The London School of Economics and Political Science

Al Jazeera English: Margins of Difference in International English-language News Broadcasting

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Declaration

Statement of use of third party for editorial help

Abstract

Launching in 2006, Al Jazeera English (AJE) set out to challenge the dominance of Western-based organisations in the field of international English-language news broadcasting. Ambitions of 'balancing the current typical information flow by reporting from the developing world back to the West' directly link the organisation to longstanding debates on asymmetric global news flows (AJE Website, Corporate Profile, 04/09/2008).

In this context, the aim of my thesis is to develop a theoretical framework that allows to conceptualise two related aspects: 1) *assessing* degrees of both similarities and differences between AJE and established Western-based news broadcasters and 2) addressing underlying mechanisms that begin to *explain* degrees of difference that AJE has managed to carve out in the field of international television news.

On the basis of a critical realist ontology, I combine Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus and capital with an understanding of agency as advanced by Archer. While the first allows me to conceptualise the *relational* nature of questions of news flows *on the level of journalistic practices* (which in the past have primarily been the domain of macro-theory), the latter serves to acknowledge the role of the reflexive powers of the individual when it comes to professional trajectories and editorial decision-making. Combined, these approaches are uniquely positioned to explore the complexities of a news organisation aiming to be simultaneously similar enough to be on a par with established networks and different enough to live up to aims of 'reporting back'.

My findings suggest that overall, in accordance with its remit, AJE focussed on the global South and on people outside the realms of power to a greater extent than BBC World News, while in other areas asymmetries at odds with AJE's remit (such as gender imbalances or an association of the South with conflict) were found to be reproduced. This dialectic was reflected in the channel's organisational environment, where a relatively autonomous position, characterised by a largely non-commercial outlook, provided actors with a rare degree of autonomy, the utilisation of which, however, continues to be contingent on an ongoing negotiation between AJE's twin aims of (professional) similarity and (editorial) difference.

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In memory of my grandfather

who encouraged me to write
and whose letters were a dependable
source of strength and humour

List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

AJA	Al Jazeera Arabic
AJAM	Al Jazeera America
AJUK	Al Jazeera UK (at the time of writing still in planning phase)
AJE	Al Jazeera English
AJI	Al Jazeera International (as AJE was called pre-launch until October 2006)
AJN	Al Jazeera Network, consisting of Al Jazeera Arabic (AJA), Al Jazeera.net, Al Jazeera Sports, Al Jazeera Mobile, the Al Jazeera Training and Development Center, Al Mubasher (Live), Al Jazeera English (AJE), Al Jazeera Documentary, Al Jazeera Balkans, Al Mubasher Al Misr and Al Jazeera America (AJAM)
ANN	Arab News Network
ARD	German Public Service TV and Radio
ART	Arab Radio and Television
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BBCW	BBC World
CBC	Canadian Broadcasting Corporation
CCASG	Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, see also GCC
CCTV	China Central Television
CMC	Central Municipal Council in Qatar (an elected body with advisory powers to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Agriculture)
CNNI	CNN International
GCC	Gulf Co-operation Council, also known as CCASG
IBT	International Broadcasting Trust
IRIB	Iranian state radio and TV
ITN	UK-based content provider servicing a range of mobile, online and film producers as well as broadcasters including ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5
MBC	Middle East Broadcasting Corporation
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NDR	Norddeutscher Rundfunk (German Public Service Broadcaster)
NIEO	New International Economic Order
NWICO	New World Information and Communication Order
OSN	Orbit Showtime Network
UAE	United Arab Emirates
VOA	Voice of America
WBR	World Business Report on BBCW
WTO	World Trade Organisation

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Chapter 1   Introduction

It is a commonplace to state that many of today's key challenges are global in scope. Climate change, pandemics, poverty, precarious working conditions, regional conflicts, financial and banking crises all have in common that in order to understand their causes and address their effects we need to understand how conditions and decisions in geographically, culturally and geo-politically divergent locales are causally interlinked. On the surface, the proliferation of media, including a rapid increase in international news channels, appears to match this need. However, more international media does not by default equate to a more pronounced international *outlook* (Hafez, 1999; Berglez, 2008) – a point arguably of particular relevance to the cost-intensive and hierarchically stratified field of news broadcasting, where competitive pressures and increasing commercialisation have led in recent years to reductions in foreign bureaus, withdrawal of foreign correspondents and less airtime for foreign news and current affairs (Burman, 2009; Franks, 2004). Moreover, if foreign news and broadcasting in general are in trouble, foreign news from the global South are arguably disproportionally affected in a journalistic field traditionally dominated by a relatively small number of organisations based in the global North.

Enter Al Jazeera English (AJE). A sizable news and current affairs broadcaster originating and based in the global South. A channel, as an AJE presenter asserted, that comes to the field 'without baggage' (personal interview, Doha, 13/02/2008). Investing in bureaus in locations that other broadcasters have left or where they have never had a permanent presence. Designed to upset the traditionally Western-dominated hierarchy of international news and to 'give a voice to the voiceless'. And equipped with the financial wherewithal to challenge the dominant players in the field. But how free and how able is this channel to deliver on its ambitions? Only to some degree, this thesis will argue, but a degree that nonetheless critically matters in this increasingly interconnected world of ours. And a degree that, if we ask the right questions, can tell us much about the margins of difference in the current set-up of the international broadcasting news and current affairs ecology.

More specifically, in organisational terms, AJE's aim of challenging the dominance of broadcasters based in countries of the global North – notably BBC World

(BBCW) and CNN International (CNNI) as the two channels that have dominated the field since the early 1990s – has been underscored by the channel's ambitious official objective of balancing 'the current typical information flow by reporting from the developing world back to the West' (AJE Website, Corporate Profile, 04/09/2008). In short, AJE has aimed at nothing less than challenging the 'taken-for-granted nature of media representation, in which we in the West do the defining, and in which you are, and I am not, the other' (Silverstone, 2007: 3). As such, it epitomises longstanding aspirations of achieving a more balanced field of international news. In the words of Painter (2008: 6):

> There has been plenty of discussion around the existence or desirability of a "non-Western" or "Southern" perspective on news. *For the first time since the beginning of that debate*, a well-funded channel exists, Al Jazeera English, which promises to mark a radical change by offering a version of the "non-Western" or "Southern" take on the news' (emphasis added).

Part and parcel of this challenge is the ambition of AJE's leadership for the channel to be on a par with the leading organisations of the field. As I will argue, the implication of this ambition is that AJE needs to navigate a very thin line: on the one hand, in order to stand a chance of challenging the likes of CNNI and BBCW, it needs to be *similar enough* to compare and therefore to compete in the first place, notably in terms of journalistic practices. On the other hand, it needs to be *different enough* to fulfil its remit of 'reporting […] back' (AJE Website, Corporate Profile, 04/09/2008).

It would be tempting, as periodically happens in literature concerning AJE, to simply conclude that the channel has variously failed to live up to its counter-hegemonic remit or succeeded in revolutionising the industry. This temptation is not unique to debates concerning AJE. In his televised lecture, 'On Television', Bourdieu cautioned against a danger in sociology of succumbing to one of two opposite illusions: 'On the one hand, "there is the sense of something that has never been seen before […] And on the other hand […] there's the opposite", "the way it has always been", "there's nothing new under the sun," […] "there'll always be people on top and people on the bottom"' (Bourdieu, 1998b: 43). In the case of AJE, neither view on its own would do justice to the complexity of the channel and, as I will argue,

would only convey part of a multidimensional (and at the time of writing still unfolding) story. And so, in the spirit of avoiding either announcing "the appearance of incredible phenomena"' (Bourdieu, 1998b: 43) or opting for the other pole of the spectrum and discarding any novelty as an old principle in a new guise, I will argue that what characterises AJE as an organisation is a constant negotiation of professional similarity (in terms of journalistic practices) and editorial difference in relation to its main competitors in the field of international English-language TV news and current affairs. This dialectic of similarity and difference is reflected both in its organisational environment and in its output.

As I will further argue, these 'structural contradictions' (Figenschou, 2012: 354), while characteristic of AJE, are not purely of the organisation's making. Rather, they also throw into relief persisting inequalities within the field of international broadcast news. To analyse the degree to which AJE is part of a media 'contra-flow', it is therefore important to take into consideration both decision-making processes *within* the organisation and characteristics of the wider organisational field that impinge on the organisation and, by so doing, enable or limit its potential for change. This relational character of questions of imbalances in international news is acknowledged in the macro theory around media imperialism, cultural imperialism and news flows. In addition, an acknowledgment on the level of overarching theoretical models is routinely *cited* in individual case studies concerned with unequal news flows, but rarely *reflected* in the concrete theoretical frameworks that underpin the particular empirical research. In this thesis I am therefore proposing a theoretical framework that is apt for conceptualising, on the basis of a critical realist foundation, the relational character of news flows *on the level of journalistic practices* within AJE. These features are reflected in the following central research question:

> In how far and in what ways does AJE deliver on the channel's declared aim of challenging asymmetric global news flows and how is this aim aided or obstructed by the interplay of agential forces and structural mechanisms residing within both the organisational field and the wider professional field?

In order to arrive at a framework that allows me to address this question, I based the theoretical positions advanced in this thesis on a critical realist ontology that runs

like a thread through the various chapters and functions as a kind of 'conceptual glue'. Firstly, critical realism's non-determinist view of causation enables me to conceptualise *potential* effects of field-specific structures, which in turn allows me to analyse some of the *underlying mechanisms* behind patterns of news content. It also allows me to link the level of structural (macro) theory of news flows with the level of journalistic practice and to combine aspects of the theoretical frameworks of Bourdieu and Archer in order to theorise the dynamics described above between structure and agency in the organisational environment of AJE.

Secondly, critical realism offers a way of differentiating between the theoretical claims of (moderately) constructivist accounts and the anti-realist ontological assumptions that are often attached to these – unnecessarily so, as I will argue in line with Elder-Vass (2012a; 2012c). This is particularly relevant in the context of media studies, since the discursive and often so very obviously *constructed* nature of the subjects studied has been accompanied by a dominance of anti-realist positions within the discipline. What critical realism has to offer to the field of media studies, as I hope to demonstrate in this thesis, is an alternative that acknowledges the referential relation between reality and the way it impinges on and is being made sense of in the media, *without sacrificing the vital arguments brought forward by constructivist accounts* that stress the contingency of social aspects of reality.

1.1 Chapter Outlook Part I: Theoretical and Methodological Framework

Being underpinned by a critical realist ontological foundation, critical realist concepts will surface throughout the thesis. As a conceptual bridge, this theoretical body helps to bridge macro-theory and empirical approaches, as I will discuss in Chapter 2. As I will outline in Chapter 3, it also allows to combine the positions of Archer and Bourdieu (Elder-Vass, 2007). And as will become apparent in Chapter 4, it serves as a basis for discussing the analytical status of the data generated in the empirical research conducted for this thesis. Following this introduction, I will therefore begin Chapter 2 by briefly outlining some of the main concepts of critical realism to provide some ontological groundwork for the discussions of the following

chapters. The second part of the chapter will serve to contextualise the most apparent characteristic of AJE – its remit of 'rebalancing' the dominance of Western news organisations in international news – with an overview of the theoretical implications of this remit. In so doing I will focus on the historical dimension of the debate, as well as on more recent concepts of news flows, including the global structural inequalities theorised in concepts of media and cultural imperialism, imbalances with regard to representational aspects of news *content*, asymmetries in the dispersion and interpretation of the notion of *professionalism* and the concepts of 'contra-flow' and 'counter-hegemonic news' as challenges to dominant news flows. Again, the combination of a channel that qualifies as 'contra-flow' (in the basic sense that it is based in the South and exports its content to countries of the global North) and advocates a counter-hegemonic editorial perspective while also pursuing global ambitions means that questions of whether or not AJE qualifies as a counter-hegemonic contra-flow or has become part of (and possibly altered the composition of) mainstream news are best addressed by analytically separating aspects of news content, journalistic practices and AJE's position in the field (as I will discuss in Chapters 6, 7 and 8 respectively).

After discussing the academic (and indeed political) trajectories implied in AJE's aim of 'reporting back', I will outline in Chapter 3 a theoretical framework based on the work of Bourdieu and Archer in order to explain how the relative persistence of unequal structures within the field of international news and the potential for change can be conceptualised on the level of journalistic practice. As I will argue, Bourdieu's theory is uniquely positioned to explain many of the phenomena emerging from my data in that it 1) provides a relational context that allows the conceptualisation of links and disparities between the journalistic field and related fields as well as between divergent expressions of professional habitus as emergent properties of divergent journalistic (sub)fields and 2) allows the explanation of certain kinds of change and difference in practice (namely the kinds of change and difference that stem from changes in related fields or mismatches between the organisational field and habitus of individuals reminiscent of the wider professional field). In addition, I will argue that, while practices brought into the organisational field of AJE from rival channels inevitably carried the *liability* (which differs form a predictable effect) of causing a steady drift back to old habits, they significantly also

had the power to provide a basis for measuring – and ultimately realising – difference. As Bourdieu remarks, in order to stand in competition, people – and organisations for that matter – 'have to agree on areas of disagreement' (Bourdieu, 2005: 36). Therefore, comparability of practice could, maybe counter-intuitively, be precisely what allows AJE to 'report back'.

In turn, Archer's framework allows individual decision-making to be related to social structures – and it does so in a much more explanatory and precise way than Bourdieu's mere assertion that social structure, by virtue of some undefined mechanism, impacts on the individual by materialising as embodied practice or habitus. Therefore, critical realism – and Archer's account of reflexivity specifically – help to explain why (and the ways in which) people's actions are constituted by more than social structures, by focussing on the *mediating role of agency* between social entities and human individuals. This is of particular relevance in the context of a relatively novel news channel that, at the time of my fieldwork, did not yet have an editorial track record as a reference point for editorial decision-making processes. And while it was clear what AJE did *not* want to represent (given a remit formulated in *opposition* to existing news conventions), questions about the *precise editorial nature* of this journalistic experiment were very much subject to discussion during the early years of the channel. In this environment, journalists' imagination about what would be possible had an impact that can hardly be overstated, for it was to a great extent their own experiences and reflexivity that created the very editorial precedents that would be recognised by journalists joining the channel in later years as core characteristics of AJE. Unravelling this process is crucial not merely as a contribution to the understanding of the early years of AJE, but more generally and perhaps more importantly, to highlighting the mechanisms through which difference on screen is potentially obstructed or enabled in the field of international news production.

After the theoretical foundation of the thesis has been outlined, Chapter 4 will provide the methodological framework to match both theory and the empirical necessities and limitations associated with studying AJE. This will include an outlining of the research questions, the multi-method approach chosen to address these, the research context of studying AJE and the analytical status of qualitative

and quantitative data generated. The main methodological elements of this study include a comparative content analysis of the news programming of AJE and BBCW News, an analysis of external and internal organisational documents, as well as 28 in-depth interviews that I conducted with AJE staff in London, Doha and Kuala Lumpur between late 2007 and early 2010. As with the different theoretical elements, quantitative methods (content analysis) and qualitative methods (analysis of research interviews) are combined by virtue of a critical realist framework. Here, an analytically stratified model of reality serves to relate descriptive and explanatory analysis by acknowledging that the content analysis focuses on the (limited) realm of the empirical, while the analysis of interviews investigates mechanisms that are part of the domain of the real and may or may not bear effects in the domains of the actual and the empirical (for more detail on the analytical stratification model of reality in critical realism, see Chapter 3).

Furthermore, in order to understand both the complex research context of AJE and the organisational context in which the empirical results are to be situated, it is crucial to understand the intricate ways in which AJE is linked to the state of Qatar and to its parent channel, Al Jazeera Arabic (AJA). Put simply, AJE would be inconceivable without the ambitions of Qatar's ruling family or its parent channel, AJA, and it continues to be subject to the environment that gave rise to it. In order to provide background on the multiple contexts that led to the foundation of AJE, Chapter 5 will describe the history, politics and journalistic endeavours that preceded (and continue to shape) AJE. This background includes the rootedness of the Al Jazeera Network (AJN) in the (limited) reform politics of Qatar, the implications of the network's financial dependence on the state, AJA's role in the region and beyond, and the backlash from regional and Western governments with which the network was confronted throughout its existence, and the launch and important early post-launch junctures in the history of AJE.

1.2 Chapter Outlook Part II: Empirical Research and Analysis

As the first of the three empirical chapters of this thesis, Chapter 6 draws on shared assumptions emerging from interviews with AJE staff as a basis for *quantitatively* assessing the channel's news *content* in comparison with equivalent BBCW News content. This serves to provide a glimpse of the ways in which AJE staff engaged in constructing difference, both actively and passively, through *their interpretations* of the editorial remit of the channel as well as some of the manifestations of the resulting practices in the *actual* content. Importantly, results from this content analysis can only ever offer examples out of several possible effects of the underlying mechanisms involved. Given that causal powers in the critical realist sense are powers that may or may not become effective depending on context, the results presented in Chapter 6 are *tendencies*. Notwithstanding this essential qualification, I found that as examples of news content produced in AJE's early years, the patterns identified reflected the tension between similarity and difference that also emerged from the interview data. As such, results from the content analysis serve to give an indication of areas where AJE was prone to delivering on its remit (for example by emphasising the global South) and areas where the emerging picture was less consistent (for example with regard to AJE's aim of 'giving a voice to the voiceless').

In Chapter 7, I will explore the relevance of habitus and journalistic agency for any difference that potentially materialises on screen. As I will argue, AJE as an organisation is endowed with causal powers and liabilities that can help to explain what ends up on screen as news *without* presuming a static or predictable causal relationship between mechanisms and news content. In particular, AJE's decision to follow the dominant professional habitus of the field brought with it limitations for the channel's recruitment strategy that in part ran counter to its remit. On the other hand, the causal powers of human individuals acting within an organisational environment that encourages reflexivity counteracted some of the influences of the wider professional field that were impinging on the organisation as a direct result of the competitive aspirations of AJE.

In journalism, the professional habitus and journalistic agency of individual journalists do matter, but so does the business model that makes their endeavours financially feasible – not least when aiming to alter geo-politically asymmetric historical practices. Therefore, in Chapter 8, I will discuss AJE's *position* within the field as an international, state-funded channel endowed with the structural liability of (self)censorship, but without an immediate need to break even and – and this I will argue is of particular relevance with regard to its ability to 'report back' – with the ability to prioritise what Bourdieu called 'cultural capital' over 'economic capital'. Here, the rather exceptional circumstance that AJE, as a sizable international news channel, operated (throughout the years analysed) without using audience ratings as a measurement of success, offers a rare opportunity to analyse a relatively autonomous organisational (sub)field within the weakly autonomous field of television news and current affairs.

To summarise, this thesis will provide a theoretical framework that allows the teasing out, on the level of an organisational case study, of the simultaneously deeply relational and reflexive nature of questions of news flows. And it will contribute to existing research on Al Jazeera by providing an understanding of AJE's early years that includes an appreciation of the limitations and enablements of the professional field as well as the dynamics within the organisation itself. Finally, in Chapter 9, I will bring together the theoretical and empirical findings to discuss the value of analysing AJE's capacity to 'report back' (and questions of news flows more generally) on the level of journalistic practice through the concepts of field theory and reflexivity.

1.3   Some Caveats

Crucially, although considering an Arab news channel – as a unique example of a sizable new entrant in the field of international broadcasting – this thesis cannot justifiably be said to be about the field of Arab media or to be aiming to contribute to Arab media studies. While making sure to incorporate the fundamental inheritance and continuing influence on the channel of AJA, Qatar and AJN as a whole (backed

by four research visits to Doha), the thesis is limited to analysing the English-language channel of Al Jazeera and its relation to other English-language channels.

In addition, it is also important to note that the thesis explicitly explores the early years of AJE (mainly 2007, 2008 and early 2009), since the main fieldwork was concluded prior to more recent developments such as the Arab Spring and AJE's coverage thereof, to recent managerial changes at Al Jazeera, the purchase of Current TV and the creation of Al Jazeera America (AJAM) or the political succession in 2013 of the Emir of Qatar and founder of Al Jazeera by his son. Again, these relatively recent developments will not go unmentioned, but are not part of the main data analysed. Rather, by analysing the early years of the channel, the thesis focuses on dynamics at play in the formative (and arguably most flexible) phase of AJE in order to gauge the margins of difference available to the then young media organisation within the wider field of international English-language television news.

Furthermore, this thesis specifically focuses on the *television* platform of the English-language side of the AJN. And while Al Jazeera has been proactive in exploring digital strategies – in part to compensate for the initial lack of distribution deals in the United States and other global areas and in part by incorporating and encouraging citizen journalism as part of the channel's Arab Spring coverage – the thesis is not about new media (which are beyond the scope of this project and a subject for further research). In contrast, this thesis is about AJE's core business of television news, how that is situated within the field of international English-language television news, and the kind of journalistic practices that are potentially enabled or constrained within this particular setting.

Finally, although employing a critical realist ontology is a central element of this thesis, it is crucial to point out that the scope and nature of this thesis do not allow to discuss critical realism as a philosophical tradition in any depth or to incorporate an exhaustive discussion of critical realism in relation to the empirical study presented here. At the very best, I hope to be able to *begin* to demonstrate *some* of the conceptual benefits of critical realism for the empirical subject at hand and to use this research project as a kind of 'trial run' for the application of a critical realist ontology

in the discipline of media and communication studies – with all the insufficiencies and limitations this implies.

Chapter 2   An Unequal Playing Field: News from North to South?

The continuing dismay with which Al Jazeera is received in Western societies, most especially in the United States, is not only because of the graphic horror of some of its images (we provide those on a daily basis) or the ferocity of its political rhetoric (likewise). It is much more fundamental. It is based on the breaking of a media taboo and the reversal of the taken-for-granted nature of media representation, in which we in the West do the defining, and in which you are, and I am not, the other.

Roger Silverstone, *Media and Morality*, (2007: 3)

2.1 Introduction

In any discussion of AJE, it is hard to overstate the relevance of academic, and indeed political, debates on unequal media flows. A central claim formulated from the outset in the corporate profile of AJE is that they seek to balance 'the current typical information flow by reporting from the developing world back to the West and from the southern to the northern hemisphere' (AJE Website, Corporate Profile, 04/09/2008) – almost literally echoing debates from the 1970s onwards that were 'primarily directed toward achieving a balance in the flow of information between the North and the South' (Thomas, 1997: 165). As such, the channel's stated ambition explicitly taps into decades of discussions about the asymmetric character of global communications. As I will outline in the following, over time the character and terminology of the debates changed from notions of cultural and media imperialism to the more contemporary terminology of media flows – a change indicative of developments in theory as well as of the international media landscape as new media hubs emerge around the world and the advance of more accessible technology continues to change global power dynamics (Silverstone & Georgiou, 2007: 33; Cunningham et al., 1998: 178-179).

However, the wider argument that, notwithstanding a more complex and multidirectional exchange of media, in *some* fields the majority of content continues to originate in relatively few Western-based organisations has retained its relevance to this day. This has particularly been the case with regard to news organisations with a widespread international reach, such as international English-language news channels.[1] In a (sub)field of journalism described as 'largely an outgrowth of Western news media' (Hachten & Scotton, 2002: 32), Al Jazeera's financial clout combined with the broadcaster's aim of 'reporting back' from the South to the North struck a chord with journalists and academics alike. As Sakr put it around the time Al Jazeera was gearing up to try and emulate some of successes of its Arabic-language

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[1] Another prominent example is the field of news agencies (Rantanen, 2009: 42-43).

[2] A different way of conceptualising inter-organisational professional habitus could be in terms of 'norm circles' that produce sets of beliefs amongst the people who constitute their parts (Elder-Vass, 2010: 156). Norm circles are closely interlinked with the causal powers of organisations that employ people who are simultaneously parts of norm circles, though not identical, as organisations 'produce a *further* and

service in English: 'If contra-flow occurs when countries once considered clients of media imperialism have successfully exported their output into the metropolis […], then Al-Jazeera offers a textbook example of the empire 'striking back' (Sakr, 2007: 116). It becomes clear then that any discussion of AJE is always to some extent a discussion about the degree to which the channel lives up to its self-declared aim of 'reporting […] back' – both in terms of content and in terms of what this might entail in the context of the organisational structure and journalistic day-to-day practice at AJE (AJE Website, Corporate Profile, 04/09/2008). In the following I will unravel the *theoretical* implications of AJE's remit by addressing some of the characteristics of the academic and political debates that AJE has evoked through the choice of language in its official profile.

In the first part of this chapter, I will give a brief overview of some of the basic concepts of critical realism. This serves to provide the ontological groundwork that will reappear as a unifying theme across theoretical, methodological and empirical parts of the thesis. The second part of the chapter outlines the historical and theoretical trajectories of discussions about global structural inequalities and the multiple ways in which the media are implicated in (and affected by) these, ranging from early debates on modernisation theory to media and cultural imperialism paradigms and concepts of counter-hegemonic media and media contra-flow. As I will argue, persisting structural inequalities in the field of international news can be looked at from the perspective of different constituent parts of the global news ecology, two of which – questions of representation and the dispersion of different kinds of journalistic practices – I will elaborate on in the latter part of the chapter.

In this vein, the third part of the chapter focuses on issues of asymmetric patterns of *representation* of different world regions in international media. Here, I will discuss some of the ways in which the global South has been portrayed in dominant Western-based media in order to make explicit some of the patterns of under- or mis-representation that AJE set out to alter. Finally, in the fourth part I will look at repercussions of asymmetric patterns of media flows for news production *practices* and notions of professionalism – and the ways in which these affect AJE's ambitions of 'reporting back'.

2.2 Ontological Foundations

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the ontological foundation on the basis of which I seek to combine theories and methodologies discussed in the following chapters is grounded in critical realism. As Elder-Vass (2010: 11) noted, 'contemporary critical realism […] is a somewhat diverse school of thought.' In the following I am going to outline some critical realist concepts and perspectives I will draw on to clarify ontological positions, as they relate to the issues addressed in thesis. This by no means comprises a comprehensive or in-depth discussion of critical realism as a philosophical tradition, which would be well beyond the scope of this study.

The theoretical foundations of critical realism were originally developed by Roy Bhaskar with the aim of combining and going beyond empirical realist and transcendental idealist approaches (Bhaskar, 1975). Critical realists share with transcendental idealist positions the notion that it is important to be able to imagine generative mechanisms that do not necessarily result in observable regularities, while they differ from the latter in allowing for 'the possibility that what is imagined need not be imaginary but may be (and come to be known as) real' (Bhaskar, 1975: 15). The term 'critical realism' is derived by combining the concepts of 'transcendental realism' and 'critical naturalism', whereby '"critical", like "transcendental" suggested affinities with Kant's philosophy, while "realism" indicated the difference from it' (Bhaskar, 1998: ix). A considerable part of Bhaskar's concern in *A Realist Theory of Science* is the distinction between causal laws and patterns of events, a distinction he subsequently developed in *The Possibility of Naturalism* (1979).

