goal of American distribution was of the highest order.

AJE could also seek placement in boutique, add-on packages such as premium or international channel bundles that customers pay an extra monthly fee for on top of their basic services. Alternately, it could be offered as a stand-alone *a la carte* channel. This would seem to minimize protests since even the most ardent critics would likely not argue against individual freedom of choice. While AJE has accepted premium tier placement in their direct deals in Toledo and Burlington, they strongly prefer against this or any option that limits their audience (Manly, 2006). Their basic distribution aim is to be as widely available to as many as possible (Interview Anstey, 2011). If they pursued this strategy, it would also entail trade-offs. One can

see a hypothetical problem with this principle and the above-mentioned interest in cable limiting online TV. If being on a premium package means sacrificing online distribution, it is likely not worthwhile since it would mean diminished audience. Thus, the two deals where they are on such packages are non-exclusive, meaning they allow for simultaneous online access. Big cable companies would want online distribution highly limited or delayed so as to drive subscription to bundles containing AJE. This could easily be a deal-breaker, as it would undercut the basic mission of being as widely available as possible.

AJE has not adopted the normal strategies of market entry such as differentiation by market, or catering its product for a particularly American audience, at least in obvious ways. It broadcasts one signal without seeking to relay American news during American prime time hours. Nor does it concentrate and time regional coverage to overlap with regional viewing hours. This was partially seen an outcome of logistics, rather than by design according to one distribution staffer (Interview, 2012). However, it does claim to be international news for everyone, always. This does not fit with differentiation strategy of media globalization. BBC, for example, launched BBC America, a special channel that featured more entertainment than news, just to break into American televisions (Hagey, 2009). In 1997, CNN International “separated its broadcast into four regional signals, or feeds - Asia-Pacific, Latin America, Europe and the United States” with each having customized programming and scheduling adapted to local time zones (Coleman, 1997). Russia Today, also by contrast, explicitly aimed at gaining a US audience through content by deriving a goal of maximizing its YouTube video views vis-à-vis its competitors. Part of that strategy included posting videos on always-popular, bizarre and lurid topics and giving voice to the tendentiously viral conspiracy theories, interspersed with some serious journalism. Russia Today’s YouTube hits are among the highest of YouTube news

channels, beating AJE in per-video views. It also claims that Nielsen Media research shows that it beats AJE in the Washington, DC market ratings where both are carried via MHz channels (“RT Expands” 2011). AJE’s content appears at first glance generally highbrow, more global south, and therefore less populist – though both showed an interest in extensively covering American protest movements. There are some common interests in what they cover about the United States. Both channels significantly led US television networks in covering some of the largest demonstrations of American dissent – the Occupy Wall Street encampments starting in 2011 – in years. Nevertheless, AJE never pronounced such an audience-maximizing approach to news, stressing instead a commitment to cover under-represented stories and regions through quality journalism. This may be attractive to journalism schools and area specialists but hardly seems a fit with the commercial aims of the American cable industry.

There was another step that AJE did not take. It did not modify its name by going with an acronym, for example. One-time managing director Tony Burman said many apply “the political stigma that’s been attached to Al-Jazeera Arabic” to AJE, saying this has hurt its distribution aims (Folkenflik, 2009). Some have suggested this can be mitigated by altering the name and logo to distance the two channels. The same way that Russia Today goes by the initials RT, Al Jazeera English could have launched as AJE. This idea never took off largely for reasons already reviewed about the importance of integrating the channels within the network. However, this commitment to retaining the brand’s integrity may have harmed – though it could just as easily have helped by improving the odds of recognition, if one subscribed to the mantra that there is no such thing as bad publicity.

The limit of AJE’s commitment to entering the US market is best displayed in its resource outlay in marketing staffing. It also has only a very small Washington, DC-based staff,

of roughly three to five, over the years, aided by interns. They are dedicated to marketing and promotion for all of the Americas. At times, namely during launch and again after the Egyptian uprising in early 2011, AJE employed PR firms to help make its case among political elite, public opinion and the cable operators. By contrast, when AJE wanted to gain more market entry in Canada, some speculated quite reasonably, it made prominent, long-time Canadian Broadcasting Corporation executive Tony Burman the managing director of the channel. He took charge after Nigel Parsons left. This was the equivalent of naming a friendly, visible ambassador. No American with high industrial contacts has served such a position. Also by contrast, the marketing and distribution staff working to promote the BBC in the United States was much larger in size and presumably better resourced since it was handled by Discovery Communications, Inc., the parent company of the Discovery Channel (“BBC and Discover...’ 2002). When BBC World News wanted to enter Asia, albeit a many times larger market even if just including English language speakers, it employed 30 personnel for marketing to Asian audiences (Shrikande, 2001, 157). With CNN’s expansion to Asia, as part of its “regionalization” project, it hired 36 personnel and spent \$5 million annually to attract Asian audiences (Coleman, 1997).

As important as wide American distribution is to AJE, it is clearly not going to do whatever it takes. AJE has demonstrably poured resources into gaining access into US marketing. However, one could question the extent of their commitment, which may be tempered by the skepticism of some who doubt the possibility of a wide American audience. According to Lindsay Oliver, the former commercial director, “We’d love to have cable distribution, but it’s not going to kill us if we don’t” (Manly, 2006). AJE staff debated, behind-the-scenes, whether investing significant resources is worthwhile. Some strongly doubted

Americans would ever be interested, though top officials disagree with this in their interviews. Parsons said, “We never thought the USA would be an easy market, nor do we think the answer to breaking into it is to throw money at it unnecessarily... All foreign news channels find this market difficult” (Dahl, 2008). The third managing director, Al Anstey, on the other hand, maintained that wide carriage in the United States was a matter of when, not if (Interview, 2011). In the end, AJE demonstrates a solid, though limited, commitment to US market entry.

Reviewing some of AJE’s marketing activities in the United States reveals the scope of their efforts. From the earliest days of the channel’s launch, when it became apparent that gaining cable deals was nearly impossible, AJE officials travelled to Washington DC under the assumption there was an informal blackout or perhaps regulatory basis for the channel’s exclusion. They were surprised to learn there was no formal basis for exclusion nor indication of a larger political agenda. The line they heard from many was that it was up to the companies primarily and that Washington had little interest in the decision. AJE officials also met with cable and satellite companies frequently over the years, and both acknowledged this in their respective public statements – which tend to reveal distribution deal-making as a slow, on-going process. The content of the meetings, which are secretive, likely revolve around whether AJE can demonstrate ample demand – enough to override the risk of alienating many in the case of carriage.

From the onset, AJE contracted PR firms, such as the London-based Brown Lloyd James to help it gain attention in the United States. It also built up its small marketing function in the United States though on a largely *ad hoc* basis, making the team small and under-resourced. Nevertheless, the activities they engaged in to promote AJE include the following:

- 1) *Buying advertisements in press and websites.* AJE accelerated its advertising during and after the Egyptian uprising. It bought ad space in *the New York Times* and had banners on the *Foreign Policy* and *Washington Post* websites, among other places. The print ad featured a list of endorsements – from Rachel Maddow, the Nation, and Sam Donaldson – as well as quotes from Business Insider reporting that President Barack Obama watched AJE and that it was AJE’s “moment,” according to *the New York Times*. It pushed readers to watch the channel online. It also purchased a promoted Twitter account during the Egyptian uprising to help it gain more followers, which it did many times over.
- 2) *Holding public events.* AJE frequently organizes panels, program showings and conferences in Washington, DC. While the network puts on a regular forum in Doha, the AJE set up one in Washington in mid-May, 2011. It featured prominent journalists, such as Bob Woodward, and politicians. At the banquet on the first night, House minority leader Nancy Pelosi and Republican senator John McCain both spoke and praised the channel. It also held televised panels at local universities, think tanks and the Newseum in Washington. For example, in November, 2010, the program Fault Lines held a televised town hall debate on the 2010 midterm elections. The panel included a broad array of speakers of different parties, including a Tea Party spokesman. A December 2011 event at a local coffee shop-restaurant featured a showing of a program on the murder of Brazilian rain forest activists. A panel afterwards included representatives of organizations, such as AmazonWatch, Greenpeace and Amnesty International. In these events, AJE tapped into advocate and specialist communities to develop programs for the public in general, and uses the events to promote its content and the channel. Other events featured lecture series with AJE personalities, such as a fall 2011 tour with Egypt-

based correspondents Ayman Mohyeldin and Sherine Tadros. Many of their stops were at universities, such as Columbia, Georgetown and the University of Maryland.

- 3) *Media outreach.* The small marketing staff and contracted PR firms engaged in press work aimed at generating media coverage of AJE. Every major news magazine and newspaper in the US reported on AJE at some point. It has also been the subject of TV coverage, some of which was by Comedy Central's popular soft news programs. AJE was featured right after launch, for example, in a Daily Show segment that poked fun at the channel, but also at Americans' fear that it was some sort of Trojan horse for terrorists. In 2011, Egypt correspondent Ayman Mohyeldin was a guest on the Colbert Report. Much of its American media messaging involved inviting the public to judge AJE for themselves, showing a conscious effort to undo the negative associations left over from the President Bush era.
- 4) *Sponsoring a "Demand Al Jazeera" campaign.* Right as popularity for AJE accelerated in the early days of the Egyptian uprising, the channel shifted its somewhat idle web-based campaign, "I Want AJE" to the more urgent "Demand Al Jazeera," added new functions, such as a letter-writing form, and they more aggressively marketed it. Through the website, 80,000 Americans wrote letters to their cable providers requesting AJE's carriage. The campaign included a Twitter hashtag and Facebook group. For one of the meetings with Comcast after the Egyptian uprising, AJE printed out 13,000 letters and pointed out that more than 40,000 emails were sent to the carrier. AJE supporters held meetings in different cities around the country with the help of social outing planning website meetup.com. AJE publicized the meetings, which were aimed to promote cable carriage, on its website.

In summary, AJE exercises some agency in building demand. What efforts it did undertake did not, as of early 2012, help produce direct deals with the cable industry, forcing it to pursue other means of distribution. However, AJE's political economy means that entering the US market is not a matter of survival, neither is generating advertising revenue. Al Anstey, Al-Jazeera English's managing editor, based in Doha, Qatar, said, "It's not about revenue for us; it's about getting our journalism to as many people as possible" (Hampp, 2011). While they do "advertise on the channel" and "look for revenue opportunities," money is "not the driving force," he added. That said, carriage in the United States is strongly desired for its political importance and the gain in audience in the largest English language market it would likely mean (Interview, distribution staff member, 2012). Wider US carriage would also very much please the bosses, of course. However, depending on a wealthy patron, in the end, means that the channel can more easily stick to principles and not be forced to take the necessary course to gain US market entry. This allows it to pursue a "global south" news agenda since catering to American preferences would put pressure on its editorial content.

6. Is a Mass Audience Even Possible Anymore?

New technologies long foreshadowed the decline of the mass audience. The term "post-network era" describes the end of a time when Americans had only three channels to choose from, a sort of mediated public commons. Even in this new era of high choice in media, there is reason to think big audiences are still possible. Against the proliferation of channels and information sources, the psychology of "passive, half-attentive" mass audiences would persist as would the political economy of mass media, which is highly incentivized against less-profitable "narrowcasting" (Neuman, 1991, 41-42). Both, of these counter-forces, it should be noted, cut against AJE gaining mass audiences to the extent that political culture is connected to this

psychology and we've seen how the current economics of cable TV stack against a niche international news channel like AJE. Another case for the possibility of mass audiences is more optimistic for AJE. Even with many channels, there is occasionally mediated content that has shared, deeper social and cultural significance among many. Lotz called this type of programming that proved widely important in society "phenomenal television" (2007, 37). It is TV that rises above the rest, grabbing the attention of many, and becoming the next day's water cooler fodder. During the Egyptian uprising, AJE's coverage arguably became such a phenomenon. This pushed many to question why the channel was unavailable on American television sets. The term that emerged, "Al Jazeera's moment" signified that its coverage was phenomenal to some degree. What kept it from having a mass audience was its absence on television. Almost half of Americans (48%) reported following the revolution closely according to a Pew study ("Public Stays Focused..." 2011). Yet, only a small percentage would have seen AJE's coverage despite the numerous favorable reviews. Thus, at least for some stories, AJE could be positioned to reach a wide audience, at least in the sense of being occasionally "phenomenal television," if only made available on television sets.

Overall, the post-network era is good for AJE. While one can lament the political polarization that comes from the growth of new news outlets in the post-network era (Prior, 2007), the exclusion of marginal voices was also a concern. In the network era, AJE wouldn't stand the slightest chance of distribution. There may be openings soon for even more media diversity. Despite its monopolistic behavior, the cable industry fears loss of subscribers to online video distribution. How it responds could help or hurt AJE's online availability in the US. It has taken the initiative against the threat posed by online distributors, such as Hulu – which Comcast acquired a significant stake in when it bought out NBC. By moving towards "TV Everywhere,"

which links more closely online TV viewing on cable subscription, cable companies hope to end the “cannibalization” of consumers who use their Internet connections, often provided by cable companies, to access TV (Ammori, 2010). Comcast’s Xfinity, a move towards digital cable, can be accessed online and on mobile devices, is an example. Cable and telecom providers of “TV Everywhere” platforms are pressuring programmers to limit offerings elsewhere online. The convergence between telecom and cable seems inevitable then, making the possibility of some greater competition for audiences, but that is not guaranteed to bring much more competition for consumers. However, even if locally the markets become oligopolistic, a slight increase in competition, the market for programming will still be balanced towards the distributors. If those same distributors, who control Internet service, overcome “net neutrality” opposition and start to charge more for heavy bandwidth users, such as those watching livestreaming video, the distributors could essentially charge for content they do not carry on their TV offerings. This would be a further obstacle for AJE.

For independent and weaker programmers like AJE, the likely changes in the market do not offer as much hope as does the growth in channel capacity provided by digital TV. With the greater technological capacity and proliferation of channels, and the shrinking of audiences for the least popular channels, AJE’s audience may someday prove large enough to justify carriage. The news in late 2011 that Comcast would finally carry BBC World News through Xfinity for 15 million homes in limited markets (Ng, 2011), after years of trying to gain distribution for BBC America, suggests that greater capacity can present opportunities for foreign, international news. Why BBC World News and not AJE can only be a source of speculation, but BBC has been trying to crack the US market for much longer with a larger marketing and distribution staff in a joint venture with Discovery Communications, Inc. If this same trend towards higher channel

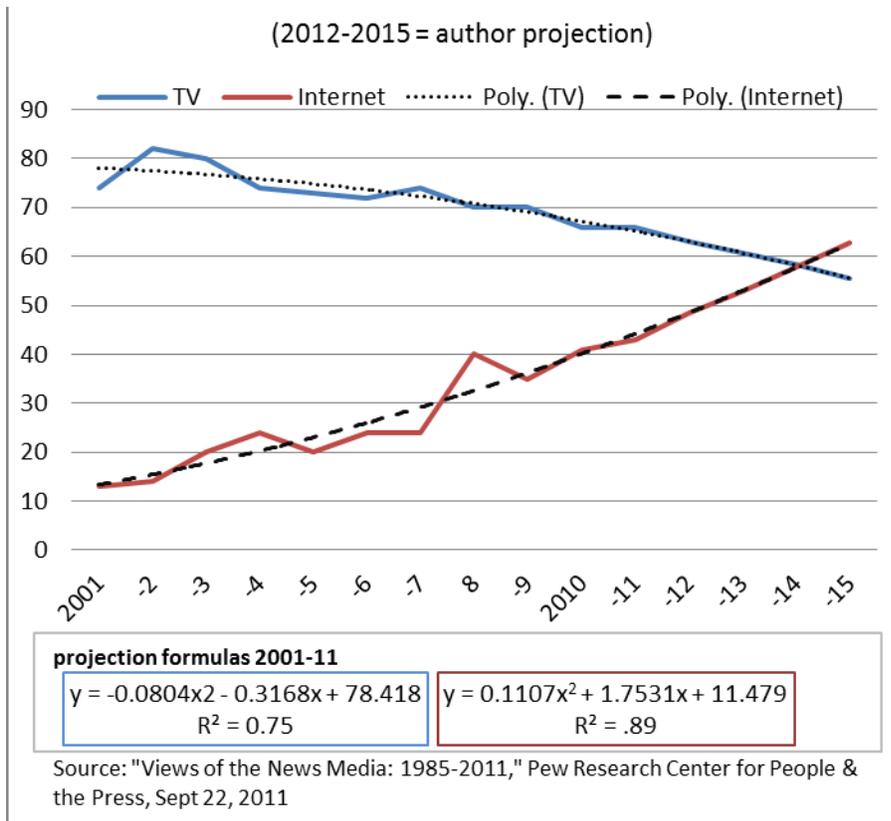
capacity benefits AJE with increased chances of carriage, it will likely come at the precise time when reaching a mass audience easily is even more difficult given how many channels and competitors there will be.

Is it possible, however, that every potential audience member for AJE has found the channel? One must ask whether that potential future audience is so much greater than is the number of those who actively seek out AJE online. AJE staffers acknowledge this, but point out that being carried on American television is important for a number of reasons. It is a sort of legitimation and would boost the channel's reputation and political influence. Of course it can also help with getting more reliable audience metrics, which are centrally important for advertisers and persuading carriers. Being on cable would also let AJE more easily be the go-to source for breaking news out of the places it covers best, such as the Middle East, a region that usually supplies plenty of news. These could be the moments AJE becomes "phenomenal television," but being available by the means that most people still watch news is an important ingredient. The gap between the 48% of Americans who followed events in Egypt with interest and the much smaller number of those who actually watched AJE indicates room for a potential audience.

Until it's available on TV screens, Internet and mobile distribution offers AJE the only and therefore the best chance of building further its American audience. This is the ultimate key to demonstrating demand. This audience is not the mass audience that Neuman (1989) discussed, they are active audience members who self-select in, online. There is a good chance eyeballs would be gained from mere presence on television. This raises an important dilemma about their audience. When AJE distribution staff members are asked if they'd agree to limit their free access in the United States to satisfy the large operators, they say they will decide when

presented with an offer. The moment may come when they have to decide between active self-selected audiences – the principle of making its content free to everyone – and incidental viewers – the prestige of cable carriage. This is not the only dilemma. AJE has had to make several choices that either strengthened or weakened its hand vis-a-vis the industry. Just as advertising and marketing give it agency in the face of political culture, its negotiating position does the same with cable, to some extent. Another trade-off is generating content that appeals to American audiences versus the many other English language audiences with vastly different mixes of preferences.

It is worth questioning whether cable will be king, in terms of news at least, for much longer. Al Anstey, the managing director in 2012, said cable is still “very important” as “one of



the main methods for people taking in information” (Calderone, 2011) and remained committed to gaining access. He predicted in 2011 that AJE would have wide cable carriage in the US by 2016 (Broomhall, 2011). Since 2001, however, there has been

Chart 3.6 US Main Source of International and National News

a slow and steady decline in the number of Americans reporting they get national and

international news from TV (3.6). At the same time, there was a rapid and consistent rise in those getting such news online. Projecting the strongly fitting lines for the 2001 to 2011 data a few years ahead, we can expect the Internet to surpass TV as the key source of news for Americans before 2015. The struggle for cable distribution could, then, become of less import over time. If AJE finds it too impenetrable or much less valuable, it will shift more resources to online distribution and marketing digital avenues of access, and give cable distributors less attention. In other words, the distribution market is itself in flux and far from settled. The story of AJE's cable efforts are then also about how the institutions of media availability in the United States adjust to the wider circulation of foreign and alternative sources of information. Do they remain as strict gatekeepers or open up to a plethora of channels?

What are the short-term prospects of carriage? Assuming that the focus on soft news and decline in international news is driven by demand, a reflection of consumer preferences, AJE faces tremendous hurdles building substantial demand in the United States. At the same time, in terms of geographic focus and topicality, as well as style, pacing and perspective, AJE brings something new to the American news market. It offers a comparative advantage, having proved itself better at covering international news than US cable networks with their declining budgets. However, this is only beneficial to the extent there is demand for it and not strong substitutes. The conventional wisdom in the news business is that the demand for international news outside of breaking stories is weak and limited to certain large or transnational cities, demographic groups (such as immigrants, global business elite, etc.), cosmopolitans and specialists. This is why news magazines such as *Time* frequently use hard international news stories for their covers in foreign editions but not on the same issue released domestically (Rohn, 2010, 214). AJE officials have rejected this in public statements, citing spikes in their own website visits during

breaking news as evidence of extant American interest in international news. As for substitutes, BBC World News, CNN International and Russia Today have been more successful in gaining US distribution, thus lessening the draw of AJE's comparative advantage.

Still, the economics of news and information are still unsettled, and could present AJE with further opportunities. The newspaper industry rushed to adjust to online technologies by placing material for free on the Internet, hoping they'd eventually figure out how to monetize their websites. Some papers, including *the New York Times*, *Financial Times* and *Wall Street Journal*, moved their best content behind paywalls, hoping to build an online subscriber base to support continued news operations. In 2010, Americans seemed happy with the availability of free news online. More than 80% said the quality of free news online is sufficient enough that they do not foresee paying for content ("Deloitte's State of the Media...", 2010, 7). If the trend towards paid content continues, this might inadvertently increase demand for news provided by foreign subsidies, such as AJE's and the host of international broadcasters. So there is reason to believe some comparative advantage persists.

II. THE CHALLENGE OF AMERICAN POLITICAL CULTURE

One-time anchor Dave Marash wrote that before the channel's launch, the conventional wisdom was that Americans did not want another news channel, let alone one focused on international news (2007, 46-7). He, as AJE spokespeople often do, cited website data to show that Americans were in fact interested. While website data shows that many Americans visited the site, this is not necessarily sufficient proof that a sizable untapped market exists of course. It is difficult not to see American audiences in general as pretty parochial. The decline in

international news on American television signifies the dearth of interest in world affairs, outside of peak breaking news events, such as the Egyptian revolution. In general, Americans' lack of knowledge in international affairs is stark compared to Canadian and European citizens (Bennett et al., 1996; Iyengar et al., 2009). So deep is this lack of interest, I argue that it reflects deeper political cultural traits. That said, political culture here should be itself differentiated along certain levels, from orientation to action. This gradation roughly mirrors the scale between interest and action, thereby capturing people with merely latent preferences and those who mobilize towards some goal that is reflective of their deeper subjective world orientations. Perhaps the defining strand in the political culture explanation of AJE's failures in the US distribution market is a pretty general dearth of interest in international affairs. There are exceptions that that. Two other strands of political culture stand in contrast to this passive neglect and pertain to the carriage question: cosmopolitanism reflected by a positive receptivity towards the foreign, and nativism, or hostility towards the foreign. This section will map these currents to social action, namely activism for and against AJE's availability on television.

A. American (Dis)Interest in International News

The amount of international news on US televisions ebbs and flows with "foreign crises" but is minimal in general (Hess, 1996, 9). As my content analyses of AJE reported above shows, international news that does not involve the United States takes up a very small percentage of the news stream on cable TV, even on CNN, which became famous for its foreign news coverage. Those interested in international news likely find it in print on the pages of *the New York Times* and *the Economist*, making it something of a niche audience in quantitative terms. This of course is congruent with the long-held view that foreign affairs are the province of elite, not public, opinion. As Lippmann observed, newspaper coverage of foreign affairs tapered off

quickly to as not to excite a stereotype-driven, “self-contained” public opinion that will rest better with problems out of sight, thus “putting out the fire by starving it” (1922, 356-7). This, many argue, does not measure up to normative standards presumed by democratic theory and the need for a healthy supply of news and information for an active, informed citizenry. Some contend that low attentiveness is acceptable and that public opinion mobilizes when it needs to, and can develop solid foundations through “heuristics” of mental shortcuts; in short, it plays a monitorial function (Zaller, 2003). This can be seen when public interest spikes in big news events taking place in foreign lands, such as the Japanese earthquake and nuclear accident, as well as the Arab protests. While these may not give way to sustained interest and engagement in the issues, they certainly signal that at moments, even a disconnected public can become suddenly attentive. Still, it is possible to point to persistent, deeply acculturated tendencies towards nativism – to which the isolationism inherent to ignorance of international affairs can be related (Simcox, 1997) – among many Americans. Even if this seems incongruous with an active American foreign policy and engagement in world affairs, it could find reflection in the way that many fear AJE being available on their television sets.

Does the absence of international news for mass audiences reflect what people’s interests are, and perhaps deeper political-cultural predilections? At first glance, it seems widespread enough to merit the question of whether it is rooted culturally. Survey research often shows Americans prefer soft news to international and hard news (Bennett, 2001), in contrast to earlier surveys finding that many Americans tune in to foreign affairs news. Self-reports by Americans that indicate they watched international news are often discounted by researchers who see this as inconsistent with chronically low scores on international affairs knowledge (Tewksbury, 2003). The on-going Pew research and other popular polling tend to show a persistence of American

disinterest in international news, generally. These were generally robust even during the war on terror years, where the United States was embroiled in foreign invasions and other military activities. This assessment is broad, covering the vast swaths of the American population – the constituents TV distributors are most interested in capturing as they possess the most eyeballs and constitute largest swaths of subscribers. That does not mean that all quarters are disinterested. Certain groups, international business people, immigrants, specialists, advocates and other internationalists pay close attention, but are largely interspersed, aside from a few large metropolitan areas. If there is a political culture of international news attentiveness, it is a minority one.

The lack of interest in international news is important in so far as it shows why the trouble for AJE in demonstrating positive demand – the universe of the possible audience is limited to start. It serves as an obstacle because distributors see it as inherently limiting the potential viewership. Those with little or no interest in foreign news coverage do not necessarily bear *directly* on, or speak out about, the cable question, necessarily. There are two other groups, both much smaller, who act directly, positively and negatively, on AJE's availability, and make the political culture analysis broader than simply about the "isolationism" inherent in international news neglect. AJE has inspired small but vocal groups to actively push for and against AJE's carriage in the United States. Their activities and messages bring to the fore some of the more interesting fundamental issues and pertinent discourses about the US, its relation to the Arab world and world at-large, and what news and information should be allowed in a community.

B. Cosmopolitanism and Nativism

Cosmopolitanism is a useful term for describing the possibility of American interest in AJE. A simple definition is Kant's third definitive article of a perpetual peace. Cosmopolitan hospitality, he wrote, is "the right of a stranger not to be treated with hostility when he arrives on someone else's territory" (1991, p. 105). Cosmopolitanism can be manifested through media viewing, through "switching between different channels and programmes" (Beck, 2006, p. 42). TV lets people experience themselves and events as part of a greater though fragmented public with great simultaneity (Beck, 2006, p. 42; Dayan and Katz, 1997). It is appropriate to label discourses advocating openness to foreign news media as cosmopolitan. This is a generalization, of course, since there could be cosmopolitan opposition to AJE, for example, if one feels it advances Qatar's national interests narrowly. How common is cosmopolitanism in American political culture?

Cosmopolitanism, as a way of relating to the world, is one strand in American political culture. It stands in contrast with nativism, the "opposition" to people "on the basis of their 'foreignness'" (Jacobson, 2008, xxi). While used most frequently in American history to refer to anti-immigration politics, it is alluring conceptually as articulated in one of the most important works on the topic. John Higham, a historian whose work on nativism looked at the years between 1860 and 1925, described nativism more broadly as an "anti-foreign spirit" (2002, p. xi), a deep running "habit of mind" in the American past, one that mirrored our national anxieties and marked out the bounds of our tolerance" (2002, p. xi). It relied on an often "defensive" opposition to "un-American" and foreign "connections" domestically. Over time, the

specific nativistic antagonisms may, and do, vary widely in response to the changing character of minority irritants and the shifting conditions of the day; but through each separate hostility runs the connecting, energizing force of modern nationalism. While drawing on much broader cultural antipathies and ethnocentric judgments, nativism translates them into a zeal to destroy the enemies of a distinctively American way of life. (2002, p. 4)

In its more current American variant, nativism is seen as a “consistent impulse” that involves diverse targets, goals, anxieties and outcomes, peaking during times of “social, political, and economic upheaval” (Jacobson, 2008, xxi). Post-9/11 America and the suspicion towards Arabs and Muslims (Jamal and Naber, 2007) would be included in this understanding of nativism. It’s a view that assumes that “Muslims, even the ones who live here with us, as us, are really them” (Shryock, 2010, 9). Could such sentiments be part of the story in counter-mobilization and mistrust of AJE – an obstacle to its contra-flow status? And can these be overturned by moments of widespread receptivity towards AJE, such as its leading coverage of the Egyptian uprising?