Central to this ontological framework is a non-deterministic view of causation. The complexity of social aspects of reality means that, as Andrew Sayer notes, 'social science has been singularly unsuccessful in discovering law-like regularities' (Sayer, 1992: 2-3). At the same time, the fact that in the realm of social (aspects of) reality many phenomena are concept-dependent, does not rule out causal explanation, 'a) because material change in society has to be explained, too and b) because reasons can also be causes, in that they prompt us to do things, think differently, etc.' (Sayer, 2000: 18). A critical realist theory of causation is therefore based on the concept of

causal powers as attributes of entities, as well as 'the combination of causal powers of different entities to produce *actual causation* (Elder-Vass, 2010: 44, emphasis in original).' In other words, events can be understood as 'the outcome of interactions between a variety of causal powers (Elder-Vass, 2010: 7-8).'

Causal powers and liabilities provide a basis to explain something about the nature of the entity that possesses them, its relations with other entities and the potential effects of these relations. Significantly, causal powers can be attributes of single objects or individuals as well as of social relations and structures (Sayer, 1992: 104-5; Hartwig, 2007: 57). They *potentially* produce regularities, but exist (and can be described) independently of these, because their efficacy depends on the interplay of causal powers and liabilities of multiple intersecting structures and individuals in contexts which serve to activate some of these powers while restraining others. In short, they produce *'tendencies'*, but not 'exceptionless regularities' (Elder-Vass, 2010: 46, emphasis in original). This allows observations to be made about structural mechanisms without being deterministic about the way that these may come to impact on social reality in different contexts.

Avoiding the 'virtual tautology' of stating that 'an object can do something because it has the power to do so' (Sayer, 1992: 105-6), such accounts of causation also serve to explain *what it is about an object* that lends it its causal powers. Characteristic questions are: 'What does the existence of this object/practice presuppose?', 'Can/Could object A exist without object B?' and 'What is it about this object which enables it to do certain things?' (Sayer, 2000:16). With regard to this study, this approach allows, for example, the identification of the causal powers of notions of a particular (historically constituted) kind of professionalism within the journalistic field[2], the causal powers of AJE as an organisation[3] and those of individual

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[2] A different way of conceptualising inter-organisational professional habitus could be in terms of 'norm circles' that produce sets of beliefs amongst the people who constitute their parts (Elder-Vass, 2010: 156). Norm circles are closely interlinked with the causal powers of organisations that employ people who are simultaneously parts of norm circles, though not identical, as organisations 'produce a *further* and non-normative causal mechanism that gives the organisation its causal powers (Elder-Vass, 2010: 156, emphasis in original).'

journalists, as well as *how* the causal powers of all these elements *interact* to produce certain tendencies, for example in editorial outcomes. Here it is precisely the relation between themes that allows for an explanation of mechanisms inherent in the organisational environment of AJE *as a whole*.

Another concept vital to this understanding of causation is that of emergence. In the words of Elder-Vass, the concept of emergence 'expresses the idea that a thing – sometimes I will say 'an entity' or 'a whole' – can have properties or capabilities that are not possessed by its parts (Elder-Vass, 2010: 4).' As such, the causal powers of a given entity – variously articulated as 'emergent properties' (Elder-Vass, 2010: 45) – are related, but, crucially, irreducible to, the causal powers of its constituent parts (Carter & New, 2004: 7; Sayer, 2000: 12). The way the parts relate to the causal powers of the whole is through causal *mechanisms* that are the product of the *interactions* of the parts (in themselves 'wholes') and in turn produce causal powers or emergent properties of the social entity in question (Elder-Vass, 2010: 66-67). It is characteristic of this relation that fundamental changes in one entity or whole may cause changes in the emergent property it gave rise to, but that the principle of irreducibility means that changes in the latter cannot be predicted or explained exclusively by changes in the first (Hartwig, 2007: 166).

Likewise related, and fundamental to this view of causation, is a stratified perspective of reality based an ontological differentiation between the *real*, the *actual* and the *empirical* – the real being invested with causal powers and liabilities that, depending on the circumstances, may or may not become activated and have effects in the realm of the actual, and the actual in turn being irreducible to what can be observed empirically. This acknowledgment that events (the domain of the actual) and experiences (the domain of the empirical) are different categories renders empirical realism dependent 'upon what is in effect a special case' (Bhaskar, 1975: 17) and *on its own* ultimately inadequate. Conversely, it also allows empirical data to be linked with wider observations, in so far as the empirical is part of the actual and

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[3] For a detailed theoretical treatise of the argument that social entities, including *organisations*, possess causal powers as well as a discussion of how these causal powers can be delineated and assessed, see Elder-Vass, 2010.

both are part of the real. Therefore, it also allows empirically discernible patterns to be observed as one *example* of several potential effects of structural mechanisms.

This last point will be of particular relevance in the following part of this chapter, as it provides a basis to resolve some overdrawn disagreements between more empirically-minded and more broadly theoretical approaches designed to theorise asymmetries in the global media, and specifically news, ecology. In the following I will outline the implications of the theoretical debates evoked (in part implicitly, in part explicitly) by AJE's editorial remit and position in international news.

2.3   Theoretical Trajectories of 'Reporting Back'

In this part of the chapter I will outline the relevance of theory that predates the terminology of 'counter-hegemonic news' and 'contra-flow' for the study of AJE – notably concepts of cultural and media imperialism. This area of theoretical work, which had been a prominent theme in media studies in the 1970s, has now largely been superseded by theory acknowledging more complex media flows. However, notwithstanding important criticisms, some of the core concerns first raised decades ago remain valid to contemporary reality. Despite 'prominent examples' of complex and multidirectional media flows, Thussu (2007: 27) stresses that to assume 'that the world communication has become more diverse and democratic' would be misleading, since to this day there remain significant discrepancies in terms of revenue and global impact between dominant Western-based media and 'subaltern' and 'geo-cultural' media flows. And theories of globalisation following in the wake of earlier debates – while functioning as a corrective to many of the shortcomings of cultural imperialism concepts – provided little to address the causes of persistent structural inequalities in the way previous discussions did (Hesmondhalgh, 2008; Sparks, 2009).

In the context of international English-language TV news specifically, this means that – despite the fact that in the decades since these debates started 'there has been plenty of discussion around the existence or *desirability* of a "non-Western" or "Southern" perspective' – the emergence of AJE marked, in the words of Painter

(2008: 6), 'the first time since the beginning of the debate' that a channel with substantial and sustained financial clout had been launched with the explicit aim of balancing dominant news flows (emphasis added). Essentially, outlining this particular theoretical trajectory serves two purposes: 1) It helps to understand the theoretical *implications* of some of the language of 'reporting back' used in AJE's official editorial profile. And 2) it helps examine some of the underlying mechanisms that to this day influence global media flows, in some sectors in fundamentally unequal terms. In other words, in order to know *what factors might be involved in AJE's aim of contributing to 'balancing' an asymmetric global media environment, it is necessary to understand what it is about this media environment that makes it 'unbalanced' or unequal in the first place*.

Given continued global imbalances, there have been calls for a revival for the concept of imperialism (Hesmondhalgh, 2008; Sparks, 2009), albeit in a modified version in the light of the intellectual and practical failings that contributed to the defeat of the concept in the 1980s. One of these modification entails a separation of causal powers and their effects by acknowledging that while 'symbolic systems [including TV programmes] enjoy their dominant position in the world as a direct consequence of the brute economic and military domination of imperialist powers, [...] that does not imply that they are themselves "imperialist" (Sparks, 2009).' This approach helps to avoid essentialist and determinist assumptions about the nature of media products. Following Sparks (2009) with reference to the context of this thesis, I therefore understand inequalities in international English-language news as 'cultural *consequences* of imperialism (emphasis added)' rather than conceptualising them as inherently imperialist in and by themselves. In addition, as I will argue, by questioning the counter-hegemonic character of different kinds of 'contra-flow' (see 2.3.3), some of the critical clout that has been a defining feature of the concept of cultural imperialism (see 2.3.2), can be preserved without resurrecting earlier versions of cultural imperialism theory.

In the following I will give a brief overview of theoretical developments, their weaknesses as well as their continued relevance for contemporary debates on inequalities in international news – ranging from modernisation theory to the debates

about a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) and strands of media and cultural imperialism theory.

2.3.1   Early Debates on Unequal Media Flows

Early demands to counter Western media hegemony need to be understood in the context of their opposition to preceding models of modernisation theory. When the debates around imbalances in international communications first became prominent in the 1950s they did not initially focus on notions of domination. Rather, the media were seen as a means to 'accelerate the process of development and modernization' of developing countries (Fejes, 1981: 281). Modernisation theorists assumed a linear social *evolutionary* process, in accordance with which developing countries could improve their relatively disadvantaged position by following the path set out by 'developed' Western countries (Fejes, 1981: 283-284). As such 'it paid little attention to how media pluralism could be defended in traditional societies' and had a tendency to perceive traditional aspects of local cultures 'as something to be defeated' for the sake of progress (Curran, 2002: 168). In subsequent decades, scholars departing from modernisation theories came to abandon this emphasis on the 'internal processes of development' and began to acknowledge the persisting structural inequalities inherent in the *relations* between the South and the North (Fejes, 1981: 283).

Central to this change in focus was the realisation that, far from supporting self-reliant development in countries of the South, the transfer of communication technologies and the export of media content from the North to the South added to existing dependencies and served primarily to strengthen foreign business and national elites (Hamelink, 1997: 70-71). From the beginning of the debate, UNESCO played 'a leading role' in the analysis and discussion of unequal global media flows (Boyd-Barrett & Thussu, 1992: 7). In the early 1950s, the international body funded the first study focussing on unequal global distribution of news (Boyd-Barrett & Thussu, 1992: 1; Rantanen, 2009: 43), and went on to generate instrumental studies, such as the first comprehensive investigation of the global distribution of *television* content conducted by Nordenstreng and Varis (1974: 7). More than three decades

before AJE set out to balance unequal information flows, their results corroborated claims of significant geo-political imbalances and (notwithstanding its methodological and conceptual limitations) provided an empirical basis for further discussions. A follow-up study conducted by Varis a decade after the initial UNESCO report on television flows found that 'no major changes in the international flow of television programmes' had taken place over that period of time, although 'a trend towards greater regional exchanges *along* with the traditional dominance of few exporting countries' also began to emerge from the data (Varis, 1985: 53, emphasis added).

Crucially, UNESCO also provided a forum for newly independent countries to voice their needs and objectives. In the 1960s and 1970s, members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) began to articulate the challenge that an unequal flow of media posed for efforts to 'decolonise' and develop their countries on their own terms (Roach, 1997: 94-95).[4] However, it was not until the mid-1970s, when 'Third World voices' gained traction at UNESCO, that the question of asymmetric communication flows became a 'dominant discursive theme' in international diplomatic circles. Efforts to highlight the role of unequal media flows culminated in demands for a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) to complement the campaign for a New International Economic Order (NIEO) (Tomlinson, 1991: 16). In 1980, a commission headed by Sean McBride supported the call for a NWICO in its final report (Boyd-Barrett & Thussu, 1992: 8). Its findings provided not least 'intellectual justification' for a NWICO (Boyd-Barrett & Thussu, 1992: 25) and acknowledged a relation between 'freedom for the "strong" and the "haves"' and structural disadvantages 'for the "weak" and the "have nots"' (Boyd-Barrett & Thussu, 1992: 26).

The empirical evidence of unequal media flows left little doubt that the media were an integral part of global imbalances between developing countries in the global

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[4] The movement had been established in Belgrade in 1961. NAM members had in common that they were not formally aligned with either of the main powers of the Cold War era. Encompassing hugely diverse regions and political positions, they shared the challenge of having to develop their (often) newly independent countries amidst colonial legacies and continuing global economic inequalities.

South and developed countries in the global North. However, discussions about the political *implications* of these imbalances were less than straightforward. As Sparks (2009) noted, the fact that UNESCO – 'a place where the only actors who count are states' – served as a prominent platform for the debate, emphasised frictions informed by inter-governmental political considerations rather than a more comprehensive concern for those dominated by elites irrespective of national affiliation. This was not necessarily reflected in the more general aims of NWICO, which included restraining 'the power of the transnational media lobby' and encouraging 'autonomous media policies in the developing world' (Thomas, 1997: 165). However, the diplomatic liabilities built into Cold War era inter-governmental debate quickly became apparent in the way these aims were received and discussed. In this geo-political setting, implicit and explicit critique of global capitalism and a debate centring on resistance to US hegemony played a central role in the unravelling of plans for a NWICO.

What followed was a growing disengagement of Western powers from debates and demands that went against the grain of the 'free flow' doctrines supported by the US and others (Roach, 1997: 103-106; Boyd-Barrett & Thussu, 1992: 22). As a diplomatic initiative, the debate ultimately lost momentum when the US, and subsequently the UK, left the negotiating table in the mid-1980s, as 'diplomatic ambiguities gave way to more direct challenges' and 'UNESCO became more and more forthright in condemning neo-colonialism' (Tomlinson, 1991: 16). To this day, the NWICO debates are credited with putting the issue of global inequalities in media and communications on the international agenda, but are widely perceived to have achieved little to mitigate the imbalances they sought to address (Thomas, 1997: 165; Vincent, 1997: 175).

2.3.2 Reconciling Empirical and Theory-based Approaches

Academic research on unequal media flows was both stimulated by and in turn informed political discussions at the time. Media scholars such as Nordenstreng and Schiller took an active part in the evolution of the NWICO debates, while also being concerned with issues somewhat removed from (if indirectly related to) the

practicalities of applied politics. In other words, not having to contend with international diplomatic 'ambiguities' in quite the same fashion, academic research on unequal media flows both complemented and (to a limited degree) outlived the diplomatic agenda of the NWICO discussions. This, however, did not mean that these discussions were free from divisions at the time. From the start, one key dispute within the academic field centred on the adequacy of empirical versus theory-based approaches to best encapsulate the issues at stake.

On one side of the spectrum were those advocating detailed empirical investigations into *media imperialism*, with very specific foci on the dissemination and directionality of particular media technology and content in particular geo-political contexts. On the other side of the spectrum were those favouring more comprehensive theoretical arguments about notions of domination inherent in post-Second World War incarnations of *cultural imperialism* (with the media but one element of continued and systematic inequalities benefitting the West). Again, the overarching geo-political influences of the time informed the fission between empirical and theoreticist approaches. In essence, the greater conceptual flexibility of empirical approaches tended to allow and account for a more pluralist, less pessimistic outlook than that represented by many of the radical political economists (in *that* sense it could be argued that it was conceptually closer to subsequent globalisation theories) – and for that very reason they were taken to task by the latter for lacking critical clout.

For proponents of the cultural imperialism perspective, such as John Tomlinson, the empirical (or 'anti-theoreticist') media imperialism approaches crucially lacked the notion of domination that was an intrinsic element of the more inclusive concept of cultural imperialism (Tomlinson, 1991: 21). Consequently, he has argued that the comparatively narrow focus of media imperialism represented a sub-category of a larger debate – 'a particular way of discussing cultural imperialism' – and that as such its merits depended on its ability to include 'all the complex political issues – and indeed the political *commitments* – entailed in the notion of cultural domination' (Tomlinson, 1991: 22, emphasis in original). Others, far from considering themselves as 'anti-theoreticist', argued for the necessity of empirical evidence and detail. In Boyd-Barrett's words: '[…] only by taking into account the full complexity of this

economic sector, by getting inside the "black box" of meaningful production, could we generate theory that was adequate to the task and take us *beyond* the fairly crude *political rhetoric* that was part of the NWICO debate then at its height' (Boyd-Barret, 1998: 165, emphasis added).

Chin-Chuan Lee makes the point that empirical enquiries into media imperialism allow to map 'variations in the kind and degree of media dependency' in ways that have tended to be 'glossed over by radical writers' (Lee, 1980: 44-45). For Lee, a closer look at the impact of internal forces such as national regulation of media markets on the kind and degree of dependency (dismissed by many political economists, not least because of its resonance with a focus on national development within modernisation theory) allowed *change* and variation to be accounted for in ways that more determinist versions of cultural imperialism did not (Lee, 1980: 45).

Research by those identifying themselves as at the more empirical end of the spectrum was designed to validate and corroborate claims of media imperialism, but also to show varying degrees of media imperialism in different geo-political settings. At the time, television technology and content were of particular interest, since the medium's introduction in developing countries had been fairly recent, bestowing on the question of television flows the urgency of an issue where 'so much remains to be decided, for good or ill' (Katz & Wedell, 1977: v). For example, in an effort to test theoretical assumptions concerning media imperialism and television flows, Chin-Chuan Lee compares three very different national contexts, Canada, Taiwan and China (Lee, 1980). These examples were specifically chosen because they defied straightforward dependency models. His findings included the observation that, despite being a major industrialised country, the 'threat of foreign media (television at least) in Canada is real and severe' (Lee, 1980: 144). In contrast, Taiwan's national context meant that 'this seems to be less the case for Taiwan' (Lee, 1980: 144), while China 'has been hailed as one of the few countries that has managed to be media-independent' (Lee, 1980: 225-226).[5] This plurality of effects in turn allowed him to highlight the conceptual risks of glossing over national difference for

[5] Crucially, he also warns against seeing China as a model for other developing countries, cautioning against the tendencies of neo-Marxist scholars to 'romanticize' China's media self-sufficiency (Lee, 1980: 232).

the benefit of harnessing the critical capacity of overarching theoretical models (Lee, 1980).

In a similar vein, Katz and Wedell also underline the potential for variation in broadcasting industries in different national contexts. They point out that several of the homogenising effects of the medium came about as a result of the fact that television was being transferred from the West to developing countries *as a package*, not as distinctive technological, professional and organisational components, which had rendered the medium more rigid and less suitable for local adaptation (Katz & Wedell, 1977: 227-229). In other words, in their analysis, television as a medium is invested both with a liability to cultural homogenisation and with the power of cultural emancipation. This aspect is particularly relevant to AJE, which, as an organisation based in the Middle East, straightforwardly adopted some traits of Western-originated TV news journalism (such as a specific kind of professionalism, technological standards and tried and tested news and current affairs formats, see also Chapter 7), while eschewing others (for example rejecting so-called 'soft news' and a Western-oriented outlook on international news, see Chapter 6). As David Morley and Kevin Robins put it, 'even if media technologies have, historically, been developed and controlled by the powerful countries of the West, they are, none the less, always capable of being appropriated and used in other ways than those for which they were intended' (Morley & Robins, 1995: 127).

In contrast, analyses with greater intellectual proximity to the theoretical models of cultural imperialism mostly do not focus in the same way on the potential role of (national) adaptation and regulation, but rather on the (international) inequalities at the root of asymmetric media flows. In this vein, one central element of the cultural imperialism approach is the critique of global capitalism. This critique has been rigorously promoted by a range of authors, who have in common their declared opposition to the concept of a 'free flow of information'. They point towards global structural inequalities in order to stress that a 'free flow' could not possibly be 'free' under market conditions heavily skewed in favour of the developed countries of the global North (Nordenstreng, 2011: 79; Mattelart, 1980: xviii; Schiller 1998: 18). Consequently, it was argued, the concept of 'free flow' hindered rather than helped developing countries in establishing self-sufficient indigenous media initiatives.

More poignantly, it was seen as an ideological tool employed by the powers that be (in particular the US) to 'naturalise' the advancement of their economic interests at the expense of developing countries.

In addition, this ideology was seen to be mutually constitutive of a system that was self-perpetuating in its very nature. For Herbert Schiller, the prevalence of the capitalist system in itself sufficed to guarantee the continued cultural hegemony of the United States, since it created an environment for individual actors and companies which made certain decisions and types of media content viable (those which lead to economic success) and precluded others. As Schiller puts it, 'You don't need a cultural police in a market system. The cultural system is the 'KGB' and it works very effectively' (Schiller, 1998: 25, emphasis in original). Accordingly, critiques of his writings have tended to focus on the deterministic way in which 'the notion of "the system" becomes reified and operates in a rather crude and rigid "functionalist" manner' (Tomlinson, 1991: 38).[6]

Another critique of research associated with cultural imperialism has been that its proponents did not do enough to avoid providing 'pretexts used respectively by conservative, communist and theocratic regimes to justify repressive media censorship' to curb the threat of Western influence through cultural imperialism (Curran, 2002: 169). In the words of Sparks (2009), by turning a blind eye to the repressive nature of some of the state actors opposing US cultural hegemony as part of the NWICO efforts at UNESCO, the cultural imperialism concept was 'discredited by its own compromises with the indefensible.' Furthermore, by not taking into

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[6] As Sayer points out, to claim that social objects, for example markets, 'have particular ways of acting as a consequence of their structure or intrinsic nature' is compatible with critical realism, as long as the epistemological essentialist or foundationalist fallacy of equating the identification of essential attributes of an object with having 'found the ultimate truth about it' is avoided (Sayer, 1995: 21). In so far as Schiller stresses predictable outcomes of (individuals' or institutions') actions within the realm of (capitalist) social structures, his work differs from a critical realist perspective in that the latter differentiates between powers and liabilities as properties of social structures, on the one hand, and potential effects which are contingent on (the interaction of) a range of internal and external factors, on the other hand. In the words of Andrew Sayer: 'in claiming that phenomena such as markets have certain essential features, we do not have to suppose that they always produce the same effects, whatever the circumstances' (Sayer, 1995: 21).

account media reception as part of the process by which power relations are exerted through media expansion, the political economy approach implies a straightforward 'hypodermic-needle' model of audience effects. In the words of David Morley and Kevin Robins: 'If we are concerned to understand the powers of cultural imperialism, our conceptual models of the absorption and indigenisation of "foreign" influences will need to be more subtle than those of traditional models of media effects' (Morley & Robins, 1995: 7). Accordingly, an increasing interest in audiences and their abilities to resist hegemonic media messages played a significant role in the passing of cultural imperialism theory as a central theme in media studies. In short, if the keys to 'decoding' media content were culturally specific (Hall, 1999), then disproportionate quantities of imported content did not by default have a homogenising effect.

Notwithstanding very relevant criticism of the determinist elements of cultural imperialism, Schiller's basic arguments were supported by studies that provided examples of the specific ways in which inequalities in relations between industrialised and newly independent economies rendered the concept of 'free flow' a counter-productive mechanism if the aim was to achieve a more balanced flow of global media. For example, in one particular case study Samarajiwa focuses on business models in international news in order to unpick the *structural obstacles in the way of market entry for financially viable alternatives* to major Western-centred news organisations (Samarajiwa, 1984). Despite being raised more than two decades prior to the creation of AJE and in relation to international news agencies rather than international news channels, two points made by Samarajiwa resonate particularly with the project and mission of Al Jazeera.

Firstly, he anticipates the argument (even if he thinks of the scenario as not very likely and potentially politically difficult) that 'economic viability is not essential if the petroleum-exporting Third World countries can be persuaded to finance, on a continuing basis, the new news exchange mechanism or mechanisms' (Samarajiwa, 1984: 130) – an exemption from the pressures of the market without which AJE would not have been able to impact on the international news ecology in the way it did, as I will demonstrate in Chapter 8. And secondly, he maintains that access to stories in the developing world could play a vital role in establishing alternatives to

the Western-based international news organisations. His suggestion is for developing countries to collaborate and 'sell' access to entire regions by demanding, whenever Western news organisations set up offices in their part of the world, comparable access for their own news organisations in the home country or region of the Western organisation (Samarajiwa, 1984: 132). Even if this kind of reciprocity has never come about, superior access to stories in the global South has certainly been one of the main mechanisms by which Al Jazeera earned its recognition and carved out its space within the field as the first English-language 24/7 international news channel not based in a Western country.

As the examples cited above demonstrate, both micro and macro approaches to analysing the international media ecology continue to resonate with the current make-up of international English-language news and current affairs broadcasting. As Sreberny and Khiabany pointed out in the context of the Iranian blogosphere, neither 'universalist approaches' nor 'theories of exceptionalism' are entirely adequate to grasp the simultaneous distinctiveness and transnational resemblance of situated media practices. They appeal that 'serious analytic work on the development of the media and communications environments of the global south have to work in between these two radical theoretical poles (Sreberny & Khiabany, 2010: 181).'

In this spirit, I shall argue that elements of both approaches – modified to address practical and theoretical weaknesses and to accommodate cotemporary contexts – are compatible on the basis of a critical realist ontology. Instead of either solely presuming effects to be the results of social structures and systems (for example cultural imperialism as an effect of global capitalism) or limiting analysis to empirically observable patterns (for example the proportion of imported Western TV programmes in a given non-Western national context), a critical realist perspective of causation allows to take into account wider structural mechanisms independently of their effects in the realm of the empirical, while also conceptualising empirical cases as being linked to wider structural mechanisms, if not in simple and predictable ways.

2.3.3   Contra-flows of Media and Aspects of 'Counter-hegemony'

Since the debates on unequal media flows began, accounts of Western media hegemony have been challenged in several ways. In addition to an increased interest in 'active' audiences (see 2.3.2), a different perspective emerged through the acknowledgment of increasingly complex and multidirectional flows of media as regional media hubs such as India, Hong Kong, Brazil or Egypt gained in influence internationally. In 'The Local and the Global in International Communication' (2000), Sreberny maps reverse flows of non-Western media expanding to reach European and North American audiences. The expansion of non-Western media industries beyond the global South, such as India's Bollywood boom (Govil, 2007; Kavoori & Punathambekar, 2008) or the export successes of Brazilian telenovelas (Rogers & Antola, 1985; Rego & La Pastina, 2007) have brought home the fact that the entertainment sector, comprising by far the largest portion of global media flows, can no longer be described as a one-way flow.

Others have commented on the spread of television, a medium originally very national in its outlook and purpose, across borders (Chalaby, 2005; Thussu, 1998, 2005, 2007). Online and satellite technology has transformed the reach and potential applications of the media and created an environment where national regulation can be circumvented in ways that were previously impossible. In particular, the highly regulated and censored environment of state broadcasting in the Middle East was suddenly faced with uncensored competition from broadcasters based outside their realms of influence, causing Nasser Judeh, then Jordan's information minister, to coin the phrase 'offshore democracy' (Sakr, 2001: 4). As an aspiring journalist at the American University in Cairo explained: '"I can't criticize from within my country," but Arab satellite channels made it possible for her 'to criticize from outside and make things different" (Pintak, 2006: 140).'

Amidst an increasingly internationalised media environment, media flows defying dependency models and a more or less mono-directional flow from the global North to the global South came to be loosely subsumed under the label of 'contra-flow'. Al Jazeera in particular became wedded to the concept as journalists and academics pinned their hopes (and their scepticism) on the broadcaster's ability (or inability) to

break the mould and challenge the Western-dominated field of global TV news.[7] However, there are a couple of central issues that require further clarification if 'contra-flow' is to be used as more than a buzzword signifying an increase in alternatives to historically dominant media. Firstly, definitions of different types of contra-flow need to be narrowed down in order to arrive at a working concept against which Al Jazeera's ambitions can be measured in a meaningful way. In 'Media on the Move' Thussu does just that when he divides contra-flows into transnational and geo-cultural contra-flows (Thussu, 2007). According to this categorisation, transnational contra-flows are described as having a strong regional presence expanding beyond their core region and aiming at broad international audiences, while geo-cultural media caters to specific cultural-linguistic audiences across the globe.

With regard to Al Jazeera it could be argued, as Thussu (2007: 13) does, that it falls into the category of transnational media, since its international significance has grown out of a strong regional presence. It is also legitimate to ask, however, whether AJA and AJE qualify as the same category of contra-flow, given their different target audiences and remits. As I will explain in more detail in Chapter 5, having its headquarters in the Middle East is a crucial element not only of AJE's heritage, but also of its ongoing development. At the same time, other than its parent channel (which originally focussed on bringing a confrontational Western-style of news reporting to the Middle East, when its unique access began to also impact on audiences based in Western countries), AJE *started out* on a global basis with its main hubs spread across four continents and its language and recruitment practices placing it in direct competition with dominant global, rather than transnational or geo-culturally specific, media.

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[7] It is important to note here that AJE is not the only channel to declare as its trademark opposition to and competition with the dominant international news channels. Channels explicitly challenging the dominance of CNNI and BBC World in the realm of international news include the French channel France24, Iranian Press TV, China's CCTV-9, Russia Today and the Venezuelan-based pan-South American channel La Nueva Televisora del Sur (Telesur). All of these channels differ substantially from AJE and from one another (see also Painter, 2008), yet share with AJE their declared aim of 'rebalancing' a field dominated by Anglo-American news media.

In the basic sense that AJE's headquarters is physically based in a country of the global South, while its content is received across the world including in countries of the global North, AJE qualifies as contra-flow. However, its global ambitions, international staff and financial backing render it a type of contra-flow that is closely connected with the dominant traditions of Western media organisations – a point that has already been argued with regard to its parent channel, AJA (Iskandar, 2005). In essence, AJE walks a fine line between conventional media traditions and contra-flow, and is indeed perceived by different people variously to belong to one or the other of these categories. The issue becomes less ambiguous once the distinction is made between media contra-flow and 'counter-hegemonic' media.

The notion of contra-flow, in particular in literature on AJE, is often coupled with the terminology of 'counter-hegemony'. AJE's remit of reporting 'from the South' as well as challenging the dominant news channels within the field of international broadcasting, means that elements both of contra-flow and of counter-hegemonic ambitions play a role. The presence of these two interrelated ambitions does not, however, mean that they can be viewed as synonymous. As Thussu (2007: 28) points out, one should resist the temptation of blurring the boundaries between contra-flows and counter-hegemonic media, since, for example, the hegemony of a 'commodified media system' can be *reinforced* by commercially-oriented contra-flows.

In order to understand how hegemony and counter-hegemony relate to the media, it is useful to refer briefly to Gramsci's concept of hegemony 'as a means to understand the processes through which certain conceptions of reality come to hold sway over competing worldviews' (Mumby, 1997: 343). To explore the social dimension of (capitalist) power, Gramsci develops the concept of hegemony to denote 'soft' instruments of domination that engender consent between those dominating and those dominated by existing relations of power. In Gramsci's own words (Forgacs, 2000: 194), the assertion of a 'moment of hegemony' is essential 'to the "accrediting" of the cultural fact, of cultural activity, of a cultural front […] *alongside* the merely economic and political ones' (emphasis added). Moreover, and with particular relevance to research on AJE, Gramsci also comments in his *Prison Notebooks* on what he perceives to be the hegemony of 'Western culture' over the rest of the world (Hoare & Smith, 1971: 416).

As a source of 'soft' power that is part of the realm of culture (in the broadest sense), the media are potentially both affected by hegemonic forces and complicit in their continued dominance. Inversely, 'counter-hegemonic' media potentially serve to corrode and deconstruct hegemonic interpretations of world events by unmasking taken-for-granted views serving economically, politically and culturally dominant elites and the ideologies that underpin their position. Asking whether AJE qualifies as counter-hegemonic, therefore, goes beyond the notion of directionality embedded in the concept of contra-flow, because it means asking how far AJE has managed to unsettle taken-for-granted global hierarchies of place, class, gender and geo-political alignment.[8] As such, the notion of counter-hegemonic media is conceptually much closer to notions of a 'bottoms-up' approach advocated by Sparks (2009) as a way of tackling *cultural consequences of imperialism* (see also 2.3.1) – an approach that serves to 'articulates the views and values of the poor and oppressed' by cutting across notions of 'foreign' and 'native' media.

Crucially, 'hegemony is not an either/or condition' (Mumby, 1997: 364-365). Consequently, ideological struggles over hegemony 'work not only when people try to contest or rupture an established ideological field in favour of an entirely new one (in the case of revolutionary struggles), but also when they disrupt the existing ideologies by *transforming* their meanings' (Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2008: 16-17, emphasis added). The fact that hegemony is a matter of degree opens up a range of positions. One suitable approach, I will argue, is to analytically separate different areas of investigation. This will allow a more 'complex interplay of power and resistance' (Mumby, 1997: 344) to be accounted for than could be accomplished by situating AJE either as purely 'counter-hegemonic' or as purely 'mainstream'.

To this end, the next section of this chapter (2.4) will be dedicated to questions of news content – a theme regarding (im)balances in international news that will be contextualised empirically in Chapter 6. Following on from there, the final part of this chapter (2.5) will deal with the implications of the global news ecology for

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[8] For an analysis of 'hegemony as a process' in the context of the media, see also Gitlin (1999).

questions of professionalism and journalistic practices – a theme that will find its empirical equivalent in Chapter 7. In Chapter 8, meanwhile, I shall turn to the issue of potential difference as a result of *market pressures*, which, as shown earlier in this chapter, has been an overarching theme of political economy approaches to asymmetric media flows.[9]

2.4   News Content: Historical and Present Patterns of Inequality

Crucially, questions concerning unequal news flows are about more than a geographically uneven distribution of news. They are about representation. As Sakr points out (2007: 118)[10] 'for […] assertions of a challenge to be justified, it needs to be demonstrated that Al-Jazeera consciously pursued a *distinctive news agenda* […]' (emphasis added). This immediately opens up the question: distinctive from what? Or, more precisely: what does 'distinctive' potentially entail in the realm of foreign news and, in the case of AJE, in particular in the context of news from and/or about the global South? In order to answer that question, it is necessary first to look at how the developing world is portrayed in various Western news media.[11] This necessity

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[9] Throughout the empirical chapters mentioned above, I shall relate the theoretical implications of unequal news flows as outlined in this present chapter to the level of AJE as an organisation (and the journalistic practices it can sustain). This *organisational dimension* of news flows will be outlined in the following chapter (Chapter 3) by expressing the issues at stake in terms of Bourdieu's field theory and complementing this focus on structure with an appraisal of the causal powers of journalistic autonomy.

[10] Here Sakr refers to AJA, writing as she was at a time when AJE was in the works, but still barely researched. However, given the central role AJA's emergent remit as a challenge to Western networks had for the way AJE's editorial remit has been conceived (see also Chapter 5), her observation carries weight for the analysis of AJN as a whole.

[11] I am referring to 'Western news' as a means of gaining an understanding of who and what AJE set out to challenge, acutely aware that this distinction entails a generalisation that is predominantly analytical and *not* intended to presume homogeneity across Western news (for differences between and within Western media systems see also Hallin & Mancini, 2004 and Cottle & Rai, 2008). At the same time it is worth noting that just as *national* television 'construes the nation as an "imagined community" by homogenising differences internal to the nation state […] *transnational* news flows construe a "beyond the nation" community by

again throws into sharp relief the inherently relational aspect of questions of news flows (which I will address in more detail in the next chapter in the context of Bourdieu's field theory).

2.4.1 Bad News from Far-away Places: The Global South and Selection Criteria in Foreign News

One of AJE's core aims is to represent the global South more adequately than its Western-based competition by 'reporting from the developing world back to the West and from the southern to the northern hemisphere' (AJE Website, Corporate Profile, 04/09/2008). As mentioned above, this aim presumes an existing imbalance in the way the southern hemisphere has been covered by Western media – an imbalance that has been the subject of academic attention for many decades. One of the first studies to systematically examine factors of newsworthiness in foreign news coverage was Galtung and Ruge's study of 'the structure of foreign news' (Galtung & Ruge, 1965). Despite critique regarding the generalisability of empirical data from one particular news sector (print) of one particular country (Norway), their study still bears some relevance in current contexts, because many of the factors identified remain prevalent throughout the journalistic field. Selection is an inevitable, recurring and formative part of news production. The simple fact that 'we cannot register everything' (1965: 65) has much less simplistic consequences for news production, since the rules governing selection processes influence the degree of resemblance between events and their depiction as a news product.

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establishing a sense of a broader "we". This "we" […] is the "imagined" community of the West, which inhabits the transnational zone of safety and construes human life in the zone of suffering as the West's "other"' (Chouliaraki, 2006: 10, emphasis added). In other words, notwithstanding notable exceptions and substantial differences within and between various Western news platforms, there is a sense that what national and transnational Western news networks tend to have in common is that neither have entirely succeeded in superseding a dependence on interpretative frameworks that are informed by geo-political hierarchies in order to turn complex aspects of reality into news.

Many of the news factors that Galtung and Ruge identify are *not specific* to foreign news, but, as I will explain below, nonetheless carry weight for the selection of foreign news (in many instances a disproportionately weight). For example, factors such as 'negativity', a tendency to personalise stories and to focus on elite protagonists are present in domestic and foreign news alike (1965: 68).[12] Other factors go a long way towards explaining geo-political asymmetries in traditional news production. Perhaps most evidently, a focus not only on elite persons, but also on 'elite nations' as protagonists whose 'actions […] are, at least usually and in short-term perspective, more consequential than the activities of others' has the potential to significantly distort the proportionality of coverage from or of different world regions (1965: 68). Reinforcing this tendency is the factor of 'cultural proximity' (1965: 67). Tendencies of 'countries with similar cultures [to] report each other more frequently or more in-depth' (Hanusch & Obijiofor, 2008: 15) mean that Western dominance in the field in terms of volume and directionality of news flows inevitably also carries subjectively predisposed perspectives of the world.

Some of these perspectives are expressed in misrepresentations, but often they take the much less obvious form of silences and absences. The latter in particular will be tested in the comparative content analysis in Chapter 6 with regard to the relative emphasis on stories from and/or about the global South on AJE and BBCW News respectively. Importantly, preferential selection of culturally proximate events does not by implication mean that journalists consciously favour culturally more familiar aspects of reality over culturally less familiar aspects. Rather it is a question of what comes across journalists' radar, what they notice and, importantly, what they notice *instantly* enough to integrate it into fast-paced news production processes.

Critically, all factors potentially correlate and have cumulative effects, arguably causing those factors not specific to foreign news (such as frequency, amplitude, clarity or negativity) to be of greater relative importance to the selection process for culturally distant events than for culturally familiar events. For example, the more distant a nation is, the less ambiguous, more consonant, negative and/or personalised the event will have to be in order to be selected (1965: 81-83) – a process endowed

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[12] For a detailed delineation of further news factors, see Galtung and Ruge (1965).

with the causal liability of producing systematically skewed accounts of countries considered culturally distant. The result is that news from or about

> nations that are culturally distant and nations that are low in international rank […] will have to refer to people, preferably top elite, and be preferably negative and unexpected but nevertheless according to a pattern that is consonant with the "mental pre-image". […] This will, in turn, facilitate an image of these countries as dangerous, ruled by capricious elites, as unchanging in their basic characteristics, as existing for the benefit of the topdog nations, and in terms of their links to those nations (Galtung & Ruge, 1965: 83-84).

Since the mid-1960s numerous studies have confirmed predispositions in Western news - national and international - to neglect (or depict distorted representations of) developing countries, which are triggered by the news values expressed through these factors. Many authors have found that, instead of gaining in volume in times of increasing global interrelatedness, 'the perspectives of the great mass of the world population are under-represented in global news' (van Ginneken, 1998: 143). In a study of Reuters' coverage of a WTO conference where 'nearly all the world's countries were represented' and 'treated equally' as part of the proceedings, Chang (1998: 537-538) found that, amongst the nations that were being mentioned in the dispatches, the agency 'underscored the activities of core countries [of the West] at the expense of other nations', with the latter mainly featuring 'through their interactions with the core nations' (Chang, 1998: 552). With reference to Anglo-American broadcast media, researchers found that 'there is a distinct shift away from programmes featuring developing countries' (Franks, 2004: 425) in the case of the UK, while with regard to US media 'a revival of foreign news' was considered 'more necessary than ever' (Gans, 2011: 4). In short, news media in general and television in particular have been found to provide 'less and less world coverage' (Miller, 2007: 1).

Moreover, where coverage of developing countries does take place, there has been criticism that 'news from poor countries is nearly always bad news' (Franks, 2004: 426-427), with an 'almost total neglect of *positive* news' (Hafez, 1999: 50, emphasis in original) and that coverage 'tends to focus on crises, with repetitive imagery of

famine, war and disease and death' (Miller, 2007: 64).[13] In addition, news coverage of disasters has been criticised by scholars for rarely addressing complex structural deficiencies and causes. In other words, there is a risk inherent in the synchronic nature of news of depicting suffering without providing the context that would allow and encourage audience members to understand how disasters, natural or otherwise, *relate to human action*. Again these factors are not specific to foreign news, but arguably particularly relevant in circumstances where – other than in domestic news – the protagonists of news reports and potential audience members do not necessarily share similar interpretative frameworks and knowledge about events. As a consequence of this focus on decontextualised disasters, criticism has been voiced aobut the largely passive roles in which those affected by the events covered are often depicted (Miller, 2007: 64). In the words of Seaton, 'representing *suffering* more adequately hardly seems the real problem at all. We have far too many victims and not enough agents on TV […] as it is. The urgent challenge is to find ways of showing the political processes that cause terrible humanitarian catastrophes (as well as those that may ameliorate them)' (Seaton, 2001: 502, emphasis added).[14]

Of course, several studies cited above draw on news in particular *national* contexts, such as Norway (Galtung & Ruge, 1965), the UK (Miller, 2007; Franks, 2004) or the US (Golan & Wanta, 2003).[15] The question arising then is whether *transnational* Western networks have outgrown geo-politically specific, nation-based perspectives. On the one hand, transnational channels differ in crucial ways from national

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[13] For empirical case studies, see for example Kalyango's analysis of CNNI's coverage of Uganda (2011) or Golan and Wanta's study analysing selection criteria for US-based coverage of elections across the world (2003).

[14] Again, this particularly refers to news and arguably applies less to current affairs programming, which provides greater scope for explaining and unraveling potential causes of conflict and disasters. At the time of writing, however, programming remains under-researched with respect to AJE, in part because such research is methodologically less straightforward than news, complicating any direct comparisons with Western-based broadcasters (see also suggestions for further research in Chapter 9.4.1).

[15] Arguably this is in partly symptomatic of the fact that news follows patterns of globalisation to a significantly lesser extent than other media. As a result, 'the overwhelming majority of news outlets – whether they be television, radio or the press – are still national or local' (Curran, 2002: 179).

channels. As Thussu notes, 'nationality scarcely matters in this market-oriented media ecology, as producers view the audience principally as consumers and not as citizens' (Thussu, 2007: 12). Consequently, the geographical range and scheduling of transnational channels is adapted to the (perceived) requirements of international audiences, '[…] tearing apart the old relationship between place and television that has traditionally prevailed in broadcasting history' (Chalaby, 2003: 464). On the other hand, transnational television, rather than opening up the market for new competitors, largely benefits existing media groups with business models well positioned to compensate high entry costs through vertical and horizontal integration (2003: 464). As Hafez argues, these kinds of technological and organisational expansions beyond national media systems have emerged at a different pace than *content* development in news (Hafez, 1999). He maintains that geo-politically specific characteristics of news are present in national as well as transnational news organisations, as many '*transnational* programmes are really made by *multinational* institutions with a clearly defined Western home base' (1999: 50, emphasis in original).[16]

Essentially, 'foreign news' as a term in itself denotes a separation between domestic and foreign issues that can only be meaningful in the context of a defined domestic base. With this distinction in mind, Berglez suggests defining global journalism – 'supposedly foreign journalism's younger cousin' (Berglez, 2008: 845) – as a distinct news style that differentiates itself from foreign news by virtue of a 'global outlook' that emphasises 'how economic, political, social and ecological practices, processes and problems in different parts of the world affect each other, are interlocked, or share commonalities' (2008: 847). In the context of AJE this is not least significant because, as Williams, Meth and Willis (2009: 10) note, 'the South is a vital and active part of processes of globalisation'. This significance of global interconnectedness, and the mutual effects it creates between and across countries of the global South and North, has not, however, been reflected in editorial structures in international media. Just as for Hafez, for Berglez, geographical expansion in news

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[16] Morley and Robins (1995: 126) likewise argue that media globalisation 'is no mere technological phenomenon, not least in so far as the media technologies in question have a very particular (Western or Euro-American) point of origin and are controlled by identifiable interests.'

coverage on the one hand and a genuinely global orientation in content on the other hand are two separate matters that evolve at different speeds. In the words of Berglez, 'it is one thing to rapidly report news from all parts of the world (the CNN approach), but something else entirely to journalistically explain and understand the world as a single place (the global outlook), and it is therefore *not* possible to say that CNN International is, *in all cases, more global in its outlook* than a national newspaper' (Berglez, 2008: 848, emphasis added).

2.4.2   Who Gets a 'Voice' on TV News?: Mechanisms of Source Selection

AJE's aim of challenging hierarchies in global news has implications beyond geographical connotations of the global South, in particular since the channel also claims and aims to be the 'voice of the voiceless'. There is, of course, an overlap between ambitions to represent 'the voiceless' and aiming to be the 'voice of the South' – precisely where the underrepresentation of countries from the global South described above renders their potential representatives comparatively 'voiceless'.[17] However, aiming to offer a platform for 'the voiceless' differs in several important ways from aiming to represent the South more proportionally. Firstly, in the global North there are likewise groups of people systematically underrepresented in the media – including mainstream parts of societies such as women, 'ordinary' citizens or 'illegal' immigrants. And secondly, there are elite voices from the South that are – far from being considered 'voiceless' – comparatively well positioned to make themselves heard internationally. In short, power imbalances and the way these are being reflected in terms of who gets to speak in international news (arguably always have and increasingly will) cut across North/South categorisations.

In the context of AJE, the ambition to give a 'voice to the voiceless', again, fell on fertile ground with academics and journalists alike, since questions of who gets to

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[17] Following Gans (2011: 5-6), I use the term 'representative' in a *symbolic* way rather than to indicate any formal form of representation. In this sense, representatives include anyone, including journalists and news sources, whose on-screen presence is symbolically linked to the characteristic or variable she or he can validly be said to stand for *in the context of a particular broadcast.*

speak on TV – quite literally whose voice has an on-air presence – have time and again exposed inequalities that were out of step with ambitions to fairly represent traditionally underrepresented sectors of the world population. More specifically, literature on news sources in particular has elaborated on how questions of power imbalances are being expressed through choices of who gets to speak in the news (Gans, 1980, 2011; Tumber, 1999; Hall et al., 1999; Gitlin, 1999; Manning, 2001, 2013). Just as with geographic imbalances more generally, this link between power imbalances and news sources is as much about who does *not* get to speak as it is about who does, because inequalities in representation find their expression in silences and absences. As Gans (1980: 116) puts it in his early work on news sources, 'a complete study of the news should therefore include an investigation of both the individuals who become sources and the 99 per cent of the population that does not'.

This often becomes particularly evident when in the lead-up to a conflict or crisis independent and alternative sources – which do not benefit from the status quo and might be comparatively well positioned to point out early signs of a looming crisis – turn out to have been largely ignored by the very media that prides itself on providing 'checks' on the powerful on behalf of 'ordinary' people. Two prominent examples include the overall reluctance of US media ahead of the US invasion of Iraq to report 'a wide-ranging debate that offered analysis and commentary from *different* perspectives' (Hayes & Guardino, 2010: 59, emphasis added) and the global media's ineffectiveness in warning of signs of an impending international financial crisis in 2008 (Manning, 2013). As the authors of the case studies cited above emphasise, sources contradicting the conventional wisdom of the time and place in question would have been accessible to journalists, but failed to be adequately considered.

As the difference in context of these two examples indicates, some of the mechanisms behind them appear to apply in general. One such mechanism emphasised in the literature is that journalists and their sources often appear to share 'a common set of assumptions' (Manning, 2013: 186). In other words, there is inevitably a danger of a degree of ideological congruence between journalists and their sources, which causes journalists not to notice important factors that fall outside

assumptions that appear to be commonly accepted and that therefore become 'naturalised'. As Gitlin argues (1999: 272), it is not least the ensuing reciprocal relationship that means that *even where journalists challenge and criticise authorities* (as they routinely do as part of their job), there is a structural liability to remain within the dominant hegemonic framework in which the powers that be set 'unspoken outer limits' for controversial debates.[18] In addition, the ideal of objectivity, ironically, sets the scene for partiality in source selection, since it increases journalists' dependence on the verification of information by officials or other 'insiders' with special knowledge of political or economic processes that cannot (or cannot in the timeframe available) be independently verified.

In this context it is also relevant to note that any imbalance in this regard is potentially exacerbated by the fact that journalists and their sources are engaged in a relationship that is itself not necessarily balanced. Sources seek positive coverage or avoidance of negative headlines and journalists need sources they can approach for confirmations and comments at short notice – but which way the power within such a relationship tips (and the likelihood of its continuation in a mutually helpful way) is contingent not least on the scarcity of the knowledge that the source can access. Thus, ordinary citizens are inherently disadvantaged compared with government officials or industry leaders, who can draw on internal information that is otherwise not readily available. One result of such power imbalances is that journalists need to put more effort into maintaining crucial relations with official sources than they would have to with many other types of source. This does not mean that they are not prepared to be critical of official sources – access does not equate in any simplistic way with positive coverage – but it does mean that it takes attention and time away from alternative approaches and sources in an already time-pressured environment. In the words of Hall (Hall et al., 1999: 254), '[…] the practical pressures of constantly working against the clock and the professional demands of impartiality and objectivity – combine to produce a systematically structured *over-accessing* to the media of those in powerful and privileged institutional positions' (emphasis in original).

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[18] There are of course laudable exceptions and at times even a shift in perception that causes a breakdown of previously shared sets of assumptions.

Absences can affect a range of groups, but there are three common cases that have been identified in the literature, which are of particular relevance in relation to AJE's remit. Firstly, given the over-exposure in news – as described above – of official sources, being the 'voice of the voiceless' would require AJE to focus more on people speaking in their capacity as 'ordinary' citizens, those opposing the powers that be or simply those affected by the decisions of authorities. And secondly, the reduction in foreign bureaus as major Western networks are cutting back, combined with the tendencies of national and international Western media to view global news through nationally or geo-culturally specific prisms (which often means linking foreign stories with the implications 'at home', see also 3.2.1) means that sources from geographically and culturally proximate regions usually enjoy greater exposure than local, non-Western sources.

As Cottle (2000: 20) puts it in the context of reporting on minority voices, 'the bureaucratic nature of news production is geared to privilege the voices and viewpoints of (white) social power holders […]'. Here, in order to fulfil its ambitious remit, AJE would need to feature non-Western voices in a more proportional way than its competitors. And 3) AJE's ambition to give a voice to people under-represented in mainstream Western news would need to extend to a greater gender equality than is practiced by its competition. Over the years, news source literature has documented an unmistakeable gender inequality that, despite a massive influx of female graduates into the industry and despite the fact that news is no longer seen as a male domain, appears to this day to resist change to a significant degree (Cann & Mohr, 2001: 172).[19] This apparent relative 'voicelessness' of women in international news (see also Franks, 2013) speaks directly to AJE's ambition to cover 'views and voices that are rarely invited onto mainstream news media programs' (Figenschou, 2010a: 86).[20]

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[19] As recently as 2010, De Swert and Hooghe suggested that 'usually women account for no more than 20-25 percent of total time devoted to people speaking in the news (2010: 69)'. Furthermore, the quality of this apparent underrepresentation displays all the signs of a culturally embedded stereotype, expressed both quantitatively and qualitatively from the on-air time allocated to women to statistically significant differences in the topics they get to speak about (De Swert & Hooghe, 2010: 70).

[20] In the context of this study, it is necessary to point out that AJE did not explicitly make it its mission to address *this particular* inequality in news. However, the

As described above, imbalances in the selection of news sources are often not the product of deliberate partialities, but reflect wider power asymmetries (Manning, 2013: 180) that play out on all levels, from local to global contexts. In the light of AJE's wide-ranging aim of being a 'voice of the voiceless', in Chapter 6 I will look at patterned presences and absences of sources in AJE's news compared with those appearing on BBCW News. In addition to analysing absences and presences of the above-mentioned categories of sources (those not endowed with socially sanctioned attributes of power, non-Western sources and female sources), another relevant question will be whether these three categories of traditionally underrepresented groups interact – meaning whether or not there are systematic patterns of correlation in source selection that further inform and intensify existing asymmetries in international news. Therefore, in the content analysis conducted for Chapter 6 (see also Chapter 4 for a methodological discussion), I will cross-reference results for all three categories of sources in order to understand better some of the dynamics of who gets to speak on international news and *whether and how exactly AJE diverts* from established inequalities. Furthermore, as will become apparent in Chapters 7 and 8, new voices and old silences on screen are directly linked to the proactivity of AJE's journalists with regard to some aspects of AJE's remit (driven by journalistic agency), as well as inactivity or 'blind spots' with regard to other implications of AJE's remit (reproduced through professional habitus).

2.5 News Practices: Transfer of Specific Professional Ideals from North to South

The problem of under- and mis-representations of the global South in Western news, as well as structural obstacles in the way of financial viability of news from the

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organisation's official aim of giving a voice to those underrepresented in 'mainstream' television news, underlined by the fact that AJE journalists I interviewed for this thesis spontaneously included gender in their interpretations of this very remit, as well as previous research highlighting the relevance of assessing the relative prevalence of female and male voices in AJE's news content (Figenschou, 2010a: 101) make gender equality one of several relevant variables for assessing questions of diversity in the context of AJE.

South, has been at the heart of discussions about news flows. Featuring less prominently in the debate, but likewise of significant consequence, is the question of the transfer of professional practices[21] from North to South. In the context of AJE – as an organisation consciously opting for a dominant form of professionalism while simultaneously aiming to fulfil a counter-hegemonic remit – it is important to point out that the dominant form of professionalism is not a 'natural' choice without alternatives (Carpentier, 2005) and, more importantly, that to follow this dominant form of professionalism carries a range of *causal liabilities* as well as *powers*.