In using these constructs, several caveats are in order. First, cosmopolitanism and nativism are not the only two dispositions in the American political cultural sphere. Second, describing oppositional responses as nativism, I should note, is not intended as a normative judgment nor to suggest some Americans are exceptionally nativistic. Rather, outright rejection of foreign media and cultural influences based on anxieties about their impact is commonplace in the world. Analytically, nativism is a descriptive category for views opposing the presence of AJE in the United States based on characterizations of the channel as signifying a foreign threat to the country. Third, these political culture traits are not essential or timeless, necessarily. They can evolve and have been evolving along with deeper social, economic and political transformations (Williams, 1961). Thus, the focus will remain on categorizing discourses around AJE according to the nativism-cosmopolitan scale rather than drawing conclusions about American political culture in general. Finally, they do not form a binary, since some discourses about AJE reflect neither nativism nor cosmopolitanism directly. For instance, the concern among some Americans that AJE is anti-Israel hints at a sort of cosmopolitanism, outward

orientation, yet is narrow enough that it cannot be considered as such. Nor is it a nativist consideration.

C. Anti-AJE Activism and Expression

Opposition to AJE in terms of social action falls along two categories. On one level, anti-AJE activism took hold as the result of organizational commitments to preventing what some groups saw as a channel broadcasting pro-terrorist, anti-American and anti-Israeli content. Advocacy groups with transparent ideological agendas opposed AJE on the grounds that it presented news and views that should get no airing in the United States. Cliff Kincaid of Accuracy in Media, a national watchdog group, led the charge against the channel with essays, videos and events about the dangers of Al Jazeera. Beginning its crusade against “terror television” in 2008, the group promoted call-ins and letter-writing campaigns to pressure cable companies and worked on legal strategies to make sure public tax dollars are not spent to carry AJE in the country. The group tends to view AJE predominately through a “war on terror” lens, seeing AJE as an ally of the enemy. Its website hails it as an Al-Qaeda mouthpiece that undermines American allies in the region. For Kincaid, Al Jazeera is all about incitement and therefore bears responsibility for the deaths of American soldiers for “radicalizing Muslims abroad to make Americans into terrorist targets” (2011). He goes on to ask whether “its impact in America itself would be any different?” – meaning AJE “could further stir up and inflame the Arabs and Muslims inside the U.S.” Following from this fear, AIM called attention to AJE’s distribution efforts. In materials promoting a twenty-minute video about Al Jazeera, AIM asks rhetorically, “Do you want your cable or satellite subscription dollars to finance terrorist propaganda?” Elsewhere, the group posted contact information for cable companies and kept tabs on meetings with AJE officials. The emergence of these efforts could not have been much

of a surprise. Even before launch it was clear that many issue advocates would “evaluate Al Jazeera International’s broadcasts for issues of balance and bias, especially by groups already disposed to doubt the fairness of the station's coverage’ (Alterman, 2005). These protests were not often large, it should be noted. In May 2006, six protesters turned out in front of Al Jazeera’s K Street offices. Organizers were expecting hundreds (Dvorak, 2006).

AIM claimed its efforts were successful in preventing any pre-launch deals, and others concurred. In outlining what he saw as the bases for cable companies’ hesitance to carry AJE, former AJE news presenter Dave Marash pointed out that “right-wing agitation” presented cable operators with risk:

A well-watered ‘grass-roots campaign’ apparently convinced some cable-system operators they would be risking their reputations, not to mention taking on a lot of public criticism, if they offered us to their customers. (Marash, 2007, 46-7).

He argued that their depiction of AJE was incorrect and presumptuous. The perception was, nevertheless, that their agitation was impactful. Early on, according to a cable trade publication, “several carriage deals were scuttled” because “special interest groups mobilized protests” based on “misconceptions about the channel, such as that it was an anti-Israel propaganda tool that aired Al Qaeda videos of beheadings” (Guthrie, 2007). Interestingly, Marash later resigned from AJE, citing among other things, Doha’s editorial control, which led to what he deemed was simple and overtly negative portrayals of the United States, a creeping “anti-American sensibility” (Stelter, 2008). While he still champions AJE in public writings, critics have cited his departure as proof of an anti-American agenda.

Secondly, outside of organizations, there was another level of adversarial response emanating from war on terror discourses, vibrant in the sentiments of some members of the public and articulated aggressively by prominent Fox News personalities. This was an

opposition that did not seem entirely coordinated by AIM or other organizations, but that emerged from a widely shared feeling that AJE is a threat. It reflected a sort of common sense about AJE, and unlike AIM's efforts, had no central address or videos to sell. True, this shared opposition against AJE was "buttressed by the blatant hostility of the Bush Administration, particularly former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's incessant attacks for allegedly lying and proselytizing for terrorists (Marash, 2007, 47). But, after tensions cooled with the Bush administration, *ad hoc* mobilizations against AJE sent the message that it was unwelcome in various communities. A few notable examples are worth reviewing. Both reporters and stations and cable systems carrying AJE faced backlash.

During the lead-up to the 2008 national elections, AJE reporters along with swarms of news media descended on metropolitan Denver, CO for the Democratic National Convention. As part of its coverage, AJE wanted to set up a small panel of citizens to discuss the election and then-candidate Barack Obama's acceptance speech at a biker saloon in nearby Golden, CO. The city initially welcomed them when the channel was planning the shoot and was going to have an event, a barbecue, to greet the reporters and "show Arab viewers what Americans are like"; but, local citizens complained, so they dropped the plans (Milbank, 2009). The day AJE planned the panel, protesters led by rival biker gangs held signs and walked the streets, telling AJE they were not welcome in the community. They painted the channel as terrorist-affiliated and anti-American, analogizing it to "Tokyo Rose," the female, pro-Axis propagandist the Japanese government broadcasted to US troops in the Pacific. It was also a pun on the saloon's name, "the Buffalo Rose." As one protester told the *Washington Post*, "Al-Jazeera is the No. 1 propaganda machine for the enemies we fight" and the Americans in the crew in Golden "are traitors to the United States of America" (Milbank, 2009). The hostility was substantial enough that AJE

correspondent and former US Marine Josh Rushing said “police snipers” were stationed “on top of the buildings” and he was flanked by “undercover cops” (Folkenflik, 2009). Not everyone in the community agreed of course. Some local citizens stayed in the saloon to show their support and organized a small counter-protest (Ambinder, 2009).

That was not the last incident an AJE correspondent met hostility on the job. In the fall of 2011, Gabriel Elizondo was travelling across the US by car with a cameraman looking for stories from the heartland on the ten year anniversary of the September 11 attacks. Passing through Booker, Texas on a Friday night, he saw the parade of cars and tailgaters heading to a high school stadium. He thought a football game in a small town would be a visually-stimulating setting for talking to ordinary people. To make sure he’s not violating any local rules, he found the school principal, told her about the piece, and got enthusiastic permission, according to Elizondo. She even asked if he could send the web link to the final report (Elizondo, 2011). It was only when she received his business card and realized he’s from Al Jazeera that her face changed. She told him she better get approval from the Superintendent, who then approached Elizondo gruffly and disallowed him to shoot. The school official later wrote that he was flustered because some children went missing earlier, but that AJE needed prior approval anyways. He claimed that since it was a “public event, on public property and at a public school function,” it justified his decision.

That was not the only incident in Texas. When the independent, left-leaning Pacifica Radio network announced it would re-transmit AJE’s news bulletin, Houston’s KPFT 90.1, an affiliate, faced a backlash. A local news channel reported that some Houstonians were upset and that the station received threats. Local conservative blogs gave voice to protests, featuring comments suggesting the station was “complicit in helping to spread Islam, the enemy for

American and all that we stand for” (“Residents Respond...” 2010). The level of threats caused the station to boost security (Rufca, 2010). Since the station was actually bombed in 1970 by the Ku Klux Klan, they took the threats seriously. Duane Bradley, the station's general manager, defended the decision, saying it was “programming of a high quality that is underexposed in America” and fits their mission of media diversity (Barron, 2010). He noted that carrying the channel was a short-term risk, given they are a donation-supported operation, but that the late 2010 launch came after three years of planning (“Residents Respond...” 2010). The Pacifica deal was reportedly delayed by internal opposition at both the network and affiliates levels. A former member of the board overseeing New York’s Pacifica-owned WBAI-FM wrote a memo advising that there would be “blowback” from a deal, as it would definitely alienate “Jewish listeners” (Farhi, 2009). The memo also suggested that as a “totally government owned and funded broadcast entity,” AJE would be biased, and that Qatar has a spotty human rights record and rampant gender inequality (Farhi, 2009). As of early 2012, AJE was still on the daily schedule in Houston, at the 5:00 AM to 6:00 AM and 4:30 to 5:00 PM slots.

One of the first cable deals was with Buckeye cable in the Toledo, OH area in 2007. Owned by a local media magnate family, the Blocks, the channel made good business sense for them given the area’s large Arab and Muslim community. The cable system’s vice president of sales and marketing said they screened it before making it available and found it to be “impartial, independent, and objective,” which would be an “important information source to provide our viewers” (“Buckeye Cable System...” 2007). While the company said it wanted to appeal to as wide a possible audience in the diverse area, it was something of a controversy. Local letters to the editor called for subscribers to stop doing business with Buckeye (Klinefelter, 2007). Readers at the Sandusky Register complained about the channel’s availability (“Al Jazeera

Draws...” 2007). AIM put out a statement saying the decision showed a “callous disregard for the lives of American citizens during a time of war” (“AIM Protests Ohio...” 2007). The brouhaha was short-lived however and the channel remained on the menu, albeit on a premium tier.

These examples do not capture the full range of oppositions, neither the strategies of groups nor the different ways AJE was countered in the expressions and behavior among members of the public. For example, some have taken to the courts to prevent AJE’s carriage. In Florida, a local man sued Daytona State College’s cable system for carrying MHz Worldview, which re-broadcasts AJE’s news hour (Circelli, 2011). These disparate responses may be linked to larger discourses advanced not just by AIM, but by prominent right-wing bloggers and TV personalities, including Bill O’ Reilly of Fox News, who called it “an anti-Semitic, anti-American network” (Mirkinson, 2011). That is not to suggest the anxieties some held about AJE – and acted upon – were artificial or constructed by those with agendas. The common string connecting them is something deeper, I suspect, at the level of political culture⁷ – which makes the possibility of controversy over carriage far-reaching and national. It taps into a deep tradition of nativism, or fear of the foreign, of which Islamophobia is just one, recently heightened articulation. Going beyond the notion, however, Islamophobia “is not located in fear alone, or in hate; nor is it found in the designation of enemies as such, since a society or group can define its enemies, or be defined as enemies, for entirely legitimate reasons” (Shryock, 2010, 9). The category of “enemy” is a strategic one, which is why organizations and vie to fit AJE within this designation. So even if we say it is rooted in political culture, it is spun forward by mobilizations, by social action. This establishes what carriers would risk for deals with AJE. At the same time,

⁷ What exactly the political cultural differences and their relation to discourses are will be fleshed out further in the next chapter about the debate in Burlington.

these expressions and efforts did not always prevent AJE's carriage, showing that they are not determinant – and increasingly, they came up against mobilized demand *for* the channel showing a political culture defined by contention.

D. Pro-AJE Activism and Expression

Organizational efforts and popular support for AJE did not really emerge until the Arab Spring. While in very few certain communities, such as Burlington, VT as we will see, people mobilized to keep AJE on air, it was not until early 2011 that organized efforts took off on a wider scale and voices from different parts of the country spoke out in favor of AJE. With AJE's sudden boost in popularity, many came to ask about and then act on AJE's absence from their television sets. At least one group formed, Rethink Press, which described itself as a “grassroots group that is working to raise awareness about the state of the journalism and media in the United States.” It started around the same time AJE began the “Demand Al Jazeera” campaign, which plugged into their early efforts but also generated expressions of support among non-activist Americans. Thus, mobilization was seen in both organizational capacities but also as a more general expression of sentiment.

Rethink Press is a group that advocates for AJE's cable carriage. Its story was that as the Arab uprisings and Wisconsin labor rallies took off in early 2011, according to the group's website, its first activists noticed that with the American TV news networks lacking “solid reporting on events, democracy and change could not flourish.” They tied media directly with larger movements for social change and saw AJE as a news outlet that could facilitate the coming of a more progressive media environment – making it the focus of their first campaign. They chose AJE “for its importance during reporting of the Arab Uprising and its history of being maligned by previous U.S. administrations and of being kept off cable by media

conglomerates,” according to its website. They organize local meet-ups, Call-Your-Cable-Company actions, and networking events using grassroots organizing. The group provides activist toolkits that include scripts for calling local cable systems and ideas for other events. In February, 2012, the group took direct action along with members of Occupy Philadelphia. They went to Comcast’s headquarters with a petition bearing 23,000 signatures (Shaw, 2012). Around forty protesters made their way. Rethink Press members Xi Wang and Mike Haack were allowed in and took the signatures, tied with a ribbon, to Comcast’s mail room for delivery to top officials (Matza, 2012). The question of carriage was politicized by those wanting to see AJE as well. Those against AJE are not the only voices heard on this subject to be sure. Pro-AJE views were most clearly mobilized in Burlington, VT, where there was a structured public deliberation, as reviewed in the next chapter.

Some expected that support for AJE and interest in international news would increase during the President Obama administration. He showed an early commitment to resetting relations with the Arab and Muslim countries, as demonstrated by his Cairo speech just months after taking office. Generally, he was seen as the cosmopolitan counter to George W. Bush’s neo-conservatism. Frederick Thomas, of MHz Networks, which carries AJE, speculated that, “people got to the point that they realized we need to know more of what's going on the world.” He suggested either “the Obama administration created it, or maybe the Obama administration benefited from that sense” (Hagey, 2009). Indeed, relations with Al Jazeera began to warm under the new president. Then-director-general Wadah Khanfar was finally able to secure a visa and visit the country, for example.

III. CONCLUSION

“If it’s been ‘market forces’ that have kept Al Jazeera/English from an American audience – fears that it would have no audience, or that it would be ‘terror TV’ – it is time to readjust to reality. If it’s been political pressure that has kept Al Jazeera/English off America’s cable and satellite servers, it’s time to reject such literal ‘know-nothing-ism.’”

– Dave Marash (2008)

One story captures the inherently interactive relationship between the factors in this study’s analytical framework. In the channel’s early years, Rasenberger Media in New York helped AJE seek distribution deals. Catherine Rasenberger, the CEO, found AJE more controversial than any other company she ever worked on, including two gay channels (Dahl, 2008). She reported that cable executives considered the channel’s substance acceptable, but worried about a backlash from angry subscribers: “They’d say, ‘We personally might watch it, but we can’t risk picketers’” (Dahl, 2008). Thus, a political cultural backlash, informed by an adversarial political context implicating its brand as hostile during the war on terror years, was translated into non-carriage by a risk averse, privatized cable industry. This only compounded the proclivity against carrying an international news outlet based on mostly valid assumptions of American disinterest in foreign affairs.

Agency, however, was also at play. Rasenberger suggested AJE was largely ignorant of the cable market and did not grasp the difficulty and costs of pursuing cable carriage. She said she pushed for more marketing expenditures to stimulate demand and change the channel’s brand associations, but she found little support among AJE personnel. This was early on and marketing functions expanded later. Either way, it’s an open question whether any degree of marketing would help, of course. After all, it did invest in contracting with a public relations

firm and building a small staff without producing any large-scale, direct cable or satellite deals. We can see in Rasenberger's anecdote how the absence of AJE in the United States is related to the structure and functioning of the cable industry, though it reflects the public's feelings towards AJE that took shape during the country's conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the channel's own agency, including its shortcomings and strategic decisions.

The main factors proposed in the analytical framework – political context, political culture, media economics and AJE's agency – interact with each other. The cosmopolitan impulse in American political culture is subject to the economics of the cable distribution market to the extent it produces demand for international news on TV. Ong was right to ask whether the cosmopolitan "imagination as a social practice can be so independent of national, transnational, and political-economic structures that enable, channel, and control the flows of people, things, and ideas" (1999, 11). However, AJE's provision of online access allows some weakening of such barriers by circumvention. Despite AJE's exclusion from TVs, it circulates among those who seek it out online – which may eventually be the key to wider distribution. Other interactions are worth considering. AJE's agency, for example in marketing, is bound within its expectations that United States will be a difficult market to enter, especially given the political context. This leads to a half-commitment in terms of resource investiture and staffing. Also, American media economics are not disconnected from political culture, a relationship that becomes more apparent in the story of Burlington Telecom's development and decision-making around offering AJE.

By looking at the analytical factors as somewhat distinct and capable of changing individually, as they do over time in AJE's short history, we can start to see which factors matter more for the question of whether and how AJE travels. This is especially true with the changes

in AJE's image and reception during the Arab Spring, the subject of chapter five. Before that, telling the story of AJE in Burlington, VT is vital for getting a better grasp on how a constellation of these factors manifest in one particular, localized case of actual carriage – the positive exception that can help us understand the generalized rule of exclusion. It is one of the few places where AJE's contra-flow potential is actualized on television sets. Discussing a case of distribution gives us something more tangible than a generalized case of absence, as is the case with AJE nationally. The case importantly also brings to life the discourses for and against AJE, and shows how a community deliberates over what kind of news and information should be available for public consumption when it is given the chance. In a show of agency, AJE entered the local debate, sending officials to answer questions about the channel. This case then ties together well the four factors making up the analytical framework, showing that the unique local conditions of AJE's contra-flow are not easily generalizable to the rest of the country.

Chapter 4

The Debate Over Al Jazeera, English in Burlington, VT.

I. INTRODUCTION

“WHEREAS the Mayor of the City of Burlington requested that the public be heard on the matter of whether or not AJE should be retained or dropped from the BT cable channel lineup before BT takes any action”

– from the joint resolution by the Burlington Telecommunications Advisory Committee (BTAC) and Burlington Cable Advisory Council (BCAC), June 24, 2008 (Appendix A).

Burlington, Vermont is one of the few places in the United States AJE is available to American television viewers as a result of a direct carriage deal between AJE and a carrier. Cable carriage of AJE in Burlington was not a smooth process, but was subject to an intense, public debate. Unlike Buckeye Cable or Link TV, Burlington Telecom (BT) is a quasi-public, municipally established entity and therefore has a different practice of accountability to its customers and citizens. The issue of offering AJE produced focused public mobilizations, which required articulable public justifications for or against the network’s availability on TV sets in the community. AJE was subject to a public discussion that took place in meetings, local media, and before official advisory committees. Whereas Buckeye Cable made the decision to carry, and received angry letters and phone calls, the political contest over AJE in Burlington yielded a fruitful public deliberation. This generated rich, textual documentation of the underlying issue

and discourses that were in play over AJE's market entry in one American city. It reveals what supporters and opponents, alike, think, or at least the thoughts they are willing to share publicly and therefore find the most persuasive. While considering that Burlington, VT is renowned for its leftist political disposition and the political economy of Burlington Telecom is unique, the public justifications unearthed in the exchanges over AJE illustrate the underlying principles at stake, the hopes and anxieties the idea of its local transmission evokes. This gives us insight into how one constellation of the analytic factors facilitated AJE's travel into one American community, which offers lessons by contrast of why AJE is not successful elsewhere.

In terms of this paper's research method, the Burlington audience debate is largely reconstructed from press reports, letters to BT, city documents, letters to the editor, interviews and videos from public meetings. This is a discourse analysis that aims to capture public articulations of those who mobilized on this issue, and is therefore not a reception study *per se*, nor is it a gauge of general public opinion.

II. BURLINGTON, VT AND BURLINGTON TELECOM

Larkin (2003) examined the "social context" of global media flows to explain why certain "media travel." Using such a decentered media approach, Larkin writes, necessarily requires describing the particularities and unique histories of the time and place in which media enter a place and is consumed. This approach dovetails nicely with scholarly literature on "place," which considers the emergence of units of space as sites of interaction, both social action and meaning. Sociologists termed the development of identifiable geographies of shared social, cultural and political dispositions the "accomplishment of place" (Molotch et al., 2000).

Kaufman and Kaliner (2011) follow the idea that the “symbolic qualities of places” can “act back on inhabitants” in their examination of why Vermont and New Hampshire came out so different politically despite so many other similarities (125). They suggest that an “idio-cultural” migration in which Vermont attracted progressives and hippies in the 1970s played a major role, but that Vermont was showing signs of change even before the migration. By “idio-culture” they adapt Fine’s definition as “a system of knowledge, beliefs, behaviors, and customs shared by members of an interacting group to which members can refer and employ as the basis of further interaction” (1979, p. 734).

Vermont is a small state in the old colonial New England region of the American northeast. It borders the Quebec province in Canada, New York state, New Hampshire and Massachusetts, which is to the south. Burlington, its largest city of roughly 40,000 people, is in its northwest. It has been the main city economically, culturally and politically since the early 1800s. The state prides itself for being politically independent, progressive and having a long-tradition of public deliberation in governance through town hall meetings – a form of small-scale “real democracy” (Bryan 2004). In few places do citizens enjoy such a strong, direct role in local policy formation and decision-making. This goes back to the country’s colonial era.

Although the state is often characterized as an exemplar of liberal New England republicanism, it has a more recent tradition of left-wing, working class politics and environmentalism, especially in Burlington (Clavel 1986, 164). Political radicalism grew in the 1970s as activists, artists and counter-cultural communes migrated there. With the University of Vermont and other educational institutions, including those offering experimental approaches to education, the city became a socio-political hub for leftist organizing. The state’s move to the left was a relatively recent transformation though it began before the 1970s. Earlier in the

century, Vermont showed cracks in its historically conservative politics by accepting, after first turning down, Great Depression federal aid to repair flood damage, as well as projects under the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), when neighboring New Hampshire refused on ideological grounds (Kaufman and Kaliner, 2011: 143). During the New Deal, Vermont shed misgivings and engaged in “federal transportation, forestry, and relief programs” (Kaufman and Kaliner, 2011: 149).

The state had been largely conservative until the 1950s when many of its industrial bases, including textile mills, approached the end of a decades-long collapse. Outside of industrial areas, the state’s primary social unit was the small town with its high reliance on farming. Vermont elected centrist Democrats for the first time since the mid-nineteenth century. They sought to develop the state, but their plans were met by opposition from several angles. During its industrial era, worker unrest and organizing were fairly common and even with the decline of industrialism their collectivist politics remained as they sought to protect workers’ rights. This was something of a Vermont tradition, according to Clavel. He cited the influence of French Canadian immigrants as one source of strong unionism. Also, changes in the economy towards eco-tourism and the narrative of a “return to the land” propagated by writers and the state’s hospitality industry glorified small farming in the first half of the century. Vermont became a regional stop for skiing enthusiasts and a place for summer homes, particularly for New Yorkers. The state developed an interest in preserving natural beauty, especially once the pollution in industrial areas subsided, which furthered popular support for conservationism measures. The state put forward regulations unfriendly to economic development. By the late 1970s, Vermont was recognized as a highly regulated state economy; it prohibited “billboard signage on highways” and many municipalities blocked “big-box stores and restaurant chains” (Kaufman

and Kaliner, 2011: 135). Howard Dean, who would eventually become a Congressman, governor and then an unsuccessful contender for the democratic nomination for President in 2004, launched his political career after spearheading a grassroots campaign to block a condominium development project on Lake Champlain. Conservation was linked to other economic bases. Vermont also developed small food industries tied to the state's image as a natural and clean location. Local producers' associations sought to market Vermont goods, such as maple sugar, to consumers in other state and hoped the "Vermont" brand name could stand for "quality" and small town "authenticity" (Kaufman and Kaliner, 2011: 137).

In Burlington, unequal development plans that gave preference to commercial growth over affordable housing led to the narrow election of a Socialist candidate for mayor in the early 1980s. Bernie Sanders was part of the migration of political activists and progressives in the 1970s. Also migrating around that time but under different circumstances, Vermont icons such as Howard Dean and ice cream makers Ben Cohen and Jerry Greenfield also settled in the Burlington area. Sanders originally moved to Vermont to work as a low-income housing advocate, and took part in anti-war activism. By tapping into both the recent activist migrants and the traditional currents of workers' rights sentiments, he was able to defeat the Democratic incumbent. As mayor, he further expanded public regulation of private enterprise, often making public interest a condition of business, but by also establishing more public-private partnerships. After serving as mayor for nearly a decade, he ran successfully for the U.S. Congress in 1991. In 2005, he began campaigning for the Senate and was elected by a wide margin. He is currently the only openly socialist Senator in American history. Burlington's mayor during the AJE debate was Bob Kiss, a member of the Vermont Progressive party. The party backed the Green Party candidate Ralph Nader's presidential bid in 2000. As testament to Vermont's leftist

political tendencies, the Vermont State Senate passed a resolution calling on Congress to undertake impeachment hearings against President Bush and his vice president (Rao, 2007).

In Burlington, a thriving town, city planners undertook public-private enterprises in order to promote a conception of development in the public good. One example that visitors to the city are sure to come across is the famed Church Street Marketplace, a strip of small-town main street shops, taverns, and restaurants closed off to pedestrian traffic. Maintained as a public space, unlike shopping malls, for example, it is a place where “consumption activities seemingly intermingle with various kinds of political campaigning and issue advocacy, as pedestrians encounter not only shopping choices but also a range of ideas and opinions that may or may not be consistent with their own” (Clough and Vanderbeck, 2006: 2262). Tensions arose around certain marketplace policies regulating protests and political expression. Activists seeking unfettered access differed with political leaders and commercial interests seeking to keep it available for shoppers firstly and for families. It is generally regarded as Burlington’s public square, a physical space for meeting and open discussion of issues of common interest – the type of site for deliberation often romanticized in public sphere writings. Foreign visitors seeking to understand the marketplace as a model for their own cities noted how democracy can be seen as residents live it in such a place (Clough and Vanderbeck, 2006: 2272-2273). Its governance includes a diverse array of stakeholders, from marketplace business owners, to local residents and business owners outside of the marketplace.

Burlington’s history of public participation, willingness to guide private enterprise and take a hand in economic matters carried over into telecommunications. In the early 1980s, many city residents opposed Adelphia’s cable monopoly and high costs (Rao, 2007). Sanders, then-Mayor, proposed a municipal-run fiber-optics network through the city. The Burlington

government eventually followed up and proposed a plan to modernize its communications infrastructure in the 1990s. It worked towards building the system through public-private partnering and mixed financing. In 1996, Burlington voters approved Burlington Electric Department's proposal to examine the provision fiber optic services. The city was also looking for an alternative to private companies, which were seen as costly and unaccountable gatekeepers on content. Three years later, city officials announced a \$15 million project to build the fiber-optic cable network in the city, suggesting it would connect government buildings and the city to cutting edge data connections. Burlington voters passed measures, including a bond of \$6.1 million, to allow for the network's creation. Critics contend they were not under the impression the project would entail cable programming. Later, in 2005, the city applied to the state's Public Service Board for a "certificate of public good" (CPG), which authorized, conditionally, a city-owned and operated cable, Internet and phone service. This came to be called Burlington Telecom (BT). The following year, 2006, it began offering Internet, phone and TV service at low rates. BT was pitched as a long-term money-saver. After being built-out and repaying its debts in the future, it was estimated to eventually provide 20% of city's general fund requirements (Mitchell, 2010).

Burlington Telecom as a public enterprise is an outgrowth of the city's political orientation to the left, and follows a trajectory of local and state government involvement in development. It stands for Burlington as a place in many ways, though its failure to attract more customers shows this may only be partial. BT reflects a Progressive Party initiative, and has not won the full support of a city where many resent its dependence on public funds and the secrecy by which the city bailed it out. Contestation around BT aside, it is central to the story of AJE becoming available in Burlington. It both signifies, and became the focus for the mobilization of,

a political culture that made possible AJE's carriage. But ultimately, the key lies in the unique political economy of a carrier with a duty to take into account public preferences, allowing for an important deliberation around the question of AJE's availability in Burlington.

III. HOW AJE GAINED CARRIAGE IN BURLINGTON

As a public initiative, BT provided the technology to vastly improve telecom services to the city and offer an alternative to the monopoly of the city's private sector cable company, which was acquired by Comcast, the nation's largest cable operator. With fiber optic service, BT's digital cable could provide virtually limitless channels and did not face the capacity constraints claimed by legacy carriers. BT's initial channel marketing strategy was to offer the same channels as competitors, as well as any channel that provided free content since it had far more bandwidth than did other cable companies. Each extra channel not carried by the other cable company was considered a competitive advantage. Initially, an agency working to obtain distribution deals for AJE contacted BT. Its General Manager Tim Nulty, decided to include AJE in its TV offerings. Critics of AJE later pointed out that there was no clear policy in place when the decision was made. It was only in February, 2007 that BT adopted TV Channel Carriage Policy that named three underlying objectives: (a) providing a diverse array of channels to maximize feasible consumer choice, (b) staying economically viable as a system operator, and (c) responding to the needs of the community it serves. As for the initial rationale, according to Richard Donnelly, BT's sales and marketing director, it was firstly "a simple competitive decision. When we heard that Comcast and Al Jazeera's talks had failed, we decided to look into

getting the channel” (Rao, 2007). Before beginning to carry AJE in December, 2006, Nulty, with Donnelly’s advice, previewed it for three weeks because they were initially hesitant about the channel based on its reputation. Nulty admitted they “were certainly squeamish about it at first, given its reputation in the United States,” but he added, “it looks like BBC” (Hemingway, 2007). Donnelly commented that the network impressed him:

I was just stunned at the quality of the coverage... It was fantastic. There were some amazing, eye-opening news stories about world affairs, women’s issues and stories about what we call the ‘Third World.’ (Rao, 2007)

They also felt carrying the network was congruent with the overall spirit of BT to provide access to views and news that provide an alternative to the mainstream. A non-binding carriage agreement was reached and the network was featured on BT’s premium (Standard Plus) cable channel lineup, although AJE preferred placement on the basic lineup. One of the company’s early announcements about carrying AJE promoted the channel as “the English language version of the notorious 10 year-old news station in Qatar,” and added that it hired famous western journalists. AJE launched on BT December 14, 2006.

IV. THE DEBATE OVER AJE

A. From Complaints to the Company to a Public Debate

The debate over BT’s AJE carriage took place in May and June, 2008. A review of more than 140 complaints provided by BT reveal there were roughly four phases of public communications about AJE in the year-and-half between the channel launch and the public debate at the focus of this chapter. From the outset, BT received a small number of messages after making the announcement. Nulty said that “One person called to complain vociferously”

plus “two others [who were] obviously put up to it by the first guy” (Hemingway, 2007). There were less than five written messages among the complaints BT kept on file, and only one email welcoming AJE’s addition. These first complaints came from residents of Burlington or surrounding cities. A few of the letter-writers were deeply angry. One Burlington resident wrote that she was “appalled to learn that Burlington Telecom has chosen to put this terrorist propaganda outlet on its system.” The letter pledged “I WILL NEVER SUBSCRIBE.” These few letters linked AJE with Al-Qaeda, holding it out as an affiliate of America’s enemies. Two months after the channel began showing, however, one letter from a local elected politician came in suggesting that constituents were displeased, even “quite emotional” since there are “a number of Guardsmen and Veterans” in the ward (February 23, 2007). Three days after this later came in, BT announced its official carriage policy, it is worth noting.

The second phase of messages appeared in mid-2007. These were likely the result of national advocacy groups and conservative discussion sites like Freerepublic.com generating letter campaigns. BT attracted their attention after the *Boston Globe* (April 22, 2007) reported the deal in a regional news brief. Very few of the dozens of letters received at this time were from Vermonters. They were also generally livid, referring to the General Manager as a treasonous “idiot,” the decision to carry as “despicable” since “Al-Jazeera is a propaganda machine for the terror-sponsoring states of the Middle East,” as an April 29, 2007 letter claimed. BT did not seem to respond to these publicly as they were not from customers or area residents.

The third phase of communication is a bit more complex. It involved direct meetings and orchestrated letter-writing campaigns. Since this stage is when BT decided to drop AJE, it was instrumental to giving way to the public debate. The first complaint was dated February 21, 2008, about 10 months after the second stage of complaints. The letter’s writer claimed to be a

supporter of BT, but wanted to know if AJE was still available: “I’m concerned about one aspect of your programming.” Since being “greatly dismayed” at a quote by a BT official in a local news article (Hemingway, 2007) published a year before, the author of the letter warned that “Al Jazeera is a wolf in sheep’s clothing – by design.” It noted that there is “good reason” AJE is carried in so few other markets, and that BT was wrong to seem “proud of being amongst the few.” Warning that opponents to AJE are not alone, supporting BT is untenable as long as it “supports radical and jihadist Islam” by “distributing one of their powerful voices and promoting their positions through the tool of Al Jazeera.”

This letter was not quickly followed by more messages. Rather, organizations acted to convince new General Manager Chris Burns to drop AJE. The complaints BT provided to me redacted the identities of Burlington residents who wrote them directly. However some of the letters and public communications indicate there was a campaign by local activists with certain groups to persuade Burns to remove the channel. It was an effective effort because in mid-April, Burns did just that. The first communication after the February letter was sent in the morning of Thursday, April 17, 2008. A Rabbi from a Temple in a neighboring town sent Burns a message saying “I am very grateful Burlington Telecom has decided to cancel the broadcast of Al Jazeera.” Though he does not condone quieting opposing views, he writes, “Al Jazeera is nothing more than the political and religious voice piece of radical Moslems.” This channel he worried could incite “civil unrest” though biased coverage of the world. The following day, two activists with the Israel Center of Vermont sent an email to the group’s members. It laid out the case against AJE, but the final paragraph directly said:

We have been in contact with Chris Burns, Managing Director of Burlington Telecom. Mr. Burns has agreed to remove Al-Jazeera from Burlington Telecom’s network. He expects an uproar from a vocal minority. He needs our support. Please write an email now to Chris Burns at cburns@burlingtontelecom.com in support of Burlington Telecom’s decision not to include Al

Jazeera in their programming any longer.

Another message, dated April 17th, was also for a listserv, though the author and the listserv cannot be identified. It called on recipients to email Burns to show support, noting that eventually the decision “is likely to rouse a hornet’s nest.” Later that day, Burns received a direct email, likely from the same author, informing him “I contacted quite a number of folks to let them know of BT’s discontinuance.” The message was optimistic that those he emailed would respond and spread word across their networks to generate “a lot of positive feedback in support of your brave action.” A few days later, on the 22nd, another email came in saying that since they’re in the “middle days” of Passover, “we’re back drumming up support for your efforts.” In the weeks following this correspondence, Burns receives dozens of messages thanking him for the decision as well as criticizing AJE. The messages dated in the second half of April were generated by this campaign. This was the first phase of letters that directly addressed the GM. Previously, messages came in through the website’s contact function.

The pro-Israel group was not the only one pressuring BT to end AJE’s carriage. Further complaints about carrying AJE emerged from conservative organizations, including the national media watchdog Accuracy in Media, which saw Burlington as did AJE itself, as a foothold in the coveted U.S. cable market. Another source of pressure was a newly formed citizen group, the Defender’s Council of Vermont, which aimed to warn the public about the threat of radical Muslims and generate support for American troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. One member of the City Council was also mobilized on this issue.

For several weeks after Burns’ decision became known to the Rabbi and the Israel Center, it was still not publicized to the wider Burlington public or to the subscriber base. Also, BT did not inform the advisory committees although they held their regular meeting in later April, 2008. BT planned to announce the decision in a bill notice, set to go out around May 9th.

The termination of AJE's carriage was planned for a week later, on May 16th. Channel carriage decisions, it should be noted, were made internally and never subject to public decision-making nor requiring any special notification outside of the protocol BT followed. The first public mention outside of listservs and other closed communication media, however, was on the Temple's website. The same Rabbi who contacted Burns earlier posted a note thanking him. The Temple repeated the message in its monthly newsletter along with a reprint of Judea Pearl's op-ed warning of the dangers of AJE. A local activist interested in Middle East peace and justice and free speech advocacy found out about the website note from a friend. A few days later, on May 7th, Burlington's alternative weekly paper, *Seven Days*, reported the decision to stop carriage. In the article, Burns noted they received "dozens" of complaints and cited "contractual issues." He stressed that as a "small cable TV carrier in Burlington trying to acquire more business" BT shouldn't "stir up more dust" (Picard, 2008b). In a later public statement, Burns clarified the contractual reason: an annual review of BT's carriage contracts showed there was not a signature on the Al Jazeera agreement, prompting concerns about legal liability. A BT staff member I interviewed (April 20, 2012) acknowledged that BT first contacted AJE's third party distribution and legal representatives in January, 2007 about the unsigned contract, and again in January, 2008, to no response.

The *Seven Days* article excited the expected "hornet's nest," to the disappointment of those behind the campaign. On May 9th, a message, likely from one of the advocates for removal, came in to BT: "I hoped that Al Jazeera would silently sink into the West next Thursday without fanfare. Seems *Seven Days* got a hold of the story somehow..." The day following the piece ran, letters started coming in, setting up the fourth phase of complaints, in which AJE's carriage became the focus of public debate and deliberation. There was a marked

backlash against the decision and many were upset to find out not from the company but from a press story. Local peace and justice organizations and viewers complained about Burns' decision. The circumstances in which people started to find out, via the Rabbi's announcement, and the Israel Center's mobilization, led many to perceive Burns' decision as meant to placate issue advocates. A May 8, 2008 letter to BT said that it was "appalling that you are making a political decision to deprive the majority of us access to a major world-wide news network in order to appease certain interest groups." Some of the letter-writers were upset subscribers who threatened to end their service plans. The response was a rigorous public debate marked by public meetings, letters, local print and broadcast media attention, and events. BT revealed that by May 15, 2008 it received 116 total messages in support of carrying AJE; by contrast, 87 were for its removal.

The ensuing outcry also reached the city's Telecommunications Advisory Committee (TAC) and Cable Advisory Council (CAC), two groups set up primarily to serve as liaisons between the public and BT, and offer advice to the company. While two committees seem redundant, TAC was established by the Vermont Public Service Board, the state regulator, and is a standard condition in a certificate of public good (CPG). BT selects its members and its purview includes all of BT's operations and services, including telephone, Internet and cable TV. CAC was set up by the city council and it focuses on the Cable TV service. They were chaired by the same person, Greg Eppler-Wood, who worked previously in community media development in Washington, DC and elsewhere in Vermont. Several members were overlapping as well. According to TAC's 2009 annual report, the Mayor's office halted the channel's termination and requested that TAC "review the situation and report its recommendations to BT on how best to move forward with this channel." TAC's next regularly scheduled meeting, on

May 23, was moved to Contois Auditorium since they anticipated many more attendees than normal. Twenty-nine individuals of the seventy-five in attendance spoke during public comment segment of the meeting. Of the speakers, roughly three-fourths supported keeping the channel on the air – though Eppler-Wood noted at the beginning that it was not a vote and that they wouldn't consider the proportion of comments. TAC recognized that “the public still had a lot to say on this issue,” so it called for interested community members to contact BT.

TAC announced it would hold a special townhall meeting on June 11, 2008. It was dedicated to public comment and aired on the local community access outlet, Channel 17. More than fifty members of the community spoke, with the vast majority speaking in favor of keeping AJE on the line-up. Each speaker was allotted three minutes, resulting in a nearly two and a half meeting.

B. AJE's Spokesmen in Burlington

AJE representatives, then-Managing Director, Tony Burman, and the network's leading American-based correspondent, Josh Rushing, were in attendance. They went to Burlington for basic public relations purposes, to present AJE, answer questions and meet people. The day before the meeting, Burman and Rushing appeared on a live community access channel to talk about AJE and field questions from a live audience and callers. On the show, appropriately called “Town Meeting,” each spoke of their own backgrounds to assuage concerns the channel was a terrorist tool. Burman came to AJE after more than three decades with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), a well-respected public broadcaster. Burman likened AJE to CBC, in that both were serious news organizations. Rushing's own story was at the center of the documentary, *Control Room*, which introduced American viewers to Al Jazeera's operations, personnel and complex relations with the US military. He was an American military spokesman

who worked out of the military's central command headquarters, or CENTCOM, in Qatar, and was a central personality in the film. With his minor southern twang and Burman's Canadian accent – Burman shared that he grew up in nearby Montreal and visited Burlington often – they were quite the opposite of what one would expect from an Al-Qaeda-linked mouthpiece. In making the case that AJE is not anti-American, Rushing pointed out “government buildings in Washington get [AJE] as well... it's probably one of the few things the Pentagon and Burlington share in common.”

At the June 11th meeting, Burman and Rushing also spoke, about two hours in and at the same microphone the other speakers used. While Burman came off as plain spoken, dispassionate, serious and professional, he fit the part of the consummate journalist-turned-executive. Burman described the meeting as a memorable and highly “exhilarating experience.” He said they came to Burlington expecting that the “record was distorted,” and they “could correct it.” For Burman, there were a lot of distortions like the “whole assertion that AJE did not cover the Darfur tragedy aggressively,” which he deemed “untrue and in fact no network” has covered it as extensively. However, he acknowledged, he did not have much to say since most of the distortions “have been in fact refuted by many citizens of Burlington.” He spoke about his own experience and background. AJE, he noted, is the product of senior journalists representing more than forty nationalities. AJE's mission was “a high-minded ambition... to provide viewers a nuanced, a comprehensive, and enlightened view of the world.” He observed that AJE's commitment to world news coverage was the opposite of trends in American news. Overall, Burman's comments projected a seriousness that fit his rich record as a journalist. As one of the faces of AJE in Burlington, it was clear he hoped to transfer his own credentials to AJE, to show it had gravity to it, a kind of credibility that undermined the depiction of AJE as a simple

propaganda outlet. This was a performative display of AJE's trustworthiness.

Rushing, by contrast, was more colorful, letting his personality out; a reliance on charisma and levity next to Burman's soberness. As a professionally trained communications specialist with the Pentagon, he understood the importance of relatability in effective communications. Rushing identified himself as a US Marine who rose from "private to captain," serving as a spokesman. His rhetorical ploy was to relate to the opposition. He said, "I kind of empathize with the Defenders (the conservative organization opposing AJE) because I was there." He related his own initial views and trepidations about working with Al Jazeera reporters during the Iraq war; he was tasked with liaising directly with them and became the face of America on Al Jazeera (Rushing observed on the TV program the irony that he became the face of Al Jazeera in the United States). He said the Defenders Council of Vermont had the "exact same fear that I had in seeing it," because he believed the way it was depicted by Rumsfeld and media monitors. His mind was changed "only by being inside." His perspective was a unique one, he asserted: "I'm the only person in the world to be inside the Pentagon leadership, the Bush administration, because my office was run directly by a Bush administration staffer, and Al Jazeera, at the same time." He seemed to anticipate where doubt may lie in this: who was he and where did he come from? He brandished his conservative credentials: "I'm not from Berkeley and I'm not from Burlington, I'm from Lonestar, Texas." By sharing he was from a small town in Texas, where his father was the fire chief and his mother a city council member, he implied he shared conservative values. At the same time he drew a connection between himself and the opponents, Rushing challenged them, betting they never really watched the programs for themselves. He observed the opponents did not really have content to show as proof. In his closing thought, he, like Burman, also paid tribute to what they witnessed that evening by saying,

“I wish I could go town-to-town in America and enjoy the same kind of discussion... it says something about Burlington that you're having it.” The outpouring of support he witnessed in Burlington would prove something of an anomaly in terms of how local communities received AJE. Just a few months later, during the Democratic National Convention, Rushing and his crew were met by angry protesters in Golden, Colorado as they taped a small forum about the presidential election (see chapter 3).

C. Methods

Through this debate, the public comments, petitions, letters to BT and media, and media chatter, the primary issues emerged. This month-long public deliberation around AJE produced justifications that illustrate some of the underlying public sentiments at play in AJE's circulation in the United States. The content of the debate is worth exploring further, in a discourse analysis.

Discourse analysis refers to an array of approaches that consider how social and cultural perspectives and identities transpire through the use of language. Some proponents of this approach contend it is not a method or procedure with clear steps (Fairclough, 2002, p. 121), while others have worked to outline what a discourse analysis method would entail (Gee, 2010; Wodak and Meyer, 2002). Its use varies greatly among different specialties: linguists hone in on the grammatical elements of language use (Gee, 2010). Sociologists and others employ it to describe content as it is embedded, situated and acted upon, in particular contexts. Unlike content or textual analysis, discourse analysis is useful for giving a deeper account of language and its impact. Critical discourse analysis centers on the role of power and the way that discourse both constitutes and is constituted by structural forces and actors in society. This approach was inspired by the Frankfurt school's critical theory and exhibits the same interest in

ideological subtexts.

Two discourse analysis approaches inform this study. Mediated Discourse Analysis (MDA) (Scollon 1998, 2001; Norris and Jones 2005) is pertinent because while it accounts for the “social and cultural contexts” of texts, it is ultimately interested in “the actions that individuals take with texts and the consequences of these actions” (Baker and Ellece, 2010, p. 70). Its central concepts – mediated action, site of engagement, mediational means, practice, nexus of practice (Scollon, 2001) and community of practice – indicate that it facilitates analysis in the material moments in which discourse produces actual action. This emerged as a response to the difficulty of showing such links through critical discourse analysis (Scollon, 2002, p. 140). I only suggest this approach informs my research, rather than serves as an explicit framework, because my case selection allows an easy bridge between discourse and social action. The citizens of Burlington, VT actively debating whether AJE should be allowed in their community appears to be a clear case in which discourse is translated into very real material, action – letter-writing, speech-making, lobbying, and so on. In the chapter three, on the Burlington Telecom debates, I will integrate concepts integral to mediated discourse analysis, and apply its privileging of social action by studying not just what was said but how citizens of Burlington acted on their views and articulations of the issue at hand.

The case of Burlington Telecom is also well-suited to adaptation of the discourse-historical approach (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001). Scholars in this tradition seek to avoid politicization by triangulating their assessments and emphasizing the argumentative nature of discourse exchange, which in a sense means airing the different sides and exploring their strategies and rationales, as well as their institutional settings. The historical work implied by this approach means going to secondary sources to provide an understanding how the “social and

political fields” came to embed discourses, how they originated and developed (Reisigl and Wodak 2001: 35).

Context is analyzed according to four levels (Wodak, 2002, p. 67) which apply clearly in the analysis of the Burlington debate. As Wodak, outlines, the first level is descriptive: the “immediate, language or text” (2002, p. 67). This requires chronicling what was said by whom and through what media or where in Burlington, and is undertaken below. Next, the intertextuality and interdiscursivity between utterances, texts, and so on, gives shape to the components of discursive argumentation. This requires documenting how arguments were articulated in response to other statements, essentially the iteration of forming, elaborating and modifying publicly expressed views. This is also reviewed below and in the discussion. Third, another level of context includes the “context of situation,” which can refer to social, sociological and institutional settings – often relating to “middle range theories” (Wodak, 2002, p. 67). This is why this chapter gave background on Burlington as an “accomplished place” with a marked political culture of localized, direct democracy, which is related to how Burlington Telecom came to be, why AJE carriage occurred and how a public debate emerged. The final and broader level accounts for the “sociopolitical and historical contexts” that embed and make theoretically relevant the discursive practices in focus, thereby invoking “grand theories” (Wodak, 2002, p. 67). This level is where the bigger ideas of media globalization (flow/counterflow), U.S.-Arab relations (e.g. clash of civilizations and conciliatory potential of media), and the state of American news consumption and televisual distribution are at play. This element is further explored in the discussion.

Specifically about the method employed to generate the categories of argument, I reviewed more than five hours of videos of meetings, press conferences and programs about this

issue, and transcribed each novel point that was raised. I coded the points to develop dozens of categories on each side. When I applied these categories to written texts, complaints to AJE and public writing in local media, blogs and comments on the petition, I was able to develop a better understanding of the connections between arguments and discovered some new ones. Then I reviewed the categories and collapsed similar ones together to develop a shorter list of arguments for and against. Below, I present the emergent categories and provide examples of each. This review of discourses around AJE gives shape to the divergent articulations of a locale seeking to set agreed-upon standards about the presence of a global, Arab-sponsored media outlet on their televisions. Starting with justifications for retaining AJE, below is a review of the main points made during the public debate.

D. Arguments for Carriage

1. Healthy Democracy

The vast majority of communications referenced the values of diversity of views for democracy, calling on the conception of the marketplace of ideas. The first public speaker at TAC's May 27th meeting said "this is an issue of which voices should be heard," it's about "democracy." This idea that pluralism in views is important is deeply entrenched in American political culture, as well as the United States Supreme Court's first amendment constitutional jurisprudence (Hopkins 1996, 40). It is believed to have emerged from the American justice Oliver Wendell Holmes' argument in the dissenting opinion in *Abrams v. United States* (1919): with the "free trade in ideas... the best test of truth is the power of the thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market." Although the term is debated, especially to the extent it has come to be interpreted as supporting economic privatization and de-regulation of media ownership, it is a widely held belief that the exchange of different opinions, facts, and

perspectives strengthens the health of a polity. There is also a general understanding that in considering issues fairly, one should get all sides of the story and it is through considering them that learning and understanding is best accomplished. The norm of media diversity, which is based on a non-economic conception of the “marketplace of ideas” was also a central theme of those supporting AJE’s carriage. It was often coupled with critiques of American news media as being highly concentrated, as well as failing to critically engage the Bush administration, as the ideal of the fourth estate would demand. A speaker at the June townhall pointed out the need for AJE “at a time in our history when a few corporations are consolidating the media because “diversity in media is essential to our democracy.”

This was such a dominant theme that some comments gave specific reasons for the relationship between an open political system and news media. Democracy is strengthened by the unencumbered flow of information some suggested, but also as a check on government power. One undated letter mailed letter to BT called the decision to remove AJE “part of the same dangerous, unthinking view that we must never question what our government tells us. In fact it is our duty to question our government all the time, and if we fail to do that, democracy does not exist.” Some took the meetings themselves as evidence that “democracy might actually be alive in this country,” as one speaker at the June 11th meeting said. Others connected the deliberation around AJE as a unique byproduct of BT’s localism and public political economy.

2. Intercultural Understanding

This notion that different views should be free to circulate with and against each other among the public has several corollary arguments. One is that communication between the Arab world and the United States could improve intercultural relations, especially American understanding of Arabs and the Middle East. Rep. Bill Aswad, a Burlington Democrat in the

state legislature, said AJE provided the opportunity for Americans to learn about Muslims and Islam (Guma, 2008). He said that since Muslims make up a quarter of the world's population, "behooves us to learn more about Muslims." In one letter to the editor, a resident claimed that a source of poor relations between the United States and the Arab region was that "citizens don't know enough about each other" (Baker, 2008). A resident, Richard Weed, said at the June 11, 2008 forum that the country needed to address its "ignorance of the Arabic world" (Zind, 2008). Others linked this to American foreign policy. A letter to BT suggested watching AJE can help us develop a "different foreign policy" to "make more friends around the world" (June 11, 2008). Another letter argued that Americans simply cannot act in isolation from the rest of the world and AQJE can help them "learn to be part of it" as "good global citizen[s]" (June 13, 2008). These arguments resonated with one of AJE's stated mission. It claims to act as a bridge between cultures. Of course, for this to be effective audiences must be open to foreign perspectives – the kinds of outlook many held AJE as representing.

A related discourse tied the opposition to increased prejudice against Arabs and Muslims in the United States. A speaker at the May TAC meeting made this connection: "There is a lot of anti-Arab bias, a lot of anti-Muslim bias, involved in this." Another said she was concerned with the "anti-Muslim sentiment" being expressed around this issue. Several speakers cited various polls showing significant numbers of Americans harbor suspicions towards Arab and Muslim Americans. One participant in the June meeting saw AJE's carriage as a civil rights issue. Someone added there is a "connection between free speech and protecting the rights of Arabs and Muslims" and that validating the reasoning of AJE's opponents was "promoting racism."

3. A Matter of Freedom

Many Burlington residents suggested that merely having the choice to watch the network

was important. They framed it in terms of freedom and argued that the advocates of removal sought to deny that freedom. One resident, James Leas, directly countered the argument that “somehow our freedom is going to be jeopardized if we are permitted the choice to tune in to Al Jazeera.” He contended at the June 11, 2008 public forum that the opposite is true, that restricting public choice is tantamount to stripping away freedom (Zind, 2008). The advisory committees acknowledged this argument, claiming that people have a right to watch what they want in their home.

Another stream of this argumentation responded to claims that carrying the network was undermining “the troops” since Al Jazeera incites violence against them. One signatory of the petition to keep Burlington on air identified himself as a disabled veteran of the Iraq war⁸. An Army veteran spoke in defense of carriage saying that soldiers “fight for our freedoms” including “the right to have different opinions” (Gram, 2008). One speaker at the June gathering argued “we are fighting for these freedoms in other parts of the world” and that compromising them would “would play into the hands of the terrorists.” Another local citizen who came from a long line of military veterans, going back to the American revolution, asked rhetorically, “what were they fighting for” (May 27, 2008).

Many made reference to another freedom, the choice of *not watching* – a freedom those wanting AJE advised the opposition to exercise. In what became one of the rallying cries of AJE’s defenders, one speaker told the opposition “your remote control will allow you not to watch Al-Jazeera.” In other words, the freedom of choice means one can just as easily not tune in. Rep. Aswad said those who were unhappy with AJE “can switch to a different channel” (Guma, 2008). An elderly speaker evoked humor during his May 27 comments: “I believe there is a device that comes with a TV service that allows viewers to change channels.” BT also offers

⁸ <http://www.petitiononline.com/petitions/BTJazera/signatures>

customers the option of blocking particular channels, which was suggested as an option for those BT customers repulsed by AJE. The joint resolution that the committees passed at the end of June suggested this.

Similarly, some felt the decision violated the letter and spirit of the constitution. There was some question as to whether BT as a public agency would be violating any constitutional rights by removing the channel. Another speaker at the June meeting said “you are implicating the first amendment when you are on the public airwaves... I don't think that is a road you want to go down.” Local attorney and activist Sandy Baird, cited a 2006 U.S. District Court case against the Miami-Dade School Board for removing a library book. She argued that as a publicly owned city utility, “it is not a privately held company that can decide for itself what is shown” (Picard, 2008b). Baird and others characterized the possible removal as “government censorship.” The *Burlington Free Press* echoed this in a June 29, 2008 editorial (“Broader view helps in understanding world”). A very common term that appeared was “censorship.” Some observed the ironic parallel between government censorship being proposed in Burlington and actual government control of the media in the Arab countries. One Arab-American resident, Mousa Ishaq, said after the May, 2008 advisory committees meeting that advocates of removal would be in agreement with many Arab leaders: “Al-Jazeera has been kicked out of every single Arab country... Arab governments do not like Al-Jazeera” (Gram, 2008). Several statements from public officials expressed hesitance at the city government deciding what news networks the public could not access – one reason the General Manager and not the city was given authority over channel carriage decisions.

The emphasis on freedom was partially by design. Sandy Baird, a free speech activist and professor at Burlington College, told me she was also active on Middle East peace and

justice campaigns. She and others approached the AJE question as a matter of free speech in order to enable a wider coalition of support. Focusing on Middle Eastern politics would de-limit the umbrella of support. Another interviewee active in the debate said she sensed those who protested BT's decision were more upset that a group was trying to remove a source of information than they were motivated out of particular fanfare for AJE. During the public debate, representatives from different groups, such as the ACLU, National Lawyers Guild, community media and local peace and anti-war groups spoke in favor of carrying AJE.