As with other factors impacting on the directionality of media flows, this transfer of practices has historically been linked to (and continues to be perpetuated by) larger geo-political inequalities. In the case of broadcasting, institutions and practices in developing countries originally 'grew as extensions and imitations' of pre-existing organisational and technological structures in Britain, France or North America respectively (Golding, 1977: 294). In the first half of the 20th century, broadcasting in the South evolved as a 'service to [colonial] settler communities' (Golding, 1977: 294). This meant that early on, at a time when the specific use of broadcasting technology was being shaped in the developing world, professional ideals and conventions historically associated with the global North 'came to displace discussion of possible preferences and alternatives' (Golding, 1977: 295). Once the 'colonial experts' left, newly independent countries were left with a skills gap and often relied heavily on training schemes, which – not least because of the speed with which broadcasting was developing – more often than not were again 'dependent on the same expatriate experts whose presence the training was intended to render unnecessary' (Golding, 1977: 195). For example, between 1950 and 1960 alone, the BBC sent nearly 60 broadcasting experts to the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation

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[21] There has been considerable debate about whether journalism qualifies as a profession in the traditional sense of the term as associated with fields like law or medicine (Tumber & Prentoulis, 2005; Witschge & Nygren, 2009). Given the lack of standardised formal entry requirements, journalism has often been categorised as a craft or a 'semi-profession'. In the following, and for the purpose of arguments about past and present transfers of journalistic practices from North to South, the terms 'profession', 'professional' and 'professionalism' will be used to signify practices historically associated with Western-based media institutions, predominantly in the tradition of the Anglo-American or liberal model (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), rather than referring to traditional interpretations of 'profession' as an entry-controlled occupational realm with a specific body of abstract theoretical knowledge.

in a training and advisory function. In addition, from the 1950s onwards hundreds of journalists from developing countries attended radio and TV courses at the BBC's home base in the UK. Similar efforts were made by French institutions with regard to broadcasting development in their former colonies (Golding, 1977: 296-297). In short, broadcasting in the developing world started out with an ideal of professionalism that appeared to come with the territory, but was not of their own making and to a degree precluded alternatives.

2.5.1 The Historical Baggage of Professionalism

Crucially, professionalism in the case of journalism has implied 'the acquisition not merely of competence, but also of *values and attitudes* thought appropriate to the implementation of media skills' (Golding, 1977: 292-293, emphasis added). The fact that journalism, as a semi-profession, is not shielded from outside interference by virtue of exclusive access to theoretical 'esoteric' knowledge has arguably further reinforced its dependence on idealistic and ideological qualities for the delineation of journalistic professionalism. A central tenet of this professional ideology – arguably the '*main ideological commitment* of the profession' (Tumber & Prentoulis, 2005: 64, emphasis added) – is the notion of objectivity.[22]

Historically, this particular brand of professionalism developed in the early 19th century with the abolition of restrictive publishing legislation in England and a growing independence of the media (and autonomy of journalists) vis-a-vis the state (Tumber & Prentoulis, 2005: 62). This development is routinely associated with the emergence of business models based on advertising (Aldridge & Evetts, 2003: 549; Hardy, 2008: 38). Providing a market-driven source of income rather than a politically supported model of financing, this new approach has been credited with making non-partisan coverage more profitable (since it appealed to a wider cross-section of the public), stimulating a shift in newspaper editors' perceptions of their readers from 'voters' to 'consumers' (Rantanen, 2009: 45) and allowing journalists

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[22] For other elements of the 'professional self-definition' of journalists see also Deuze (2005: 446-447).

to distance themselves from party politics – although, as James Curran points out, newspaper ownership by Members of Parliament or party loyalists preserved strong links between the political and the media system 'well into the twentieth century' (Curran & Seaton, 2010: 6). From the 1920s onwards, notions of objectivity became gradually more and more institutionalised in the US and the UK and increasingly featured in journalists' day-to-day work (Allan, 1999: 25).

This has had direct implications for the transfer of practices and notions of professionalism from the global North to the global South. Given the different geo-political and economic circumstances within which journalists have striven to implement practices that over time came to be regarded in the West as 'professional', some have argued that what was indeed being transferred were not first and foremost actual practices (many of which proved difficult or even impossible to follow through financially and/or politically in often radically different circumstances), but primarily the ideology that came with this particular understanding of professionalism (Golding, 1977: 293). Essentially, while the free flow of information doctrine was seen by many as an ideological means to an (economic) end, the transfer of professionalism represented the transfer of a particular ideology in itself.

2.5.2 Objectivity and Implications of Historically Western Concepts of Professionalism

As Deuze maintains (2005: 444), 'conceptualizing journalism as an ideology […] primarily means understanding journalism in terms of how journalists *give meaning* to their newswork' (emphasis added). It is largely undisputed that, in the context of newswork, the concept of objectivity allows journalists to attribute to their work a relative importance and meaning that would otherwise be difficult to justify (see also Carpentier, 2005: 205). However, in journalism and academia alike, 'the problems of basing professional practice on such an illusive concept have never ceased to challenge' (Tumber & Prentoulis, 2005: 65). In-depth analysis of the subject would exceed the scope of this study. In the following, I will therefore largely limit the discussion to matters directly related to questions of news flows. In this particular

context, notions of objectivity in journalism matter mainly in two specific ways: 1) with regard to the perceived lack of objectivity in the representation of the global South in international news (and the implied ontological questions about the possibility of objectivity) and 2) with regard to the implications of objectivity *as a professional ideal* for degrees of homogeneity and heterogeneity of journalism(s) in different parts of the world.

Firstly, debates about objectivity in news inescapably also are debates about bias. For decades, news sociologists in particular have cautioned against taking the concept of objectivity at face value at the expense of masking ideologically informed bias (Gieber, 1964; Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Tuchman, 1972; Schlesinger, 1978; Golding & Elliot, 1979; Schudson, 1989).[23] In the 1970s and 1980s, the statement of a reporter that 'news and news programmes could almost be called random reactions to random events' (Schudson, 1989: 264) owed much of the criticism it attracted to the fact that media scholars had started to focus on the *structural constraints* of news production in order to explain what they found to be news accounts often prone to explicitly or implicitly reflecting the interests of the respective political-economic elite. While news sociologists have frequently focussed on bias against (or in favour of) different social strata within a given national or regional context, the implications of bias in news are equally applicable to international contexts. Just as news sociologists have established that there is a risk inherent in the nature of the routines of domestic news-making processes of naturalising existing power relations at home, studies looking at international news items in Western news have pointed out how '[…] news discourse normalises inequalities' (Joye, 2009: 45) on a global scale. As Lilie Chouliaraki points out, 'the idea that *hierarchies of place* and human life are

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[23] These studies were instrumental in making visible structural mechanisms that impact on the composition and patterned (im)balances of news. However, the undisputed unlikelihood in practical news work of attaining neutrality and objectivity and the fact that even *if*, for the sake of argument, a news account was entirely neutral there would be no simple way of *knowing* that this was the case (an epistemological issue), has often been unnecessarily coupled with presenting an anti-realist constructivist ontology as an inevitable consequence. There is, I would argue, no convincing reason why one should follow from the other. As Elder-Vass (2012a; 2012c) has demonstrated in his recent work, there are accounts of constructivism that – far from being by default anti-realist – are compatible with a critical realist ontology.

reproduced in Western news is not new in social research' (Chouliaraki, 2006: 8, emphasis added).

Importantly, detecting bias by virtue of empirical analysis is not the same as negating the theoretical possibility of objectivity, despite the fact that both are often alleged simultaneously. Rather, the sweeping way in which the very *possibility* of objectivity has come under attack from postmodern scholars suggests that different underlying understandings of the term are at least in part the cause of divergent arguments. In this context, Lichtenberg (2000) illuminates in her account 'in defence of objectivity' several core aspects of the debate by unravelling practical and theoretical implications of the terminology of objectivity, neutrality and bias. Crucially, she does so without negating many of the most fundamental underpinnings of social constructivist thought. She readily agrees that 'our culture, our political and other interests do much to structure and the determine the way we (whoever "we" may be) look at the world, and […] our news reports reflect, reinforce, and even create these biases' (Lichtenberg, 2000: 242). She vividly describes how 'at a certain point in our intellectual development […] we are struck with the realization that language plays a crucial role in shaping the experience and worldview of individuals and even whole cultures' (Lichtenberg, 2000: 243). And she unreservedly accepts that news 'can illuminatingly be said to construct reality' a) in (comparatively rare) cases that 'are genuine media creations' and b) in (comparatively common) cases where coverage of an event has real consequences that the subject of the coverage itself would not on its own have engendered (Lichtenberg, 2000: 245).

Yet Lichtenberg draws profoundly different conclusions from these truisms than do those denying the possibility of objectivity. One of her arguments is that, despite the fact that it is often difficult and sometimes impossible to objectively determine the truth about a matter – a situation that journalists will routinely encounter – 'it is rare […] that we have no guidance at all' and people generally have methods of comparing sources and interrogating a subject that often will make them more likely to be able 'to distinguish between better and worse, more or less accurate accounts' (2000: 241). Greater and lesser degrees of accuracy, however, only make sense in relation to an external reality against which one can (fallibly) attempt to measure factual claims. This argument is further strengthened when exploring the

inconsistency whereby, in the field of communication studies, many of those who attack the theoretical validity and empirical possibility of objectivity do so with the underlying (and in many instances justified) critique that news claiming to be objective is in fact biased in one way or another. Yet to accuse an individual, institution or social system of bias is to assume that a more accurate rendition of events is possible. In the words of Lichtenberg (2000: 243):

> In so far as objectivity is impossible there can be no sense in the claim – certainly none in the rebuke – that the media are ideological or partial, for these concepts imply the possibility of a contrast. Conversely, in so far as we agree that the media serve an ideological function or bias our vision, we implicitly accept the view that other, better, more objective ways are possible.

Likewise AJE's aim to balance international news, as specified in their corporate profile (AJE Website, Corporate Profile, 04/09/2008), implies two things: a) a *lack of balance* within Western news in the way the developing world is routinely being covered that, at least hypothetically, runs deeper than mere issues of allocation of airtime. And b) the promise that a *more* balanced perspective on world events is *possible*, which only makes sense vis-à-vis an external reality that one can (fallibly) attempt to portray in more or less balanced ways (irrespective of the epistemological inconvenience of regularly not being able to confirm empirically the degree of balance achieved due to the inherent complexity of social aspects of reality).

Secondly, many have gone further and perceive a bias in the very idea and ideal of objective reporting, *not on the grounds of an alleged impossibility of objectivity,* but *on the basis that this ideal strikes them as a Western imposition*, particularly where decidedly partisan opinion pieces in the media are historically linked to a spirit of standing up to colonial powers as part of hard-fought struggles for independence. It comes as no surprise then that accepting notions of objectivity as a hand-me-down from those very Western powers which in turn appear to be biased themselves in their coverage of the global South, has sat uncomfortably with realities on the ground in some journalistic fields. Consequently, in the context of institutions from former colonial powers transplanting their professional ideals to media institutions in newly independent countries, professionalism and the notions of objectivity it entailed have been perceived in some quarters as being 'reflective of […] values of Western

society' (Musa & Domatob, 2007: 320-321) and as 'a prop for the status quo' (Golding, 1977: 305).

This heritage of journalism with an outright political function continued to have an impact on evolving journalistic cultures. O'Brian recounts that, in a seminar she directed for African broadcasters in the mid-1970s, 'some felt that there was a need to re-define the role of journalist from being the "conscience of society" to being supportive of the government's development programme' (Cruise O'Brian, 1977: 30). As Carpentier (2005: 206) notes 'the majority of the more formal attempts to rearticulate the hegemonic journalistic identity are aimed at the nodal point of objectivity or its constituent parts'. As he goes on to explain (2005: 206):

> In development and emancipatory journalism, it is explicitly stated that neutrality does not apply when universal values, such as peace, democracy, human rights, (gender and racial) equality, (social) progress and national literation, are at stake.

As an alternative to Western models of reporting stemming from the very context of historic and present global inequalities that AJE set out to counter, the rejection of dominant professional practices as part of a larger rejection of Western-dominated news posed an interesting conundrum for AJE's management teams when seeking to recruit in the South. Notwithstanding past and present currents of partisanship within Western journalism,[24] the concept of development journalism has continued to sit uneasily with the 'fourth estate' approach derived from Western media systems, which at the same time has also continued to have a strong influence on emerging media industries. This contrast of approaches has created a sense of 'divided loyalties' (Musa & Domatob, 2007: 326) and even 'guilt' (Cruise O'Brian, 1977: 30)

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[24] There have traditionally been strong currents of partisanship, for example in Southern Europe, where the media was influenced by comparatively late transitions to democracy and resilient traditions of 'political mobilisation' as part of what Daniel C. Hallin and Paolo Mancini call the 'polarized pluralist model' (Hallin & Mancini, 2004: 89-90). In addition, countries traditionally associated with the liberal model, in particular the US, arguably began to display – not least in commercial broadcasting – tendencies of 'converging towards something much closer to the Polarized Pluralist model' as commercial pressures began to rise and alignment with political camps increased (Hallin, 2009: 333).

on the part of development journalists, some of whom have found themselves torn in their work between divergent underlying principles.

Decades after these issues had first been raised, this plurality of approaches also presented a case of 'divided loyalties' for AJE, if in a rather different manner than for development journalists. As I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 7, divergent attitudes towards a Western understanding of professionalism in various non-Western broadcasting systems posed a particular structural problem for those recruiting for AJE. On the one hand, AJE as an organisation unambiguously subscribed to historically Western international journalism practices, while on the other hand, in order to fulfil its remit of 'reporting back' on an organisational level, AJE's management urgently sought to recruit journalists in countries and regions where the broadcasting industries at times differed precisely in this regard due to high levels of 'political parallelism' (Hallin & Mancini, 2004: 38).

2.6   Conclusion

In this Chapter, I situated AJE's aim of 'reporting back from the South to the North' within theoretical and geo-political debates on unequal media flows – from accounts of modernisation and cultural imperialism to concepts of contra-flow as part of a multidirectional media ecology. I outlined how media flows diversify in an increasingly interconnected global sphere, yet remain intertwined with historical and present geo-political inequalities. In the context of longstanding discussions about the global concentration of media power (specifically in international news) and the resulting Western bias inherent in the professional field, a news channel that both challenges the established mainstream media and has the economic resources to pursue its aims makes for an interesting case on which to test claims of diversification.

In the context of this thesis, three aspects of asymmetries in international news are of particular relevance: questions of news content, concepts of professionalism and the relative autonomy of AJE within a weakly autonomous field. These three aspects are

reflected in the three empirical chapters of this thesis (Chapters 6, 7 and 8). Therefore, while the first part of this chapter dealt with overarching themes of news flows and global asymmetries in media, the second part of this chapter focussed on the implications of AJE's editorial remit of aiming to be the 'voice of the South' and giving a 'voice to the voiceless.' Finally, the third part of the chapter elaborated on the structural challenge AJE faced as a result of the combination of following dominant interpretations of journalistic professionalism as endorsed by established Western-based news organisations, while at the same time seeking to build presences in regions where the local journalistic fields for historical reasons potentially differ in terms of political and economic influences as well as shared assumptions about journalists' role in society.

In the end, all of these factors affect and are affected by journalistic practices, which are endowed both with the liability to reproduce existing global inequalities and the power to reflexively bring about changes in what is considered newsworthy in global news. However, even within the most autonomous news organisation, journalistic practice does not play out according to the rules set by the intra-organisational environment alone. Rather, the organisation's aim of competing within a given field intrinsically links it with the wider professional and organisational environment it operates in. In the next chapter I shall therefore develop a theoretical framework that allows the conceptualisation both of the inherently *relational* nature of AJE's aims to 'balance' international news and of the role played by journalistic routines and reflexivity.

Chapter 3   Journalistic Habitus and Agency: How Much Room for Manoeuvre?

There are factors, and something like habitus is one of them, that condition the extent of difference between different contexts. The analytical interest lies in the extent to which such dispositions are challenged [...] by different practices.

Alistair Mutch, *Communities of Practice and Habitus: A Critique*, (2003: 397)

When journalists themselves begin to express concern about the quality and reliability of news output from 24-hours, multimedia newsrooms the need is perhaps all the greater for adequately theorized sociological research that can give us a more complete understanding of journalists' motivations and how these shape what they do at work and the ways they do it.

Roger Dickinson, *Accomplishing Journalism*, (2007: 190)

3.1   Introduction – The Dialectic of Similarity and Difference

In the previous chapter I outlined the relevance of academic debates on unequal media flows to AJE's self-declared aim of rebalancing international news. Complementing that approach, in this chapter I shall look at factors in media production that influence AJE's ability to achieve this aim. After all, balancing unequal media flows cannot be achieved purely by virtue of being based in the Middle East and aiming to be sufficiently successful to match the impact of Western-based news organisations, but crucially also involves being sufficiently *different* editorially to 'current typical' news organisations dominating the field of English-language international TV news and current affairs. In turn, being different editorially is a function, on the one hand, of journalistic routines and, on the other, of journalists' abilities to reflect on these and modify their practices.

Given the centrality of journalistic practice for questions of 'reporting back', it is a significant omission that, as Figenschou has pointed out recently, literature on media flows has been 'largely ignoring' aspects of news production (Figenschou, 2012: 355). Particularly in the field of foreign news coverage, 'researchers' preoccupation with content analysis procedures may have […] blurred the importance of investigating the *underlying reasons* why foreign news editors and reporters select and report news the way they do' (Hanusch & Obijiofor, 2008: 14, emphasis added). With the noteworthy exception of Figenschou's work (2012), this overall tendency, possibly in part reinforced by methodological considerations,[25] is reflected in literature on Al Jazeera and AJE in particular.[26] [27] In her research, Figenschou looks

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[25] As I will discuss in more detail in the methodology chapter, the complexities involved in acquiring extensive access to AJE's newsrooms may mean that on a practical level content analysis (and to a lesser degree audience research) at times appears more feasible.

[26] Most studies of AJE focus on the evolution of the channel's success story (Powers, 2012; Rushing, 2007), its content in relation to particular conflicts or events (Fisher, 2011; Merriman, 2012; Gilboa, 2012; Lynch, 2012; Kolmer & Semetko, 2009), as well as questions of distribution (Youmans, 2012), media diplomacy (Seib, 2008; El-Nawawy, 2012) and audience effects (Fahmy & Johnson, 2007; Amin, 2012). While there are some studies that include interviews with AJE staff and therefore methodologically go beyond the analysis of AJE's output and effects, these studies are *not primarily* aimed at analysing organisational practices and structures, but

at editorial strategies of journalists and managers working at AJE and points towards 'structural contradictions' inherent in the channel's aim 'to implement an alternative, southern news perspective while maintaining professional journalistic standards' traditionally associated with Western news organisations (Figenschou, 2012: 354).

As I will argue, these structural contradictions are also symptomatic of continuing imbalances within the *wider* field of international TV news. Thus, AJE's hybrid approach of a 'professionalization of alternative media production processes' (Figenschou, 2012: 359) throws into sharp relief the degree to which AJE – as an organisation positioning itself within a given professional field – is limited in its aim of reversing asymmetric news flows by the very composition of that field. Therefore, in order to complement Figenschou's research I shall introduce a *relational* perspective to the study of organisational factors of reporting back in the context of AJE. To this end I employ Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus and capital to arrive at a theoretical framework that will help to articulate existing dependencies within the field of international English-language broadcasting news and allow a highlighting of the room for manoeuvre and the obstacles involved in aiming to contribute to a more balanced international TV news ecology. In other words, what is missing is an approach that begins to explain how far organisational practices at AJE can sustain various degrees of difference vis-a-vis a larger professional environment endowed with powers and liabilities that variously enable and limit these practices.

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retain their focus on analysing AJE's content (Barkho, 2007; Lawson, 2011) or effects (El-Nawawy & Powers, 2008) respectively. One study in particular does focus on *organisational* 'key drivers' of editorial content at BBCWN, CNNI and AJE – describing a correlation 'between the tone, rhetoric, make up of staff and institutional culture on the one hand and the editorial decision making and allocation of resources on the other' (Henery, 2010: 32). However, basing her preliminary findings on a single interview per organisation, Henery specifically calls for further research to support her tentative findings (2010).

[27] Another example of a study looking at organisational factors and practices is Mohamed Zayani and Sofiane Sahaoui's research on *The Culture of Al Jazeera*, in which they combine their expertise in media studies and organisational studies respectively (Zayani & Sahraoui, 2007). However, they differ from the present study in crucial ways. Firstly, having conducted their fieldwork prior to the launch of AJE, they focus exclusively on its parent channel, AJA. And secondly, their outlook, derived from organisational studies, is predominantly *strategic* in its aim of determining how far AJA's organisational culture has contributed to the network's success in ways that make this success replicable and transferable (2007).

However, Bourdieu's focus on the individual through the concept of habitus stresses the social orientation of individuals endowed with comparatively little margin of freedom, portraying change in practices as a consequence of changes in social context rather than any kind of deliberate reflexive effort.[28] And while the relational nature of field theory and the explanatory value of field-specific habitus contribute significantly to the understanding of AJE's position within the wider international news ecology, the concept of journalists' reflexivity (which includes reflexive awareness of the limitations of their trade) is by no means marginal to the understanding of editorial decision-making processes at a news channel specifically designed to challenge pre-existing ideas of what constitutes news-worthiness, particularly in its formative years.

Therefore, in order to incorporate not only the possibility of organisational and professional change, but also a sense of *deliberation* in the bringing about of potential change, it is necessary to introduce an understanding of agency on the basis of a critical realist ontology that is theoretically compatible with Bourdieu's work. To this end, I will combine Bourdieu's framework with Archer's account of reflexivity as a form of subjectivity that incorporates the individual into the equation − not merely as a site of the embodiment of social structures, but as an agent 'pertaining to a different level of stratified reality' (Archer, 2003: 2). In the following I shall outline these theoretical strands, their relevance for the study of AJE and their compatibility on ontological and theoretical grounds.

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[28] A similar dependency on structure (and rejection of individual agency) as an explanatory force can be observed in the field of news sociology. While early studies, such as White's 'gatekeeper' study (1999, reprint of article from 1950), still focussed on individual decision-making processes, from the mid-1960s to the 1980s news sociologists provided a growing awareness of the structural constraints and mechanisms that shaped production in journalists' day-to-day work (Gieber, 1964; Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Tuchman, 1972; Schlesinger, 1978; Golding & Elliot, 1979; Schudson, 1989, see also 2.5.2). This is noteworthy not least because their approach grew to become an important one in the study of media production, thematically linking the study of journalistic practice with a string of sociological studies of newsroom behaviour (Cottle, 2003: 6).

3.2   A Relational Approach to Difference in International TV News

AJE has the resources and the remit to address some of the imbalances in international news and to change significantly the ecology of international news broadcasting. To achieve the organisation's ambitious aims, however, AJE cannot operate in an isolated fashion. The aim of rebalancing 'the current typical information flow' is meaningful *only in relation* to those channels from which AJE seeks to set itself apart. This is the case not least because, in order to be perceived as a different voice *within a particular setting*, AJE needs to be similar enough to be comparable with those organisations from which it seeks in the first place to differentiate itself. In the words of Bourdieu, to stand in a relationship of competition, 'people have to agree on areas of disagreement' (Bourdieu, 2005: 36). And in order to be similar enough to be comparable (and therefore to compete), the channel has depended (particularly in its early years) on outside experience and resources that implicitly link it to other organisations. Therefore the success of AJE's aims depends on internal organisational factors as well as on factors residing within the wider professional field.

Bourdieu's work on practice and cultural production – while initially being slow to pervade the boundaries between the neighbouring disciplines of social science, cultural studies and media studies (Hesmondhalgh, 2006: 211) – has considerable explanatory potential with regard to the field of journalism. Characterised by a concern for the ways in which the field of journalism encroached on other fields, Bourdieu's late work (1998b; 2005) began to explicitly address dynamics within the journalistic field, and within the field of television in particular. In the case of the journalistic field, one of Bourdieu's main concerns has been to make explicit how economic pressures on journalism (and the resulting increasingly heteronomous, or commercial, nature of the journalistic field) not only pose a threat to the autonomy of the journalistic field, but also adversely affect the relative autonomy of related fields of cultural production, such as literary or sociological fields, as well as other adjacent fields, such as the political or juridical fields (Bourdieu, 1998b).[29] Media scholars

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[29] For example, in a given scientific field people are being judged by their scientific merits. When and where they begin to be also judged by rules particular to other fields, such as the journalistic field (for example their ability to look and sound

have taken up this conceptual groundwork to theorise media power in the sense of 'media's impact on social reality' (Couldry, 2003: 2) and generally to explain journalism as functioning within a matrix of external and internal forces (Champagne, 1999, 2005; Benson, 1998; 2005, 2006; Benson & Neveu, 2005; Hesmondhalgh, 2006; Duval, 2005; Jansson, 2012; Schultz, 2007; Willig, 2012; Markham, 2008, 2011; Thorpe, 2009).

Analysis of journalistic fields has long expanded beyond its French origins, but is often applied to analyse national, rather than international, contexts. As Benson notes (2005: 86-88) field theory has much to offer to cross-national analysis on a theoretical level, but methodologically there are many factors that render such comparative in-depth analysis difficult to operationalise. In the particular context of this thesis, the inter-organisational professional migration of journalists offers an important cross-national comparative element – if not on the level of national journalistic fields but on the level of nationally-based international organisations – while the relevance of the state of Qatar introduces national political and economic fields to the equation (see also Chapter 5).

Field theory has not been commonly applied to address questions of news flows – and even less so to study any part or aspect of Al Jazeera – but it is precisely the way Bourdieu's concepts allow to establish links and highlight intersections *between* fields that makes it suitable for the study of an Arab news channel staffed with international journalists and competing in a subfield of journalism dominated by Western-based organisations. Furthermore, as I will argue, this approach allows, in line with the critical realist understanding outlined earlier, to mediate between overarching theories and situated practice. In the words of Benson (1998: 463):

> '[…] the focus on the mezzo-level of the "field" offers both a theoretical and
> empirical bridge between traditionally separated macro-"societal" level

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convincing on television, which is different from and occurs independently of the ability to convince scientific peers in a presentation or a scientific publication), it essentially short-circuits 'internal hierarchies' (Bourdieu, 1998b: 56). Depending on the degree of autonomy of the field in question, this has the potential to decrease the relative value of field-specific cultural capital and to increase the field's vulnerability to economic considerations, therefore threatening the continued emergence of achievements won by virtue of the field's relative independence and specialisation.

models of the news media, such as political economy, hegemony, cultural and technological theories, and micro-"organizational" approaches.'

In the following I will introduce Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus and capital as a theoretical framework allowing me to conceptualise linkages between intra- and inter-organisational factors in the case of AJE and its position within international news broadcasting.

3.2.1 The Journalistic Field

According to Bourdieu, to speak of the journalistic field is to understand 'journalism as a microcosm with its own laws, defined both by its position in the world at large and by the attractions and repulsions to which it is subject from other such microcosms' (Bourdieu, 1998b: 39). In other words, fields are governed by their own sets of implicit rules, but they are neither static nor isolated. In order to be able to explain what is happening within any given field, it is necessary to understand both the forces within its particular social environment and those impinging on the field from related fields. This is particularly significant with regard to journalism, because the dependence of the journalistic field on generating popular demand has the effect of making the journalistic field 'much more dependent on external forces than other fields of cultural production, such as mathematics, literature, law, science […]' (Bourdieu, 1998b: 53).

Another central tenet of Bourdieu's field theory is the stratified nature of fields. According to this, fields relate to one another not only laterally, for example in the way that political and journalistic fields mutually affect one another, but also vertically, in the sense that a field can be analytically divided into various subfields. As a 'structured system of social positions', a field can be occupied by individuals as well as by institutions (Jenkins, 1992: 85). For example, media organisations as well as individual journalists inhabit the journalistic field. In turn, a media organisation in itself can be conceptualised as a subfield of the journalistic field.

3.2.2 Delineating Professional and Organisational (Sub-)Fields with the Journalistic Field

Bourdieu did not primarily develop the concept of the 'field' with *formal* organisations in mind, but it has proven to be a useful conceptual tool for the study of organisations which, in line with Richard Jenkins's definition of a field, can be characterised as 'a structural system of social positions […] the nature of which defines the situation for their occupants' (Jenkins, 1992: 85). As Vaughan argues, 'given that [Bourdieu] developed [field] theory by comparing different forms of social organization, extending the theory's relevance to formal organizations is a logical step' (Vaughan, 2008: 65-66).[30] Furthermore, Emirbayer and Johnson suggest that it would be of value to consider three separate levels of interrelated fields when analysing organisations.

Firstly, there are fields consisting of clusters of organisations with *related practices* (it is not necessary for these organisations to interact directly in order for them to be identified through similarities in structural constraints and practices as belonging to the same field) (Emirbayer and Johnson, 2008: 5ff). Secondly, there are related fields that shape the environment within which these organisations operate (such as political or economic fields) and that impact on organisational fields to varying degrees depending on the level of autonomy that an organisational field can maintain (2008: 3). And thirdly, there is the organisation-as-field as a concept that helps in understanding intra-organisational dynamics (2008: 22ff).

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[30] It has been noted that, while Bourdieu's theoretical work has gained some attention in the discipline of organisational studies, few analyses of organisations have made use of (or explored the connections between) all three related concepts of field, habitus and capital (Emirbayer & Johnson, 2008; Vaughan, 2008; Swartz, 2008).

Figure 1.1 – Stratification of Fields

As shown in Figure 1.1, the following fields are relevant to understanding AJE's position and the degrees of editorial difference and similarity that the channel has been able to carve out within the field of international English-language news broadcasting. On an overarching level are the interrelated areas of the journalistic, political and economic fields. In addition, there are a number of journalistic subfields, which in the context of AJE most importantly include what I will refer to in the following as the *professional field* of international English-language TV news and current affairs and the *organisational field* of AJE. In the context of this study the 'professional field' demarcates a cluster of English-language news channels with significant international reach, broadly subscribing to a shared implicit understanding of what constitutes professionalism in their field. Apart from AJE, organisations within this field most prominently include BBCW News and CNNI.[31] The organisational field – referred to by Emirbayer and Johnson as the 'organization-as-field (2008: 22)' – denotes AJE as an organisational entity. Importantly, for the purpose of this study this does not entail the entirety of AJN, but only those functions of AJN which are directly related to its English-language television output.[32] In order

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[31] Emirbayer and Johnson refer to a field consisting of two or more organisations as an 'organizational field'. However, in order to avoid confusion with the concept of AJE as an 'organization-as-field' – and to highlight the central role of notions of a specific kind of professionalism as the connecting tissue or 'nodes' between organisations within such a field (2008: 6) – I prefer the term 'professional field' for the purpose of the present study.

[32] While AJE is embedded within the wider organisational structure of AJN, the English-language channel differs structurally and editorially in significant ways from

to achieve its aim of 'reporting back', AJE as an organisation will have to significantly alter the composition of the professional field by introducing a sufficiently different editorial profile.

3.2.3 Economic and Cultural Capital Specific to the Journalistic Field

The degree to which a field is susceptible to influences from related fields – as well as a subfield's relative position within a wider field – depends on the degree of autonomy that specific field can sustain. Bourdieu characterised the journalistic field as a 'weakly autonomous field' (Bourdieu 2005, 33). Any degree of autonomy 'means that one cannot understand what happens there simply on the basis of knowledge of the surrounding world' (Bourdieu 2005, 33). At the same time, being 'weakly autonomous' also means being vulnerable to influences from neighbouring fields, such as the economic field. However autonomous or heteronomous a field or subfield is, it can be described by the relative importance ascribed to different 'forms of power' or 'capital' – namely 'economic capital' and 'cultural capital' (Benson & Neveu, 2005: 3). Economic capital encompasses 'money or assets that can be turned into money', while cultural capital encompasses field-specific cultural skills, abilities, sensibilities and expertise (Benson & Neveu, 2005: 4).

Fields dominated by economic capital are characterised by a high degree of heteronomy, while fields dominated by cultural capital display a high degree of autonomy (Benson & Neveu, 2005: 4). Within a field (such as the professional field of international English-language TV news and current affairs) economic capital tends to be more powerful than cultural capital. However, those individuals or organisations with large amounts of both kinds of capital or those able to successfully convert one kind of capital into the other are dominant within their field

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its Arabic counterpart and from other platforms (for more details please see Chapter 4) and operates in competition with and in relation to the wider professional field of English-language international news broadcasting. A similar relational study on the basis of Bourdieu's field theory could be conducted to analyse the relations between AJE, AJA and their position within AJN, but this lies beyond the scope of the present study.

(and exert greater influence over the habitus of the field) (Benson & Neveu, 2005: 4). In the case of the journalistic field, 'economic capital is expressed via circulation, or advertising revenues, or audience ratings, whereas the "specific" cultural capital of the field takes the form of intelligent commentary, in-depth reporting' or in other words 'the kind of journalistic practices rewarded each year by the US Pulitzer Prizes' (Benson & Neveu, 2005: 4).[33] As I will outline in Chapter 8, in the case of AJE, the degree of autonomy that the organisational field can sustain vis-à-vis the professional field plays a crucial role in terms of the organisation's ability to provide a different editorial outlook.

3.3   The Role of Habitus in Journalistic Practice

In order to gain an understanding of how fields impact upon journalistic practice it is necessary to introduce another of Bourdieu's key concepts, namely that of habitus. Perhaps the most basic description of the concept is 'habitus as a feel for the game' (Bourdieu, 1998a: 80). Habitus relates to the concept of the field in that the conditions specific to a given field contribute to shaping how those inhabiting this particular field habitually go about doing things. In short, fields are generative of field-specific practices and habitus. Despite emphasising the habitual and collective nature of practice, the site of habitus as 'an acquired system of generative schemes objectively adjusted to the particular conditions in which it is constituted' (Bourdieu, 1977: 95) inevitably has to be the individual. Jenkins describes habitus as 'a bridge-building exercise' between understandings of practice 'solely in terms of individual decision-making' and practice as 'determined by supra-individual structures', which 'only exists in, through and because of the practices of actors and their interaction with each other and with the rest of their environment' (Jenkins, 1992: 74-75). For

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[33] Some of the specifics of the journalistic field, according to Ryfe, serve to *counter* its heteronomous tendencies, as they diminish the relative importance that actors within the field ascribe to the various incarnations of economic capital vis-a-vis other factors that may be at odds with economic imperatives. In his words, 'political legitimacy is of more immediate concern to journalists' than economic considerations simply because 'economic considerations are too diffuse and remote from day-to-day activities of journalists to generate the kind of uniform, transorganizational routines identified by news scholars' (Ryfe, 2006: 138-9).

example, with regard to AJE, the concept of habitus connects the level of the professional or organisational field with the level of the individual journalist. However, as I will outline later in this chapter, arguing that Bourdieu focuses on the role of the individual through the concept of habitus is not the same as maintaining that he ascribes reflexive agency to individual actors. After all, habitus according to Bourdieu is the *embodied* form of 'the very basics of culture' internalised by the individual more through *experience* than through active learning (Jenkins, 1992: 75-76).

3.3.1 Primary and Specific Habitus

Essentially, habitus represents dispositions unconsciously acquired by individuals by virtue of being part of a particular environment. Therefore, a significant part of a person's habitus is acquired early in life. However, it has also been argued in the context of professional practices that it is constructive to analytically distinguish between *primary* habitus acquired in early life and *specific* habitus that is obtained later in life, for example within a particular professional field. Brubaker argues for a stratified habitus, whereby a higher-order habitus transforms 'without superseding, a primary familial […] habitus' (Brubaker in Mutch, 2003: 392). Emirbayer and Johnson claim that Bourdieu distinguished between primary and specific habitus and paraphrase Vaughan in arguing that 'people acquire the taken-for-granted understandings that inform their practical action not only in the class conditions surrounding their early lives but also in the organisational settings in which they are active later in life' (Emirbayer & Johnson, 2008: 29). And Jenkins remarks that 'in places, [Bourdieu] writes as if each field generates its own specific habitus. Elsewhere, it seems to be the case that actors bring to whichever field they are part of their own, preexisting and historically constituted habituses. Both of these options may, of course, be true' (Jenkins, 1992: 90). As I will argue, habitus specific to the professional field of international English-language news broadcasting is of particular relevance to the study of the early years of AJE, because of the initial relative weakness of the emerging organisational field vis-a-vis a mature professional field, from within which AJE was recruiting virtually its entire staff.

This is important not least because ultimately the specific habitus of a given field is generative of the practices within that field, which in the case of the journalistic field includes editorial decision-making processes. Practices and habitus are mutually constitutive, not in a determinist fashion, but in the sense that 'practices are the product of the habitus, as well as serving to reproduce it' (Jenkins, 1992: 80). In the case of AJE that means that shortly before and after the channel's launch, at a time when the channel's editorial profile was still being thrashed out in daily discussions over editorial preferences on all hierarchical levels of the organisation, professional habitus inevitably predominantly originated from practices which journalists had brought with them from previous employers, such as the BBC, CNN, ITV, SKY, ABC, CBC and other 'mainstream' Western-based broadcasters. In this particular setting, the concept of field provides a way of conceptualising the relation between the specific professional habitus of the individual and the organisational culture that shapes the environment in which the specific habitus is being applied and potentially modified. Furthermore, understanding the dynamics of specific habitus in relation to different fields, including organisational fields, paves the way to understanding 'the differential distribution of practices' (Emirbayer and Johnson, 2008: 27) across fields and the potential effects of this distribution on specific organisational environments (as I outline in the empirical chapters) and on questions of 'reporting back' (as I will outline in the conclusion to the thesis).

3.3.2 Conceptualising Change through Clashes of Habitus

Another advantage of conceptualising habitus in the context of related fields of practice is that it helps in understanding some degree of difference. Thus, new forms of practice occur when 'dissonances between the conditions under which the habitus was acquired or subsequently shaped and the current organizational setting allow organizational members to see windows of opportunity hidden […] to members of other organizations' (Emirbayer & Johnson, 2008: 30). Habitus, in other words, is key to the conceptualisation both of the reproduction of practices within fields (in that it serves to perpetuate habitual practice) and of organisational change (in that

'misfits' between habitus and field have the potential to break routines). As Benson and Neveu put it, 'Bourdieu posits that influxes of new agents into the field can serve either as forces for transformation or conservation' (2005: 5).

Given that in the founding years of AJE virtually every journalist constituted a 'new agent' in the organisational field, there were two kinds of structural dissonance potentially generative of editorial difference. Firstly, clashes between habitus acquired within the wider professional field and AJE's declared aim of altering the Western-oriented landscape of international TV news. And secondly, clashes between different kinds of habitus, where a course of action was habitually pursued by one or several journalists and subsequently changed not as a result of unprompted spontaneous reflection, but as a result of dissonances between this course of action and practices of colleagues who had acquired their professional habitus in different organisational settings. This explanation of change based on structural dissonances captures the relational aspect of difference in that it situates difference as a struggle over defining editorial policy within the organisational field resulting from diverging influences from the wider professional field.[34]

3.4 Accounting for Agency as a Source of Editorial Difference

However, habitus cannot explain *how* people arrived at the decision to join AJE in the first place, what *motivated* them to explore new editorial choices, or why they reacted in the way they did when clashes of habitus exposed differences between conflicting conventions amongst members of newly gathered editorial teams. These factors contributing to editorial difference in part at least *precede* clashes of different kinds of habitus within a given field and can only be satisfactorily explained by accounting for a kind of agency on the part of journalists that cannot be entirely reduced to shifting social forces.

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[34] Here, it is worth noting that incorporating a temporal aspect into the continuous evolution of a person's habitus as it is shaped by a succession of overlapping personal and professional environments also serves to ward off accusations of crude structural determinism (Benson & Neveu, 2005: 3).

Therefore, the following questions need to be addressed: a) Is Bourdieu's theoretical framework flexible enough to account for the prevalence of reflexivity encountered at a news channel with a mission to defy at least some of the conventional wisdom of the industry?; If not, as I will argue in the following, b) which approach might be conducive to conceptualising reflexivity in this way?; And c), on what ontological and theoretical ground can a common basis can be found that renders compatible approaches focussing on habitus and on reflexivity respectively?

3.4.1   Reflexivity as a Possibility in the Work of Pierre Bourdieu

In order to answer the question of whether Bourdieu's theoretical framework is flexible enough to account for the prevalence and nature of journalistic reflexivity encountered at AJE (Question a, see 3.4), it is important to first understand that Bourdieu did allow for *some* degree of agency in his work. As he points out, actions of individuals within fields are 'partially preconstrained, but with a margin of freedom' (Bourdieu, 2005: 30). In the words of Rodney Benson, 'cultural rules operating in fields are constraining, not determining' (Benson, 2006: 194). In particular, according to Bourdieu, a sociological approach to academic practice in general and social science in particular – a sociology of science – offers the opportunity to attain a degree of agential freedom by unmasking the social determinants that otherwise govern the habitual actions characteristic of academic traditions and actions. In the words of Derek Robbins, 'by outlining the social conditions which create the educational institutions which socially condition our thinking, Bourdieu has tried, both reflexively and objectively, to create conditions within which people can transcend those conditions precisely because he has enabled them to recognize them as such' (1991: 160).

Bourdieu did not proceed, however, to claim that such reflexive 'loopholes' were frequently and readily available to actors in general, which is precisely where he differs from those defending the pervasiveness of reflexivity in our daily lives. With regard to the journalistic field, and specifically to the subfield of television, he does not go so far as to completely negate the possibility of reflexivity as a means of

overcoming structural constraints, but for him this remains a distant, even 'utopian' aspiration (Bourdieu, 1998b: 55-56). Reflexivity and conscious decision-making – as opposed to decision-making as a spontaneous enactment of the habitus (Jenkins, 1992: 77; Emirbayer and Johnson, 2008: 32) – certainly have been rather marginal to Bourdieu's main theoretical objectives. In critiquing certain aspects of journalistic practice, his focus on structure has been – much like the approaches of news sociologists in the 1970s and 1980s – specifically *designed to deflect the 'simplistic criticism' of individuals* (Bourdieu, 1998b: 45, emphasis added) and instead to focus on (invisible) structures that impel people to act in certain field-specific ways. This has allowed him to describe and map 'a host of properties that do not present themselves to intuition' (1998b: 31).

Consequently, in his televised lecture 'On television', Bourdieu went out of his way to stress that exposing the structural constraints of television production was 'not a question of blaming or fighting journalists, who often suffer a good deal from the very constraints they are forced to impose' (1998b: 14). For him, the pressures of the journalistic field, in particular in the subfield of television, are so powerful that 'in some sense, the choices made on television are choices made by no subject' (1998b: 25). This becomes particularly evident when he replaces the subject with the concept of field, as he does when he begins his sentence with 'Journalists – we should really say the journalistic field […]' (1998b: 46). This perspective conveys the explicit objective of understanding the structures behind journalistic decision-making – 'to let individuals off the hook' (1998b: 17) – in order to be able to begin to grasp the power exerted by the rules that govern the field of TV journalism. For Bourdieu, laying the burden of responsibility for structural ills on the shoulders of individual journalists is both inadequate and dangerous, because it 'takes the place of the work necessary to understand phenomena such as the fact that, even no one really wishes it this way, and without any intervention on the part of people actually paying for it, we end up with this very strange product, the "TV news"' (1998b: 45).

As such, Bourdieu's concessions to the *possibility* of reflexivity do little to distract from the fact that the strength of his model is to show how individuals are subject to social forces not of their choosing and compelled to act in accordance with their relative position in a stratified system of social structures. In other words, in his

theoretical framework reflexivity remains a vague possibility, 'an *option* open to certain agents' (Archer, 2007: 46, emphasis in original) and under certain conditions, rather than an intrinsic part of human day-to-day activity. Therefore, to not merely describe but begin to *explain* the relative difference of TV content in the empirical context of AJE, Bourdieu's approach needs to be *complemented* by and combined with a model that takes into account the conscious decisions of individuals who actively make career choices as well as editorial choices. Despite the relatively resilient influence of habitus, these choices, I will argue, cannot simply be reduced to shifting social forces without a risk of overlooking crucial factors contributing to balances and imbalances in the field of international television news.

3.4.2   Reflexivity as Necessity in the Work of Margaret Archer

This leads to Question b) (as specified in 3.4), which is the question of which approach might be conducive to conceptualising reflexivity in a way helpful to analysing news flows generally and the case of AJE more specifically. As I shall argue in this thesis, Archer's approach is uniquely apt for understanding editorial difference in the context of AJE, not only because some of her empirical work focuses on people's occupational concerns, but crucially because her theoretical framework facilitates an accounting for people's motivations for joining AJE and their *anticipation* of both personal career opportunities and the opportunity to contribute to counter-acting geo-political asymmetries within the field of international English-language TV news (Archer, 2007: 12). One of the foremost proponents of the necessity of accounting in social theory for the pervasiveness of reflexivity in people's lives, Archer's critical realist approach (2003; 2007; 2012) defines reflexivity as 'the regular exercise of the mental ability, shared by all normal people, to consider themselves in relation to their (social) contexts and vice versa' (2007: 4).

Central to Archer's theoretical framework is the notion that people reflect on their personal and professional concerns and adopt 'projects' in an effort to realise concerns that are important to them. Projects, broadly defined as 'any course of

action intentionally engaged upon by a human being' are indispensable to human action, if one accepts reflexivity as an essential property of individuals that allows the transcending of naïve accounts of social determinism (2007: 7). The way people arrive at projects is through what Archer terms the 'internal conversation' (2007). Intra-personal dialogue or internal conversation is not entirely like natural language or external conversation, but includes shortcuts, symbols and imagery as well as natural language (2007: 67). Such internal dialogue can subsume a range of reflexive internal activities, from 'daydreaming' and 'silently mulling things over' to 'thinking things through' and 'reaching concrete decisions' (2007: 2-4). Archer specifically points out that not all kinds of inner dialogue are fully reflexive (2007: 2-3; 63). Of those internal dialogues that are intrinsically reflexive, the central characteristics are 'silently to pose questions to ourselves and to answer them, to speculate about ourselves, any aspect of our environment and, above all, about the relationship between them' (2007: 63). Basically, this kind of internal conversation is another expression of reflexive thought, which is reflexive precisely because it entails a distinction between the subject and objective circumstances, which are being weighed and analysed in relation to one another. In Archer's words:

> Reflexive thought is synonymous with internal conversation because reflexivity is *not* a vague self-awareness but a *questioning* exploration of subject in relation to object, including the subject as object, one which need not have any practical outcome or intent (Archer, 2007: 73, emphasis in original).

At the core of Archer's work is the position that in today's globalised societies strongly reflexive 'internal conversations' concerning the realisation of personal projects are not exceptional, but, as she demonstrates in her empirical work, a common aspect of how people go about their daily lives.[35]

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[35] Again, it is important to point out that this concept does not presume that people conceive and pursue their projects in circumstances of their own choosing (Archer, 2007: 64; 88). Rather, material and social contexts 'obstruct or facilitate our projects to very varying degrees' (2007: 8). These contexts are part and parcel of the agency-structure relationship that shapes the outcomes of human endeavours as causal powers of material objects or social structures are activated by (and become effective

Another main feature of her work on reflexivity is the argument that reflexivity is 'not a homogenous phenomenon' (2007: 92), but that there are different *modes of reflexivity*. These modes of reflexivity, which range from intrinsically communicative to largely self-reliant, in part depend on the degree of contextual (dis)continuity that a person encounters in his or her life (2007: 84ff). This is the case because contextual continuity makes it more conducive and comfortable to discuss inner musings (and therefore more effortless to externalise the internal conversation in natural language) in the context of social surroundings that are aligned to the subject's own perceptions and preferences. Contextual discontinuity, on the other hand, has the effect of throwing the subject back on her own mental resources, since her inner musings are out of sync with her social surroundings and discussing them with others is likely to lead to misunderstandings and little productive feedback. Different modes of reflexivity are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, all interviewees in Archer's sample practiced different modes of reflexivity at different times. However, most of her interviewees displayed clear inclinations towards one mode or another (93%), with only 7% of the subjects in her sample of 128 interviewees predominantly exercising two modes of reflexivity in equal measure (2007: 94). These modes of reflexivity are 'communicative reflexive', 'autonomous reflexive', 'meta-reflexive' and 'fractured reflexive'.

In their dominant use, two of these modes are of particular interest with regard to journalists who decided to leave various jobs at established news channels to join AJE prior to or around the time of the channel's launch: autonomous reflexives and meta-reflexives.[36] These two modes have in common that they both characterise

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in relation to) the causal powers of our attempts to accomplish personal projects (2007: 8).

[36] The categories of 'communicative reflexives' and 'fractured reflexives' do not apply in their dominant forms to the context of the present study. Communicative reflexives use their reflexivity to work actively 'at staying put' instead of courting change (Archer, 2007: 158). For 'fractured reflexives' internal conversation does not tend to result in decisions aiding change in personal or professional settings either, as thinking things over 'only serves to intensify their personal distress and social disorientation, without enabling them to determine upon a purposeful course of action to alleviate or resolve their problems' (Archer, 2007: 96). Therefore, neither mode of reflexivity particularly fits a sample of interviewees who have in common

individuals who largely rely on their own mental resources for their deliberations and decision-making processes and who tend to be socially mobile in their endeavours to fulfil personal projects. These groups also differ in important ways. While autonomous reflexives are 'firmly avowing themselves to be "lone thinkers"', relying on their own conclusions and often quick to decide as they act without cross-referencing their internal dialogues by consulting others, meta-reflexives tend to be more 'self-interrogative', imaginative and cautious in their reflexive deliberations (Archer, 2007: 129). As the term suggests, 'meta-reflexives' reflect on their own powers of reflexivity, which bears the risk of getting absorbed in their musings (2007: 127-128). Like autonomous reflexives, they tend not to seek external confirmation of their internal dialogues – but, unlike them, they refrain from external confirmation *not* because they are confident to the point of genuinely not feeling the need to consult others, but because they are aware of external influences in the shape of local norms and conventions and critical towards the potentially assimilative influence of these on their actions (Archer, 2007: 129). Another crucial difference between the two modes is that while autonomous reflexives tend to be task-oriented, meta-reflexives display a tendency to be value-oriented (2007: 130).

Both modes are conducive to decisions and actions that lead to transformations in people's personal and professional lives, since they actively seek out opportunities that fit their strategic aims and values and therefore are perceived as enablements to the fulfilment of personal projects. As I will argue, these modes closely match the profiles of journalists who decided to take professional risks and opportunities and reflexively engage in 'reporting back'. In the following I discuss how far Archer's account of reflexivity is compatible with Bourdieu's relational approach of capital and habitus and the journalistic field.

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that they were interested in change within their professional field and prepared and able to take professional risks in order to more closely align their personal projects with their professional environments.

3.5 Combining the Concepts of Habitus and Reflexivity

Several authors have argued the need for theoretical frameworks that allow both habitual and reflexive action to be accounted for (Sayer, 2009; Fleetwood, 2008; Elder-Vass, 2007; Mutch et al., 2006). Empirically there seems to be overwhelming evidence that we are living in times where contextual discontinuity has become such a regular feature of life that practices cannot satisfactorily be explained by reverting to a strong focus on structure. Similarly obvious, however, is the fact that this contextual discontinuity does not pervade all geo-political contexts, social strata or aspects of people's lives in equal measure and that people continue to act within limitations not of their choosing, without at all times being aware of (or acting reflexively in relation to) the structures that enable or limit their decisions and actions. As a consequence, many authors 'reject the implication that structure and agency represent a binary choice (Elder-Vass, 2010: 3).'

In the context of AJE, for example, the adaptation of professional routines appropriated from Western international 'mainstream' broadcasting suggests continuity and a principal role for habitus specific to the wider professional field. In contrast, a strong objective of altering the rules of the game by balancing the 'current typical information flow' presumes a readiness to reflect on what a 'current typical' habitus entails (in other words to reflexively review routines) in order to be able to challenge habitual practices where it is thought to be conducive to the channel's editorial aims (AJE Website, Corporate Profile, 04/09/2008). I agree with Archer that a hybridisation of habitus and reflexivity in the shape of a routinised reflexivity or 'reflexive habitus' in some respects misses the point. To state that 'people now have a *disposition* to be reflexive' says very little other than stating that reflexivity is considered to be very common in times of contextual discontinuity, but as Archer points out, it is hard to see what can be gained by forcing reflexivity into the conceptual mould of habitus (Archer, 2010: 288f). As I shall explain in the following, however, I disagree with Archer on the question of whether it is possible (and feasible to underpin theoretically) for actions to be either *co-determined* or *alternately influenced* by both habitus and reflexivity.

3.5.1 Ontological Compatibility

In order to answer Question c) – on what ontological and theoretical basis can approaches focussing on habitus (Bourdieu) and reflexivity (Archer) be rendered compatible (see also 3.4) – a number of ontological and theoretical issues need to be addressed. Elaborating on the ontological basis for the compatibility of Archer's account of reflexivity and Bourdieu's notion of habitus, Elder-Vass argues that the two approaches could be brought together in a critical realist emergentist theory of action (Elder-Vass, 2007). He agrees with Archer on the realist ontological premise that structure and agency cannot be conflated, but also highlights the benefits of the incorporation of the concept of habitus into any theoretical discussion of structure and agency.

On an ontological level, a critical realist understanding of the relation between structure and agency requires that the embodiment of social structures in the form of habitus – in the sense that structures reside within individuals as embodied residues of societal influence – cannot be accepted in a literal sense. Social structures do affect individuals on many levels, but quite simply people and social structures are endowed with different sets of causal powers and liabilities, irrespective of the multiple ways in which they impinge on one another, and so they have to be conceptualised 'through analytical dualism' as separate entities if the aim is to understand anything at all about the arbitrations and negotiating mechanisms between the two (Archer, 2010: 275). And, while Archer allows that in certain circumstances it 'sounds quite plausible' to focus on social context, she adds that what critical realism is offering is a way to 'disentangle' aspects of subjective properties of a person and a social context in relation to these dispositions (Archer, 2003: 12).[37]

In their outline of a relational sociology of organisations, Mutch, Delbridge and Ventresca suggest that Bourdieu's theoretical framework is 'compatible with a

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[37] For Archer, Bourdieu is conflationist in the sense that his attempt to transcend the dualism of agency and structure through the concept of habitus as embodied social structure comes at the cost of conflating the ontologically separate entities of agents and the social world (Archer, 2007: 41-44).

broadly realist ontology' (Mutch et al, 2006: 610). Here, the fact that there is a certain amount of uncertainty as to how Bourdieu's concept of habitus produces practices and about the circumstances under which an 'awakening of consciousness' may or may not play a role in this transition (Jenkins, 1992: 82-83) is indicative of sufficient room for manoeuvre to reconcile Bourdieu's approach with a critical realist understanding of the relation between structure and agency in social science. As Elder-Vass (2007: 329) points out:

> In the absence of a clear explanation of how dispositions produce practices and hence how consciousness might sometimes be involved in the process, it is understandable that there is confusion about the apparent conflict between Bourdieu's stress on the subconscious operation of habitus and his heavily qualified acceptance of *some* role of conscious thought (emphasis added).