4. No Worse than Fox News

Why would carrying a biased network matter if some of the news channels are already openly biased, some asked. Several speakers at the public meetings compared AJE with Fox News. Some suggested they were similar, while others argued Fox was a greater “threat to liberty.” Others merely mentioned the news network in terms of the freedom to not watch that all BT subscribers should have. The Army veteran quoted above said, “Personally I don't really like Fox News, so I don't watch that” (Gram, 2008). His insinuation was that AJE can be similarly neglected. This argument rejects the claim that AJE is somehow beyond the pale of acceptable bias in the context of American politics. A related argument was the removal of a disagreeable network would set a dangerous precedent and implied that those opposing Fox News – or Gay, women's or religious channels – could mount similar efforts in the future. One speaker at the May 27 meeting said, “If we get rid of Al Jazeera, let's get rid of everything with an opinion. We'll be left with Nickelodeon.”

5. Don't Bow to Minority Views or Issue Advocacy Groups

“Please don't let special interest groups bully you folks,” one letter-writer pleaded (June 2, 2008). As mentioned above, there was a widely held perception that AJE was being removed

due to the urging of pro-Israel and conservative advocacy groups. One letter to BT called it “disheartening and sad to see the Burlington Telecom bowed to Israel Center in Vermont” (May 13, 2008). A speaker, surely a veteran of many battles with the Center, referred to them as “the Burlington thought police on Middle Eastern affairs.” Others lampooned the Defender’s Council claim to be patriotic, calling it a “version” that was un-American for being closed off to diversity of views. This argument related to several specific discourses. One was that minority views driven by particular agendas sought to block the rest of the community from having access to a particular information source. One speaker demeaned the efforts as “ugly intimidation” (May 27, 2008). A second, very common argument was that AJE and the Arabic service were widely available in Israel, a response to claims the network was deeply anti-Israel. To the claim the channels were anti-American, several speakers and letters pointed out that Qatar was an American ally and that the channel was available in government offices – points re-affirmed by AJE spokespeople who visited Burlington in early June for the second townhall meeting and local media. Speakers suggested that bowing to organized pressures on this issue would encourage others to lobby for dropping other channels.

One speaker in the June townhall directly challenged the opposition on several fronts. He said it “should be a non-issue... but we live in such an age of fear,” suggesting they were driven to “control public information” out of an unfounded and uninformed panic about Al Jazeera. He explained that they failed to substantiate their generalizations about the network. They did not meet their “obligation to present specific details, instances of this horrendous bias they want us to fear... they have not done that yet and my guess is they can’t.” Several of the letters that came into BT also pointed out weaknesses in the opposition’s case, explicitly citing the lack of

evidence. They must have referred to convincing evidence, as they did present proof of their claims, which I review in the next section below.

7. AJE is High Quality News

A letter-writer to BT protested that she subscribe only if BT “continues to offer this informative, thorough and objective network that gives Burlington a true window on the world.” Many speakers and letter-writers heavily praised the channel. A speaker at the June townhall complimented the documentaries in particular because they address topics Americans are not familiar with. He cited as an example, a feature on the challenge of making medical services available in rural areas. Others tuned in to AJE to see what was so objectionable and were surprised by what they saw. One teacher who spoke at the June event said the “the description of Al Jazeera English from its critics is unrecognizable” that it is “akin to BBC World” and could be valuable to her students. At least two college professors in Burlington and one from Middlebury college chimed in through letters and in the townhalls about the channel’s educational value. Some argued AJE was better at covering US foreign policy than were US TV news organizations. AJE is one of the news channels that covered speeches and statements by members of the President’s cabinet, one observed at the May meeting

8. Other Arguments

There were a few other arguments worth mentioning. Some were concerned about procedure. A May 13 letter asked how “BT takes it upon itself to make this decision, without consultation with its paying customer.” One suggested that AJE’s newshour and some programs could still be seen in Burlington, specifically, by RETN, the local educational channel, which aired on Comcast as well. It was carrying AJE’s broadcasts already. Thus it seemed strange that

opposition making BT carriage an issue when its programs could be seen in Burlington through other venues, including online. Separately, others noted that the opposition to AJE had weak evidence or seemed to be acting out of ideology as opposed to credible data about AJE's coverage. At least one commenter felt the argument that AJE would change how viewers think "belittles" their intelligence. In a letter, one resident rejected the assumption that "those who watch it will have their opinions forcibly transformed in some 'anti-American' manner (Baker, 2008). Others pointed out that since it is not illegal to air, and it does not cost BT money, offering it is not problematic. Several letters and public speakers lamented that AJE was not available on BT's basic tier – a position fuelled by the numerous reminders that AJE's signal was being provided to BT without charge.

E. Arguments Against Carriage

Those calling for AJE's removal tended to advance a logic presumed on a 'war on terror' that fell along roughly civilizational lines, a furtherance of the type of worldview inherent to Huntington's thesis (1996) about the fault lines of conflict that shape the world. Rather than undercutting democracy, they held that democratic principles were under attack by radical extremists and authoritarian regimes willing to use violence and propaganda. Al Jazeera, they argued, was the media face of this assault and that this justifies denying the network a presence on BT's lineup. The United States, after all, has a rich history of denying access to foreign propaganda outlets in times of war.

1. AJE is Foreign Propaganda

Complaints focused on AJE as a foreign, government-subsidized network. They opposed this in principle, but also often had very particular critiques of Qatar, where AJE is headquartered and funded from. Some pointed out it is a "hereditary monarchy" that enforces

oppressive religious law. Zeppernick wrote that it was “a dictatorship posing as a monarchy” (2008). A speaker at the June townhall cited media reports that an early Al Jazeera official was linked to Saddam Hussein as further evidence of the network’s propaganda nature.

One resident warned that just because they have the right to broadcast by law and is not necessarily overt propaganda, they should not be invited in to Burlington homes. She warned that their propaganda was a “soft, subtle cultural jihad” (Zind, 2008). Rather than AJE’s content specifically being the problem, one resident charged, the “concern here is the duality of messages” during the June meeting. AJE is different than the Arabic service, but supporting it bolsters the network generally and thereby benefits the Arabic news channel, which is deeply problematic, he alleged. During the June townhall, one community member “this more benign-appearing version is here tonight telling you pay no attention to the man behind the curtain. I'm not buying it.” Several letters and speakers stressed that deception was crucial to the channel’s aims to pursue jihad against the United States, and that the appearance of AJE as straight news is an example of that. One letter warned that some may support AJE because they cannot differentiate it from CNN, and stressed that this is precisely “what Al Jazeera (sic) would have them believe” (May 21, 2008).

2. Al Jazeera Promotes Terrorism

When supporters of AJE claimed opponents provided no evidence to support their charges, they missed many examples. A speaker at the June townhall cited a study by Leeds university scholars showing that Al Jazeera viewership was linked to radicalization of British Muslim youth and therefore home-grown acts of terrorism. He further quoted a critical essay in that ran in *Foreign Policy*. The writer “determined that although Al Jazeera does not support terrorism, it makes little attempt to disassociate themselves from those who do.” For example,

AJ depicts the Taliban as underdog champions of resistance against an imperialistic United States. A letter-writer referred to an Accuracy in Media report asserting that Al Jazeera was used to recruit terrorists who go on to “kill our soldiers” (May 21, 2008). This reflected a particular “ideology” that shows an “intent to kill the infidel... that is, anyone who is not a practicing Muslim.”

The overall effects of this propaganda would be deleterious for the health of American democracy. Paul Laffal and Jeffrey Kaufman, local residents and members of the Israel Center of Vermont, suggested that Al Jazeera’s “hate speech insidiously presented as news serves only to undermine the basic tenets of democracy” (Picard, 2008). Some feared that AJE could promote the radicalization of Arab and Muslim youth, as the study from Leeds cited above found with British Muslims.

3. AJE is Anti-American

One of the predominant themes of the protests against AJE is that the entire Al Jazeera brand is hostile to the United States. Advocates for removal claimed Al Jazeera called for the killing of Americans. Zeppernick wrote that the Arab service’s content directly motivated people to kill American soldiers; he referred to anecdotes of suicide bombers moved by what they saw on the network⁹. He considered that even if “one American troop is killed by someone who was enticed by what they watched on Al-Jazeera, then that is one too many” (2008). This line of reasoning suggests that supporting American troops necessitates opposing the channel’s inclusion on BT’s lineup. This struck a deep chord with several, including City Councilor Paul Decelles, who lost a friend in Iraq. He said he was “insulted” and “disgusted” and would refuse to subscribe to “as long as Al-Jazeera is there” (Gram, 2008).

⁹ I have not been able to verify this, but will try.

4. *AJE is anti-Israel*

The Israel Center of Vermont urged its supporters to write letters of support to BT when it was considering ending AJE's presence on the system. A local rabbi wrote on his temple's website that the network was "nothing more than a political and religious voice piece of radical Moslems" (Picard, 2008b). He opposed silencing opinions, he wrote, but the cable system should not allow channels that "incite civil unrest or religious prejudice." Incitement, it should be noted, is one of the well-known exceptions to first amendment free speech protections. The tenor of public comments is captured in letters to the advisory oversight committees. The advisory committees mentioned in the joint resolution that they received the message that AJE promotes anti-Semitism and the destruction of the State of Israel.

5. *Against BT's Interests*

Some argued that carrying AJE goes against BT's interests and is bad for the company's business interests – calling into mind a more economically-minded reading of the free marketplace of ideas. Steve Flemer, a resident, articulated this most forcefully in a letter published on the *Burlington Free Press* blog (2008). He wrote that a "fledgling city-owned outfit" that struggles with low customer subscriptions should "provide a varied cable menu without having to feel like they needed to make potentially self-harming political statements." He feels this endangers the entire enterprise, suggesting they would be better off avoiding controversy. He questions whether "our priority [is] to make a political statement which is deemed offensive by a large swath of the city's potential cable subscribers or do we want to shepherd Burlington Telecom into a successful example of a locally-controlled cable provider?" He ends the letter by claiming that as much as he would like to support BT, he will not subscribe because does not wish to support the political act of carrying AJE. Letter-writers repeated this

argument, claiming it made no sense from a “marketing standpoint,” because alienating potential subscribers was going to hurt business.

Others were fundamentally opposed to the city “running a business,” as one letter put forward (May 21, 2008). Some opponents said that if BT were a private company they would not take an issue with AJE carriage. During the June townhall, Kaufman said that if BT was private, he “wouldn't be here tonight,” but as a city project, “Burlington taxpayers are supporting the parent company.” In other words, BT’s decision does not just have commercial implications, but reflects actual financial arrangements between the taxpayers and the network that he sees as Al-Qaeda’s mouthpiece.

6. Not a Free Speech Matter

Critics of BT’s provision of AJE argued against the idea that free speech was at issue. Zeppernick wrote in an op-ed that there is a difference between “free speech” and the right to a “podium provided or paid for by others” (2008). In other words, if BT dropped AJE, it would not infringe on some free speech right that AJE possessed since this is not a total ban. It could, for instance, still be seen online using BT’s fiber optic cables. A city councilman likened AJE’s exclusion to a corner store that stops selling one of the newspapers. This does not negate freedom of the press, but is a simple commercial decision. Some agreed that it was a free speech issue, but justified the violation. During the May 27 meeting, a self-described veteran of the 1960s said he “learned the value of reasonable limitations” on free speech, which can be expected since “we are a nation at war.”

Some felt that AJE was exploiting American freedom to destroy it. Marc Abrahams, a local resident, said referring to AJE’s sponsors, “They laugh at us, knowing that our blind, sheepish bleatings about ‘freedom’ will ‘freedom’ us right into totalitarianism” (Gram 2008).

On the issue of freedom, others took a different argumentative approach. One speaker at the May 27 meeting said that as a country at war, freedoms could be limited and that, after all, they were originally intended for Americans, not foreign propaganda outlets. Another speaker claimed the founders did not intend these rights to apply to foreigners. After all, as purveyors of terrorism, their aim is to undermine freedom. A speaker at the May 27 meeting applauded BT's decision because the channel, he claimed, was proud to show the beheading of journalist Daniel Pearl, "who fought for free speech." Another considered AJE a "subtle means towards long-term undermining of what we've come to take for granted" – the freedoms that make the country exceptional. Someone else speaking at that meeting called AL Jazeera "dangerously intolerant" and an "affront to... pluralistic communities."

7. Procedural

Though a less direct form of opposition, many pinpointed the process as the issue. Some did so as points of order while others sought it as a basis for nullifying the carriage agreement. City Council member Andy Montroll acknowledged that the public is in favor of disallowing BT's removal of the network, but argued there needs to be better controls in place – perhaps a group of unelected people or outside groups to determine the channel offerings. From a different purely oppositional position, Zeppernick, of the Defenders Council of Vermont, protested that "we haven't been able to find a very detailed and proper framework – and how these decisions are made, who makes them [in] what types of time frames" (Potter, 2008). One critic of AJE's carriage, Jeffrey Kaufman, chronicled a list of procedural shortcomings he felt were designed to make the commissions' decisions foregone conclusions – by marginalizing the opposition and their ability to impact the outcome. The townhall meetings were not well-advertised, there was not clarity about the standards by which the decision would be made, and meeting attendees were

not told how much time they would have to speak and were denied sufficient speaking time, he contends (Interview, anti-AJE activist, 2012).

Kaufman made one main procedural point at the June meeting, saying the whole debate was inappropriate because “we have a carriage policy and a decision by GM Chris Burns based on that policy to discontinue Al Jazeera.” Leaders of the opposition to AJE disagreed with the proceedings because they felt that the same policy – that BT’s GM decides channel carriage arrangements – gave way both to the initial AJE deal, as well as Burns’ decision. They felt this was consistent application of policy and that these proceedings were *ad hoc* and not based in pre-set policies.

F. Discussion and the Outcome

Applying Wodak’s level of discourse analysis focused on intertextuality and interdiscursivity, we can see the benefit of iteration in public deliberation. Over the many weeks of exchange, the central issues became better elaborated as the circularity of talking and listening seemed to improve each side’s argumentation and deployment of facts or quasi-facts (as often was the case). This is, however, only partially related to the actual outcome, which implicates more than the pure reason of the public sphere, even as the townhall process is very close to the democratic ideal. Of course, politics mattered fundamentally – especially with the Mayor and city leaders being Progressive Party members and the likelihood that the city’s progressives largely came down on the side of keeping AJE. Since the question was not resolved by direct vote but rather by the city’s political leadership, albeit bolstered by the recommendations of the joint advisory committees, the point that politics was at play is undeniable. Still, empirically, the documented voices that publicly spoke in favor of carriage outnumbered those against, making consideration of this question purely speculative. Also, the extent of publicity – or the public

nature of this decision – simply does not occur in private sector cable decision-making, so we can conclude that there was a significant opportunity for public input to determine the final decision.

Reading the letters and texts produced over time showed some signs of greater factuality and more clear engagement with other positions. Though it was a small error, some who referred to AJE as Al Jazeera International, its pre-launch name, started calling it by its correct name. Among opponents, they stopped simply assuming AJE was the English translation of the Arab channel, and focused more on the importance of the institutional relationship between the two. This marked a greater sophistication. Despite this, inaccuracies on both sides proved robust to some degree. Supporters of AJE maintained frequently that Al Jazeera is the most watched news channel in Israel, for instance, although this is difficult to prove. Another inter-textual element was that the conversation moved from simply being about Al Jazeera into more sophisticated policy questions about what is the proper procedure for making carriage decisions. This led to several months of further debate after the AJE question was resolved.

One very interesting trend in this debate was that it generated agreed upon public facts. While they became mutually asserted, providing some common ground for discussion, they were interpreted in completely contradictory ways. Both sides stressed often that Burlington was one of the only cities in the country AJE was available in via television. For supporters of AJE, this was a point of pride that showed the exceptional qualities, such as tolerance to different views, that defined Burlington. At the May 27 meeting, one speaker took pride in AJE's presence as showing the city stands for freedom. An opponent said that BT's decision was the same one "all of America made except for a small town in Ohio" (a reference to Toledo). Opponents took this as a sign of the impropriety of AJE carriage. If so few communities welcomed it, they reasoned,

something must be wrong with the channel. Similarly, supporters of AJE took the fact that Arab states banned Al Jazeera as evidence it was a positive force for reform in the region. One opponent cited this as demonstrating the network was a threat. Another example of factual agreement with interpretive discrepancy was that Qatar sponsored the channel. Those campaigning to keep AJE on stressed Qatar was an American ally while the other sides dismissed it as an authoritarian state sympathetic to radical Muslim movements. Occasionally, they agreed frequently on incorrect facts. There was an often-stated view that AJE reflected Arab and Muslim perspectives, which of course was either championed or vilified depending on who was speaking. However, as the content analysis in chapter two shows, it does not focus primarily on the Middle East and North Africa. Either way, this shows the value of iterative public deliberation in establish facts. Even if some were not actually true, over time the differences became more about interpretation and analysis of facts, and served as a sort of common ground. This is particularly at a time when many scholars and observers bemoan its decline in American public life.

At TAC's regularly scheduled meeting held on June 24th, after the two meetings, the committees re-convened and deliberated their final recommendation. They issued a joint resolution (APPENDIX A) calling to keep AJE on BT's channel list. The resolution acknowledged arguments on both sides and adjudicated between them. As a final text, it reflected the productive inter-textuality of the debate. They concluded that arguments that the station's "content is objectionable in that it supports terrorism, anti-Semitism and promotes the destruction of the State of Israel" were weak since they were "based on secondary sources." Critics disputed this, contending they provided actual footage of Al Jazeera Arabic content. The bodies seemed to want evidence that AJE's broadcasting was problematic. The Committees

cited the dearth of “consistent or widespread agreement or evidence from respected sources” as a reason for rejecting these claims. The resolution recommended continued carriage while admitting some of AJE’s faults. AJE, the resolution suggests, is a media organ financed by the Emir of Qatar, which the resolution says is an ally of the U.S., but is “a constitutional monarchy that applies Islamic law and is perceived by many as being restrictive of human rights.” The advisory bodies stated they cannot determine whether these particular characteristics of Qatar have any bearing on the content of AJE. The resolution was not based on a calculation of the consequences for BT’s revenues since advocates from both sides of the debate threatened to drop their BT subscriptions. The net effect was therefore impossible to predict. On balance, the bodies heard more from those wanting to keep AJE on BT. However, opponents of AJE feel the process and final analysis was stacked against them. They protest that they were not even sure if public comment would be allowed before the meetings even as late as the day before. Also, they point out the criteria for the advisory opinion were not well-articulated beforehand. The resolution, for example, references a “compelling preponderance” of support for keeping AJE and reinforces the principle of freedom of expression. Some who worked to keep AJE off of BT argued that there was not clarity as to whether this preponderance came from Burlington residents. That same uncertainty would also apply to those opposing AJE as well, however.

BT, with Mayor Kiss’s order, maintained AJE’s carriage. BT signed a new contract to carry in July, 2008. Naturally, AJE welcomed the decision. Washington Bureau Chief Will Stebbins said, “We’re overjoyed” and compared it to the movie ‘Inherit the Wind,’ but “with Clarence Darrow winning this time” (Briggs, 2008b). The advocates for removing AJE were disappointed and re-mobilized by proposing the question put to a city-wide referendum. In a July 7th, 2008, press conference, Zeppernick, joined by city councilor Paul Decelles, announced

the launch of a “citizen’s initiative” petitioning for a referendum question on the ballot of the next general election. They viewed BTAC’s hearing process as “faulty,” which meant that the “people have not been heard from.” Zeppernick observed that only 1 in 200 Burlington citizens stated their views. They contended that the TAC/BCAC recommendation was invalid because they were contrary to BT carriage policy and procedure since the GM was empowered to make carriage decisions unilaterally – which was why the channel was picked up in the first place. They also felt that CAC and TAC members were not impartial but had articulated publicly positions receptive to AJE. Nevertheless, the city council did not approve the initiative and the referendum never made the ballot. One activist said that city council did not want to touch the issue, perhaps finding it too controversial.

Did the outcome cost BT subscribers? In the city’s 2009 annual report, it claims that by “the end of calendar year 2008, approximately 4300 customers were hooked up to BT’s all-fiber network with an average of 50-70 new installations per week.” At the end of 2007, it had approximately 2500 customers and claimed the same rate of weekly installations. For the fiscal year after the debate, 2009, the city reported an 11.5% growth in customer accounts. There is no evidence that BT suffered a general loss in subscribers as a result of the AJE debate. However, by 2012, it was still not the dominant provider. BT services less than 25% of the Burlington homes it passed (Interview, Burlington Telecom staffer, 2012). It is not impossible that BT could have more subscribers if it never carried AJE, but this is not possible to demonstrate.

V. APPLYING THE FRAMEWORK

Al Jazeera, English gained carriage on Burlington Telecom and survived efforts to

remove it as the result of several factors: Burlington's culture of public deliberation, BT's public political economy, AJE's agency and the greater socio-political context. Burlington's political culture offers one explanation for how AJE came to be offered in the city. The city has an idiosyncratic political orientation to the left, a pride in political independence, and tradition of local deliberation, participation and business that made the decision to carry more likely. Many acknowledged that Burlington stands for principles that fundamentally run against the idea of taking AJE off the menu – diversity of opinions, tolerance and openness to dissent. After being challenged by some, public debate through local committees allowed for some form of resolution – even if many opponents were not pleased with the process or outcome. This period of deliberation was itself a reflection of a local decision-making indicative of the New England townhall meeting, as well as a leftist politics shared by other college towns. In other words, Burlington is not the only place such local deliberation could happen in the United States. However, such debates have not taken place in other cities with similar political culture traditions or orientations. Local political culture is therefore necessary but not sufficient.

Another necessary factor was BT's nature as a public enterprise, a long-term project aimed at development free from the control of the orthodox cable industry. As a taxpayer-supported entity, its programming decisions, unlike those of private sector telecommunication companies, could be subject to public citizen scrutiny. Viewers could mobilize as citizens to make demands on a shared institution rather than need to attempt to organize consumer pressures in the case of a private company. The public nature of BT's political economy is therefore a partial explanation, and likely a prominent one given that Comcast, a competitor, has not made AJE available in Burlington or in similarly ideologically-constituted cities. Still, carrying AJE was made possible by the technological affordances of fiber optic cable – a surplus of free

channels to fill meant that BT was initially open to carrying any free channels. This incidentally was a function of AJE's political economy. The network's funding from Qatar's emir means it was able to seek carriage without seeking excessive fees. However, political economy of BT alone is not sufficient as an explanation. More than eighty other municipalities in places like Lafayette, LA, Chattanooga, TN, Bristol, VA and elsewhere have public local systems offering cable TV services, but none carry AJE. Likely, it is the combination of the political culture and leftist politics with the political economy.

AJE's agency was also a factor, albeit one likely less important than the two reviewed above. Deploying public spokespeople to AJE helped assuage some concerns about a hidden agenda and let AJE define itself against what it saw as blatant mischaracterizations. The presence of AJE representatives was an important example of AJE agency to effectuate greater carriage in the United States. The extent to which it impacted the decision ultimately is difficult to gauge. Even before they arrived in early June, the community's sentiment that was expressed publicly seemed to prefer reversing BT's decision to stop carrying the channel. No one I spoke with in Burlington claimed their appearance decidedly changed the outcome. That is may be more about the inevitability of the decision being overturned and less a statement on their efficacy.

The national political context was highly pertinent; though this proved less so than the local one as analyzed in the political culture factor discussion above. The debate about AJE reflects larger "war on terror" concerns. Both sides referenced the country's wars frequently. Within the limits of Burlington's leftist leanings, one can see an ideological divide between those who take the United States to be a nation under threat from foreign enemies versus those who see it as a country that should engage with the world on dialogic terms. The supporters of AJE felt it

offered a chance for dialogue and mutual learning. The advocates of removal saw it as a threatening propaganda mouthpiece that incites hatred of the United States and Israel. One side saw the ability to watch AJE as a freedom of choice that furthers a healthy marketplace of ideas, while the others suggested that a foreign media outlet has no right to carriage even in an ostensibly liberal media system and that AJE's carriage would be a victory for those aiming to harm the country. Supporters of AJE argued it was no worse than other biased news sources and that people were wise enough not to be brainwashed. Opponents charged the network with being beyond the pale, and felt that citizens should have more control over channel decisions so that they could keep out hostile content from the collective channel lineup. The political context eventually gave way to a more specific discussion about how decisions about content available on a municipal system should be made, leading to a refinement of prior policies. While BT has a commercial interest in tightly controlling such decisions – a competitive company cannot make such decisions by public committee – the debate seemed to solidify and give further articulation to the company's public mandate and what that means for operations.

Overall, these factors gave way to a productive tension between AJE's supporters and the opposition, generating a public stream of ideas, perceptions and interactions that outline the distributional-ideational map – the discourses that run in support or against AJE's market entry. If the public justifications that emerged in Burlington are indicative of a potential discursive divide around AJE nationally, we can get a better sense of the ideational obstacles to AJE's market entry. Many of these concerns are pre-reception and based on several unquestioned assumptions. However, without a political economy that invites public deliberation over carriage, these discourses around AJE are mostly latent, and will not be adjudicated in public forums.

With private sector political economy, cable companies are effectively institutional gatekeepers, and will make the decision about carriage – framed as the availability of public information in Burlington – without the slightest transparency or process of public input. The kind of pressure campaign directed at Burns before his decision to drop AJE was brought to light only because of BT’s public mandate. That is not to suggest this happens in each community, and it likely does not since AJE is not available. However, this gives a glimpse of the kind of controversy cable operators would be keen to avoid. There were some preemptive pressure campaigns. Accuracy in Media, for example, sent letters warning against carrying AJE to cable carriers around the country. The CEO of Buckeye cable cited the letter as motivating him to carry the channel because he was so offended by the letter’s content. This was a rather idiosyncratic response, probably made feasible since the company is a family operation, rather than accountable to stakeholders, which would introduce extra risk aversion.

Applying the lesson of Burlington to the rest of the country, we can see that without public mobilizations around the issue of carriage, or substantial change in demand for AJE, the *status quo* of non-carriage will likely remain. Cable companies will safely act out of risk avoidance – especially without a strong possibility of profitability – and let presumptions about audience tastes determine carriage decisions. AJE’s potential for counter-hegemonic effects or intercultural bridge-building is limited by the challenges of widespread distribution in the United States. However, this debate in AJE shows that latent discourses can be activated to demand AJE. There is some basis among some ideological and identity groups, portending the possibility of future distribution.

After the Burlington, VT debate AJE gained access to a few major markets, including Washington DC via the MhZ deal, as covered in chapter three. However, as of 2012, AJE did

not sign any major direct distribution deals with any of the major American cable companies.

This was true even after AJE's reputation in the United States changed dramatically following its coverage of the Arab uprisings starting in late December, 2010. Its reporting in Egypt in particular led many to speculate whether "Al Jazeera's Moment" had finally arrived. The next chapter examines this closer.

Chapter 5

Al Jazeera's Moment? Elite Discourse, Public Sentiments and Distribution

I. INTRODUCTION

Less than three years following the Burlington debate, its reporting of events in the Middle East changed the channel's standing in the United States, particularly among political elite. The Arab Spring, or the series of popular uprisings that began in Tunisia in December, 2010, proved to be the first opportunity for Al Jazeera English to attract wide attention in the United States. This transformation sheds light on which factors matter most and further conveys just how limited are the prospects for wide traditional TV distribution. In its coverage of 2011's biggest news story – the mass insurrections of Arab publics against long-time rulers – AJE capitalized on its physical proximity, political and cultural expertise, access and most importantly the rich resources at its disposal. AJE's reporting was some of the most riveting, clearly surpassing other international TV news media. Many Americans were aware of this. During the start of the Egyptian revolution against authoritarian figurehead Hosni Mubarak in late January, 2011, Americans turned to AJE in record numbers for what would be one the biggest developments of the Arab Spring. Attentive Americans, policymakers and elite regarded AJE's coverage as superior, especially in relation to American news media's, which was often behind, limited in depth and filled with American-centric punditry. In 2012, judges for the prestigious Peabody Awards recognized AJE's reporting, saying its "on-the-ground reporting was thorough, enterprising and brave," making the channel a first time recipient (McNally, 2012).

As AJE became a go-to source for subsequent rebellions in Libya and Syria, the channel's brand underwent a major transformation, altering the larger political context of its distribution efforts. AJE was increasingly discussed in the United States in terms of a positive "Arab Spring" frame, as opposed to the negative associations of the "war on terror" frame that lingered from the time of the Bush administration. The perceptions of AJE most vibrant among AJE's opponents in Burlington lost currency as AJE won accolades from the highest quarters of American political elite. No longer was the channel so easily painted as a threat, but it had become a resource and proponent for reform movements that were largely well-received among American policy thinkers. The Arab Spring inspired a "Demand Al Jazeera" campaign that generated 100,000 letters to cable companies. However, as of early 2012, AJE still had no major cable or satellite distribution deals to show for its efforts. This chapter gauges the extent to which the change in the larger political context and the discourse around AJE reflected in American political culture at the level of the public, or the masses of cable and satellite customers. AJE embarked on its most aggressive push for carriage in the United States – the greatest deployment of AJE attention and resources for wider American carriage. These contrasting forces illustrate what is a natural limit on AJE's potential audience.

This chapter focuses on the reputational gains AJE derived from its Egypt coverage and what it means for the larger research question. First, there is an overview of the Arab Spring with an explanation of why the Egypt story was of central importance, justifying its position as the revolution of focus in this chapter. Then, there is a closer look at how AJE covered the Egypt story, and how American elite discourse changed as a result. This chapter asks whether AJE's image changed among the American public and what accounts for continued opposition to AJE among some Americans. Finally, the conclusion applies insights from the Arab Spring era

to the factors of this study's analytical framework. This brings into sharper focus the reasons for AJE's absence from American TVs and calls into question the prospects of wide carriage.

A. The Arab Spring

Egypt's uprising was just one of several that altered the Arab political map, but it did more than any other to change perceptions and inspire praise of AJE among many in the United States. For one thing, the Egyptian revolt generated more news coverage and global popular attention than did the others. Tunisia's preceding revolution was a more complete revolution because the previous regime was effectively removed and a newer political order came into being. Whereas in Egypt, the military, led by many of the regime's remnants, remained a dominant political actor. However, being first and having excluded many foreign journalists, Tunisia's story was slower to get news organizations' attention. Also, the protests began away from the main cities, in smaller towns before spreading to the capital, Tunis. Egypt's revolution followed soon after Tunisians successfully overthrew Zinedine Ben-Ali, which drew international attention to the region. Egypt produced the right mix of images, was set in the most visible locations – being centered in Cairo – and had foreign news journalists already there. Also, as a larger country renowned as a site in ancient history, taught in every nation's school books, it was bound to seize public attention. There are other reasons AJE in particular captured the Egyptian story so effectively. But first, it is useful to review why the other cases of the Arab Spring were less important for AJE's reputation in the United States.

The Libyan revolution produced some highly memorable moments and iconic images, from Benghazi's protesters pelting a screen of projected video of Gaddafi with their shoes, to the soon-deposed leader's bizarre public appearances. The many acts of bravery by casually dressed teenagers wielding weaponry in desert combat made for powerful imagery. However, it lacked

the simplicity of a popular uprising as it came to resemble a civil war with regional powers playing roles. It departed from the revolutionary narrative by involving NATO bombing and Turkey and Qatar's interventions – the latter of which, by the way, renewed a current of criticism that the Al Jazeera channels were in the service of Qatari foreign policy. Many of AJE's reporters were embedded with rebels, for example, though some also reported from the capital Tripoli and covered the regime's many press briefings. Overall, as a more complicated story with a longer timeline, it captured popular attention in the United States less than did Egypt. Still, AJE garnered attention for some of its coverage. Notably, it was the first news channel to broadcast images of deposed leader Muammar Gaddafi's corpse. There is one key issue with the AJE's Libya coverage that dampened how it was perceived among some observers, and it was not inherent to the content itself. Given Qatar's active foreign policy on the Libya issue, which included sending arms and forces to back the rebels, as well as diplomatic support, AJE's reportage was presumed by many to be biased, particularly by those critical of Qatar's role and the NATO intervention. This was not a substantial number of Americans, given Gaddafi's long-time vilification, but it did trouble some AJE viewers. Whether this perception was valid or not is beyond the scope of this study since it does not appear impact the distribution question. It is worth observing though that it was with the Libya story that Senator John McCain's approval of AJE became most enthusiastic. He was a vocal proponent of intervention of Libya, and expressed his approval of AJE most fervently regarding its Libya work. AJE's critical coverage of the Libyan leader, as with Qatari foreign policy, dovetailed with the American position to a considerable degree, in stark contrast with the Arabic news service's reporting in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The uprising in Yemen also ultimately led to the end of a long-time head of state, but

only after many months of protests, political intrigue by regional powers and a failed assassination attempt. In the end, the former president Ali Abdullah Saleh's regime remained firmly in place, even if he was not formally retained as figurehead. While the protesters were no less courageous or just in their cause than any of the others, the Yemen story was not a prime-time news event like Egypt's. It lacked the quick turn of events, public familiarity, foreign news presence and flows of imagery that made the Egyptian revolution so visible.

The Bahrain and Syria uprisings did not bring about changes in their heads of state as of July, 2012, which likely explains why they could not be stories on the scale of Egypt. These stories lacked the simple narrative of mass public protestors turning out for street demonstrations to overturn the leader. They also took place over many months, thereby decreasing their attraction as hot news stories, even though the Syria question was debated in the United Nations Security Council, involving American, Russian and Chinese interests – which elevated its newsworthiness.

The Bahrain and Syria cases proved challenging for the network. Critics considered AJE's coverage of them as contradictory, suggesting the Qatari regime's editorial influence, as was the case with the Libya coverage. In the Bahrain protests, the Gulf Cooperation Council, which includes Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the UAE and others, came to the defense of the Bahraini rulers. Qatar offered aid to its neighboring government against the demands of protesters, many of whom belong to the majority Shia sect. Bahrain's rulers are Sunni, an identity shared with the GCC's ruling families. They tend to see the large Shia populations in their region as sources of Iranian influence and therefore threats to the regional order. Some charge that AJE did not cover Bahrain adequately and geo-political sectarian competition explains why. AJE initially cited the Bahraini government's press restrictions as one reason it was under-reporting the protests there.

Al Jazeera reporters were not allowed in the country. Still, AJE reporters managed to get in and they produced a powerful documentary, “Shouting in the Dark,” about the struggle in Bahrain. It gained wide attention, won awards and angered Bahrain’s rulers. While the video remained online, AJE cancelled scheduled replays via broadcast, likely as a result of Bahrain’s official protests.

In Syria, predominately Sunni demonstrators and insurgents are rebelling against a minority regime led by members of the Alawi sect, which is often understood as a Shia offshoot. Qatari foreign policy was to back the uprising quite openly. AJE has been covering the Syrian uprising quite aggressively and using social media, activist and YouTube content to compensate for exclusions and press controls by the Al-Assad regime. Some suggest that there is a disparity in how much coverage the Syrian and Bahraini cases got from AJE and that this is explained by Qatari foreign policy. It was odd that AJE proffered Bahrain’s ban on news reporters as an explanation for the lack of reportage, yet in Syria activist and YouTube content supplemented the silencing by use of the same controls. Still, one could point to many reports on Bahraini activist detention (“Bahrain activist Rajab released on bail,” May 28, 2012), press curtailments (“Bahrain bans main opposition newspaper,” April 3, 2011) and hunger strikes (“Bahrain says hunger striker in ‘good health’,” April 25, 2012) to show dissent was far from silenced. Many qualify this criticism by pointing out the gap is wider on the Arab news channel than the English one. Also, this accusation does not account for the “Shouting in the Dark” documentary.

Each uprising is certainly unique and trying to explain differences in coverage and analyze the merits of bias claims is not instructive for purposes of the study unless they come to bear on the question of distribution. While all of the revolts were about replacing or deeply reforming entrenched, autocratic regimes, they varied in terms of: the overlap with sectarianism;

militarization or the use of violence by rebels; the role of social media and the Internet by activists and regimes; the degree of external intervention; and, relatedly, how much they captured the world’s attention. For the story of Al Jazeera English in the United States, the center-piece of the new popularity around the channel’s Arab Spring reporting was the Egyptian revolution. After Mubarak’s fall, American viewers, fans and commentators began suggesting that “Al Jazeera’s Moment” arrived. This was an important discursive shift, marking a key juncture in Al Jazeera English’s efforts to gain wider distribution in the United States. Inconsistencies in coverage as outlined above did not impact the primary question in this study.

There is another basis for centering the Egyptian revolution in the evolution of AJE’s image in the United States. Website traffic data provided by AJE shows that the Egyptian story was a leading attraction in 2011 for web visitors in general, as well as Americans (Chart 5.1).

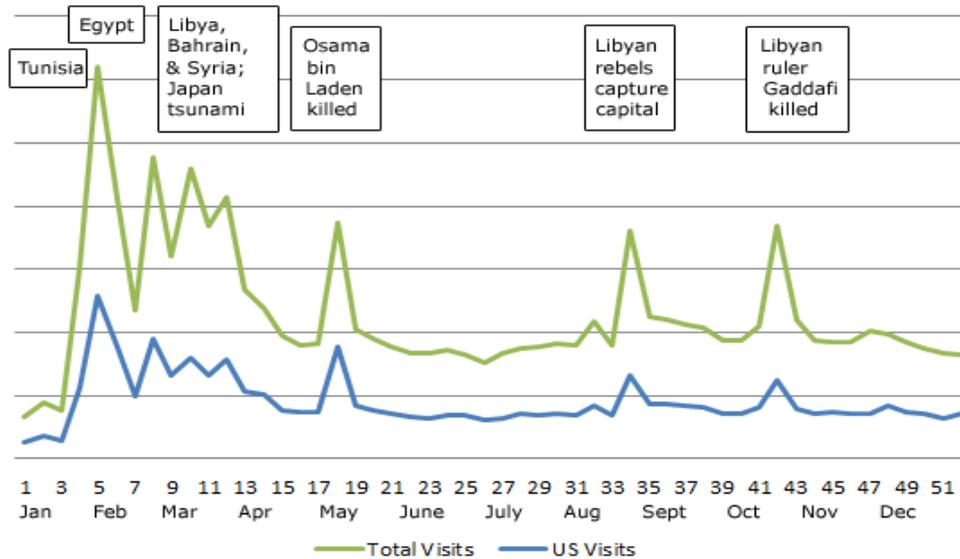


Chart 5.1 Weekly AJE website visits, 2011

The website figures show large traffic increases for other news stories, including the Japan earthquake, which actually was one of the single busiest days for the website that year. The Osama bin Laden assassination was another key driver of news, as were various milestones in

the Libyan revolution. None of these accounted for as much traffic as did the Egyptian story for Americans and global visitors. Americans, it should be noted, comprised 40% of all AJE website users that year, evincing the existence – but not true scale – of an American market for AJE.

II. REPORTING REVOLUTION

During the 2011 uprising in Egypt, which began with planned protests on January 25th, Al Jazeera English (AJE) emerged as the leading English language outlet for news about the mass mobilizations and protest encampment in a central Cairene rotunda, Tahrir Square. AJE undoubtedly served as an important source for English language publics and other media seeking information and analysis. The reason for AJE’s success was its proximity to the story, which was bolstered by its extensive reporting presence there, access to activists, and the network’s willingness to retransmit and base stories on “citizen journalism” – which calls up the notion of “networked journalism,” or news-gathering practices that involve online integration, info-sharing and communication between professional journalists, web-based activists and members of the public producing content. Using mobile phone lines, flip cameras, videos uploaded to YouTube and social media content (e.g. Facebook and Twitter) that circumvented the Egyptian information blockade, AJE became a primary conduit for Egyptian activists to spread their messages and counter-propaganda campaigns to English-speaking audiences. This proved especially potent for shaping public reactions in countries where the governments were close allies of the Egyptian regime. A primary avenue for this was news media’s re-transmission and re-circulation of social media content. The online relations between AJE staff and Egyptian

activists and citizen journalists undoubtedly helped AJE’s reporting advantage, but reporters, editors, producers and the director of news all had an intimate familiarity with Egypt that preceded social media.

A. Covering the Egyptian Revolution

AJE’s coverage of Egypt was intense, as shown by the frequency of its reporting. In the first 26 days of the Egyptian revolution, AJE posted 211 YouTube videos, between January 25 and February 20,

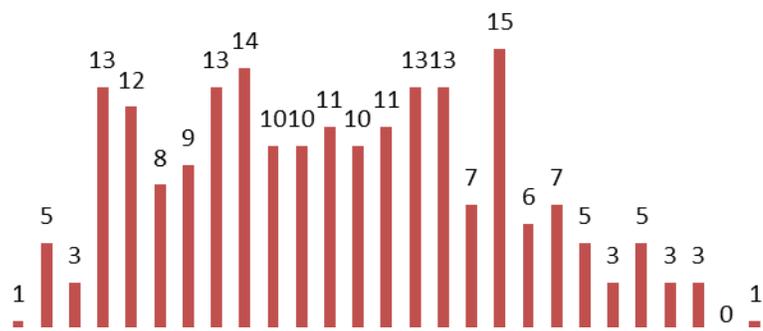


Chart 5.2 Reports on Egypt per Day, January – February, 2011

2011 about events in Egypt (Chart 5.2). The videos were an array of formats – feature programs, raw footage, news packages, and spot reports, photo slideshows or interviews. Features are longer programs that are in-depth and usually mix pre-produced packages and commentators. Raw footage included unedited video that had no clear story or voiceover narration. News packages are traditional news pieces that have a clear focus, a voiceover and an assemblage of related images and interviews. Spot reporting is on location reports filed by correspondents from scenes of action and are normally driven by in-studio presenter questioning. Photo slideshows are also uploaded to YouTube, these were just series of stills, and combined AJE, user-generated and wire service photos. Finally, interviews were videos that only involved exchanges between a reporter or presenter and a guest in studio or participant on the street.

The YouTube videos did not include most of the rolling coverage from the studio, the interviews with pundits and other “breaking news” filler intended to keep audiences engaged until more news reports arrived. Such commentary and analysis is important for a channel’s

coverage, particularly if the pundits are competent specialists rather than simply TV-friendly personalities lacking in-depth knowledge. AJE showed a preference for actual expertise and gave them ample time to respond to questions, undoubtedly further distinction with American news outlets that too often relied on those with questionable credentials who conversed in rapid-fire exchanges. This type of in-studio content also takes up a great deal of broadcast time. Ultimately, it is not part of the newsgathering production under consideration here since it does not reflect on the question of type of journalism. Nevertheless, chart 5.1 shows a great deal of attention devoted to the story. On the 11th of February, the day Mubarak resigned, AJE posted 15 videos. While it took AJE a few days after the surprising start of the revolt on January 25th to fully mobilize its reporting, the day after, it produced 5 videos, several of which were full packages. By the 28th, the “Friday of Anger” in which citizens turned out *en masse*, AJE was in full gear, turning out 13 videos. As shown in 5.1, the website visit data, the Egyptian story brought significant American attention and interest. Below I examine broadly two explanations for AJE’s Egypt coverage being attractive. The first looks at the channel’s reporting outlays there, and specifically its reporters’ intimate knowledge of Egypt. A second, and indeed secondary, explanation, relates to how AJE effectively managed social media and other online data by practicing “networked journalism.” This supplemented coverage driven by traditional facets of journalistic practice.

i. *Proximity to the Story*

There are vitally important, but facially obvious, reasons for the efficacy and depth of AJE’s reporting on the Egyptian uprising. Being headquartered in the region, present in Cairo already, well-resourced to invest heavily in enhanced coverage, and free to report aggressively, the network, and AJE in particular, enjoyed a situational advantage over its competitors. This

was especially so given that American news organizations had been scaling back their foreign reporting, bureaus and correspondents, for years. In reviewing AJE's reporting infrastructure there, one other explanation emerges: many AJE reporters and staff have personal ties to Egypt, know the country well, and therefore enjoyed intrinsic advantages in news reporting. The biographies of journalists, granted, do not fully explain coverage given the roles of editors, institutional pressures and the ability of sources, advocates and governments to also impact news stories. Still, investigating their backgrounds and coverage suggests why AJE enjoyed a reporting advantage, calling on AJE's public preference for reporters with intimate knowledge of the places they cover, but also points to some of the potential weaknesses – namely whether they are prone to being embedded in certain perspectives because of pre-existing and naturally developed affiliations.

Many of AJE's correspondents and staff who covered Egypt were of Egyptian descent and well-connected to various circles of protesters and advocates. AJE's news director, who determined the channel's editorial vision and wielded great influence over resource expenditure, Salah Negm, is an experienced journalist from Egypt. He was a driving force between AJE's rapid investment and intense reporting in Egypt. His instinct for news was refined through decades of experience, but his intimate knowledge of Egypt, as an Egyptian, was advantageous in terms of knowing the country's political sphere, having access to sources and being invested in the story.

AJE sent dozens of reporters and producers through Egypt, but already had a reporting presence in place – unlike in Tunisia where Al Jazeera was banned. Most of the leading reporters were of Egyptian or Arab background, so that even if they were not already well-connected in the Egyptian polity, they could navigate the country's socio-political terrain more

easily. Egypt correspondent Ayman Mohyeldin, an Arab-American of Egyptian and Palestinian ancestry emerged as AJE's star reporter in Egypt, was born in Cairo and lived there for part of his life. He was well-versed in Egyptian politics, including the inner workings of the opposition movements, when I spoke with him in December, 2010. His reporting was recognized by *Time* magazine later on and NBC News hired him away from AJE. The correspondent in Alexandria, Egypt's second largest city, Jamal Elshayyal, is British-born but also is of Egyptian background. He was a news producer in Doha, one of the first to work on the Middle East desk, and became a news editor for Middle East news, indicating his background in the region. From Alexandria, he monitored protests there as well as others that spread outside of Cairo. Rawya Rageh, whose post-revolution reporting was recognized as top-notch by Columbia University's journalism school, is also originally from Egypt and went to school there. She was based in Egypt previously, reporting from there as late as 2010, until moving to Iraq to cover the government for AJE. She reported from the initial protests on January 25, 2011 the revolution and filed reports from the scene of protests, but also put together packages on Egyptian minorities and other contextual themes.

During AJE's Egypt coverage, these reporters' lineage was not referenced overtly and there was no reason to suggest they lacked professionalism. It was only after Mubarak stepped down that their personal connection to the place was brought into the open, making for a very interesting TV moment in which professional correspondents who adeptly performed the role of detached reporters in their presentation were asked for their personal feelings amidst crowds roaring in celebration. AJE's news presenter, former BBC reporter Adrian Finighan, asked these reporters to step out of their roles as journalists and speak to the news personally – an awkward request of journalists, but one that acknowledged the undeniably emotional historical moment

they were living through – a breakdown in the mythic wall of journalistic objectivity. Speaking to Mohyeldin during live coverage of celebrations following the announcement of Mubarak’s resignation on February 11, 2011, Finighan said,

Ayman, you’re the first Egyptian I spoke to since this happened... a personal question. You’ve been there throughout this, all of the 18 days. I want you to stop being impartial for a moment because your reporting has been exemplary all the way though... give me your personal feeling as to what you’re seeing there now, in Cairo tonight.

Mohyeldin paused for several seconds before answering as if to signal a break from what had been stone cold reporting in substance and temperament. Initially, he could not easily switch from the third person objective voice to the personal expression demanded by Finighan’s question. He blended his reaction within generalizations about all Egyptians but also his own family’s history of migration and sacrifice. He began by acknowledging that as someone who grew up and spent considerable time in Egypt and witnessed the personal sacrifices of “ordinary Egyptians who had been complaining for a better quality of life,” there “is a great deal of emotion” for all Egyptians whether in the country or outside – a possible reference to his own story of migration and distant connectedness, but one that gets inter-mingled in generalizations about the reactions of others. Every Egyptian, he continued “is feeling a great sense of pride because for the first time in a long time... perhaps even in the modern history... the Egyptians’ voice has been heard in this country.” The Egyptian people who for so long were seen as “dormant” took control of their own future, he observed, and this changed the dynamics for the first time in his and even his parents’ generation. Towards the end of his remarks, he finally found his first-person voice:

It is a very emotional night, I can tell you that as an Egyptian born here... I never thought that I would actually live to see a day like this because you hear about Egypt in the past from your parents and grandparents, the sacrifices that so many Egyptians have made to live abroad and immigrate, seeing that better future. Tonight they’re realizing that the people here in this country have gotten one step closer to making that future better.

When asked about her personal reaction, Rageh commented, “I was born 30 years ago, the week President Mubarak came to power,” and admitted a feeling of excitement.

This moment prompted by Finighan’s question captured the uneasy tension between the norms and stylistics of professional journalism – captured by the tonality of presentation – and the unavoidable subjectivity of the reporter in shaping the news. While personal investment and excitement could account for the exceptional coverage, and made for a more exciting TV moment than could be found on TV news outlets where the reporters had no personal connection, it also raised the problem of where a reporter crosses the line from being a witness to a participant in events, or less dramatically, “embedded” physically and subjectively among actors in one side of the story. If reporters have a personal investment in the place being covered, it risks bias or the perception that it colors reports, but this can be obfuscated by the veneer of journalistic professionalism, a language of neutrality, a tendency to ascribe views to others while masking the systematic editorial structures that may prioritize one narrative over another. This does not mean that foreign reporters are systematically preferable. Complete detachment in place and a lack of knowledge and language competence can tend to produce other forms of bias, to be sure, such as subscription to Orientalist prejudices. Certainly Anderson Cooper’s appearance in Egypt, in which his being physically attacked became a leading CNN story, represent an opposite form of bias, one that privileged the American and the familiarity of the celebrity reporter foreign to an important political story.

Just as the channel has an uneasy tension between the global south perspective and a commitment to “objective” journalism, it shows the difficulty of balancing the notion of the reporter as detached with the reporter-as-the-story, or the subjective involvement of the journalist.

This came out in the news director Salah Negm's point that the ideal is to have reporters from the place being covered working in tandem with those who have an outsider's perspective (Interview, 2010). Despite AJE's claim that reporters are not the story – a response given after American observers accused AJE of under-reporting the sexual assault of an American reporter, Lara Logan, in Cairo (Capehart, 2011; 2011b) – AJE did report on its own personnel's travails. On February 6, Ayman Mohyeldin was detained by military in Tahrir Square. Handcuffed and kept in a holding area, blindfolded along with other journalists and arrestees. Military police detained him for 9 hours, interrogated, then asked what he thought of the protests, what the military was doing, what he was doing in Egypt and why he was projecting a negative image of Egypt to the world. The military roughed up the other detainees, many were crying and the “military showed no mercy” in harming and intimidating prisoners. They were required to sign papers saying they could not return to the Square with military permission.

The strange relation between knowledge of place, appreciation for context and being embedded, comes out in once early news package. Rawya Rageh's report from the first day of protests provided vital context that accentuated the magnitude of the protests in relation to recent protest history and government repression, underlying an awareness of the track record of organized dissent in Egypt. In her news package “Thousands join Cairo protests,” she appeared within a group of marching protesters who answered a call over Facebook. She said live on location, “just listen to the chants roaring in downtown Cairo. The hundreds of people walking through the streets. It's unprecedented for people to march through the streets this way as an act of protest without security trying to prevent them.” Using the terminology of the organizers, she said, “The day of anger broke new grounds” and proposed several frames that became common during Egypt revolution commentary. First, she noted that online activists finally found a way to

gain mass presence on the street, a reference to previous online Egyptian campaigns that had trouble translating into sizable demonstrations. Second, she suggested the psychological barrier of fear the regime requires to enforce collective complacency was finally broken, reflecting a “frustration [that] has been building up for years.” Finally, she noted that Egyptians were both inspired by their neighbors and had qualms rooted in economics, or quality of life: “Egyptians are no strangers to the type of economic hardship that toppled the Tunisian regime.” Her *vox populi* interviews were of Egyptians who expressed their inability to provide for their families, find work, and put food on the table. Her piece betrayed a close understanding of what was happening, but also seemed firmly reflective of “the voice of the voiceless,” or the protesters, as Rageh marched along with them.

Not all of the primary reporters were Egyptian. Sherine Tadros also reported from Cairo but was based in the Gaza Strip, where she, along with Mohyeldin, gained recognition for being the only reporters during Israel’s three week-long attack starting in late 2008. She filed stories from Tahrir Square, including scenes of jubilation when Mubarak’s resignation was made public, and covered Egypt’s revolutionary media. Being fluent in Arabic, though not Egyptian, gave her better in-country mobility and access to sources. She remained in Egypt to cover post-revolution Egypt through 2011 and well into 2012. As evidence of the investment AJE put into coverage, it also sent senior news presenter Jane Dutton from Doha to report live from Cairo as one of the main correspondents. Dutton, a veteran of CNN, CNBC and BBC World, was evacuated from Cairo, witnessed the regime’s violent repression first-hand and reported for ten hours straight one day from balconies and the Square itself. Roving reporters also contributed occasional stories: Charles Stratford, African correspondent Andrew Simmons, James Bayes and Dan Nolan flew in from Doha to provide occasional reportage. Regional coverage, looking at the Egyptian uprising

in a regional context, brought in nearby correspondents, such as Nisreen El Shamayleh in Amman, Jordan, Anita McNaught in Istanbul, Turkey, and Nicole Johnston in Gaza, for example. Egypt was also extensively covered in features programs, in various talk segments as well as in documentaries and investigative reports that called on diverse reporters and producers. This large team of journalists also exemplified the rich resources AJE devoted to covering Egypt – an advantage rooted in the political economy of the network.

AJE's coverage fixated on the actions of the protesters. Take the iconic, constant and leading shot of Tahrir Square: a live overhead feed of the entire Square that captured the encampment all day, every day. A camera placed high in a building on the Square let AJE broadcast a bird's eye view of the crowds and happenings there at any time of the day. Mohyeldin was able to place the hidden camera through word-of-mouth communication. He asked around for someone whose apartment faced the Square and then he persuaded the tenant to take the risk to secure the camera that produced some of the most important images in the revolution. The stream survived regime efforts to track down the device. This had the effect of prioritizing the space of dissent over the many other spaces of non-dissent throughout the city in AJE's coverage. This juxtaposition was highlighted by AJE on the many occasions it showed live protest scenes Tahrir next to re-broadcast state TV depicting the many quiet places in Cairo. Neither source adequately covered the array of dispositions and sentiments fully, each showing the angle that best fit with overriding, polar narratives: one being that of a popular, historic revolution, in AJE's case, versus the other of a marginal show of deviance that did not resonate with the masses, as Egypt's state-controlled TV suggested. Only one of these circulated internationally and resonated with the world, however.

ii. *Networked Journalism*

While traditional journalism practices, and measures, such as the personal relations of journalists in the places they work, were important for AJE's reporting in Egypt, many stress as centrally important the use of new media for information-sharing. Many articles engaged in the debate around the role of social media in Egypt's uprising have as a title some play on Gil Scott-Heron's "the revolution will not be televised." Often the title has a negation and/or the word "tweeted" substituted for "televised." The opposition underlying this is between old and new media, as if they are dichotomous. For example, Alterman wrote, "What is striking about the political movements of early 2011 is not so much the power of 21st-century media, but rather the power of 20th-century media" (2011, p. 103). While one can stress the inherent activist functionalities of new media, it is easy to point out that the sheer numbers that are produced in popular uprisings are far greater than those who have access to such technologies. Networked journalism suggests the division between new and old media is largely artificial, that the two are too intertwined, their effects too interactive, to differentiate them. Traditional media amplify the few who use new media, and new media users re-circulate output from traditional news sources. When the Egyptian regime blocked the internet for several days at the end of January, 2011, tweets of transcribed phone messages from Egypt circulated thanks to the work of outside activists. Jenkins' formulation of convergence (2006) applies to this conception of networked journalism.

The main definitional elements of the model have been hashed out since the idea's earliest formulations (Bardoel and Deuze, 2001), which followed from earlier thinking of how the

Internet changes the work of journalists (Bardoel, 1996; Quinn, 1998; Pavlik, 1999; Singer, 1998; Deuze, 1999). Jeff Jarvis (2006) suggested that what sets “networked journalism” apart from traditional professional practice is that it:

takes into account the collaborative nature of journalism now: professionals and amateurs working together to get the real story, linking to each other across brands and old boundaries to share facts, questions, answers, ideas, perspectives. It recognizes the complex relationships that will make news. And it focuses on the process more than the product.