For Archer, the question of *how* dispositions influence practices lies at the core of the debate. And the answer for her is that dispositions influence practices through the reflexive mediation of individuals who subjectively review their personal aspirations in the light of objective circumstances. Reflexivity, for Archer, therefore plays a vital role in converting social structures into practices. It is not an option available to certain agents under certain circumstances, but '*indispensable to explaining social outcomes*' (Archer, 2007: 5, emphasis in original). Put differently, the causal powers of structures can only become effective *in relation* to agential powers of the individual (Archer, 2003: 5; 2007: 12).

3.5.2   Theoretical Compatibility

Basing his theoretical argument on the emergent relationship between neurophysiologic aspects of brain and thought – and in particular on findings that the synaptic networks in the brain that store knowledge and beliefs (dispositions) are conditioned, which means strengthened or weakened by the sum of our experiences – Elder-Vass continues to demonstrate how decision-making is co-determined by both habitual and reflexive mechanisms. He does so primarily by stressing the processual character of practices, which allows for both reflexive thought and (fully or partially)

habitual execution. In other words, while a decision may be conscious, its execution will often depend on unconscious behaviour based on past experience – leaving open the possibility of conscious 'last minute' amendments to the action.

On the one hand, Elder-Vass agrees with Archer that as individuals 'we possess the causal power to think consciously about our plans' (Elder-Vass, 2007: 340). Here, reflexivity plays a role on two levels: firstly, actions are subject to deliberate decisions both when an initial decision is taken to do something in a given way (which may be split seconds or hours or weeks removed from a partially unconscious execution) and at the point of implementation in the form of a conscious 'last minute' review. And secondly, since past experience in part has been based on conscious decisions, deliberate acts contribute to the dispositions that are generative of the habitus. As Elder-Vass put it: 'Our habitus at any one time is not the unmediated product of social structures, but the result of a lifetime of critical reflection upon our experiences, including our experiences of those structures' (2007: 344).[38]

On the other hand, habitual practices continue to play an important role. The fact that, neurophysiologically speaking, (synaptic) dispositions are continuously modified by experience closely fits Bourdieu's concept of habitus. In addition, there is an element to action of habitual practice that is present even in actions that originate in fully deliberate decisions, since only *some* aspects of the realisation of a decision or project are performed in a fully reflexive manner: 'The conscious decision takes place at one time, and the execution is done nonconsciously at a later moment. Furthermore, the conscious decision only partially describes the behaviour to be undertaken, leaving other details to be "filled in" nonconsciously' (Elder-Vass, 2007: 338). In the context of AJE this is particularly relevant. For example, the motivation and decision of a journalist to join the channel and contribute to challenging established routines in international news is a deliberate act and forms part of an individual project that is reflexive in its very nature. Yet the

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[38] This view of a co-existence of habitus and reflexivity at any given moment is also in line with Archer's observation that 'the "active agent" does not have a passive childhood or adolescence, which allows "society to get at them first" (Archer, 2007: 90).' In other words, dispositions stemming from earlier mediations of the social through the individual inevitably entail previous enactments of reflexivity.

implementation of this decision can have both reflexive and habitual elements, particularly in situations where time pressures mean that deadlines can only be met by reverting to tried and tested routines.

To some degree, then, Archer's account of reflexivity goes against the grain of Bourdieu's theory in that she places agency, not structure, at the centre of her theory of practice – but, as Sayer argued, this should not per se preclude the possibility of 'combining concepts of habitus and individual reflexivity' (Sayer, 2009: 122). On the contrary, as I have argued in line with Archer's critique of Bourdieu, an understanding of the relevance of reflexivity is needed in order to conceptualise the ways in which habitus is generative of practices (Archer, 2007: 44f). Furthermore, Archer's critique is in part based on the premise that there is, in her words, 'a date-stamp on Bourdieu's theorizing' (Archer, 2010: 300) as contextual discontinuity intensifies in increasingly globalised times, questioning the durability and continuing relevance of habitus (Archer, 2010: 296). For Archer, '[…] change is now too rapid and appropriate practices now too evanescent for inter-generational socialisation to take place' (Archer, 2007: 41). However, putting a date-stamp on Bourdieu's concept of habitus is to acknowledge that there is a theoretically sound basis for his arguments, even if this is time-dependent. To say that today's generations of young adults are no longer 'Bourdieu's people' (Archer, 2007: 61; 2010: 287) is to concede that 'Bourdieu may have been more or less right in practice for the period to which the bulk of his work relates' (Archer, 2010: 287).

Consequently, it becomes an empirical question of the degree to which habitus continues to play a role in today's world (and indeed how far the continued relevance or disruption of habitus differs across social and geographical strata) - a question many answer by pointing out that 'while there probably is an increase in contextual discontinuity there is still plenty of stability, and [children] could hardly become competent social actors if they did not develop a feel for familiar games' (Sayer, 2009: 122). Therefore, if Bourdieu can be accused of downplaying historical variability (Archer, 2007: 39), Archer can be accused of downplaying the contextual continuity of structures. For example, in the context of the present study, the durability of Western-oriented professional practices in international English-language TV news and current affairs. In this study I will therefore seek to combine

Archer's concept of agency with a Bourdieusian relational analysis in order to understand the dynamics between organisational and wider professional practices that has characterised the emerging organisational identity of AJE.

3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I argued that on the one hand the inherent 'structural contradictions' that Figenschou points out with regard to AJE's strategy of a 'professionalization of alternative media production processes' (Figenschou, 2012: 359) are at least partially symptomatic of dynamics within the wider professional field of international English-language TV news and current affairs.[39] On the other hand, AJE's explicit aim to 'challenge established perceptions' highlights the *necessity* of a reflexive revaluation of the journalistic habitus prevalent within the professional field vis-à-vis the organisational field of AJE. I went on to argue that a combination of Archer's critical realist approach to reflexivity and an understanding of the continuing relevance of Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus and capital are uniquely apt for conceptualising both practices linking AJE to the professional field and the reflexive deliberations of journalists aiming to change (some of) the rules of the game.

To summarise, Bourdieu's theoretical framework allows a conceptualisation of the link between AJE and the wider industry with regard both to practices (habitus) and to AJE's position within the field (cultural and economic capital). As such, it helps to unravel the objective circumstances – material, social and symbolic – that impinge upon practices (including editorial decision-making processes). And it allows a

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[39] Clearly, AJE has not only been influenced by the international field the channel competes in, but has been (and continues to be) very much a product of the national and regional context it emerged from. In other words, in order to understand AJE it is vital to understand the political and organisational environment that created it. As Khiabany (2010: 9) cautions, the 'state has undoubtedly been one of the blind spots of media theory.' And while this thesis is not about filling this particular gap, I nonetheless consider it crucial that I shall situate AJE in the context of its Qatari roots and the continued financial dependency on the state, as well as the achievements and international controversies of its parent channel, AJA, which essentially positioned AJE as a well-known brand and an ambitious yet controversial international player even before the English-language channel broadcast its first news programme (see Chapter 5).

conceptualisation of change (and therefore of editorial difference) where these are the result of dissonances between habitus and field or of clashes between different kinds of habitus. In contrast, Margaret Archer's concepts are not relational in the way that Bourdieu's concepts are (she looks at processes of social conditioning, but her focus on the role of reflexivity in these processes means that she does not reflect on how social conditioning links different fields through shared practices).

And while Bourdieu's framework is underdeveloped when it comes to the question of what exactly happens at the interface between social structures and the individual, this question is pivotal for Archer, who focuses on the ways in which reflexivity is generative of practice by mediating between the two. In her words, 'the specification of *how* social forms are influential also entails the reception of these objective influences, with their potential power to condition what people may do, by reflexive agents whose subjective powers ultimately determine what they do in fact do' (2003: 8, emphasis added). Therefore, by complementing Bourdieu's core concepts with Archer's account of agency, it is possible to gain an understanding of the crucial role that individual deliberation played in decision-making processes as reflexive as deciding to give up a job to join a different organisation or developing novel editorial practices in an emerging organisational environment.

In short, in conceptualising an organisation as focussed on difference and change as AJE, it is indispensable to complement Bourdieu's concepts with a theoretical framework that allows to account for deliberate action to a greater degree than habitus can satisfactorily explain. However, at the same time it is important to recognise that habitus does play a role in the execution of practices. Even consciously decided-upon projects are not acted upon in a purely reflexive fashion, as Elder-Vass pointed out in his work (2007). As some of the following chapter will show, this is particularly evident in a field as reliant on the efficiency of routines as 24/7 news production.

Exploring the above described dynamics *empirically* for the purpose of this thesis involved conducting in-depth interviews with AJE staff in various locations, considering external and internal AJE documents and analysing news content in comparison with the equivalent news content on BBCW News. In the following I am

going to outline how the multi-method approach presented here fits the overall objective and framework of this thesis – and what the results can (and cannot) validly and reliably say about the early years of AJE.

Chapter 4   Methodology

Little can be said about method without taking into account the nature of the things which the methods are to be used to study.

Andrew Sayer, *Method in Social Science: A Realist Approach*, (1992: 85)

4.1 Introduction

Methodology is a means to an end. As such it is not, however, secondary to its end, but on the contrary shapes in important ways the insights a study can deliver. As an intermediary between object of study and theory it determines whether what is being stated about the object can justifiably be said to be valid and reliable. In the case of an object that concerns social aspects of reality, being able to provide an explanation beyond description while also being able to judge explanations as more or less adequate poses a particular set of challenges. In this thesis, these challenges are met by underpinning the methodology with a realist ontology as well as an acknowledgment of the need to 'take into account that its object is concept/discourse/text-dependent (though not concept/discourse/text-determined)' (Shield, 2007: 308-9). The critical realist framework of this study entails an appreciation of the discursive nature of the data, in which discourse is defined as 'an element of social practice, which constitutes other elements as well as being shaped by them' (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999: vii), referring 'precisely to the capacity of meaning-making resources to constitute social reality […] within specific social contexts' (Chouliaraki, 2008: 674).

On the basis of this critical realist ontology, a combination of methods forms the basis for the empirical enquiry. In the context specifically of research on international news flows, Hanusch and Obijiofor (2008: 14) express their concern that 'researchers' preoccupation with content analysis procedures may have […] blurred the importance of investigating the underlying reasons why foreign news editors and reporters select and report news the way they do'. Consequently, they call for the application of mixed methods to questions of news flows, arguing that 'a *combination* of content analysis and personal interviews with journalists would strengthen rather than weaken the quality of research on foreign news' (2008: 14, emphasis added). Expressed in critical realist terms, 'experiences may seem to "push" themselves upon researchers as evidence of events. However, the task of research is to mount a countervailing "pull" – to infer underlying mechanisms' (Jensen, 2002: 269). And while different methods serve to answer different aspects of the main research question (see 4.2), they also help to triangulate the data and increase the validity of the findings (Riffe et al., 2005: 159).

Therefore, one element of the methodology is a quantitative comparative analysis of AJE and BBCW news programmes, designed to complement the interview data by providing examples of *potential* effects of generative mechanisms in AJE's news output relative to that of one of its main competitors, BBCW. The second element is a qualitative enquiry into mutual influences between AJE's remit, organisational factors and journalistic practice. For this purpose I conducted 28 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with editors, correspondents, producers, presenters, researchers and management staff at the London, Doha and Kuala Lumpur offices of AJE. These interviews will be explored in a thematic analysis that focuses on patterns above the level of the clause, allowing an understanding of some of the ways in which debates within the channel play out in relation to AJE's organisational identity and editorial line.

I agree with Sayer (1992: 197) that, if quantitative analysis is to be meaningful in relation to this research, this relies on 'conceptual preparation', which ideally would 'precede statistical analysis.' For the purpose of the present thesis, I first conducted and analysed interviews with AJE staff and *then* designed and conducted the content analysis. However, in terms of the order in which chapters are presented within the thesis, I decided to outline the results from the descriptive quantitative analysis before going into more detail in the qualitative chapters. This was done so as to provide anyone not familiar with the output of AJE during the period of analysis with a preliminary understanding of what the news on the channel looked like (compared with BBCW) before using 'other "languages" […] needed to show' (Sayer, 1992: 180) how powers and liabilities inherent in journalistic practices and structures made certain outcomes more likely than others in the specific case of AJE.

Also, since 'reporting back' is a relational concept that acquires meaning in contrast to other actors or organisations, the methodology contains comparative elements on several levels. Apart from the content analysis (which is comparative in obvious ways) the fact that virtually the entire first generation of AJE staff brought with them significant experience from other news broadcasters, where most of them they had worked until relatively shortly before the research interviews for this thesis were

conducted, added a comparative dimension to *their* interpretations and perceptions of AJE and its relation to the wider field.

In the following, I will outline the foundations of my methodology, including research questions, choice of methods and the analytical status of the quantitative and qualitative data generated for this research. The subsequent section of this chapter will address methodological decisions and processes regarding the comparative content analysis. In the third part of the chapter I will consider the specifics of fieldwork and conducting research interviews in the Doha, London and Kuala Lumpur offices of AJE, and focus on thematic analysis as a means of understanding patterns and tensions within the interview data.

4.2   Methodological Foundations

In order to make informed methodological choices, it is vital first to formulate a set of research questions (Hansen et al., 1998: 99), bearing in mind that 'different methodologies may be suited to examine different aspects of a research question, and not necessarily in the same empirical domain' (Jensen, 2002: 272). Research questions in turn are informed and guided by the theoretical framework of the study as outlined in the previous chapters. In the context of this study, they were devised to interrogate questions of news flows from a relational perspective taking into account intra- and inter-organisational factors and their mediation through journalistic practices, both habitual and reflexive. The overarching question guiding this research can be summarised as follows:

> In how far and in what ways does AJE deliver on the channel's declared aim to challenge asymmetric global news flows and how is this aim aided or obstructed by the interplay of agential forces and structural mechanisms residing both within the organisational field and the wider professional field?

This question will be discussed in the context of the early years of Al Jazeera English, which as an empirical case study offers the rare opportunity to research the

formative years of a media organisation that simultaneously aimed at reversing 'conventional' news flows and had the financial backing to pursue its aims on a scale that allowed it to compete with well-established channels.

4.2.1 Research Questions and Choice of Methods

On a more detailed level, a range of sub-questions emerge from the theoretical framework. These can be grouped into three categories. The first category concerns questions of representation. The second category concerns questions of journalistic practices, the unequal dispersion of specific kinds of professional habitus and journalistic agency. And the third category concerns questions of journalistic habitus and agency with regard to AJE's position in the journalistic field, as expressed through the relative weight of cultural and economic capital. The three empirical chapters of this thesis will be guided by these three sets of questions.

In order to answer questions of representation (Chapter 6), I conducted a comparative content analysis that looks at AJE's news content both in relation to the organisation's remit *and* in relation to the news content of BBCW. This analysis has both quantitative and qualitative elements (with a strong emphasis on the first) and serves to give a sense of some of the *potential* effects of the structural mechanisms addressed in the interview-based empirical chapters to follow. Questions to be answered in Chapter 6 include:

1. Does AJE fulfil its remit of being a 'voice of the South' by representing the global South to a greater degree than its competitors in its news programmes?
    a. If so, how *consistent* is any emphasis on the global South relative to other broadcasters?
    b. And how is AJE's remit reflected within the structures of the news programmes in terms of the time allocated to items from the global South as opposed to items from the global North, and the number of items not carried on other networks?

2. Does AJE fulfil its remit of being a 'voice of the voiceless' by representing in its news programmes those who are comparatively under-represented in the field of international news to a greater degree than its competitors, including non-Western voices, female voices or people speaking in their capacities as 'ordinary people' and from other positions outside the realms of power?

3. Are there any correlations and/or overlaps between different under-represented groups that would weaken or strengthen AJE's claim of providing a difference in its news profile?

As stated earlier (4.1), I agree with Sayer (1992: 193) that 'if [quantitative] methods are to gain any plausibility they must be supplemented by realist appraisals based on qualitative structural analysis'. Therefore, in-depth interviews and their qualitative analysis are indispensable for some of the questions raised in this thesis, because they allow a look into potential generative mechanisms that are impossible to infer from a quantitative analysis of news content. And so, in order to answer questions with regard to professional habitus and agency (Chapter 7) and capital (Chapter 8), I conducted in-depth interviews with AJE staff, drawing on their extensive experiences within the wider professional field as well as their motivations to join AJE and their experiences in actively seeking out change and pursuing difference in international news.[40] Research questions for Chapter 7 include:

4. How do factors specific to the professional field affect the channel's capacity to challenge – both in the sense of being on a par structurally and contesting editorially – established international news channels?

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[40] There are of course many methods one could hypothetically apply in a qualitative analysis of mechanisms within the organisation. As I will discuss in more detail later in this chapter, in the case of research on AJE that choice was somewhat restricted, since the organisation's management tended to be comparatively cautious in deciding to whom and under what conditions to grant access. As Zayani and Sahraoui (2007: 9) note, even superficial and 'benign' questions about the basic structure of the organisation frequently resulted in prolonged negotiations and vague answers. And so it is hardly surprising that ethnographic approaches or other observational methods were not an option for this thesis for practical reasons. As Figenschou's (2010b: 964) experience confirmed, '[…] researchers visiting Al Jazeera are not authorized to observe production processes and therefore rely on interviews alone'.

a. More specifically, what is the role of professional habitus in AJE's aim to 'rebalance' international news?

b. And how does the unequal global dispersion of a particular professional habitus associated with the field of international English-language news and current affairs broadcasting impact on AJE's aim of challenging historically grown asymmetric structures within the industry?

5. How is AJE's aim of redressing the 'current typical information flow' reflected on an *organisational* level in terms of professional habitus and journalistic agency?

a. More specifically, what are the mutual influences between AJE's remit and its staff profile?

b. And to what degree does journalistic agency impact on the emerging habitus of the organisational field as an environment devised specifically to challenge existing practices?

The second interview-based chapter, Chapter 8, addresses questions regarding AJE's position within the field and the significance of cultural capital:

6. How does AJE's position within the journalistic subfield of international English-language news broadcasting – as demarcated by the relative significance of cultural vis-à-vis economic capital within the organisational environment – impact on the channel's ability to 'rebalance' unequal news flows?

7. How does AJE's position in the field affect the channel's ability to impact in turn on the wider field?

8. And in what ways is AJE's position mediated by journalistic habitus and agency?

As the nature and range of the above outlined questions signifies, finding answers to them necessitates different methodological approaches, including both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Importantly, 'quantitative and qualitative methods may

be subsumed under the same theoretical framework' (Jensen, 2002: 258). Furthermore, 'the realist framework is of special interest in a convergence perspective' (2002: 269), since generative mechanisms and empirical manifestations inhabiting different analytical strata of reality require different methods in order to investigate them in a meaningful way. As such, descriptive statistics and a qualitative exploration of powers, liabilities and causal mechanisms (which may or may not result in actual events or even empirically measurable data) are not mutually exclusive on epistemological grounds. Rather, while on their own not very informative, quantitative methods may '*usefully supplement* qualitative descriptions' (Sayer, 1992: 191, emphasis added) – and in the present case be used to record some of 'the *effects* associated with the exercise of causal powers' (1992: 180, emphasis added).

4.2.2 The Analytical Status of the Data – A Critical Realist Approach

Across the social sciences and media studies, the analytical status of research data has been a matter of debate with regard both to researcher-generated 'texts' (such as interviews) and to 'texts' existing prior to the research process (such as news output). While the assertion that a text is a resource for data that refers to something that exists independently of its interpretation is comparatively unchallenged in some areas of quantitative traditions, qualitative approaches have largely departed from this position, becoming 'ideologically more separate from quantitative research' (Platt, 2002: 50-51). This ideological departure, also referred to as a 'linguistic turn,' constituted 'a major shift in social science research' from a focus on reality existing independently of language to 'studying the world as a language-mediated process that exists in discourse' (Chouliaraki, 2008: 676). In terms of methodology, this shift manifested itself in a focus on the subjective and interactive[41] aspects of data

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[41] While the interactive character of a semi-structured interview situation is immediately obvious (and to a slightly lesser degree in qualitative interrogations of pre-existing 'texts' like news output), the way in which the actions of the researcher interact with and therefore affect data also apply to data generated in quantitative content analysis. As Sayer (1992: 179-180) highlights in his discussion of quantitative methods, the *choice of the researcher* of dependent and independent (or so-called 'explanatory') variables is an inherently qualitative decision that impacts

generation. Some qualitative researchers went one step further by claiming that *all* that can be extracted from the data is information about the data itself and its subjective interpretation, but not the topics it references. Dismissing the referential aspects of data in relation to an external reality, methodologies based on these foundations are concerned with how people negotiate and create accounts of 'their' reality in the process of decoding news texts or in interview situations. The text itself becomes the (sole) topic of research.

This ideological departure in social sciences and media studies towards approaches that appreciate the constitutive nature of the data (an appreciation that is indisputably vital to the conceptualisation of social aspects of reality) led some to overdraw the dichotomy between constructivist approaches and realist approaches. Symptomatic of this condition is, for example, the crude juxtaposition in methodological literature on content analysis of (outlasted) positivist ideas in social science with assumptions that media texts '*have no objective – that is reader-independent – qualities*' at all (Krippendorff, 2004: 22, emphasis in original). In literature on research interviewing specifically, this 'paradigm war' (Bryman, 2008: 625) likewise plays out in a tendency to present decisions regarding the analytical status of the data as a dichotomy between two mutually exclusive approaches, whereby postmodern constructivist accounts tend to be juxtaposed with 'positivism', 'naïve objectivism' or even foundationalism (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995; Gillham, 2005; Warren, 2002).[42] I am aware that such accounts may serve to outline extremes as a shortcut to explaining a *range* of approaches, but this is exactly what they ultimately do *not* provide.

Instead, the extreme positivist position routinely serves as a prop to highlight the advantages of constructivist methodology in complex social settings without

on the data that will emerge from the sample, since it implies a causal relationship that a) cannot be inferred from the quantitative data itself and therefore depends on factors external to the 'text' and b) cannot be confirmed by the data, which at best reveals correlations, but by definition never causes.

[42] It is precisely this refusal to acknowledge the simultaneously constitutive and constituted nature of social aspects of reality that Bourdieu argues against from his structuralist constructivist position. As Everett points out, Bourdieu was 'dismayed by the dualistic nature of sociological thinking' (Everett, 2002: 57).

qualifying how far the latter could be compatible with other realist approaches. As Warren contends, 'unlike the survey interview, the epistemology of the qualitative interview tends to be *more constructionist than positivist*' (Warren, 2002: 83, emphasis added), as if 'positivist' was the only viable alternative to 'constructivist', the rigidity of the first serving to highlight the advantages of the latter in the realm of 'real life' data. In this context constructionist accounts are seen as doing justice to the complexity of the data through in-depth interpretation (with limited claims of superiority to alternative interpretations). 'Positivist' accounts, on the other hand, are seen as prone to perceiving interview participants as passive conduits for retrieving information from an existing vessel of answers (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995: 83) and to taking 'a very surface approach' (Gillham, 2005: 6).

In contrast to this position, I agree with Seale (1998: 215) that treating data as resource *and* as topic are not mutually exclusive approaches. In the realm of social aspects of reality, both what is said and how it is said are relevant resources. What is missing from much of the methods literature, then, is an indication that interpretative and realist approaches do not have to be mutually exclusive. On the contrary, I would argue, *only* an approach that allows an accounting for the contingencies of social life is apt to constitute a realist approach to the analysis of *social* phenomena. In the following I will address these issues with reference to the theoretical framework of this study, arguing that critical realism offers a way of bridging what has in many cases been an overdrawn dichotomy between objectivist and subjectivist approaches.

In order to exemplify the ways in which a critical realist approach can serve to mediate between these two positions, I shall present a critical realist critique of Kvale's metaphorical illustration of what he describes as two divergent models of the researcher's role in the context of research interviews (1996: 3-5). The first metaphor is that of the researcher as miner, while the second likens the researcher to a traveller. According to Kvale, the second metaphor 'understands the interviewer as a traveller on a journey that leads to a tale to be told upon returning home.' Through his own interpretation, the traveller reconstructs for his audience the stories he encounters. Through interpretation, 'the tales are remoulded into new narratives, which are convincing in their aesthetic form and are *validated through their impact upon the listeners'* (Kvale, 1996: 4, emphasis added). The metaphor of the miner portrays the

interviewer as somebody who digs for the knowledge 'waiting in the subjects' interior to be uncovered, uncontaminated by the miner' in the course of this stripping 'the surface of conscious experience' (1996: 3). The terminology continues to evoke inhuman machinery: facts are being 'purified', 'knowledge nuggets' dumped on the 'conveyor belt' that is transcription, meanings are 'moulded', their value determined by their 'degree of purity' (3-4). [43]

I would think that anybody would be hard pressed not to prefer 'roaming freely' and the ability to 'enter conversations with people encountered' to insulting the dignity of their interviewees by attempting to excavate knowledge out of the 'subjects' interior'. However, there are a number of ways in which Kvale's two opposing metaphors and the methodological assumptions they represent fail to convince. The most important critique is that the approaches illustrated by both these metaphors reduce ontology to epistemology. By so doing they commit what Bhaskar calls an epistemic fallacy or 'the analysis or definition of statements about being in terms of statements about our knowledge (of being)' (Bhaskar, 1993: 397), albeit with very different theoretical implications. The traveller's 'new knowledge' reduces encounters and landscapes to the subjective narratives that are 'validated through their impact upon the listeners' (Kvale, 1996: 4), thereby equating what can be known with what there is. The metaphor of the miner also conflates epistemological and ontological issues by suggesting that 'knowledge nuggets' *reside* within the real objects *to be collected* by the researcher, thereby confusing the acknowledgment of an external reality with claims of direct and straightforward access to it.

As I will argue, a clear analytical distinction between epistemological and ontological issues, as outlined in critical realist accounts, helps to resolve the rigidity of both approaches and to arrive at a position where the complexity and constitution of knowledge is adequately taken into consideration *and* statements are taken to have referential relations to reality.[44] Or, as Bryman (2008: 590) puts it, 'critical realists

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[43] This again resonates with metaphors used in the context of content analysis of text as a 'container' (Krippendorff, 2004: 22) for content 'waiting to be separated from its form and described' (2004, 20).

[44] In addition, methodological approaches associated with the metaphor of the traveller are often implicitly presented as the more ethical choice, while approaches

occupy a middle ground between positivism and postmodernism by claiming that an entity can exist independently of our knowledge of it, while also asserting that access to the social world is always mediated and thus subjective'.

As this example shows, the distinction between real objects and thought objects (Sayer, 1992: 46-49) is paramount for the conceptualisation of knowledge, whereby thought objects include any kind of statements about real objects. Bhaskar distinguishes between intransitive objects of knowledge that do not depend on any kind of human activity for their existence (e.g. the shape of the earth or the movement of tides) and transitive objects of knowledge that are social products (such as antecedently established scientific facts and theories) (Bhaskar, 1998). Sayer expands this notion to cover a kind of knowledge central to social sciences: knowledge about the objects of knowledge of others. In his words: 'While natural scientists necessarily have to enter the hermeneutic circle of their scientific community, social scientists also have to enter that of those whom they study' (Sayer, 2000: 17). Consequently, in the double hermeneutic of social science, thought objects include theories about other thought objects. While in the case of this particular research the object of study is the (itself transitive) object that is AJE as an organisation, both data (in the shape of news content and interview texts) and written analysis take the form of thought objects that relate to – but are distinct from – that object.