Most definitions focus on the greater intensity of audience and news producer relations, making the news-gathering process more collaborative or participatory. To build an operational definition, this chapter incorporates the following elements: Deuze applies Jenkins’ notion of “convergence” to show how journalism is producing new hybridities. He wrote “multimedia newsrooms and integrated news companies” that facilitate the coming together of “media production and consumption, which in journalism refers to the increased use of the citizen-consumer as a source or co-creator of news reports, opinion and analysis” (2008, p. 104). Such media involves a wider “array of new media platforms” that are “available at all hours of the day,” “interactive,” and “inexpensive” (Beckett and Mansell, 2008). These make journalism resemble a conversation or seminar more than a one-way lecture (Gillmor, 2006, xxiv). This requires a different engagement with publics. For Beckett (2010), networked journalism is inherently a public service, because professional journalists adapt their reporting acumen into the curatorial work of sifting through public content, verifying it and interacting with people on the ground and expert observers, to highlight and generate valuable information¹⁰.

There are significant challenges to networked journalism adaptation. News institutions

¹⁰ This work distinguishes it from citizen journalism (Gillmor, 2004), in which non-professionals engage in traditional reporting practices (Beckett and Mansell, 2008). Even if citizen journalists use online avenues to spread their information, they are not inherently engaged in the practice of culling information interactively. However, networked journalism usually means engaging with citizen journalists as sources or guests.

have been long premised on linear journalism processes and hierarchical editorial structures, which are contrary to networked journalism models (Beckett and Mansell, 2008). It requires widespread media literacy and special training for journalists. Networked journalism can easily only be used as a token or supplement (Deuze 2003), rather than embedded in the news process. The degree of integration depends on how open or closed news operations are as systems. This can be measured by how content is “moderated, filtered, edited or otherwise forced through a more or less traditional (that is: centralized and professionally controlled) gatekeeping process” (Deuze, 2003). By contrast, the work of networked journalism entails “gatewatching,” by which journalists promote news even if it originates in external networks (Bruns, 2005). This contradicts exclusivity, a long-time, basic goal driving news competition. There may be a profit-motive in relying on free labor of citizen journalists and wise crowds, especially in light of declining news budgets, but this does not suggest a genuine integration of networks in the news-making process.

Empirical research often reveals a gap between models and actual practices. In a news production study that finds audience content under-used by the BBC, Wardle and Williams (2009) defined networked journalism to be a process by which reporting entails interaction with the public, and impact the final news product. This distinction was vital for characterizing the newsroom practices at BBC, in which they found little actual practice of networked journalism. Audience content was however, often relied upon, though in ways that often resembled traditional news media practices – such as call-in shows, new tip-offs or publishing letters to the editor – more than any converged paradigm suggests. BBC maintained a top-heavy editorial control and was fairly reluctant to risk the spontaneity sometimes entailed in true networked journalism. Kperogi (2010), analyzing CNN’s iReport platform, concluded that “the trend

toward corporate sponsored citizen media may, in the final analysis, blur the distinction between citizen and mainstream journalism” (p. 1). These assessments might prove the difficulty of actually implementing networked journalism or they may merely be snapshots in an inevitable evolutionary process. Research on networked journalism has largely entailed production-side methods, with only some exceptions. Flew and Wilson (2010) found that although networked practices were marginal in terms of content, the practices were shifting in a direction towards reliance on interactivity with audiences.

While anecdotal evidence that AJE was engaged in networked journalism abounds, this section aims to empirically measure this question through content analysis of AJE’s output. This question is important for understanding what drove AJE’s “moment” in the United States, and how this “moment” reflects AJE’s reporting advantages. Was AJE’s reporting infrastructure and resources what made its coverage unique or was it in a sense deriving gains from integration with social media – and perhaps just making reputational gains by association with an exciting moment in Middle East history, one that many Americans were highly attentive towards¹¹?

Previous research by journalism scholar Matt Duffy (2011) echoed Powers (2010) view that AJE engaged in networked journalism. Interactive maps during the Israeli Gaza invasion (2008-2009) as well as its various blogs projects were examples, though Duffy noted that it could do more to be better networked. Much of AJE’s coverage during the Arab revolts could be described as networked journalism. Others observed that during the Egyptian revolution, “reporting was often influenced by information and footage coming from citizen journalists on the ground” (Idle and Nunns, 2011).

Anecdotal evidence strongly suggests AJE extensively engaged in new forms of journalism. Some programs on AJE are deeply engaged in utilizing new media content. Richard

¹¹ Pew Research Center found that 40% of Americans reported paying close attention to the Egyptian protests.

Gizbert, host of AJE's program about media, The Listening Post, called the audience "producers for us," and added, "they don't even know it and we don't pay them" (McGann, 2010). Drawing story ideas and commentary from the show's social media accounts, including submitted videos from viewers, the show uses "new media" as "modern versions of letters to the editor." He feels the English language channel is more engaged in extracting information from Arab world audiences than it is in providing them content. The program, The Stream, which was launched in mid-2011, identifies as an online community's show; viewers participate directly in the editorial process and pose live questions during shows. Guests are most often individuals active and highly visible in social media platforms.

There are countless other examples of networked journalism even from the regular news coverage. Especially during the long spells of "breaking news" standby in the beginning, AJE showed tweets and Facebook messages to relay commentary and information, including calls for action in efforts to mobilize protests, responses to larger arguments and updates on the state of security presence in particular locales. On January 31, 2011, the channel broadcast the following messages, among others, which were shown in text on the screen, next to a superimposed Twitter icon:

@organica "Confirmed; Million man March Feb. 1 for all Egyptians: Christian, Muslims, Secularists, Socialists TAHRIR SQ Cairo"

Amr El Beliedy (@beliedy) "Curfew has started, tons of people on the street, it's not only Egyptian parents who can't enforce curfews."

Mohammed Maree (@mar3e) "State security is gone from mahalla, we have freed the prisoners, we own the streets of mahalla."

That same day, AJE also showed a YouTube video of a protestor's funeral. YouTube proved to be a frequent source of other Egyptian news, such as the release of Google executive and public figure Wael Ghonim, as well as in coverage of the uprisings in other countries where AJE's journalists were constrained, such as Libya and Syria. In true convergence form, YouTube also began to livestream AJE's news reporting, making it a platform of news-gathering and distribution – social media played the same converged roles in general. This arguably enriched AJE's news coverage by bringing in new perspectives, footage and content.

Activists engaged in the ground were a fertile source of reportage, as AJE could draw directly from their timelines and updates via social media to generate primary data. This was known and exploited by activists who had set up their own media operations in Tahrir Square and other protest centers. Prominent Egyptian activist Hossam el-Hamalawy said that

the [real] strength of the Internet lies in the fact that traditional media themselves now use it as a source of information. Thus, when well-known and respectable online journalists post something that is read by thousands of others, it is almost certain that Al-Jazeera, the BBC, and the Guardian will mention it, as happened with the live feeds from Egypt (quoted in Aouragh & Alexander, 2011, p. 1351).

Egyptian activists felt that "Twitter in particular provided a mechanism by which contacts could be made between activists and journalists" (Aouragh & Alexander, 2011, p. 1352). One activist, Amr Gharbeia, noted that international media found the activists through their accounts and use of particular hashtags, or marked keywords, which ended up getting them on shows and used as news sources. Later, as the government's repression began to accelerate and the regime brought down Internet service, Gharbeia's network of activism found ways to collect and transmit information and videos, which were carried by global news media, such as Al Jazeera (Aouragh & Alexander, 2011, 1352). Visibility through social media established public figures, such as

representatives of the youth movement, who personified the uprising and became symbols of empathy and solidarity. On a February 14 segment of Inside Story, AJE's lengthy talk segment featured young activists, Alaa Abdel-Fattah, Mohamad Waked and Gigi Ibrahim.

The mutuality of the relationship between activists and AJE is precisely what networked journalism is about. Reviews of AJE's Egyptian correspondents Twitter accounts showed they followed numerous Egyptian activists, and likely relied on their tweets as sources. AJE enticed people to submit their own content. It set up a special website¹² for the public to upload images and video. The welcome video message by Egypt correspondent Sherine Tadros stated the reason for the site, "We've seen the impact from social media right across the Arab World." She asked that "any videos or images from these areas" be emailed or uploaded via the site.

AJE relied on networked sources even when the regime shut off access to the Internet January 27th for several days in an ineffective effort to prevent the protests from swelling. On January 31, 2011, AJE interviewed John Scott-Railton, the American graduate student who set up a voice-to-tweet service that took phone calls from Egyptians and tweeted them on their behalf through the account @Jan25voices. He summarized on air examples of the information he was getting through the service. A few days later, reporter Rob Reynolds put together a news package highlighting the student's work. Not only was social media a source for the channel, but the use of social media was itself a frequent topic in AJE coverage, including lengthy features by programs The Listening Post (February 10, 2011), The Stream (July 13, 2011) and Empire (February 17, 2011). Later in the year as protests continued against the country's military leadership, entire news reports consisted of video taken from social media sites. The report, "Egyptians document Tahrir police violence" (November, 21, 2011), showed images of the military's use of lethal violence against civilians.

¹² <http://yourmedia.aljazeera.net/>

On the face of it, AJE appeared to be practicing networked journalism extensively. However, it is not clear that such an integrated approach defined most of AJE's reporting. In reviewing the more than two hundred YouTube videos AJE posted from January 25, 2011 until February 20, I concluded that networked journalism was not a dominant feature of AJE's broadcast output, though it was more common in its online-only videos. On balance, in terms of the content, AJE's coverage was largely reliant on traditional modes of journalism, which was based on personal familiarity and expertise, and enabled by rich resource outlays. That said, AJE used social media and user-generated content to supplement its correspondents coverage. This observation is not complete, but brings up two important points for networked journalism scholarship. The kinds of online-gained content brought more diversity in views to the typical breaking news filler time normally populated by experts and other talking heads. Displaying Twitter and Facebook messages, as well as activists and others' videos, made the rolling coverage a bit more interesting. Also, this analysis cannot account for the personal connectivity of the journalists. Reviewing their social media accounts showed they used them as reporting tools, by establishing contacts and arranging meetings and keeping track of news. It seemed to serve for them as communication platforms as well as sources for research. The degree to which these technologies influences or added to their reporting in comparison to what off-line means they would have used in the past is a subject deserving of further research. The next section covers changing American elite discourse around AJE as a result of AJE's Egypt reporting.

III. U.S. ELITE DISCOURSE BEFORE AND AFTER EGYPT

During the Egyptian revolution AJE's absence from American TV channel lineups became a topic of discussion among many in the public sphere as well as citizens interested in sources of world news. Finding they could only access it online, many Americans around the country began to ask why it was unavailable on their television sets. Previously, such debates were largely restricted to a few localities, as we've seen in Burlington, VT. While the discourses about AJE shifted from a largely "war on terror" frame that cast the channel as an adversary of the United States to an "Arab Spring" frame that re-presented it as a force for reform, this did not translate into wider cable and satellite distribution. In the war on terror frame, AJE is an Al-Qaeda mouthpiece that airs anti-American views. This frame reflected in the debate in Burlington, VT. With the Arab Spring frame, AJE underwent a change of perception in its brand. Even compared with the pro-AJE discourses in Burlington, this frame was novel. It was not about AJE as simply being a window to the world, it was held up as an organization contributing to the spread of freedom in the world – an argument never made in the Burlington debate. Its reporting presence in Egypt was so well-received, many began referring to the story as Al Jazeera's "moment" of arrival in the United States. This greater increase in demand, AJE staff and officials felt, would help them finally break into the American TV market. However, by mid-2012, more than a year later, there were only small gains in distribution. This raises the question of whether a change in elite discourse can translate into greater TV distribution in the United States. The conversion in elite treatment of AJE lets us gauge more sharply the other factors at play in the network's failure to gain wide carriage in the United States – media economics, political culture and AJE's agency.

A. From the Voice of Arab Reform to the War on Terror and Back Again

As reviewed at length in chapter two, AJE, as a network, was painted as a terrorist-affiliated network by the George W. Bush administration (Miles, 2005; DiMaggio, 2008: 241;). This led some to speculate that US carriers refused to include AJE in their offerings “out of fear of alienating themselves from advertisers and angering the Bush administration and other American political leaders.” (Dimaggio 2008: 246). Despite efforts to position itself as a global media destination, many in the United States continued to associate AJE with Al Qaeda, Osama bin Laden, and America’s adversaries in the “war on terror.” At the same time, the network challenged governments the world over, with the exception of Qatar, of course. Historically, the network has been as or possibly more critical of Arab regimes than western ones. The network challenged the heads of global south states. It arguably subverted Arab leaders such as Libya’s Muammar Gaddafi, Tunisia’s Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and Egypt’s Hosni Mubarak even before the uprisings.

If one looks at American relations with Al Jazeera since 1996, when the network began operating, the Bush-era antagonism has not been characteristic. In fact, the Arab Spring frame represents a full circle for its reputation. During the Bill Clinton presidency, Al Jazeera was both championed as a force for reform initiated by an American ally in the region, and assailed – albeit quietly – in some quarters for its critical coverage of American foreign policy in Israel-Palestine and Iraq, around the United Nations sanctions. In fact, AJA made its name in the Arab world for its hard, critical coverage of the 1998 ‘Desert Fox’ operation, in which the United States bombed Iraq, and the attacks on Sudan and Afghanistan that unsuccessfully targeted Osama bin Laden. It was only with the post-9/11 ‘war on terror,’ that Al Jazeera was seen as America’s unqualified villain by those in power.

Al Jazeera experienced a warming of relations with the United States in the early Obama years. Certainly, the tone of the relationship shifted remarkably, just as Obama's rhetoric towards Arab and Muslim countries showed signs of rapprochement. However, the Arab Spring led to unprecedented public displays of affection. An online news item circulated in early February reporting that the American President Barack Obama and his staffers kept up on news in Egypt by watching CNN and Al Jazeera English (MacNicol, 2011). In apparently candid remarks to political donors, Obama was quoted as saying about his meeting with Qatar's emir that the country and the network were a force for democracy in the region. "Reform, reform, reform – you're seeing it on Al Jazeera," he said (Jackson, 2011).

The Arab Spring demonstrated the "Al Jazeera Effect" (Seib, 2005), referring to the power of new forms of media, such as AJE, to re-create and re-formulate political identities, networks of affiliation and structures in global politics. By getting out information and analysis critical to the revolutions in Egypt and Libya, and to a lesser extent Tunisia, AJE was vital for observers in other countries, including their governments. While the Arabic news service was more important in the rebelling countries, AJE helped put and keep Arab movements for change in the international limelight. AJE practiced a type of journalism that let protesters share their views and information with the rest of the world – making its coverage especially alluring. This off-set somewhat governments' strictures on reporters and efforts to control news flows. AJE helped internationalize Arab reform movements that undermined traditional modes of state power and facilitated lines of solidarity between different populations. It also arguably privileged online activists by giving them coverage and re-broadcasting their content, which empowered them to define the uprisings in their terms. This broke through government propaganda aims, as well as the impulse of outside experts and advocates to impose their own

interpretations on the events. It was a powerful on-the-ground presentation that piqued the world's and America's interest. Some Americans who had long opposed the network, suddenly changed their stances. Increasingly, political elite, media figures and public intellectuals turned to the network for news, and declared so publicly. Tony Burman, AJE's chief strategic adviser for the Americas, said that the story of the uprising against Egypt's president "Hosni Mubarak did in 18 days what I thought it would take two years to do," referring to AJE's new prominence in the United States. He noted that the "impact and importance of Al-Jazeera seems to be visible to all, particularly people in Washington."

The official response towards AJE after Egypt is still nuanced. The State Department intervened when Egyptian authorities detained AJE reporters. Then, during a US Senate committee meeting on American foreign policy priorities and budgeting in early March, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton praised AJE – an unprecedented endorsement. She said it was gaining an online audience in the US because it was "real news." Secretary Clinton asserted, "Al Jazeera has been the leader in that they are literally changing people's minds and attitudes. And like it or hate it, it is really effective" (Radia, 2011; Bauder, 2011). The nuance is located in the motive of the statement. The Secretary was seeking more funding for America's own informational activities. She used the term "information war" to describe the state of competition between her government and the young news network. While American officials have lavished some praise, there is also an acknowledgement that it is a foreign news media source, even if belonging to an ally.

Praise for the network post-Arab Spring came from other government officials, such as Juliette Kayyem of the Department of Homeland Security, who wrote a pro-AJE op-ed in the *Boston Globe* (Kayyem, 2011). Public intellectual Lee Bollinger, the president of Columbia

University, also penned an op-ed calling for AJE's carriage in the United States. Media personalities such as MSNBC program host Rachel Maddow, Sam Donaldson of ABC News, former *The New York Times* columnist Frank Rich and NBC News' chief foreign affairs correspondent Andrea Mitchell also publicly praised the channel (Kaplan, 2011; Rich, 2011; Hudson, 2011). Mitchell told the Atlantic, "I think Al-Jazeera has become indispensable. There's a big difference between Al-Jazeera overseas and Al-Jazeera English but they are clearly part of the story and I rely on them very heavily, as does the State Department. I think the channel ought to be available more widely in the U.S. given the work they've been doing in Tunisia, Libya and certainly Egypt" (Hudson, 2011).

Voices within the mainstream media, including AJE officials, referred to AJE's Egypt coverage as "AJE's moment" (Kirkpatrick and Worth, 2011; Burman, 2011; Bauder, 2011). This was a reference to "CNN's moment" during the 1990-91 Gulf War when advanced technology, 24-hour news coverage, on-the-ground reporting, and stunning visuals took CNN to the fore of international news. CNN has since maintained its position as a global news giant. A "moment" in this sense refers to a turning point in a news network's standing and popularity due to leading coverage of an important event. The ideas that "AJE's moment" arrived was subject to debate. Political discourse about AJE, often framed within the question of cable carriage, became increasingly polarized. This was because it gained more public supporters, but an opposition largely based in conservative political groups also mobilized.

B. Vocal Elite Opposition to AJE

High profile pundits and various organizations claim that AJE has no place on American televisions, citing allegations that AJ and AJE are supportive of terrorists and anti-American. The Washington D.C.-based media advocacy group Accuracy in Media (AIM) and Fox News

program host Bill O'Reilly have challenged AJE's efforts to sign distribution deals with large cable companies, such as Comcast and Time-Warner (Loeb, 2011; Kincaid, 2011). AIM launched an online petition calling for cable companies to shut out AJE due to what it deemed propagandistic content.¹³ AIM calls on "Comcast, and other cable and satellite companies" to "not help to provide Al-Jazeera English the audience and the exposure that they seek" because "America is at war with radical Islam." Smaller local groups have likewise lobbied to have AJE stricken from places where it or its news bulletins are carried, including in Daytona Beach, FL, where a local college TV station carries AJE news bulletins (Circelli, 2010). When the progressive radio network Pacifica signed a deal with AJE to retransmit the channel's news bulletins, a board member protested publicly. This deal spawned protests in Houston, TX, where Pacifica has an affiliate station. Many took issue with taxpayer-supported stations offering AJE, saying that the people should not pay to support a foreign government's broadcasting channel, especially one they argued was biased. They are targeting government funding of any entity broadcasting or carrying AJE.

Despite the new visibility and prominence, criticism that the network was biased and driven by an anti-American agenda continued after AJE's "Moment." For instance, charges of AJE bias circulated after a *Washington Post* columnist argued that AJE buried the story about CBS News reporter Lara Logan, who was sexually assaulted and attacked in Egypt after the overthrow of President Hosni Mubarak (Capehart, 2011; 2011b). AIM put out more material against AJE and re-launched a web-based campaign against the network. AJE's managing director, Al Anstey, optimistically contended that criticisms that the network is unfair can be changed through exposure to the channel: "Those misconceptions are being addressed now with every viewer that's switching us on and sees the content. And I always lay down the gauntlet and

¹³ <http://www.aim.org/al-jazeera-english/>

say if you watch the content of Al-Jazeera English, those misconceptions, if they apply, are immediately dispelled” (quoted in Robichaux, 2011).

Opposition to AJE is also based on the content of the Arab news service. In a lengthy piece put out by the Washington Institute for Near Eastern Policy, (WINEP), David Pollock argued that compared with the Arabic channel, AJE has “a greater internationalist bent to its reporting” (Pollock, 2011). The biases are apparent and strongly in favor of Qatar’s interests, he argues, to the extent that Al Jazeera is in total no force for reform. The piece implicitly acknowledges AJE’s “freedom to report on regional developments.” Thus, the Arab Spring did not seduce everyone in Washington.

C. Public Demand for Al Jazeera

As AJE became a news source for many Americans during the Arab protest movements in early 2011, demand for AJE carriage by cable and satellite providers grew. Online viewing, the primary means for Americans to watch AJE, skyrocketed. Of those watching online around the world, around forty percent were Americans, though press reported numbers as high as 50%, which sometimes conflated Canadian web figures (Elder, 2011). AJE sought to parlay its new online popularity into a grassroots-style campaign to pressure cable companies through demonstrated demand. Using a specially-designed webpage, social media, and emails, they generated over 40,000 letters to American cable companies in a little more than a month (Bauder, 2011). By the year’s end, that number would more than double. Student and community groups also began letter-writing campaigns asking their local cable operators to carry the station (Buletti, 2011).

The attentive American public became somewhat divided over AJE after the Arab Spring. At the channel’s launch, the average public response among Americans was cool, and

voices against the network were louder than those for the network. Significantly, most Americans' opinions of AJE were not formed through exposure to the channel but congealed around what they heard about it, how it was reported and commented on in the media, and how opinion leaders characterized it – which was apparent in the Burlington debate. Cable companies in the United States were generally uninterested in carrying the network, which further prevented Americans from developing their own attitudes towards the news channel. However, with the Arab Spring a larger market for AJE seemed apparent. Political elite defended the network. For the first time, publicly articulated views towards AJE started to fall along partisan lines, hardly surprising for a polarized political culture. With the Egyptian revolution coverage, the most prominent sea change in the American reception towards AJE took place among policymakers, policy specialists, media figures, prominent academics and others normally characterized as “opinion leaders,” in short, the elite. One must ask to what extent the views of policy elite and new AJE fans were shared among the public at-large, given they make up the forces of demand to which cable companies are most attuned.

IV. THE AMERICAN PUBLIC AND AL JAZEERA ENGLISH.

This section considers how Americans in general received and evaluated AJE in the weeks after the Egyptian protesters deposed long-time ruler, Hosni Mubarak. It will shed empirical light on: 1) if the American public evaluates AJE fairly; 2) how their evaluations compare with perceptions of an American competitor, CNN International (CNNI), and: 3) how these evaluations relate to political ideology and prejudice against Arab-Americans – deeper-seated views rooted in currents within American political culture. The results suggest that, even in the aftermath of “AJE’s moment,” a considerable number of Americans were predisposed

against the channel – showing that as with Burlington, the threat of a vocal minority can disrupt AJE’s distribution efforts.

A. Assessing AJE’s Credibility: The Role of Prejudice and Ideology

A crucial factor in shifting attitudes is perceived credibility of the source. In one of the earliest social science studies on source credibility, Hovland and Weiss tested the effects of source credibility on persuasion and retention of information (1951). Subjects read the same articles. Half were told the articles were printed in esteemed publications and/or written by notable figures. The other half were told they were written by propagandists in questionable publications. They found differences in attitudinal change varied with the respective source’s credibility, which they defined as “trustworthiness” and “expertise” (1951: 636-38). Later scholarship on credibility and persuasion sought to better define the factors impacting credibility assessments and consider other relevant characteristics. Starting with Hovland (1953), audience traits came to be seen as playing a role. In general, perceived credibility of information was increasingly linked to characteristics of the source, message, audience, and medium. In an online study, I¹⁴ showed participants an AJE news clip attributed to, and made to look like, either AJE or CNN International (CNNI). With the only difference being the brand name of the clip being shown, it is possible to isolate the source of the news – or how people perceive those sources – as the key explanation for differences in participants’ assessments.

This secondary set of research questions concerned audience factors that could explain differential assessments of AJE and CNNI’s credibility by individuals. There are a few possible explanations. First, it is possible that evaluations of AJE are linked to general sentiments towards Arab Americans and the notion that AJE represents an Arab perspective. In other words, viewers’ sentiments towards AJE would be correlated with anti-Arab views. Second,

¹⁴ Along with my co-author Katie Brown.

differential assessments could be explained by political ideology, with conservatives tending to rate AJE lower in terms of credibility. The most ardent critics of AJE have been conservative political and media figures. We utilized an online survey to address these questions. These factors are linked to American political culture, to go back to this study's overarching framework.

B. Methods

1. Participants

The sample includes 177 Americans recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk), an online survey community who participated in exchange for \$.25 or \$.50. The mean participant age was 30.29, with a range of 17 to 67. About 66% of the participants were female. The average participant (59%) lived in a suburb, though 22% described their residential area as "urban" and 19% as "rural." Resembling national education attainment data, the average participant has completed some college coursework. Half of the participants identified as Christian, 17% as agnostic, and 13% as atheist. The majority of participants (80%) were white. Other ethnicities represented include Asian-Americans and Pacific Islanders (10%), African-Americans (4%), Latino/as (4%), and Arab-American (less than 1%). The mean political ideology on a 7-point scale was 3.55, in the moderate to somewhat liberal range. The vast majority of participants (98%) do not watch AJE or CNNI regularly. However, CNN was the most popular source of TV news among respondents (18%), followed by Fox News (16%).

2. Procedure

Participants completed the study online between February 23 and March 5, 2011. The first part of the study included several questions about their news viewing habits. Participants were then randomized into one of three conditions: AJE, CNNI, or control. Participants in the

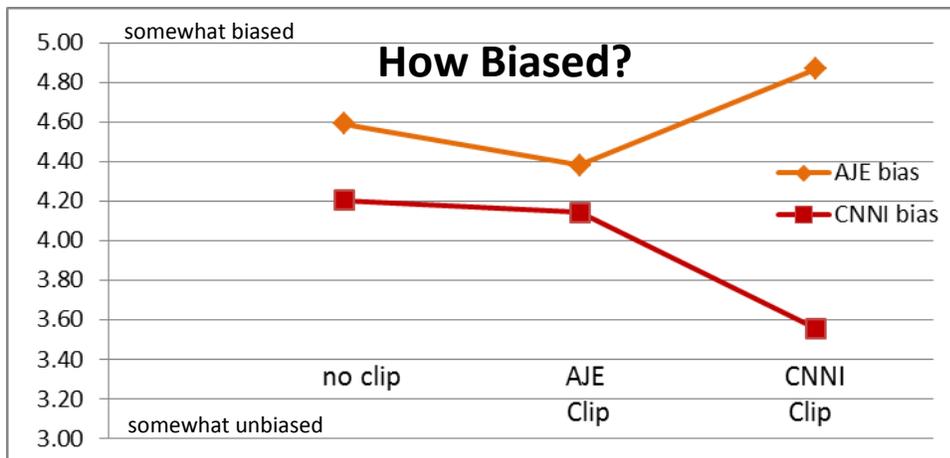
AJE and CNNI conditions viewed a news story about the Taliban and its position towards peace talks with the government in Kabul that originally aired on AJE.¹⁵ AJE markings were removed and replaced with CNNI branding for the CNNI clip condition. Those in the control condition did not watch a video. Participants were then asked to indicate how biased and trustworthy they would rate AJE and CNNI and their intention to watch AJE and CNN, all on a 7-point Lichert scale. Participants were also asked “If your local cable company was considering carrying Al Jazeera English (CNN International), would you have a preference or try to influence its decision?”, with 5 options ranging from “I would directly pressure the company in support of carrying Al Jazeera English (CNN International)” to “I would directly pressure the company against carrying Al Jazeera English (CNN International). Participants first answered the questions for whichever news condition they were in and then the other network, presented in a brief description as a competing news station. The order of network question presentation in the control group was counter-balanced such that half answered AJE questions first, while half saw CNNI questions first; no differences were found between responses across these two groups, indicating no ordering effects. Participants were then asked to indicate which network they would trust more for news about the Arab world. Next, I gauged Arab American prejudice using questions adapted from Bushman and Bonacci’s (2004) Arab American Prejudice scale, an 11 question inventory that we reduced in the present study to six questions (under Bushman’s guidance). Participants were then asked if they believed “AJE represents an Arab outlook on the news.” Three questions about the events in Egypt came next, all answered on a 5-point Lichert scale: Do you sympathize with the Egyptians who protested and overthrew their leader Hosni Mubarak, a long-time ally of the United States?; Do you think American foreign policy,

¹⁵ “Taliban 'rejects' Afghan peace offer,” uploaded to YouTube on June 6, 2010, was filed by James Bays, an AJE correspondent who reported from both Kabul and Baghdad. The video is posted at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cZnBrniJGDg>

including its military presence in the Middle East, is helping to spread democracy to Egypt and other countries in this region?; and Do you think that Al Jazeera as network contributed to the protests against Egypt's President Mubarak? Finally, all participants answered basic demographic questions, including political ideology, and were debriefed.

C. Findings

Chart 5.3 Bias ratings of AJE and CNNI by participant condition (left to right: control group watched no clip, watched AJE clip, watched CNNI-marked clip).



The bias questions yielded the most significant differences. As illustrated by Chart 5.3, the bias ratings for AJE differed between

conditions. Those who viewed the clip marked as AJE ranked the station as less biased than those in the control and CNNI conditions, but the differences were non-significant. Bias ratings for CNNI (Chart 5.3), on the other hand differed significantly by condition¹⁶. On a 7-point scale (1 = extremely unbiased; 7 = extremely biased), the mean value for CNNI's bias rating was 4.20 in the control group and 4.14 in the AJE group, both in the neutral to somewhat biased range. Participants in the CNNI condition gave an average response of 3.56, on the other side of neutral

¹⁶ (F (2, 174) = 3.70; η^2 = .03).

towards somewhat unbiased¹⁷. CNNI appeared significantly less biased to participants who viewed a clip from AJE attributed to CNNI compared to participants who saw no clip. In other words, the clip boosted evaluations of CNNI while doing nothing for AJE – perceptions of AJE were relatively robust to actual exposure, then, suggesting the strength of pre-judgment in shaping reactions to AJE’s content.

In terms of trustworthiness, likelihood to watch, and the question of cable carriage, we found no significant differences by experimental condition. Watching the AJE clip did not result in more positive evaluations of the network in those measures. But, comparing network evaluations across conditions, AJE was considered less trustworthy than CNNI. All participants similarly reported lower intentions to watch AJE than CNNI. For the question “if your local cable company was considering carrying Al Jazeera English (CNN International), would you have a preference or try to influence its decision?”, we again find a significant difference between evaluations of AJE and CNNI across conditions, with opposition to AJE being greater.

		bias	trustworthiness	likely to watch	cable carriage
AJE	Arab American prejudice	.31	.41	.38	.50
	ideology	.36	.39	.25	.38
CNNI	Arab American prejudice	non-significant	non-significant	non-significant	non-significant
	ideology	.37	.40	.23**	.20**
All reported Pearson correlation coefficients above are $\alpha < .001$; ** = $\alpha < .01$					

Chart 5.4 Pearson’s correlations of anti-Arab attitudes and ideology with views towards AJE and CNNI.

Since there was no variance in views towards Arab-Americans linked to the different conditions, watching AJE probably did not heighten mistrust against Arab-Americans. The more

¹⁷ . Planned contrasts with a Tukey’s correction indicate the difference detected by the ANOVA lies between participants in the CNNI group compared to the control group ($\alpha = .04$). The difference between participants in the CNNI group and AJE group is marginally significant ($\alpha = .06$) and non-significant between AJE and the control.

likely scenario is that mistrust of Arab-Americans in general led to negative perceptions of AJE. On average, participants agreed with the statement that “Al Jazeera English represents an Arab outlook on the news” – a view articulated by both sides in the Burlington debate. This justifies a test of the relation between prejudice towards Arab-American and evaluations of AJE across all the conditions (table 1). The Arab American prejudice measure correlates highly with several of our dependent variables, showing the negative assessments of AJE were strongly related to suspicions towards Arab-Americans¹⁸.

As expected, Table 1 shows a strong correlation between Arab- American prejudice scores and perceived bias, perceived trustworthiness of AJE, intention to watch AJE, and opposition to cable AJE carriage. That is, as Arab American prejudice increases, evaluated trustworthiness and intention to watch AJE decreases while AJE bias ratings and opposition to AJE cable carriage increase. Arab-American prejudice and CNNI evaluations on each of these four points are not significantly correlated.

There are also similar correlations between reported political ideology and perceived bias, trustworthiness of AJE, intention to watch AJE, and opposition to cable AJE carriage. In other words, as conservatism increases, reported trustworthiness of AJE and intention to watch AJE decrease, while opposition to cable carriage increases.¹⁹ These trends are mirrored in evaluations of CNNI. Self-reported conservatism correlates with CNNI evaluations: political ideology and perceived bias, trustworthiness, intention to watch, and opposition to cable carriage. Interestingly, the relationship between ideology and the first three measures – bias, trustworthiness and likelihood to watch – are roughly equal for AJE and CNNI. However, when

¹⁸ To gauge this, I combined responses to the six-item index for each participant to create a composite Arab-American prejudice score; the lowest factor loading for any one item was .80.

¹⁹ Political ideology and Arab American prejudice also correlate ($r = .38, \alpha < .001$), such that conservatism and prejudice increase in tandem.

it comes to cable carriage, the relationship is much stronger on the question of AJE as opposed to CNNI. It seems conservatives see AJE as somehow beyond the pale whereas CNNI presents an acceptable amount of objectionable content. This is about something other than political ideology but about the standards for allowing public information to circulate within a society. It is a question at the focal point in Burlington: the tension between freedom and security and what that means in relation to the foreign – a response to which should be guided either by the nativistic fear of the unknown or the dialogic promise of cosmopolitanism.

D. Discussion: Are Americans prejudiced against AJE?

Has the network's publicity and the widespread recognition for its coverage of Egypt made AJE palatable for Americans? The findings that show differential bias ratings between AJE and CNNI based on the same exact news clip suggest Americans are, on average, still unable or unwilling to fairly evaluate the station when it comes to assessments of bias even in the midst of excitement over AJE's moment. If there was no prejudice against AJE, the reputational change between CNNI and AJE would be equal. Instead, there is no movement for AJE and gain for CNNI for the same exact news package. AJE was evaluated significantly less favorably for the trustworthiness, likelihood to watch, and the cable carriage questions vis-à-vis CNNI. This is eye-opening given that roughly the same numbers of participants, 2%, reported watching AJE and, separately, CNNI. Since most have not watched AJE, the differences are based in pre-formed perceptions of the channel, likely rooted in how others have framed AJE. Perceptions of AJE appear to be negative among many, though not all, even after the Egyptian uprising.

Further, this online study showed that the American public's interest in Al Jazeera English is not substantial. 98% of participants had little or no exposure to the news channel, yet generally find it untrustworthy and are uninterested in watching, even after exposure to a clip

that is credible enough to boost CNNI evaluations when ascribed to that network. This does not bode well for the prospects of AJE gaining a *broad* audience in the United States. The issue may be branding, or the associations the public makes with a company's name and logo. CNNI's better evaluations likely resulted from the goodwill of CNN's brand. This study indicates that AJE faces a long road if it hopes to overcome the negative associations its brand suffered in the years of the George W. Bush administration. Since the Arab American prejudice score and self-identified conservatism significantly correlate with negative evaluations of the network, and each other, it seems the roots for AJE prejudice run deep – pointing to political culture.²⁰ Given that CNNI evaluations also correlated with political conservatism, but not prejudice towards Arab-Americans, and that AJE evaluations were more highly correlated with anti-Arab views than political ideology, the bigger obstacle to AJE is a built-in mistrust of Arabs – the nativism discussed in chapter three. Thus, “prejudice” against AJE – an interesting projection of views towards people on to a media outlet – can be traced to political ideology and nativism.

Internal divides in the American political and social spheres that center on ideology and views towards Arabs, Arab-Americans and Islam will be crucial to the question of the network's future in the country. Specifically, the high correlations between anti-Arab sentiments, ideology, and attitudes towards carriage and likelihood of watching suggest that certain segments of the population will resist viewing AJE with an open mind – a dynamic witnessed in the Burlington debates. There is some, but minor, evidence to support AJE's argument that people change their minds when they watch AJE. These correlations mean that those on the liberal end of the ideological spectrum and those who do not harbor suspicions of Arabs are more likely to change their views of AJE with exposure. This suggests there is a market for AJE. However, public

²⁰ It should be noted that some conservative websites lauded AJE. For example, the Drudge Report site (<http://www.drudgereport.com/>) kept a link to AJE at the top during the Egypt protest coverage in early 2011.

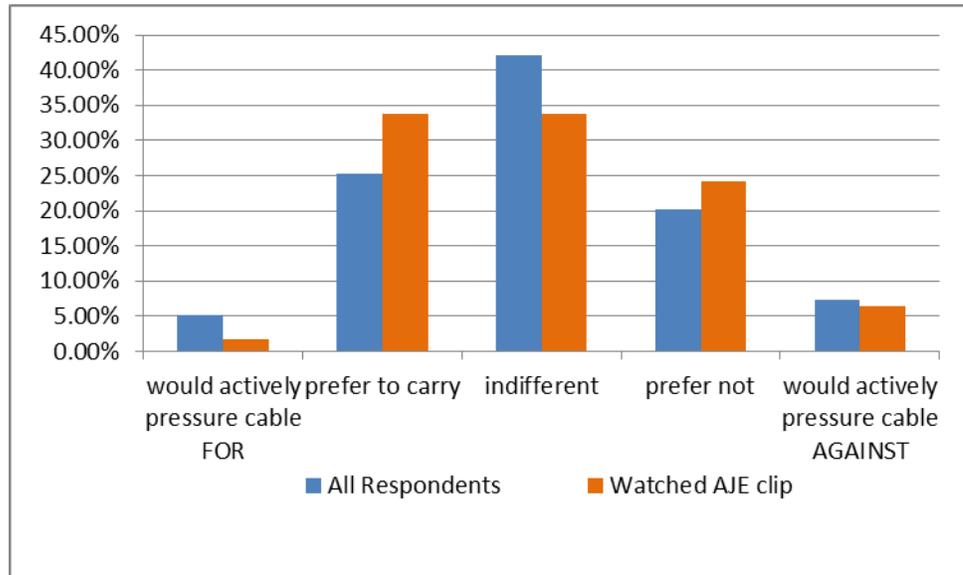
mobilizations against AJE and cable deals would be linked to political conservatism and anti-Arab prejudice. Thus, strong reactions by some influence the access of some to AJE via their televisions.

AJE's contra-flow potential within the United States is limited by unfair evaluations and active mobilization against the network, which introduce risk to private sector cable carriers. What does this mean for AJE's potential to encourage conciliatory, or moderated views towards the Arab world? While El-Nawaway and Powers (2008; 2009) found that dogmatism decreased with how long people had been AJE viewers, their sample was also self-selected – they sought out affirmative media that comport with their pre-existing worldviews. This study also indicates that viewers may not just steer away from AJE, but they will unfairly evaluate AJE's reporting when they come across it. Even with the measures that did not change with the test conditions, AJE was rated negatively despite the fact that 98% of the respondents did not watch AJE. To the extent these findings are generalizable, the reception of AJE in the United States speaks to the contentious state of politics in the United States, and deep-seated mistrust of Arabs, than it does about the network itself. AJE is landing right into the particularly post-9/11 problem of political and cultural polarization around the question of US-Arab relations in the United States.

As for the future of AJE distribution in the US, is demand among those interested in AJE's brand of journalism, potentially a growing minority, enough to bring about wider cable carriage? The results show that viewers likely to negatively evaluate AJE would not watch it again. Most of those who negatively assess AJE as biased and untrustworthy would prefer no carriage and some would actively work against cable deals. While those assessing the network positively were more likely to watch again and prefer cable carriage, the means of each of the measures indicated participants were on average resistant to AJE.

Polarization was reflected in the responses about cable carriage. Compared with those who did not watch the AJE clip, those who watched the AJE clip were more likely to both prefer and *not* prefer the network's carriage on U.S. cable systems. Fewer of

Chart 5.5 Reactions to the prospects of AJE's cable carriage.



those watching the AJE clip were indifferent. While 7% of all respondents said they would actively pressure cable companies not to show AJE, not one said the same of CNNI. Groups like Accuracy in Media will seek to off-set AJE's drive to garner pressure on the cable industry with their own pressure. Even if AJE gains carriage, it is not clear the average person would watch with an open mind. The more immediate threat to AJE's American market ambitions is that popular prejudices against the station dissuade cable companies from signing distribution deals no matter the quality of AJE's reportage. Further, due to cable companies' inherent risk aversion, those mobilizing in opposition to AJE may effectively keep the network from the airwaves. This would preclude AJE from being viewed by new and incidental audiences.

E. Limitations

There are several limitations that offer opportunities for future research. First, the sample is not fully representative, even if there is mounting evidence that MTurk provides more representative samples than do the other study pools available to university researchers (Berinsky

et al, 2010). This study involved just one news story watched in a particular historical context, right after “AJE’s Moment.” Future studies could consider the effects of long-term exposure over time, and at later dates in the case that reputational changes take a longer time to manifest. That said, this study relies on an audience that has not decided to watch AJE specifically. This design is similar to incidental exposure – those who accidentally tune in – if AJE were available to mass American audiences. Also, it is not yet clear whether public opinion matters in AJE’s goals, or whether the development of markets and elite, governmental opinion is most important. There are therefore some limits on drawing general predictions and inferences based on this study alone.

F. No Al Jazeera English “Moment” for the American Public

AJE’s coverage of the early 2011 uprisings in the Arab world, most notably Egypt, garnered acclaim, attention, and declarations that it was the network’s “moment.” This study asked whether AJE can leverage this moment into a broader American audience via increased carriage to become a mainstay in American news media as CNN did following its moment in the early 1990s. Results suggest this is unlikely. The perception of AJE as biased is robust among American viewers in general, and especially among those politically conservative and suspicious of Arabs. Since these perceptions correlate highly with the more deeply held constructs of political ideology and prejudice, this “moment” is, at best, limited to a willingly receptive portion of the country. If those who remain prejudiced against AJE mobilize around this view and oppose cable carriage of AJE, it could offset gains in AJE’s reputation. This would limit the network’s market penetration and therefore the potential for educating or moderating the views of Americans who have little access to news and perspectives originating outside of the country’s borders.

V. APPLYING THE FRAMEWORK

The changing discourse around AJE in the United States was most apparent among political elite in the immediate aftermath of the Egyptian revolution. At the level of the public, the views of AJE's availability are largely polarized along ideological lines and around the nativism-cosmopolitanism divide and are yet to transform as completely as did elite discourse – which was attracted by reportage informed by deep familiarity with Egypt, access to protesters and cutting edge utilization of networked journalism. AJE's agency manifested in both superior coverage, but more directly in an aggressive astro-turf “Demand AJE” campaign, which generated tens of thousands of letters. It hired PR firms, placed ads in the prestige newspapers and held public events. It also initiated meetings with the big cable companies in the midst of strong praise for the channel from influential quarters. This did not bring about wider distribution, however. The lesson, post-Arab Spring, is that the cable industry is responding more to audience preferences, which are rooted in deeper political culture, than to elite influence, which is more closely tied to larger geo-political and foreign policy considerations, in its continued reluctance to carry AJE.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

For Al Jazeera English to be regarded as a contra-flow medium in global communication, as a mediator of “global south” news and information, its circulation in the global north is a vital condition. It cannot be deemed a prototypical contra-flow merely for existing. The potential that some research holds out for it as a conciliatory medium that facilitates intercultural learning is bound by its limited availability. Its scant carriage in the United States constrains its status as media moving against the historic grain, the one-way directionality that typified international news flow for so long. At the same time, the gatekeeping power of states and private carriage systems has diminished, as AJE exploited online distribution to reach audiences and enhance its reputation during the Egyptian revolution. Despite conventional wisdom, AJE showed there is an American audience for international news, particularly in certain locales and among those highly attentive to international news – such as the foreign policy establishment, those interested in international affairs, expatriates, migrants, those with international ties and cosmopolitans. This audience is so far not large nor activated enough to override the opposition to AJE’s carriage, which is required to convince naturally risk averse cable companies that carrying AJE would be to their benefit.

The United States as a receiver of foreign originated news, generally, and from the Arab Middle East, specifically, is highly bounded by the factors outlined in the framework, though this is subject to change. While the political cultural streams of cosmopolitanism and nativism can be seen in debates around AJE, the industry’s perception that there is a prevailing disinterest in international news among average Americans means non-carriage is the default. After all, those

who really want AJE can satisfy their demand via the Internet – thus diminishing pressure on cable companies (though demand was itself first stimulated by Internet viewing). Without much direct competition from other companies and having the mandate to pursue private interests, the structure and operations of cable companies indicate the long trends of media economics militate against AJE gaining carriage, taking into consideration the political cultural factors. Still, the economics of news consumption is in a high state of change as news outlets’ revenues decline and TV carriers face new online challengers. These developments could eventually advance AJE’s goals of wide TV carriage given its generous subsidies allow it to carry on with high quality, original journalism and the audience for this, while relatively small, are large enough vis-à-vis audiences for other channels yet to be added. This just a speculation and it depends on other factors, such as the channel’s ability to attract advertisers – another source of cable company revenue.

The one factor in the framework which saw a giant shift, approximating a reversal, was the greater political context. American political elite views went from seeing AJE through a “war on terror” lens to an “Arab Spring” one. That change at the level of those most attentive did not percolate to the vocal minority in the general public who are antagonistic to AJE. As for the channel’s agency, the new hype around its reportage in 2011 inspired it to engage in more grassroots efforts to encourage popular demand. Yet, its decision to not pursue other strategies of globalization means that it is unable or unwilling to tailor its product for the American audience – an inherent cap on its efforts. Whether limited by principle or practice, AJE’s broadcasting of one signal for one world defies the trend of glocalization – in which global goods are adapted to local uses and sensibilities in order to best penetrate the market. At the most basic level though, if the Americans demanding AJE on cable vastly outnumber those opposing, cable

companies would start to carry AJE. However, this, along with the lingering associations of the war on terror, the deeper traditions of cultural nativism, and the still centralized power of cable providers in local markets, suggests wider distribution via traditional avenues is a long way off.

AJE is still a young organization and the economies and technologies of news reporting are in flux, of course. This concluding chapter presents an analysis of future prospects, starting with a return to Burlington, further analysis of post-Arab Spring potential and the study's framework, and offers recommendations for AJE. Finally, it relates the findings back to the growing body of literature on AJE and proposes future research endeavors to build on the problem of circulation.

I. A RETURN TO BURLINGTON

The Burlington case study brought out the latent discourses of support for and opposition to AJE among the country's populace, while accounting for the idiosyncrasies that make the small city such a unique place. It revealed both the anxieties and hopes of carriage, which came to bear on the community's decision whether to allow AJE to be featured on their municipally-founded carrier. Given the change in the larger political context and elite discourse presented in chapter five, it was worth visiting Burlington to gauge where AJE stood years after the debate subsided. In April, 2012, I travelled to Burlington and conducted interviews with Burlington Telecom staff, members of the advisory committees that passed a resolution calling for maintaining AJE as an option for BT customers and members of the public who were active on the question. This section relays what I found and draws lessons about AJE's struggle for market entry.

A. AJE Carriage is No Longer Contested in Burlington.

There is no longer an active movement to remove the channel. In the aftermath, many opponents complained of procedural issues in deciding how a channel is picked up and what the role of the community is in the decisions. Those are still not resolved as the tension between competing in the cable services market and the transparency of a public decision-making body has been difficult to surmount. There seems to be a settling of the issue of AJE to a large extent. That is not to suggest that its opponents are happy with the decision now, nor are many supporters content that the channel is only available on premium bundles rather than basic cable as many would prefer. The wide praise for AJE in 2011 has not warmed its most active critics to the channel. One of the highly active opponents I spoke with still disagreed with the channel's presence despite the praise it received during the Arab Spring coverage. He maintained that it signified the danger of fundamentalist and militant Islam to the United States, echoing charges by Accuracy in Media. However, the lack of continued dissent shows it's not a prominent, flashpoint issue any longer.

B. AJE Does Not Have a Significant TV Viewership in Burlington.

Given that around one-quarter of Burlington's nearly 16,000 households and businesses in BT's service area are subscribers, AJE's audience size via TV is small. Even among BT subscribers, only those with a costlier premium channel bundle have access. Therefore, the full TV audience for AJE is capped to a small minority of residents. While some of AJE's programs are re-transmitted via local cable access channels, and therefore reach more, these are only aired for very brief parts of the day. Some of the proponents of AJE I spoke with mentioned following AJE closely during the revolutions in 2011. Several admitted to watching online, however, and did not check in regularly unless there was breaking international news.

C. BT has Bigger Problems.

After the economic downturn and due to aggressive Comcast's aggressive promotions in the city, BT fell into debt and required loans from the city. A political scandal ensued because \$17 million was transferred from municipal funds without public awareness. This was a violation of its Certificate of Public Good and angered a public that expected BT to be financially self-sufficient, as was promised by its founders. This led to a backlash against the Progressive Party and likely motivated Mayor Bob Kiss's decision not to seek re-election in 2012. After the financial scandal, a Democratic mayor came into office for the first time since 1981, when Bernie Sanders was elected. Although its future is uncertain presently, 4,800 of the city's nearly 20,000 homes and businesses – some of whom are still outsiders of its service area – were subscribed to at least one of BT's services. While it can pay its own operating costs, it cannot afford to service its debts or pay back the city. BT is seeking private investors to repay its debts and complete its build-out. The AJE debate proved minor compared with this controversy and the question of its fate.

D. The Lesson.

This does not bode well for AJE. In one of the few cities it gained a direct carriage deal, a particularly progressive and politically sympathetic one, where people mobilized to call for its carriage, it is currently not widely available. Part of this has to do with backlash against BT, of course, which is tied to local partisan politics, local governance problems and the controversy around a publicly funded telecom and cable system. To the extent that AJE benefitted from the political economy of BT, this shows that publicly owned systems offer promise. Without the profit-motive and a commitment to public service, they can forgo some of the risk aversion of carriage, but only if the local community is a hospitable one. These types of systems are few, though growing. Tellingly, none of the several other systems carry AJE. While

a political economy explanation is compelling, especially when looking at the US in an international comparative perspective (chapter three), it is only part of the story. On its own, a public political economy is not sufficient to enable carriage given AJE's controversial image among the American public. Local political culture must support it.

II. POST-ARAB SPRING CARRIAGE?

While prior negotiations with the largest companies failed to produce results, AJE re-entered negotiations in late February, 2011 in the midst of AJE's "moment." It carried the momentum of heightened, positive publicity stemming from its Arab uprisings coverage, the transformation in the government officials treatment of AJE and a new elite admiration for the network. Its executives met with the nation's largest cable operator, Comcast (Fernandez, 2011), among others. Despite carrying with them 13,000 letters from Comcast subscribers, no deal was announced. Comcast later said in a letter to an opponent of AJE carriage dated April 15, 2011 that no agreement was reached with AJE and that the company "is not currently in active talks to complete such an agreement." Smaller deals were signed with local operators in Rhode Island and Massachusetts by late April, 2011. The transformation of AJE's image among policymakers and media figures did not immediately translate into greater carriage. Even the most promising carriage advance, such as getting on to New York City's cable providers, was the result of an indirect, third-party deal. This offers AJE an opportunity to build an audience but is easily dismissed as anomalous and not the kind of immediate precedence that could motivate more deals around the country.

There are several plausible explanations for cable's continued reluctance. An industry source suggested the cable industry's leader, Comcast, wanted to see if the interest in AJE lasted beyond the period of Arab uprisings (Wilkerson, 2011). Other industry insiders speculated the

threat of pressure had an effect: “Some people would attack some of the distributors like Comcast and others who would carry it for being un-American for carrying Al-Jazeera,” said Jeff Zucker, who stepped down as CEO of NBC at the end of January, 2011. He added, that some news channels “would go after some of those distributors if they were to put Al-Jazeera on” (“Talking Heads...” 2011). There are ways to mitigate the risks of such backlash, however, such as being carried via Video on Demand functions rather than as a regular, full channel (Ali and Guthrie, 2011).

Given the lack of transparency in distribution deal-making, there is not strong evidence that the politicization of AJE has an actual impact. On prior occasions, political considerations were seen bearing directly on carriage decisions. For example, before AJE’s launch, Comcast mysteriously nixed a near-deal to carry AJE in Dearborn, MI, which houses a large Arab-American population, a natural constituency for the network (Samuel-Azran, 2010: 106). AJE officials involved believed that a fear of backlash and active pressure caused the last minute change. As we’ve seen, AJE’s cable carriage in Burlington, VT was subject to a lively local debate, which involved town hall meetings and a vibrant discussion in the local media. In one of the few other cities where AJE was carried, Toledo, Ohio, a private cable operator, Buckeye Cable, unilaterally chose to offer AJE. They received some angry correspondence from subscribers, but reported no substantial loss of subscribers and the opposition eventually quieted (Moss, 2007). Reasons given by protesting subscribers and members of the public who would mobilize against AJE are largely political – ranging from the fear of promoting terrorism, to resentment of what they perceive is an anti-American bias.

These episodes suggest that carrying AJE risks some backlash, a sentiment that was expressed in the findings of the online survey presented in chapter five. Alienating subscribers,

even just a small percentage of them, could harm business, especially as cable television providers fear a declining subscriber base. This forms the basis for the *risk* of AJE's carriage for distributors. Until companies perceive the benefit of offering AJE as being great enough to assume the risk of a backlash, it does not make clear commercial sense. Even without the risk of backlash, the level of demand and advertiser interest would need to suggest the possibility of revenues greater than the next best programming alternative for carriers. While some carriers point to limits on bandwidth as an obstacle to a deal, it is clear that some channels with very small audience shares could easily be replaced (Barnhart, 2011), so long as they are not bundled with more popular sister channels (for example ESPN Classic, which airs old games, is bundled with ESPN). Still, operators see channels as "real estate" and want to make sure they maximize revenue potential. Even if AJE's demand is greater, companies must account for the threat of boycotts or pulled subscriptions by potential protesters.

There is no reason to conclude the cable industry has any other basis for exclusion. In the public statements made by cable and satellite carriers about the prospects of AJE, none dismissed it out-of-hand. In often guarded, public relations language, they kept open the possibility of eventual deals without suggesting one was imminent (Stelter, 2011). Time Warner's spokesman said, "We remain willing to talk with them, or any other programming provider, for carriage of their network." Charter Communications acknowledged meeting with AJE staff on occasion, but not on a "regular basis." Verizon stated that its FiOS digital cable TV service receives "requests for many channels, including Al Jazeera English, and we make those requests part of our decision-making process." It added that it evaluates additions to the lineup "against expressed customer interests as well as other factors." As strategic communication, these are not the best gauges of actual positions. Companies closely guard their actual programming decision-making

processes. There is not clear evidence of ideological exclusion by the industry.

AJE's managing director Al Anstey maintains that its cable penetration is a matter of "when, not if." There were reasons for this optimism after the Arab Spring. Although this study found a linkage between ideology and prejudices against AJE, Republican lawmakers increasingly appeared on AJE. The political divide was not then clearly a partisan one at the level of the elite, a sentiment that could eventually spread to the public. A *Politico* story noted that a Republican-run lobbying firm that worked to advance Qatar and Al Jazeera's standing with the party may have paid off. It quoted Suhail Khan, who was in the White House Office of Public Liaison during the George W. Bush administration: "The PR campaign, to a certain degree, was successful. They just began booking Republican guests." AJE, it should be noted, has the ability to lobby and impact public perceptions through publicity and marketing. It was difficult in the months following the Arab Spring to find Republicans willing to openly criticize Al Jazeera. It quoted a spokeswoman for one of the few, Rep. Paul Broun (R-Ga.), and noted the conditionality of the warning that "If Al Jazeera English hopes to establish itself more so on American soil, it must prove to the United States that their intentions are primarily improving our relations with the Middle East — rather than promoting anti-American rhetoric." Elite-level views may spread to the public in due time.