Being key to the realist framework of this study, this distinction enables me to appreciate the constituted *and* constitutive relation between texts (as thought objects) and their objects. In the case of content analysis, this means that I understand the text to transport information and meaning that (however multi-layered and subjectively constructed) relate to various aspects of an external reality that concerns AJE's editorial profile. And, in the case of research interviews, this means that interviewees' comments, for example on themes of organisational identity, are not conflated with organisational identity or (mis)taken for unproblematic evidence of

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associated with the metaphor of the miner are likened to 'human engineering' (Kvale, 1996: 4). Critical realists have made the opposite point. Positioning discourse within the materiality that affects it, they argue, is a matter of doing justice to the individuals' perspectives in that material restrictions and needs are not being reduced to perception and rhetoric (Sims-Schouten, Riley & Willig, 2007: 103-4).

the character of this identity, but that a reciprocal relationship between that identity and the way it is being talked about is assumed.

4.3   Comparative Content Analysis

In order to tease out some of the intricacies involved in 'reporting back' and to show some *examples* of potential[45] on-screen expressions of the competing causal powers of journalistic habitus and agency (as advanced in Chapters 7 and 8), I conducted a detailed comparative content analysis of AJE and BBCW news programmes. Being arguably the most straightforward method of analysing aspects of a news broadcaster, content analyses of AJE's news programmes have been conducted in a range of contexts (see also 5.4.2), but these have largely been directly linked to coverage of a particular issue and/or region (Barkho, 2007; Kolmer & Semetko, 2009; Azran, 2010; El-Ibiary, 2010; Lawson, 2011; Mellese & Mueller, 2012). What I seek to do here, in contrast, is to assess AJE's aims on the more generic level. Notably, there are two previous studies with similarly broad objectives (Painter, 2008; Figenschou, 2010a). In relation to this thesis their respective results provided invaluable groundwork from which I could proceed to add several new aspects that closely match the objective of my content analysis (see Chapter 6), which is to further understand *to what degree* and *with respect to which categories* AJE provides, relative to one of its main rivals (and in the specific context of the news programmes analysed), the editorial difference enshrined in its corporate profile.

In terms of methodology, the two examples mentioned above can be characterised respectively by their comparative focus (Painter, 2008) and their non-comparative

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[45] Here, I use the modification of the term 'potential' to once more indicate that I am not assuming a straightforward causal relationship between underlying mechanisms of journalistic practice and the *particular* content I analysed, but rather regard the latter as *one of many* possible expressions of a set of underlying mechanisms that are not necessarily simultaneously activated and therefore may, without forfeiting their explanatory value, produce different results in different situations. This lack of a strictly repeatable pattern is precisely what makes it so difficult to 'predict' social outcomes, but for that very reason has to be addressed (as is the case in critical realism) in a theory of causation that does not hinge on reproducibility if it is to make sense in the context-dependent realm of social aspects of reality.

but very nuanced approach (Figenschou, 2010a). Therefore, the aim of the content analysis in this thesis is add to and to go beyond previous results by combining a wide range of variables with a comparative element in order to allow for a robust evaluation of AJE's news content in direct relation to my research questions. For this content analysis, the comparative element is important not least because it reflects the implicitly comparative element within the research interviews with journalists, a majority of whom – at the time of interview – had relatively recently joined AJE from one of the major Western broadcasters and who often compared their experience at AJE with their previous work. This is provided by relating AJE's news content to correlating news broadcasts on BBCW.[46] The inclusion of BBCW footage serves as a backdrop against which examples of *relative* difference and similarity in AJE's content become discernible.

In addition, I included several new aspects in order to explore issues not covered in previous research. New elements included, for example, analysing the proportion of original items not covered by the other channel and the inclusion of variables regarding actors' geo-cultural backgrounds (or primary habitus) as a potential contribution to difference in international news (for a more detailed delineation of variables, see 4.3.2). Another example is the differentiation between (percentages of) numbers of news items and the airtime allocated to these. In order to assess whether stories from particular regions were *systematically being allocated greater amounts of time*, I decided to measure the percentages both of items[47] and of airtime[48] in order

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[46] The latter was chosen because the UK location of BBCW's headquarters matched most closely the methodological parameters of the *overall* data I generated for this analysis, which also include several interviews with AJE staff based in London (as well as in Doha and in Southeast Asia, but not in the United States). A more fully comparative study including content of other competitors, most notably CNNI, as well as interviews with staff of rival organisations, proved to be beyond the scope of this study.

[47] Where the news item was the unit of analysis, I defined 'item' for the purpose of this analysis as all the constituent parts of the coverage on one issue as introduced as a new topic by the anchor. According to this distinction, a news item could include an introduction by the presenter, on its own or accompanied by footage or graphics, packages from correspondents, studio guests, recorded interviews or live two-ways.

[48] Airtime was measured in seconds.

to be able to see whether the comparison between these different units of analysis confirmed tendencies observed elsewhere in the sample or added new insights.

Moreover, cross-referencing some of the variables in ways that had not been explored before (for example by juxtaposing the socio-political roles of protagonists with gender to see whether any patterns surfaced from this particular sample) allowed me to further point out correlations and discrepancies, which I found to add a deeper understanding of potential effects of the dialectic of similarity and difference pervading different aspects of AJE. In order to further contextualise the quantitative variable-driven elements of the content analysis – and to assess Painter's findings (2008: 44, emphasis in original) that despite an emphasis on the global South 'at times the *treatment* of stories out of those countries does not differ widely' – I supplemented the results for Questions 1 and 2 with short examples of particular news items, which allowed me to consider some of the more qualitative differences and similarities between the news output of the two channels analysed.

4.3.1 Sampling, Reliability and Validity

The sample for the comparative content analysis consisted of eight hours of news content, four hours from each channel. In order to limit potentially distorting effects of stories dominating the news for several days without, over a longer period, being representative with regard to the factors analysed, I chose programmes spread over the course of one year. For this purpose, I selected a starting date and then analysed programmes at intervals of three months – a 'sampling strategy' employed to help achieve a 'reasonably representative' (Hansen et al, 1998: 102-103) sample and to increase content (or face) validity (Holsti, 1969: 143). The days selected were 15th August 2007, 15th November 2007, 15th February 2008 and 15th May 2008. This timeframe was chosen to coincide with the majority of the interviews I conducted with AJE staff for the purpose of this study. In terms of AJE's organisational development, these covered the period from the run-up to the channel's first anniversary and reached half way into the editorially more consolidated second year post launch. I analysed one hour each per channel and sampled date from 18:00 GMT on AJE for the channel's flagship news programme, *Newshour,* and from

19:00 GMT on BBCW News to coincide with the start of *World News Today*.[49] The most apparent difference between the two hours of news is the respective components of World Business Report [WBR] on BBCW and the sports section of AJE's *Newshour*, neither of which has an equivalent during that hour on the other channel. In order to make sure that results were not skewed by this apparent inconsistency and to make explicit any potential effects this particular difference in scheduling could have had on the results, I included both outcomes including *and* outcomes excluding the respective business and sports sections of the news programming analysed.

In order to assess the reliability of the overall analysis, inter-coder reliability was measured using Cohen's kappa (to gauge coding consistency with a formula that accounts not merely for the percentage of inter-coder agreement observed in the data, but also the impact of chance agreement) (Riffe et al., 2005: 151). A resilient test of inter-coder reliability further served to underscore the validity of the analysis. For this purpose, 12.5% of the sample were coded, as well as by myself, by an advanced law student familiar with the purpose of the study, trained and instructed in how individual variables were defined in its context. Perhaps unsurprisingly, a couple of clear-cut variables such as 'gender' and 'region' were consistent between the two coders in 100% of cases, while other variables variously displayed a kappa ranging from 0.81 (for the variable 'global South / North'), to 0.82 (for the variable 'news genre'), 0.92 (for the variable 'socio-political role') and 0.94 (for the variable 'geo-cultural background'). According to Bryman (2012: 280) 'a coefficient of 0.75 or above is considered very good'. In the following I shall outline the main characteristics of the variables chosen in relation to the research questions outlined earlier in this chapter.

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[49] The time of day has an impact on the geographical emphasis on both channels (see also Painter, 2008: 28, 36), for the simple reason that editors take into account that it will always be the middle of the night for parts of a potentially global audience. In the case of the news programmes in my sample, Asia was probably less focused upon than it would have been earlier in the day, particularly in the case of AJE, which during the timespan analysed used to broadcasts news anchored live from the Malaysian capital in the morning (for later changes in the role of AJE's four broadcast centres, see 9.4.1).

4.3.2 Code Development and Analysis

In developing the variables for the coding process, I followed the directions outlined in the research questions, which in turn had been inspired by the theoretical framework of the thesis (see also 4.2.1). In addition, preliminary results from the qualitative elements of the research further informed the delineation of variables. For example, instead of merely taking into account the official editorial remit and mission statements of the channel, I also considered journalists' interpretations of AJE's remit in order to assess the degree to which AJE delivered on providing difference in international news by its own standards. I then 'tested' the variables by applying them to parts of the sample to see a) whether they generated significant results and b) whether further familiarising myself with the footage in this way brought up relevant aspects that I had neglected before. This process of refining variables was repeated several times until I was confident that the coding structure did justice to the data and was apt to address the issues outlined in the research questions. These variables then formed the basis for the development of a codebook[50] and for the ultimate analysis.

To answer Research Question 1 – whether AJE fulfilled its remit of being a 'voice of the South' by providing a greater emphasis on the global South relative to the equivalent news content on BBCW (see also 4.2.1) – I coded news content for being from or about the 'global South' and from or about the 'global North' and compared the results with regard to a range of factors. Apart from the *overall* emphasis on stories on the global South and North respectively, these factors included degrees of *consistency and variation* across the sample, 'original' items not carried by the respective other channel and the relative distribution across different news genres.

The delineation of a global South is, of course, as Williams et al. (2009: 27) point out, just one way of grouping global regions that, as a concept, has 'nothing natural' about it, although it 'continues to be a common practice' to construe the world

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[50] The codebook can be accessed in Appendix 2.

through this lens.[51] Encompassing hugely diverse regions, it is not surprising that the concept can be, as Painter puts it, 'notoriously nebulous' (2008: 24). However, the concept does retain *some* 'cartographic continuity' (Rigg, 2007: 3).[52] It also subsumes shared experiences of domination of a political and economic nature. In short, 'what *does* link the regions [of the global South] is that these are parts of the world that have been commonly described for many decades now as *developing areas'* (Williams et al., 2009: 8, emphasis in original). Commonly, regions subsumed under the category of the global South include Asia, Africa and Latin America, with further differentiations that variously list the Caribbean (Williams et al., 2009: 27) or the Middle East (Painter, 2008: 30; Figenschou, 2010a: 91) as distinct categories. For the purpose of the content analysis in this thesis I followed previous studies on AJE in defining the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, and Latin America as the geographically delineated constituents of the 'global South'.

In addition, the terminology of '*global* South' – as opposed to 'the South' – is suggestive of an acknowledgement of the fact that processes of globalisation have further complicated any such categorisation and rendered strictly geographical interpretations inadequate. Given that the variables of 'global South' and 'global North' therefore supersede simplistic geographical definitions (for more detail on this question, see also the introduction to Chapter 6), there is not a one hundred percent correlation between all the coverage coded as *concerning* issues from the South and the sum of all the coverage *located in* countries of the South. Coverage coded as being about the South, while geographically belonging to the North, included for example an item on Roma refugees in Italy and an item on Native Americans in the US. Again, this corresponds with working definitions of the global

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[51] Historically, the terminology of the North/South divide is frequently associated with a commission chaired by the former German chancellor, Willy Brandt, which published a report called 'North-South: A Programme for Survival' in 1980 (Williams et al., 2009: 1).

[52] Notwithstanding the circumstance that this 'cartographic continuity' is complicated by the fact that not every country of 'the North' lies in the Northern hemisphere and 'the South' is equally difficult to define geographically, with Japan, Australia and New Zealand frequently cited as defying simplistic North/South categories (Rigg, 2007: 4).

South as employed by AJE staff. Where an item featured more than one country, I divided item and time between all main locations mentioned in the report (which explains the occasional decimals in the category of items). For example, a sports news item on two Spanish tennis players reaching the semi-final in a tournament in China is split between Asia and Europe, if the coverage focused on *both* China as a host country *and* the status of the sport in Spain.

To answer Research Question 2 – whether AJE fulfilled its remit of being a 'voice of the voiceless' (see also 4.2.1) – I first distinguished between different on-screen 'roles' or functions of those having a voice in the news, such as journalists, protagonists in news items and guests invited for interviews. [53] [54] When operationalising AJE's official remit including the rather abstract notion of 'the voiceless', I was again guided by the interpretations of this remit by AJE staff.[55] As a result, I looked at three categories for the position from which an actor might speak – what could be called the *geo-cultural background*, the *socio-political position* and the *gender*. Crucially, this is not to reduce the person in question to her or his association with one of these particular variables, but rather to highlight the *position* that the actor (inadvertently and inevitably) comes to represent on screen *in this particular context*. While for a quantitative analysis the category of gender is fairly straightforward, the categories of geo-cultural and socio-political positions warrant

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[53] I decided that with regard to presenters the sample of four news programmes per channel was not sufficiently representative to provide meaningful results. Suffice it to say that when Henery compared presenters' backgrounds on AJE, BBCW and CNNI news programmes she came to the conclusion that in terms of on-screen diversity 'AJE's mix was moderate' (Henery, 2010: 31).

[54] As for staff working out of sight of the viewer, there are obvious limitations when it comes to content analysis. It is worth considering in this context, however, that there may well be interesting variations between different on- and off-screen roles. For example, the precise linguistic requirements for on-screen jobs in English-language news make it arguably more likely that one will find greater diversity amongst 'behind-the-scenes' newsroom staff. On the other hand, it has been noted elsewhere that while there were relatively high levels of 'diversity in the AJE newsroom', there were concerns 'that the uniform management group represents "the North" rather than "the South"', prompting 'a call for more diversity in the top management from executive producers and up' (Figenschou, 2012: 365).

[55] For a more detailed description, see Chapter 6.

further explanation (and had to be further broken down to work as variables for coding the news programmes.)

The socio-political position was divided into one variable for establishment members, in other words those inside 'the realms of power' such as for example representatives of authorities, industry or politicians. Another category described those 'outside the realms of power', including actors appearing in their capacity as ordinary members of the public, citizens and illegal immigrants, those affected by poverty, conflict or disasters or in other ways being in a position juxtaposed to the powers that be. As Manning noted (2001: 139), 'the sociology of journalism and news production has long distinguished between "official" and "non-official sources"', but this distinction had to be expanded to encompass *socio-economic* dimensions in addition to the political dimension of bureaucratic officialdom, if it was to reflect a more inclusive 'theory of dominance' (Manning, 2001: 140). By grouping state authorities and industry leaders in the same category, I followed Grant's distinction, as appropriated by Manning (2001: 140f), of 'insider groups' with access to the realms of power and 'outsiders' who do not enjoy privileged access to policy makers and other powerful positions and actors. The subdivision of 'outsiders' into 'potential insiders', 'outsiders by necessity' and 'ideological outsiders' (Manning, 2001: 141) is likewise reflected in the division of the variable into individual categories or values.

Thus, in the content analysis, the category of 'ordinary citizens' and others outside the realms of power includes 'outsiders by necessity' (such as victims of man-made or natural disasters, economically disadvantaged groups in society or those denied a legal status) as well as 'potential insiders' and 'ideological outsiders' (either of which can apply to opposition movements, depending on their stance in relation to positions of power). However, 'ideological outsiders' can also potentially accumulate sufficient cultural capital to allow them to become part of what has been recently described as an 'independent elite' (Figenschou, 2010a: 99). Therefore, for the present study, a third value serves to describe those who are not in official or economically sanctioned positions of power, but who nonetheless wield varying degrees of symbolic power, such as independent academics, researchers, writers, artists or representatives of NGOs.

Other than gender and socio-political variables, analysing news programmes with regard to the geo-cultural backgrounds of those appearing in them is deeply vested with a host of ambiguities and problematic questions. First of all, it is inherently superficial and reductive. It immediately warrants the question of how representative anyone conceptualised as a representative of a region or culture *can* ever be, or even just would consider him- or herself to be. (For example, I am a German national, but at the time of writing, after having lived for long periods in the UK and Southeast Asia, I would probably not consider myself as being particularly representative of my home country). In short, any such distinction disregards peoples' experiences of living in more than one country or region at different times and the range of cultural as well as organisational settings that actors may have encountered in the course of their personal and professional lives. This goes for Western journalists with extensive experience of living and working in the South as well as for non-Western journalists who received their training from, for example, the BBC. It goes for the US-based non-Western commentators as well as for the Western aid worker in the Philippines. In other words, the position someone speaks from is so complex, and his or her ability to speak for or from the perspective of a group of people is informed by so many factors, professionally and personally, that constructing a perspective around a particular geo-cultural background - let alone a Western / non-Western dichotomy - does not appear to do anybody justice.

However, given AJE's self-proclaimed aim of reporting back from the South and giving a voice to the voiceless, it is virtually impossible to ignore, in any organisational study of AJE, the question of whose voices are supposed to speak on behalf of 'the South' and 'the voiceless'. In the sense that 'the question of "who speaks" can be posed in terms of the access of nations and cultures to a "voice in the world"' (Tomlinson, 2002: 12), AJE's remit is intrinsically related to the question of who has a physical presence in their news programmes, in terms both of protagonists and of journalists. Being a visual medium, superficial criteria of visual representation do matter in television. Furthermore, as Tomlinson remarks in relation to the academic side of the news flow debate, 'the issue of "who speaks?" is of peculiar sensitivity' in the context of unequal media flows, because without attention to this aspect of representation (whether it concerns academic debates about cultural

imperialism or journalistic efforts to rebalance international news) '*there is a danger of the practice of cultural imperialism being reproduced in the discussion of it*' (Tomlinson, 2002: 11, emphasis added). Consequently, as has been remarked elsewhere in a comparative study of AJE, BBCW and CNNI:

> One very important test of "global perspective" arguably is a diverse makeup of staff. The more culturally diverse the make-up of each network's staff, the more substance each could then have to claim that they offer a "global perspective". It would be more difficult to assert the claim of offering a "global perspective" without such a mix' (Henery, 2010: 30).

This left me with the question of how to define geo-cultural backgrounds for reliable coding under circumstances so multifaceted that reducing these to quantitatively measurable variables was virtually impossible to accomplish in any satisfactory way. Short of ignoring the question – and in order to arrive at a viable methodological *compromise* – I decided that the criterion for coding 'Western' and 'non-Western' backgrounds of protagonists in news items had to be less the actual primary habitus of a given actor – which just as any other viewer I often had no way of verifying beyond the information given in the report - but the background that the person *came to represent on screen.* For example, I would code a protagonist speaking as a representative of a local community in a rural neighbourhood in China as having a 'non-Western background' and a protagonist who spoke on behalf of French expatriates in Singapore as coming from a 'Western background', with the assumption that there would be a substantial correlation – if incomplete, fallible and superficial in its quantitative nature – with the actual backgrounds of the protagonists represented. In addition, in the case of journalists and representatives from the establishment or independent elites, staff webpages and online biographies were usually available to help determine whether their primary habitus had predominately been shaped in a Western or a non-Western context.

To answer Research Question 3 – whether there are any correlations and/or overlaps between variables that would weaken or strengthen AJE's claim of providing a difference (see also 4.2.1) – I cross-referenced the variables described above as

follows. In relation to AJE reporters, protagonists in news items and studio guests, I cross-referenced geo-cultural backgrounds with socio-political positions and gender to see whether different aspects of power were doubly inscribed in patterns of representation. In addition I also cross-referenced the categories of 'global North' and 'global South' with the type of news content (conflict/disasters, political processes, culture, business, sport etc.), the relative weight given to official statements and press conferences, as well as to (original) items not featured on the respective other channel.

4.4   Interviews with AJE staff

Research interviews formed the core element of the data for this thesis. The majority of interviews conducted for this thesis coincided with the timeframe for the sample of the content analysis, but follow-up interviews and background conversations continued until early 2013, when I travelled to Doha for a last time as part of this study in order to complete my research and update any contextual information about the organisation.

I conducted 28 semi-structured in-depth interviews in three of the four locations where AJE had set up its main offices (London, Doha and Kuala Lumpur). Interviewees included a range of news and programme editors, researchers, producers and presenters, political analysts, correspondents, promotions producers and management staff. I tried to achieve the greatest possible symmetry of interview samples at the various offices, as well as to balance on and off-screen, journalistic and management personnel. However, it is also important to note that the choice of interviewees was neither representative within these categories (which would not have been feasible given that the channel does not release statistics about its staff profile) nor established entirely by myself, but emerged out of negotiations with media relations personnel (in the case of the Doha sample) and the bureau chief's office (in the case of London and Kuala Lumpur). In addition, the fact that a significant share of staff frequently travel at short-notice meant that replacements for interviewees who had to rush off prior to an interview or mid-interview at times volunteered spontaneously on location.

Over the course of my research for this thesis I travelled to the channel's Kuala Lumpur office for two weeks in 2009 and four times to the channel's headquarters in Doha, including two weeks of fieldwork in 2008 and follow-up trips in 2009 and 2010, as well as a three-week trip in 2013 to conclude my research with a final fact check and update. Being London-based for most of the research period, interviews I conducted at AJE's London office were spread over the entire time of fieldwork. Levels of access did not seem to be fixed at any given time, but rather had to be continuously negotiated throughout the research period. In all, the level of access that enabled me to arrive at this particular sample was extremely generous and enabled me to draw in my analysis on about 30 hours of recordings (the equivalent of approximately 500 pages of transcript).

4.4.1 Getting Access to AJE

Researching AJE was a rewarding and challenging experience, which, as with any fieldwork environment, brought with it specific circumstances that influenced the direction and scope of the study. One of the main challenges began long before the first interview or even the first face-to-face contact (and to a lesser degree stayed with me throughout the research process): getting into the door. In the course of my research I enjoyed generous access without which this project would not have been feasible. However, prior to getting to the stage of the first interview there was a sustained period of trying to secure the degree of access that I envisioned for this project. In retrospect, the main obstacle seemed, maybe counter-intuitively, to stem from the novelty of the channel. Unlike long-established news organisations, AJE in its early days did not have tried-and-tested procedures for dealing with research requests. Furthermore, the massive endeavour of starting a 24/7 news channel simultaneously on four continents meant that keeping the organisation up and running occupied resources arguably to a greater degree than it did during later stages. Requests from academic departments understandably were not a priority during that time. In addition, during the first few months after the launch, which was around the time I started the project, the channel saw itself confronted with intense

academic and public attention, which naturally made gaining access more competitive.

Researching AJE in any depth is only possible in cooperation with the channel's media and press relations office. This is in part due to the mundane fact that conducting research about an organisation operating from offices equipped not only with front desks but with multiple security gates makes it a very different experience from studying a more or less dispersed social phenomenon or profession: it is difficult to imagine how one would get the degree of access I required for this thesis without the organisation's endorsement. This characteristic is one that my study shares with many research designs across various disciplines and that was first conceptualised in political science as what is now commonly referred to as 'elite interviewing'. Arguably the most distinctive feature of elite interviewing is that it provides a set of tools designed for gaining access to a professional environment that in many ways shields its employees from the curiosity of outsiders (Goldstein, 2002). Hence, interviewees are usually 'in a position to control or facilitate the researcher's access to their network or institution' (Gillham, 2005: 54).

As Gillham notes, for many the term 'elite' carries uncomfortable connotations, yet the term 'elite interviewing' is merely meant to indicate a 'shorthand for a kind of interviewing which has a distinctive value' (2005: 54). Elite interviewing is often described as consisting of a combination of existing practices, rather than a fully-fledged method in its own right. It is precisely the flexibility of this definition that carries elite interviewing beyond the limitations of interviewing those traditionally defined as an elite. According to Odendahl & Shaw 'elite' – as opposed to class – signifies 'specifiable groups', often in terms of particular professions (2002: 301). In a study categorising elites by occupation, Lerner et al. describe the cultural sectors, and the media specifically, as complementing traditional businesses and political functions (Odendahl & Shaw, 2002: 302). If we accept that the media wield power, then those who contribute to its production participate in realising this power in meaningful ways. This power is unequally distributed between different industries and organisations as well as within any one organisation – managers exercise a different kind of power than editors or creatives – but some of the protection

mechanisms that accompany the *institutional* power of any given organisation necessarily extend to everybody working for that organisation at a given time.

Ironically, given that the dispersion of information is the core business of a media organisation, researchers have found that 'getting media organizations to trust the researcher in a culture that is information averse is not always easy' (Zayani & Sahraoui, 2007: 7). With regard to AJE, Zayani and Sahraoui note that 'an independent researcher is usually received cautiously unless introduced and recommended by inner circles or members of the network. Even so, it is hard for researchers to scratch beyond the surface […]' (2007: 7). Figenschou (2010b: 961) describes this paradox as follows:

> On the one hand, Al Jazeera has been a catalyst for freedom of speech, breaking taboos and promoting openness in the Arab world […], but on the other hand the channel itself has remained closed to the outside world.

This caution on the part of the channel, which has extended to the lack of availability of any kind of 'hard data' (such as data regarding the channel's budget, diversity of its staff profile or even basic organisational charts), has been a challenge for academics researching Al Jazeera (Zayani & Sahraoui, 2007: 7; Figenschou, 2010b: 967). In part, this has to do with AJE's autonomous position due to its business model (not being dependent on advertisers means that the organisation is under no pressure to make data available to present itself to the market, while not being accountable to any license-fee paying public means there is no political pressure to disclose organisational data either). And in part this is likely to be related to 'a lack of independent, critical social research in the Arab Gulf, and thus a limited understanding of the research methodology for both local and visiting researchers' (Figenschou, 2010b: 967). Whatever the (combination of) causes, the result is that researchers depend on the information they obtain through informal conversations and formal interviews arguably to a greater degree than would be the case in the fieldwork context of research on many other broadcasters.

Depending on information from interviews and conversations also means that questions of access continue after 'getting a foot in the door'. During my fieldwork – which began around AJE's first anniversary in late 2007 – the channel went through

an intense time of various transitional phases as management took stock, resulting in extensive personal and structural changes.[56] In early 2008, a resulting assimilation in salaries between AJA and AJE, a lack of communication within the organisation, as well as long periods of contractual uncertainty and transition led to disenchantment in some quarters. Newspapers, notably *The Guardian*, wrote about AJE's 'staffing crisis' (Holmwood, 30/01/2008), analysing potential motives and scanning the mood for any ideological changes in AJE's editorial leadership. At the time of writing a number of different potential directions for the channel continue to be envisaged by different parties. On the ground as much as at management levels, a rally to shape this redefinition is still under way and is set to continue. Understandably, the readiness on the part of the journalists to talk on and off the record in times of transition – even if this transition is not the sole or even main subject of the interview – unsurprisingly varied, ranging from very supportive and forthcoming to acutely cautious.