AJE began making strides towards greater acceptance in the United States. It announced its intention to open two new domestic bureaus in 2011, one in Chicago and another in Miami. It launched a journalism fellowship in partnership with Columbia University. In May 2011, it held its first US-based media forum in Washington, DC, where it attracted opinion leaders. *Time* magazine recognized one of the network's correspondents who reported from Egypt, Ayman Mohyeldin, as one of the top 100 most influential people in the world in 2011 (Rather, 2011).

News junkies and those interested in international affairs, particularly in areas underreported by cable and network news, now recognize AJE as a primary source. Its newsgathering apparatus outside of the United States is increasingly seen as superior to those of American news networks. In contrast with AJE's 400 journalists and 65 bureaus around the world, CNN, the most international of America news channels, pales in comparison with only 33 bureaus (Ricchiardi, 2011).

The gains of greater legitimation after the Arab Spring became apparent in one prominent international story. After United States forces raided Osama bin Laden's compound in Pakistan and killed him, media and government officials relied on AJ as a source. Joe Scarborough of MSNBC interviewed an AJ correspondent on "Morning Joe," a weekday morning talk show the morning of May 3rd, 2011. Going to reporters from AJ had happened in the past, but Scarborough later referred to the interviewee as "our friend from Al Jazeera" – a significant departure in tone from the Bush administration years. In a White House press conference later that day, John Brennan, the deputy national security adviser for homeland security and counterterrorism, responded to a reporter's question by citing what he watched on the channel. The press conference was aired live on several news networks, giving this type of high-level validation wide publicity.

At the level of the public, anecdotes hinted at a normalization of AJE. A bar full of Americans, including veterans, in Sierra Madre, CA asked that the bartender change the TV to AJE after news broke about bin Laden's killing – and everyone there agreed (Stephens, 2011). A high school student in New York City brought up in a class discussion about bin Laden what he learned after watching AJE all night (Otterman, 2011). These anecdotes signify the transformation of Al Jazeera's brand from that of a vilified, alleged terrorist mouthpiece into a

reliable and reputable source of information on news events – a transition that the “Arab Spring” frame made possible. When news of the bin Laden assassination began breaking roughly before midnight on May 2nd, web traffic to AJE’s site increased tremendously, showing increases similar to the news of Hosni Mubarak’s resignation. The vast majority of the web traffic came from the United States. Interestingly, the death of bin Laden coincided with the reformation of the Al Jazeera brand in the minds of many Americans – the death of the perceived connection between the news network and Al Qaeda. Yet, the struggle for cable carriage continued.

III. BACK TO THE FRAMEWORK

It is impossible to show there was a concerted and effective effort either by programmers, the industry, activists or officials to exclude AJE, but it is also hard to prove a purely apolitical commercial logic laid behind the cable companies’ disinclination to offer their customers the choice to view AJE on their televisions. Though cable companies are the primary gatekeepers since they alone decide on carriage, it is worth weighing how the parties and sectors that pressure and influence them changed during the Arab Spring. The greatest conversion was among the political elite, especially within the government, as reviewed in chapter five. A network that was largely shunned by those in power was increasingly welcomed in 2011. This was no more evidenced than by Donald Rumsfeld’s 2011 interview on AJE’s program, “Frost over the World” (October 1, 2011). The former Secretary of Defense was responsible for the harshest public critiques of Al Jazeera, yet praised the English channel in his interview. Also, other media and programmers, especially CNN, MSNBC and the networks, grew more favorable publicly. Fox News did not, and neither did Americans identifying as conservative or expressing prejudicial

views against Arabs, suggesting a polarization in American news responses to AJE – a type of split seen in Burlington during the public debate.

The study on viewer responses to AJE (chapter five) provided a snapshot in the weeks following the substantial attention paid to AJE's coverage of the uprising in Egypt. It pointed to a greater overlap between reactions to AJE and general political polarization. While the average American was indifferent to the question of whether AJE should appear on American TV sets, she was also more likely to gauge AJE as more biased than CNN International for the same exact news package. Being linked to deeper political cultural values, such as suspicion towards Arab-Americans, as well as political ideology, suggests AJE's distribution taps into deeper currents within American society. Even if Republican political leaders were not willing to oppose AJE publicly, those actively against AJE presented cable companies with a degree of risk, particularly as groups such as Accuracy in Media maintained pressure campaigns. On the margins, small percentages claimed they would actively support or oppose AJE distribution. Perhaps those with strong views have cancelled each other out in the eyes of cable companies, leaving a default of non-carriage for the time being.

Cable companies, which are at the focus of the decision, are bottom-line-driven and as risk averse as other corporations. Their mandate is primarily to advance the interest of shareholders, to maximize revenues and minimize costs and risks – an outgrowth of a political economy of media delivery systems stemming from a greater commitment to private ownership and decades of de-regulation. As political economy scholars note, private control of news media availability does not serve the public's informational needs well. While many, including government regulators, point to the Internet as offering a balance to the power of gatekeepers, we can see that for AJE online distribution is not a sufficient substitute. In Burlington, we saw how

the political economy of the operator brought out the underlying views, discourses linked to political culture, and forced them into public articulation through an iterative exchange. With private sector companies, there is no forum for deliberation on these questions, as important as they may seem to a society. The catch is that publicly sponsored companies, such as BT, could face significant hurdles in development if the community does not fully support the endeavor or it is not managed properly.

Still, the lack of carriage is not based on some ideological exclusion, but on the companies' estimation of the impact on their balance sheets. They have the primary concern of profitability. The marginality of the political elite to this question became exposed after the Arab Spring. With the political class no longer as opposed to Al Jazeera after the Arab revolts, the companies did not have to fear political backlash from them as much as they had in the past. However, the main carriers remain apprehensive that some Americans, issue publics and pundits see AJE as an anti-American terrorist mouthpiece. Without a sufficient demonstration of demand to overcome the risk brought on by controversy, carriage would only introduce economic threat while simultaneously offering little reward. AJE's goal of gaining wide entry through cable required it to show to the companies it had a large, sustained audience. It had to assure cable that the gains of carriage would compensate for the perceived risks of carriage. As of early 2012, it failed to do this. This, I must stress, is not only due to conservative activists and other opponents of AJE but also due to the well-documented and large-scale disinterest towards international news – both of which are currents within American political culture. Yes, there is a market for AJE, but there is market directly opposed to carrying AJE, and the fact that most people do not care only hurts AJE since the default is non-carriage.

The complicating factor in this story is the problem of AJE's agency. While it undertook

great effort to market and promote itself in the United States, setting up events, employing PR firms, buying ads and organizing a letter-writing campaign, it clearly has limits on what it is willing to do to gain access. It will not differentiate its signal to better appeal to the American market. It will not pay providers to secure carriage, though that is what upstart cable news channels did in the past. Even its resource allocation to marketing and distribution work in the United States is scant. The personnel working on North American distribution and promotion can be counted on one hand. Against these obstacles, we see that AJE has acted somewhat on its goal of getting on American televisions, but not fully. To speculate, either its planners were privately more cognizant of the obstacles – giving way to a pragmatically reserved resource expenditure – or unprepared for the resistance.

Therefore, the basis for AJE's lack of success is in large part commercial – the absence of demand for the network combined with an already saturated and declining cable news market (Stetler, 2011). However, this lack of demand starts firstly with a general disinterest among Americans for news, especially international news, a phenomenon that shows in numerous studies (Curran et al, 2009; Wu, 1998; Holcomb et al, 2011). The news Americans seem to prefer, as industry experience suggests, is closer to “entertainment,” whether one looks at the proliferation of soft news or in the changes in TV hard news over time. Sober, straight news – the type AJE proffers – is not seen as capable of garnering a significant American audience. There is another factor: an ideological disposition about the country's role in the world and the Middle East in particular, one related to a form of political conservatism that entails suspicion towards Arab-Americans, reflecting a strand of nativism in American political culture. While the political context of AJE shifted from the war on terror frame to the Arab Spring among Washington, DC elite and the foreign policy establishment, this change has not diluted the

minority of the public opposed to AJE, and thus the calculus of cable companies is clear.

IV. AJE'S OPTIONS

AJE's actions matter, even after accounting for the obstacles presented by political culture, and media economics. There are alternatives to AJE's audience-building approach. This section looks at both online distribution and different approaches to seeking cable distribution. It draws on both trends in media and technology, as well as theories about news audiences and the future development of the American news sphere, to consider different paths AJE can take.

A. Online Distribution

AJE has already made strides developing multiple online access points in pursuit of its stated aim to make its content available to as many people through as many platforms as possible. Larger trends in TV and news distribution point to various possibilities for AJE's expanding its audience in the US through online reach. An argument could be made for AJE expending resources on further developing online access, from content partnerships to web and application innovation, rather than on courting the cable industry. This appears to be just what AJE is doing. How does its Internet-based access impact its efforts to get on American cable? And, what does this suggest about how much time and attention they should dedicate to persuading companies to give them deals?

Enhanced online livestreaming and other content delivery services make AJE as accessible as possible. This is simply part of its basic mission. There is simply no other way to build demand. One possibility is that greater online availability adds more incentive for cable carriers to offer the channel. If cable eventually faces more competition from online video, or

“over-the-top”, providers, this could pressure cable to prevent customer loss by carrying AJE – as long as they do not lose more as a result of carriage. There is still the risk that some subscribers defect but there are also opportunity costs of not carrying another channel that would be more profitable. In absence of these, traditional providers may face competition from new entrants in tele-visual provision. AJE’s deal with Roku, an internet-based video service that provides a set-top box for channel-viewing is an example of such a direction (Levy, 2011). Google and Apple’s entry in this field also makes the cable industry anxious.

However, there is a real risk that availability through other means, such as the Internet, makes AJE less attractive to carriers (Flint, 2011). It undermines the incentive that AJE’s carriage could offer: inviting new subscribers and getting interested people to watch cable. Cable companies resist strongly programmers’ provision of content outside of their services, naturally. Large providers like Comcast are trying to utilize digital platforms to tie cable subscriptions to online TV viewing, in fact, as a way to head off cord-cutters. A programmer that provides content outside of such a system would be of little added benefit then. Unfortunately, the practice of secrecy of negotiations prevented AJE or the companies from commenting on this point. If it is valid, it is another way that AJE’s agency – its decision to widely offer AJE for free – harmed its distribution efforts. The alternative – not offering free, online access – is a difficult move because AJE could have insufficient demand and really no way to build it further while driving previous audience members to a host of international news competitors. An interesting problem for AJE would be if a national distribution deal was conditioned on them ending their livestream in the United States. This would likely cause a split between those in the organization who hold out online distribution as more promising against those who see cable as still the primary way to reach Americans and therefore gain influence

within the American public sphere.

Presented with that quandary, AJE would have to look at larger trends. The industry and observers have long raised the fear that Americans will drop cable carriers for online video, or that new Internet-based services, such as Apple TV, will effectively disrupt the cable subscriber base. Current consumer behavior suggests that “cable-cutting,” or online watching of video as a substitute for TV in the United States, is a long way off (Stetler, 2011). However, as the chart (3.6) in chapter three showed, online news consumption is increasing rapidly, suggesting that the way Americans obtain their news is liable to change in the coming years. AJE, having invested heavily in online live-streaming and its website’s news-gathering functions, may be well-positioned to capture news-seekers. It is a leading news provider on YouTube, for example, and has invested heavily in web streaming, as well as mobile applications that give users direct access to its live feed. Would it be willing to sacrifice this in order to get on cable?

This is a difficult question because TV is currently the most important medium. While it increasingly interacts with new, online media, it is the main arbiter in determining what shall be presented for publics (Dayan, 2009) – it’s the final filter on what is important for the public, and therefore is still the central news outlet in public life. In the United States, TV is still the primary means by which people access news (Holcomb et al, 2011). While we can speak of a post-broadcast era in which news audiences have largely fragmented in polarized partisan and ideological camps made up of self-selected media users (Prior, 2007), a news channel like AJE still desires placement on channel lineups for good reason. AJE’s aim to be available in American homes is partially justified by the chance that it could bring about incidental viewing, which its top officials say would correct misperceptions about the channel – something this study

casts into doubt. Also, being relegated to Internet access for most Americans does not offer great hope, as new information hierarchies have formed around very few sources that attract the vast majority of web traffic (Hindman, 2008).

By the same token, AJE's desire to get on American cable is based on antiquated notions of the mass audience as a feasible goal for new news media. A "daily me" informational economy (Sunstein, 2002), defined by personalized self-selection in media viewing, which leads to highly fragmented public audiences, gives AJE little hope for expanding its influence in the United States. Enhancements in digital cable have led to the further proliferation of channels with smaller niche audiences – something programmers, advertisers and others fear. Even this point has a flip-side: if cable news and the broadcasting networks face smaller audiences, they lose revenues and see their budgets shrink even further, giving state-subsidized AJE an even bigger competitive advantage (which could eventually encourage its carriage because it faces less journalistic contenders). In other words, a well-funded operation like AJE could start to fill gaps in types of coverage – expensive investigative and feature reporting – that emerge due to shrinking revenue bases for domestic news media. These two opposing circumstances show that the changing media environment is ripe with both obstacles and opportunities.

For now, the basic inertia is behind continued non-carriage as AJE seems unable to use online avenues to attract the wide audience they imagine is possible via cable. This still keeps AJE as a marginal player in the American news scape, which in turn affirms for companies their decision to keep AJE off the lineup. Big news events like the Egyptian revolution are such important moments because they offer the best chance of breaking this cycle by bringing new audiences *en masse*. Are these types of moments fleeting or do they lead to sustained, enlarged audiences? If website traffic mirrors TV viewing then audience spikes are followed by

significant drop-off, but often at levels of viewership somewhat higher than before – the pattern AJE saw with its website during and after the Egyptian revolution (see chart 5.1 in chapter five). With enough big news events, the resulting level of traffic might eventually be large enough to persuade companies that carriage is justified – it would minimize the risk and seem to optimize channel space. Ironically, by the time the politics and economics supporting distribution evolve, and when demand becomes persuasively demonstrable, the utility of cable TV as the key to building a large audience may be long gone.

B. Another Strategy – Focus on Cities

It appears unlikely that any large-scale national deals will result in the short-term. After more than 15 years of effort, the BBC World itself just signed a limited distribution deal with Comcast (Ng, 2011). It would be very surprising if AJE did any better in the US market, especially given its website’s poor performance next to the BBC’s (chart 3.3). With limited resources for marketing and distribution, AJE would be advised to stop aiming for national distribution, as it has been. Instead, it should focus on key cities, taking an incremental approach to gaining a bigger US footprint.

Chart 6.1 AJE Website Visits per Capita.

	2010	2011	% change
Washington, DC	0.96	3.75	392.4%
Seattle	0.68	2.80	410.4%
Minneapolis	0.69	2.74	395.1%
San Francisco	0.65	2.71	419.7%
Arlington, VA	0.49	2.37	485.1%
Portland	0.53	1.80	343.5%
Atlanta	0.55	1.61	289.4%
Denver	0.33	1.37	411.9%
Oakland	0.31	1.23	389.2%
Boston	0.20	1.21	607.7%
Austin	0.24	1.07	436.6%
New York	0.17	0.73	442.0%
Chicago	0.15	0.69	458.6%
San Diego	0.14	0.69	482.6%
Columbus, OH	0.18	0.63	352.4%
Los Angeles	0.15	0.61	400.8%
Houston	0.11	0.57	500.9%
San Jose	0.18	0.54	303.6%
Philadelphia	0.13	0.53	417.0%
Dallas	0.13	0.52	413.4%

At best, certain cities' systems will offer AJE as long as there is sufficient local demand. Given the difficulty in answering this, AJE should expend its resources more carefully. Instead of aiming for a large national deal, it should focus on key cities where likely constituencies will demonstrate demand. On what basis should it decide cities to focus on? There are several available data sources they could draw on. They could analyze where the demand AJE letters came from, which indicate where they have the most supporters willing to mobilize. Another useful metric is website visits. Using website data supplied by AJE, I ran an analysis to determine which cities produced the most per capita website visits (chart 6.1). I first identified from which cities did the most website visits emanate, then I calculated a ratio between the number of visits and the city's population.

The key findings worth pointing out are: first, Washington DC is the city most interested in AJE. This suggests that it is not more stigmatized as a news source in the nation's capital than it is elsewhere in the country, further proof that the political context of US foreign policy is no longer as primary a factor in AJE's struggle for distribution. Also, congruent with chapter five, it posted a fairly large increase of per capita visits – nearly four times – in the year of the Arab Spring. Second, this shows that website accessibility and TV viewing are correlated. DC and Arlington, VA, a suburb, are places where AJE is most available, and both are in the top five for per capita website visits per year. From this, we cannot say, as cable companies might, that free online access necessarily cannibalizes TV viewing from this evidence, though this point requires further individual-level or cross-district research. Third, assuming that website visits are an indicator of demand where there is not distribution, we can paint a profile of cities AJE should target. Also consistent with the Burlington case and the findings in chapter five, the leading contenders are cities known for liberal politics and openness to foreigners consistent with

cosmopolitanism. Specifically, cities like Seattle, Minneapolis, San Francisco, Portland, Atlanta, Denver, Oakland and Boston, and so on, register as ideal targets for a localized distribution strategy. There would be other factors for AJE to consider in choosing markets to focus on: what is the competitive map like in terms of cable companies, for example? Is there competition to exploit or not? It could cross-check this list with its lists of letter-writers in the Demand AJE campaign to see where a supporter base could be strong enough to act. It may also prefer to take initiative in cities where it has an office, given the presence of journalists who can speak publicly, and represent the channel in marketing outreach. If AJE picks up more piecemeal deals in localities, larger companies could become more easily persuaded over time. Advertisers may seek out placement on AJE to reach its audience, which should happen over time as it becomes normalized within the news scape – making AJE more attractive to carriers.

Why didn't AJE pursue this? The station has not adapted some of the main lessons of commercial globalization – that companies are advised to tailor and adapt their products to target markets, given that the world is made up of diverse tastes and preferences. By conceiving of an undifferentiated global audience, AJE's target viewership is a common denominator demographic. It is not willing to develop regional services, tailored to regional differences, for example. This mirrors the embedded universalism in "global South" perspective that insinuates a common experience of the disempowered and marginalized around the globe. However, the channel also claims to get to the news behind the news, and show a localized understanding based on depth and an understanding of localized nuances. This claim is not reflected in its distribution work in the United States. The assumption has been to treat the United States as a unified national market for news by going straight to the corporate headquarters of the largest companies. Perhaps, AJE is better off disaggregating the US market and narrowly focusing on

local markets and smaller cable systems in areas where larger web audiences are.

A different strategy is to forget about adding more distribution deals in the United States, and focus more on building audiences in the few places they have carriage. Getting impressive audience figures where they are on TV would make the most convincing case for more deals. This approach would allow AJE also to center its limited resources where it could have the most powerful impact. These suggestions, I should note, are intended to also show that AJE's agency matters in this story.

V. RELEVANCE FOR SCHOLARSHIP & FUTURE RESEARCH

When it comes to academic literature about AJE, researchers have advanced two themes with which to gauge the channel's international impact. Scholarship centered on power posits AJE as a potentially counter-hegemonic force (Boyd-Barrett & Xie, 2008; Al-Najjar, 2009; Gardner, 2009; Seib, 2005, 2008; Samuel-Azran, 2010; Sakr, 2007; Painter, 2008). Others taking a conflict-centered approach considered it a possible means of promoting inter-cultural understanding (Khamis, 2007; Tehranian, 2006; El-Nawawy and Powers, 2008, 2009, 2010). Both of these are conflated in analysis weighing AJE as a contra-flow, a news organization that goes against long-time global patterns of news and information production and distribution: from the advanced, industrialized states of the north to the rest of the world. This shift, it is theorized, impacts geo-politics or how societies perceive others, and therefore foreign policies and the prospects for intercultural communication. Traditionally powerful states exercise less media power in an age of multi-centric media pluralism, one argument goes. While some of this scholarship acknowledges AJE's incomplete circulation as a limitation on this "Al Jazeera

Effect” (Seib, 2005), this study pursues this course of thinking more closely. An inventory of where AJE is in the United States, how it got there and what changed with the Arab Spring can tell us more about the potential for larger changes under these theoretical lenses. In other words, we need to better understand distribution before drawing conclusions about political impact.

There is an argument that AJE offers more counter-hegemonic than intercultural, conciliatory potential. Even with limited distribution, it is plausible that AJE’s coverage potentially impacts policies, as Seib suggests (2005). If AJE’s coverage, for example, helped persuade the Obama administration to alter its policies, it would be because the channel was well-received in Washington, DC as a legitimate source of information. Elite audiences in DC had regular TV access and were more likely to access its website as the preceding chart demonstrates. Still, showing actual policy change consequences or larger geo-political effects of AJE’s specific news coverage is very difficult empirically. The intercultural bridge notion is proscribed by the absence of distribution. It means the likely audience is self-selected, already cosmopolitan and not going to show conciliatory effects. While AJE can influence other media, thereby offering some possibility for diminishing perceptions of an impending “clash of civilizations” among Americans, without being available for Americans where they consume most of their news, this is a marginal prospect. However, even with availability, given the power of ideology and prejudices to shape how people view AJE, it is unlikely to serve an intercultural bridge or foster dialogue between peoples at the popular level, one conclusion of chapter five. As El-Nawawy and Powers show in their survey research (2008, 2009, 2010), this is an empirically-testable proposition at the individual level. The value of a study about distribution is it shows the contours of generalizing individual-level findings of effects to larger populations. Also, it shows how some of the views that AJE is held out as an antidote for – such as

Islamophobia – actually act to prevent the greater availability of the channel.

This does not bode well for the image of the United States as a receiver of transnational news in a globalized media age. The American public sphere is weakly transnational when it comes to AJE. As a free marketplace for ideas, particularly regarding international news that incites the passions of US-Arab relations in the post-9/11 atmosphere, the United States in general is not robust, welcoming of differing views and new perspectives. The nation-state imaginary is thus sticky. While online distribution offers a significant exception, it is not a full substitute for TV among AJE's planners and officials – nor does it hold the same potential for a wide American audience and the greater influence that would obtain. On balance, this suggests that media pluralism in news, when it means in-flows for foreign news in the U.S., is highly restricted by popular prejudices, inflexible native carriage systems and the politicization of the availability of Arab news and information. As the debate and ultimate outcome (relegation to premium bundle) in Burlington, VT showed, many Americans want to extend a state's physical borders to the realm of news and information. Despite the flattening of the world in the new media age, nativism still structures what is available in a media environment.

Regarding further research, follow-up to this study can pursue several lines of inquiry. Research centered on AJE should pay closer attention to its availability, the map of AJE's accessibility tells a story about the channel's efforts to build a global audience among English-speaking audiences. Its circulation is a key element to the question of larger impact – a question that much of the research and analysis concerned with AJE approached. Much more audience research is needed to gain better insight into how different publics receive and interpret AJE. Distribution is not an equivalent of individual reception and interpretation. We still know very little about how audiences consume and process AJE's news coverage. This is essential for

understanding if AJE fulfills its contra-flow potential. Production side research has been productive, particularly Figenschou's series of papers. Its use of new media delivery systems is also worth closer study, especially for those interested in the future of news and different modes of journalism. New media presents the interesting dynamic by which tools of reportage and output distribution are converged, presenting new forms of networked journalism. AJE is a leading purveyor of this, and chapter five offers initial work in this direction. As for global media and international communication scholarship, the framework proposed in this book can be adapted to consider how/why particular news media travel or do not in certain regional, national and local settings. Media globalization studies focused on news can further inform, amend or contribute to the factors proposed above. It was intended that these factors present an inventory or framework for use by other researchers seeking to map new directionalities in the exchange of news and information in the world.

APPENDIX

A. Appendix A

Recommendation Resolution re: Al Jazeera English on Burlington Telecom

Adopted by the Burlington Telecommunications Advisory Committee (BTAC)/Burlington Cable Advisory Council (BCAC) at their joint June 24, 2008 meeting

WHEREAS the Telecommunications Advisory Committee (TAC) was created by Burlington City Council, which desired to include a measure of citizen input and oversight into the development and deployment of Burlington Telecom; and,

WHEREAS the Vermont Public Service Board required Burlington Telecom to form the Cable Advisory Council (CAC) to provide it with ongoing public input from Burlington residents of all walks of life on community needs and to serve as a vehicle for two-way communication with Burlington Telecom (BT); and,

WHEREAS the Mayor of the City of Burlington requested that the TAC and CAC make a recommendation of whether or not Al Jazeera English (AJE) should be retained or dropped from the BT cable channel lineup before BT takes any action; and

WHEREAS the Mayor of the City of Burlington requested that the public be heard on the matter of whether or not AJE should be retained or dropped from the BT cable channel lineup before BT takes any action; and,

WHEREAS our Committees have received both written and verbal comments from individuals residing inside and outside of Burlington; and

WHEREAS our Committees are unequivocally opposed to hateful and intolerant speech in whatever form; and

WHEREAS our Committees have heard assertions that AJE's content is objectionable in that it supports terrorism, anti-Semitism and promotes the destruction of the State of Israel; and

WHEREAS the Committees believe that much of the testimony regarding AJE's objectionable content has been based on secondary sources, and that the Committees have seen no consistent or widespread agreement or evidence from respected sources to substantiate the aforementioned assertions; and,

WHEREAS our Committees understand that while AJE is owned and financially supported by the Emir of Qatar, an ally of the United States and a constitutional monarchy that applies Islamic law and is perceived by many as being restrictive of human rights, we cannot draw any conclusions as to whether or to what extent these particular characteristics have impact on the content of AJE or have any relationship to AJE carriage on BT; and,

WHEREAS our Committees have heard that many potential customers of BT will not subscribe to its services while AJE remains in the channel lineup, and, likewise, our Committees have also heard that many current customers of BT will unsubscribe if AJE were to be removed from the channel lineup or will only subscribe if it is offered, and that these conflicting assertions present an uncertain revenue effect upon BT, such uncertainly being underscored by the fact that requests from our Committees to BT for empirical information to measure revenue impacts in this regard have not been productive; and,

WHEREAS our Committees have heard from a significant number of subscribers and potential subscribers asking that BT expand the number of international news and information channels available on BT; and,

WHEREAS our Committees recognize that individuals have both the capacity and the right to watch what they want in their home; and,

WHEREAS BT subscribers currently have at their disposal technologies capable of blocking objectionable material; and,

WHEREAS our Committees believe that AJE provides a point of view not found in the coverage of national and international news of other channels; and,

WHEREAS our Committees firmly stand on the side of free expression, we have heard arguments supporting the contention that the removal of AJE is a First Amendment issue as well as arguments that it is not a First Amendment issue, nevertheless determining the answer to this question is outside the scope of the expertise of our Committees, particularly since BT is organizationally structured as a department of a municipality; and,

WHEREAS our Committees appreciate the overall tenor and thoughtfulness of those in our community who have chosen to make their voice heard on all sides of this issue; and,

WHEREAS upon consideration of all public testimony, our Committees have witnessed a compelling preponderance of subscribers and potential subscribers requesting that BT not drop AJE; and,

WHEREAS BT has in effect a Cable TV Channel Carriage Policy (the spirit and letter of which was approved by the TAC and CAC) that guides BT to make choices based on three principal objectives of (a) providing a wide variety of channels along with the greatest feasible degree of consumer choice, (b) remaining economically viable as a system operator in a climate of rapidly changing technology and consumer trends, and (c) being responsive to the needs of the communities it serves; and,

WHEREAS BT has not provided our Committee with requested contractual detail pertaining to its carriage of AJE thus preventing our Committees from considering contractual circumstances as part of our recommendation,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Telecommunications Advisory Committee and Cable Advisory Council in their advisory capacities jointly and unanimously recommend that Burlington Telecom maintain its carriage of Al Jazeera English.

Members voting unanimously for the Resolution:

Michael Burak (TAC/CAC)

Gregory EplerWood, Chair (TAC/CAC)

Jules Fishelman (CAC)

Timothy George (TAC)

David Jenemann (CAC)

Shakuntala Rao (CAC)

Jan Schultz (TAC/CAC)

Members absent:

Linda Deliduka (CAC)

Patrick Griffin (TAC/CAC)

Michael Wood-Lewis (TAC/CAC)

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