4.4.2 'Elite Interviewing' and Interview Design

These factors not only impacted on securing interviews, but also on the interview design and situation itself. In the case of 'elite' interviewees, who are usually well 'aware of the problems that could follow from any statement they make', offering anonymity puts people in a position where they can be 'less cautious and more helpful, not least because it reflects the researcher's awareness of the "elite" interviewee's position and responsibilities' (Gillham, 2005: 55). In the interviews I conducted I offered anonymity to interviewees regardless of their position within the channel, but (where this information did not interfere with anonymity requirements) I indicate their position and location in order to add explanatory context to their quotes and paraphrases. Another common (though by no means exclusive) theme that runs

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[56] For example, while the creation of the network (which had been designed to bring Al Jazeera's Arabic, English, Sport and Documentary channels under one administrational roof) formally took place as early as March 2006, many of its effects were felt only after the launch in November 2006. As late as August 2008 new shared departments – such as human resources and finance – were still being created, transferring responsibility for administrational matters from the individual channels to the overarching organisational structure of AJN.

through the different approaches to elite interviewing is that it necessitates a semi-structured approach to interviews, since interviewees with potentially similar academic backgrounds to the researcher will seldom appreciate being 'taken by the hand' and guided through a preconceived or even standardised interview. However, far from being perceived as a restriction, it is emphasised that there are many advantages in letting an expert interviewee in part set the agenda of the conversation (Dexter, 1970). Thus, allowing the interviewee to spend more time with certain themes than with others, while retaining a basic structure that grants a certain level of comparability makes it possible to 'preserve [the] narrative element in the developmental sequence of the questions, even if the framework is more categorical in character' (Gillham, 2005: 72). Secondly, this is the most appropriate technique for interviewing people who are reflexive in relation to their own role and knowledgeable about the area of research, since it gives the interviewees the chance to lead the interview into directions that the researcher may not have been able to conceive of prior to the conversation.

Lastly, 'elite' interviewees tend to be alert to the implications of questions: being told that one is asking the wrong question is 'a typical index of this phenomenon' (Gillham: 2005: 54), as is getting return questions as responses or being asked to ask more questions or to ask them differently – all of which happened at some point during my research as various participants simultaneously took part in the interview and commented on the activity of being interviewed. In some cases this meta-discourse appeared to be driven by genuine interest in the research, while in others it took the slightly more aggressive tone of a power game and at times it appeared to assume a deflective function. The latter frequently expressed itself in a tendency to stick to the official line and language as much as possible, given the critical and in part damning reception that Al Jazeera had received from all directions since its inception (see also Chapter 5). As a result, as Figenschou notes, many of 'the channel's management and editorial members of staff have become experts in deflecting critical questions with well-rehearsed statements' (Figenschou, 2010b: 970).

One important achievement of qualitative approaches to interviewing has been to acknowledge its interactive character. With a method that generates data, rather than

analysing 'naturally occurring' data, the traces that this process leaves in the data need to be recognised as such. An important aspect of this position, associated with feminist approaches amongst others, is the issue of power imbalances between interviewer and interviewee, which one seeks to reduce as much as possible by being explicit about the purpose of the study and using a more conversational and non-directive interviewing style. Building on establishing trust and familiarity between the researcher and the interviewee, these approaches serve to reduce alienation caused by the staged setting of the interview. Interviewing journalists means, by default, choosing some of the methodological practices associated with this kind of qualitative interviewing and discarding others.

As indicated above, interviews will necessarily be more conversational than pre-structured, not because of a deliberate effort on the part of the researcher to empower the interviewee, but because the interviewee is likely to be as used to this kind of power as is the academic. On the contrary, as Figenschou outlined in illuminating detail (2010b: 974), being a young, female Western researcher in the patriarchal context of the Arab Gulf at times meant that some of the senior male managers who agreed to interviews made no secret of the fact that they perceived the power balance to be tipped in their favour. In this context, any efforts to make the interviewee feel more 'at ease' not only seem unnecessary, but may very well prove counterproductive. Furthermore, in the case of interviewing editorial staff, it would be difficult to argue that the interview situation had an alienating effect on someone who was himself constantly using this method professionally, albeit with a different objective.

4.4.3 Media Scholars and Journalists – Ambiguous Relations

Another aspect potentially affecting interview situations was the fact that relations between media scholars and journalists have not been without tensions in the past. Given that members of these two professions share at least superficially some of the aspects of their trades, and most importantly are dealing – although in very different ways – with the subject of the media, dialogue between media scholars and

journalists should be a matter of course. However, there is ample evidence that this cannot be taken for granted. In *Foreign News: Exploring the World of Foreign Correspondents*, a work in which he stresses the value of 'studying sideways', Hannerz (2004: 8) shares his impression that 'indeed journalists often have a reasonable suspicion that academics generally are inclined to be critical of news work'. Yet, given that critical engagement is an ideal shared by both professions, it is hard to imagine that a critical attitude is the sole reason for what some go as far as describing as mutual suspicion.

One of the contributing factors thus may stem from very *specific* theoretical assumptions that coincided with a time when news sociology was in its heyday. This strand of media studies was characterised by prioritising structure and its links to dominant social forces over journalistic agency, which of course from a journalist's perspective carries the implicit accusation not only that their work was secondary to the system they worked in, but also that they were blind to that system's ideological character. News sociologist Schudson (1989: 263), in a slightly partial attempt to reduce the apparent mutual 'mistrust' to a problem of (mis)understanding *on the part of the journalists,* concludes that 'social scientists who study the news speak a language that journalists mistrust and misunderstand'. The 1996 interview between Noam Chomsky and the BBC's Andrew Marr is a case in point. Marr repeatedly enquires why Chomsky appears to allege that journalists ('people like me') are 'self-censoring', while Chomsky is at pains to explain that the bias to which he refers is not a matter of self-censorship on the part of individual journalists, but of an inherently biased social system, which is profoundly different than alleging self-censorship (Chomsky & Marr, 1996). Indeed, language is part of the problem, but, as I would argue, in a more mutual fashion than members of both professions at times allege.

On the one hand, as Murdock (1994: 110) explains, social scientists (other than scholars of the natural sciences) are confronted with the problem that the terminology that intuitively lends itself to describing the phenomena they study is already burdened with a plethora of colloquial usages and connotations. Consequently, these either warrant further definition or need to be abandoned in favour of 'specialist' terminology that signifies a distinct phenomenon or structure in

less uncertain terms. When interviewing social scientists, journalists often come to regard these kinds of terms (for example, habitus, heteronomous tendencies, fields, causal liabilities, to name a few used in this thesis) as *fuzzy* and *drawn-out*, despite them being *more precise* and *shorter* than their colloquial explanations, because they get in the way of their job, which is to make the information accessible to a broad audience. However, breaking these terms down into colloquial language would, *if done properly*, in most cases lead to longer rather than shorter explanations (that is why they are used as 'shortcuts' in academic discourse), for which of course there is rarely space and time in journalism. The exercise therefore often results in variously grave degrees of imprecision, leaving journalists annoyed by the process and academics baffled by the product (for numerous examples of misrepresentations of social scientists' accounts in the media, see Haslam & Bryman, 1994).

On the other hand, academics at times succumb to the fallacy that colloquial 'journalistic' language is by default indicative of a lack of in-depth analysis. As a result, they sometimes crudely underestimate the extent to which journalists engage with their topics, because, as one producer explained, journalists measure their success by how well they *manage to simplify* issues without losing the shades of grey. Not using academic terminology is *part of that skill*, and therefore not indicative of being either aware or unaware of underlying complexities and discourses. In one particular incident, an AJE producer recounted how, after thoroughly studying and debating a topic for a prolonged period of time and subsequently succeeding in breaking it down and 'translating' abstract terminology into colloquial language for a documentary piece, she felt offended by an academic's ready judgement that underlying her report were deeper theoretical issues that she had allegedly unknowingly 'stumbled upon' (personal interview, London, 24/10/2007).

These are just a few examples that show how ambiguous relations are at times between the related professions of journalist and media scholar. This condition stems in part from previous encounters and resulting bias – and it is a condition that neither media academics who engage with journalism on a theoretical level nor journalists who value precision in their journalistic products can afford to uphold. Here, I agree with Gans (2011: 11) that 'both would gain from a properly designed division of

labor; journalists would enable empirically inclined academics to be more topical, and thus more relevant to the general public, and researchers could help to sharpen the journalists' analytic skills and repertoires'. It is precisely in this context that Archer's contribution to theories of agency and practice comes to bear and provides a vital corrective to some aspects of Bourdieu's work. While Bourdieu stresses reflexivity mostly as an academic disposition 'open to certain agents' that treats academia as 'a world apart', Archer (2007: 46) conceptualises reflexivity as a core human characteristic, maintaining that 'most people are potentially reflexive subjects whose deliberations can help them to make their own way through the world'. As I will argue, recognising journalists' reflexivity in this way is a first step to addressing some of the causes of an at times ambiguous relationship between two professions that need not be 'a world apart' (Archer, 2007: 46). Here, the way in which the academic language of asymmetric 'news flows' has been appropriated by AJE journalists to consciously and reflexively aim to 'report back' and 'balance' international news can be seen as testament to the potential of academic-journalistic dialogue.

4.4.4 Thematic Analysis – Patterns and Tensions

For the purpose of identifying wider themes within the data that allow me to analyse (tensions between) groups of arguments around various aspects of the channel's organisational environment, I will conduct a qualitative thematic analysis of the interview data. The process of organising several hundred pages of transcripts around themes was supported by use of the qualitative analysis software NVivo. However, as the software is only as good as the themes entered, I only began to apply the software at a later stage, after having familiarised myself with the data and developed the initial themes. Thematic analysis has been described broadly by Braun & Clarke as a qualitative analytical tool that focuses on analysing recurring themes throughout the data. Themes are identified by locating regularities in the data that occur above the level of the clause. Boyatzis defines a theme as 'a pattern found in the information that at the minimum describes and organizes possible observations or at maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon' (1998: vii). Themes can be located

at a manifest or at a latent level within the data. Naturally, the number and variety of patterns identifiable in the data is limited, but extremely high – too high certainly to be exhausted in this study. The question of how one is to look for patterns therefore significantly influences the direction of the research. A number of approaches are possible and can be broadly divided into inductive data-driven and deductive theory-driven approaches. For the purpose of this study, themes will be identified as 'patterned response' to research questions, following Braun & Clarke's (2006: 82) emphasis of the centrality of the research question in relation to theme development. Here, the centrality of the theme is not necessarily being derived from its pervasiveness throughout the data, but from its relevance *in relation to research questions*, while maintaining sensitivity towards themes emerging outside their immediate focus.

Furthermore, thematic analysis is characterised by an epistemological flexibility that makes it applicable within a variety of theoretical frameworks. According to Braun & Clarke, thematic analysis is compatible with both realist and constructivist accounts, as well as with what they refer to as a 'contextualist' method, which acknowledges 'the ways individuals make meaning of their experience, and, in turn, the ways the broader social context impinges on those meanings, while retaining focus on the material and other limits of "reality"' (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 81). Boyatzis goes even further by claiming that thematic analysis as a method is uniquely positioned to allow 'interpretative' and 'positivist' social scientists to mutually benefit from their respective approaches to data interpretation (Boyatzis, 1998: viii). In this judgement he fails to explain by virtue of what view of reality they could make use of their respective methodological advantages. However, his appreciation of the potential of thematic analysis to reconcile themes of 'discovery' and 'construction' in qualitative analysis gives an indication of the appropriateness of this approach in the context of the critical realist framework of this study.

Braun & Clarke describe the six stages of thematic analysis as familiarisation, generation of initial codes, generation of initial themes, reviewing themes, defining

and labelling of themes and writing the analysis.[57] The first stage of the analysis – familiarisation with the data – is a process that begins during the actual interview and continues throughout the engagement with the data. Transcribing the interview recordings is one of the early phases of actively engaging with the data. Therefore, even if 'thematic analysis […] does not require the same level of detail in the transcript as […] discourse analysis' (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 88) and other forms of analysis that focus on language at the level below the clause, attention to detail in order to create a rigorous verbatim written account of the interview is essential for later analysis. Subsequent re-reading of the transcripts further enhances the level of acquaintance and the ability to 'navigate' within the sample. The second step, the initial coding of the data, involves systematically creating shorthand descriptions of cohesive segments for each individual transcript before collating matching extracts across the sample under the label of a common code. Codes remain more descriptive than fully developed themes. In a third step these codes are aggregated into themes. For example the theme 'The Network: AJA & AJE' emerged from the following codes:

- Sharing administrational functions within AJN
- Mutual support in foreign bureaus
- Sharing equipment and footage
- Little or no organisational overlap editorially
- AJE staff's respect for AJA's accomplishments
- AJE not a 'translation' of AJA
- AJE staff accused of thinking of themselves 'more international'
- AJE staff accused of thinking of themselves as more professional
- AJE staff alleged to be ignorant about cultural sensitivities and historical detail of Middle Eastern affairs
- More 'descriptive' explanation of context on AJE – More in-depth analysis and debate on AJA

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[57] A terminological difference between this approach and Boyatzis's model is that for Braun & Clarke a code is a basic description of extracts of relevant data to be condensed into coherent themes at a later stage, while in Boyatzis's model a code is a detailed description and definition of a fully developed theme that can be applied across the data (Boyatzis, 1998: 31).

- Appealing to different audiences

- Allegations that AJE has 'piggy-backed' on AJA's success

- Fear that AJE dilutes the brand AJA journalists created

- Metaphors of family members to describe relationship between AJA and AJE

Other initial themes included vocational trajectories and staff profile, organisational identity an editorial remit, international journalistic practice, objectivity and professionalism, journalistic ethics, and alternative vs. mainstream concepts of AJE. At this stage of the analysis potential overlaps between the themes are considered and the themes are stratified into overarching themes and sub-themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 89-90).

The fourth phase of the analysis was to review these initial themes. In the case of this particular study this involved refining themes in the process of entering the interview into NVivo by applying the initial themes and amending and streamlining them, as new links between themes emerged from the data collations assembled by the software. These collations also helped to identify sub-themes and to improve internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity (that meant making sure that themes were internally consistent and there were no significant overlaps between themes). Once the thematic map has thus been refined, the fifth step is to label, define and describe the themes.[58] At the end of this process, the following three main themes emerged: 1) AJE's editorial remit, 2) journalistic practice, habitus and agency and 3) the relative importance of cultural and economic capital for journalistic performance. These three themes will be discussed in the empirical chapters 6, 7 and 8 of this thesis. In addition, I collated a range of themes emerging from the data that were not directly related to one of the three main themes under so-called 'free-nodes' (as opposed to so-called 'tree-nodes' which signify relations between themes), which I could then consult for relevant context during the process of the analysis. The three main themes were divided into sub-themes as follows:

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[58] This process has a function equivalent to what is being defined as 'coding' in Boyatzis' model (1998: 29-53).

Main theme	Sub-themes
Editorial remit	'Rebalancing' international news flows
	Sustained commitment in the global South
	Grassroots approach to news
	Covering stories that others do not report
	Covering the same stories differently
	Ignoring stories that other networks run
	Lack of soft news
	Alternative vs. mainstream
	Being 'truly international' by ignoring domestic angles
	Role of Middle East coverage
	Reporting on the North from a Southern perspective
Journalistic practice, habitus and agency	Adapting to AJE's editorial remit
	Primary habitus South
	Primary habitus North
	Professional habitus
	Circulation of staff between broadcasters
	Shared international practice
	Clash of professional habitus within organisational environment
	Motivations for joining AJE
Relative importance of cultural vis-à-vis economic capital for journalistic performance	Financial dependence and questions of editorial independence
	Cultural capital
	Economic capital
	Internal decision-making processes
	Plans to become commercially more viable
	(Perceived) audiences
	AJE's position in the field vis-à-vis other major networks
	AJE's position in the field vis-à-vis recent 'alternative' 24/7s
	AJE's potential to impact on the field in the mid- / long-term

Table 1.1: Thematic Analysis – Main themes and sub-themes

At this stage the analysis moves beyond paraphrasing and grouping data extracts, as it includes describing a theme's relation to the research question and its explanatory

value for the study. It also includes analysing the relations between themes and sub-themes and establishing a 'hierarchy of meaning' (Braun & Clarke, 2006:92). The sixth and final step of the thematic analysis is to 'tell the complicated story of the data' (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 93) in a way that elucidates how the data contributes to addressing the research question and theoretical positions that this study is endorsing.

4.5   Conclusion

This chapter served to outline the empirical context of this study and some of the gratifications and challenges involved in the pursuit of original data about AJE. Combining interview data and content analysis allows me to conceptualise difference both in terms of the channel's mission as an intellectual exercise by AJE staff and of the production of difference as a practical activity. And it allows an analysis of underlying mechanisms in line with a critical realist understanding of causation (Elder-Vass, 2012b). As I have argued in this chapter, the very possibility of relating the data to the material and social reality of AJE's organisational culture, in particular with regard to the qualitative and interactively generated interview data, depends on avoiding the epistemic fallacy of conflating what is said with the object of that talk. However, I assume that the two are engaged in a relationship of mutual influence: journalists' work limits what they can meaningfully say about it and the way that working routines and editorial lines are being talked about potentially feeds back into practice. Furthermore, the combination of distinct methods to approach different aspects of the research questions serves to increase the validity of the findings presented in Chapters 6, 7 and 8.

Each method carries a number of opportunities and liabilities. Analysing AJE's news content in relation to news on BBCW provides a picture of *actual* differences in covering the world between AJE and one of its main competitors in relation to AJE's remit of 'reporting back' from the global South (with the methodological caveat that whether or not structural mechanisms manifest themselves in observable patterns is dependent on context, so that what the content analysis can offer is but a 'snapshot' of a given moment at which certain mechanisms were 'active' and had effects on

news output while others, no less real, did not). What focussing on the relations and tensions between themes emerging from the interview data allows me to explore is the (under-researched) link between organisational factors such as the channel's staff profile, the organisational culture of the channel, editorial decision-making processes and the scope for difference that AJE can potentially sustain within the wider ecology of international news.

Furthermore, each method is endowed with comparative elements that help to elucidate the inherently relational character of questions of news flows. While the content analysis is comparative in obvious ways, juxtaposing the news programming of AJE and BBCW News, the less explicit comparative aspects of the interviews with AJE staff lie in the particular circumstances of AJE as a *new* organisation at the time. As I have argued, at the time of fieldwork journalists to an overwhelming extent had just joined AJE from other international and regional broadcasters – a necessity for a new entrant that launches on the scale AJE did – adding a comparative dimension to their interpretations of AJE and its relation to and position within the wider field.

This chapter has not been about telling 'the complicated story of the data' (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 93). It has been about telling the story of how the 'story of the data' came about. Researching AJE has been a fascinating journey, and one that came with unexpected obstacles as well as unexpected gratifications. This chapter therefore also served to provide an understanding of the particular fieldwork context within which the data was obtained – in part collected and in part generated – in order to understand the limitations and opportunities stemming from this specific research framework. It has been about the story of how the data relates to its object – and that story is not at all complicated. After all that has been said, the bottom line is simple. I do not claim that the data I generated provides me with any kind of direct or even privileged access to reality, but I claim that nevertheless it does provide me with insights into that reality – insights that are *indirect*, *fallible* and *valuable*.

These insights show a picture of this unusual journalistic endeavour that captures the dynamics of its early and formative years. And this is how this chapter lays the foundation for all that is to come. It allows me to turn my attention to the detail of the

data itself, its complicated and simple stories and its potential to provide answers –
and some new questions. In the following chapter, before proceeding to the empirical
chapters, I shall outline how, as a product of a particular historical and geo-political
combination of factors, the founding of AJE was intricately associated with historical
and political processes in Qatar and the renowned record of its 'parent channel' AJA.

Chapter 5 Legacy of Difference: Situating the Emergence of AJE Within the Context of Qatari Politics and its Parent Channel AJA

You have to understand that the Al Jazeera network is by far the most complex media organisation in the world today. Not just by the nature of the broadcast centres, but the Arabic management and all these international people and the political space within which Qatar works and its foreign policy and all of these kind of things. There are no easy answers.

Senior AJE journalist (personal interview, Kuala Lumpur, 05/06/2009)

5.1 Introduction

AJE cannot be fully understood without taking into account Qatar as the country that gave rise to and continues to fund the Al Jazeera Network. Similarly, despite being editorially separate and staffed by people who in their majority do not have the linguistic background to follow Arabic-language news, AJE cannot be fully understood without looking at the legacy of its Arabic-language parent channel (Powers, 2012: 7-8; Seib, 2012: 188). This is the case in part because AJA's background and infrastructure continue to provide the backdrop for a number of its successes, and in part because understanding the not always straightforward relationship between these two organisational entities helps to understand the circumstances under which AJE, far from being a translation of AJA, came to develop its own voice. In other words, while AJE is by no means reducible to influences from the state of Qatar or from its parent channel AJA, it continues to be shaped by their legacy and would be inconceivable without them. In this vein, this chapter serves to give an understanding of the news network's rootedness in Qatari politics, its history of challenging the relationship between media and politics in the Middle East by ruffling the feathers of virtually every government in the region, as well as the uneasy reception it received in the West, all of which contributed to the way AJE was envisioned and designed from the outset.

5.2 Ambitions of a Small State and the Rise of Al Jazeera

When Al Jazeera was launched in 1996 it transformed the media landscape of a region dominated by state-controlled channels prone to toeing government lines and avoiding reporting on contentious issues. While Arab-owned pan-regional satellite television had already taken a firm hold in the region,[59] the advent of Al Jazeera,

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[59] This had been the case particularly since the years following the 1991 Gulf War, when CNN's dominant presence created a new demand, putting pressure on regional media industries to expand into satellite broadcasting (Sakr, 2008: 277; Sreberny, 1998: 188). The development began to accelerate with the launch of the London-based Middle East Broadcasting Centre (MBC) under Saudi Arabian ownership in 1991 (Zayani & Ayish, 2006: 482). In 1994 alone 'no less than 20 pan-regional satellite-delivered television channels' were launched (Sreberny, 1998: 189). By

Arabic for 'the island', had pioneered a kind of journalism unparalleled in its outspokenness. The channel's editorial staff reported on everything from political corruption to women's rights, creating a foothold for free expression that 'would forever change the expectations of Arab citizens' (Powers, 2012: 10). Two programmes in particular, 'The Opposite Direction' (modelled on CNN's 'Crossfire') and 'Religion and Life' (a programme on religion tackling modern life questions 'from politics to sex'), had been relentless in their frankness, regularly triggering heated debates in the studio and beyond (Miles, 2005: 37-46; Miladi, 2006: 952). In addition, the channel was able to secure access to widespread distribution infrastructure not long after its launch by being allocated a slot on the coveted C-band transponder on the Saudi-owned satellite, Arabsat, instantly making Al Jazeera's content available to 'anyone in the Middle East who had a small, cheap satellite dish' (Powers, 2012: 9).

Another intrinsic element of AJE's outspoken approach and quick rise to prominence within the region has been the station's historic link with the BBC. Shortly before AJA's inception, BBC Arabic TV collapsed after only two years on air. The demise of the news service occurred as a result of the breakdown of the BBC's contract with the Saudi Arabian Orbit Communications Corporation (owned by a group that had been chaired by a relative of the Saudi king) to carry the channel on its satellite network. Orbit's unilateral decision to terminate the contract was triggered by a dispute over a BBC Panorama programme critical of Saudi Arabia's human rights record.[60] Seizing the opportunity presented by 'a surplus of unemployed, BBC-trained Arab reporters and producers' (Rushing, 2007: 121), the Qatari Emir wasted no time in inviting many of the newly redundant journalists to take part in his 'bold new media project' (Tatham, 2006: 66).

2008, competition had expanded from 'a mere handful of stations a few years ago' to 'more than 450 Arab satellite channels (Seib, 2008: x).'

[60] For a detailed narrative of the fraught and short-lived cooperation between the BBC and Orbit Communications Corporation (the Saudi partner of pre-merger Orbit Showtime), see Ian Richardson's account of 'the failed dream that led to Al-Jazeera' (Richardson, 11/04/2003).

However, while the rise of Al Jazeera was closely linked to the journalistic traditions of the BBC, it would have been inconceivable without a unique combination of circumstances specific to the Gulf state of Qatar – in terms both of political developments and of economic resources. Qatar is a small country, less than half the size of Belgium with a population of about 1.7 million inhabitants, more than three-quarters of whom are foreign workers or expatriates. In relation to its population size, in 2012 Qatar had the highest migration rate in the world, which means the country's overall population change has been affected by migration to a greater degree than that of any other country in the world (*CIA World Factbook*, 17/07/2012).[61] At the same time, the country's significant oil and gas wealth has provided its relatively small population with one of the highest ratios of GDP per capita in the world (*CIA World Factbook*, 17/07/2012; *The Economist*, 5/11/2011). Qatar is the world's third-largest exporter of natural gas after Russia and Norway and saw the world's highest year-on-year GDP growth in 2011, with an increase of 18.8 % (*CIA World Factbook*, 17/07/2012). As I will further outline later in this chapter and in more detail in Chapter 8, the country's deep pockets are fundamental to the existence of Al Jazeera, since the news network's remit and reception within the region and beyond have so far made financial self-sufficiency virtually impossible.

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[61] Within the past two decades, Qatar's population has more than tripled, largely due to massive growth in the foreign workforce (Cochrane, 05/10/2011). Concerns about a 'dwindling participation of Qatari citizens in the labour force' (Al-Kuwari, 2012: 86) have to be understood in the context of a labour market where nationality is a strong indicator of status and 'tends to be linked closely to occupation' (Nagy, 2006: 123). With 'a near-guarantee of public sector jobs for nationals' (Romar & Toppa, 2013: 27), Qatari citizenship is 'a key predictor of both higher wages and shorter working hours' (Forstenlechner & Rutledge, 2011: 30), while the private sector is largely run by the non-national majority. The government pursues a nationalisation programme known as 'Qatarization' in an effort to increase the number of nationals in the private sector. For non-nationals, entering the country is contingent upon a residence visa applied for through their Qatari employer or 'sponsor', a system that has widely been seen to provide 'ample opportunities for legal and illegal arbitrage' (Forstenlechner & Rutledge, 2011: 33). Many of the low-skilled labourers and domestic servants working in the country are victims of human traffickers delivering them into forced labour arrangements. According to the *Trafficking in Persons Report 2012*, the Qatari government is showing 'increasing efforts to address human trafficking', but it does not yet 'fully comply with the *minimum standards* for the elimination of trafficking' (U.S. State Department, 2012, emphasis added).'

5.2.1 Al Jazeera in the Context of Political Change in Qatar

Since the bloodless coup d'état in which Sheik Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani[62] ousted his father in 1995, Qatar's political outlook has changed substantially. The youngest leader in the Gulf at the time he took power, the new Emir modernised court proceedings, simplified royal protocol and introduced to government a 'team of young, Western-educated technocrats […] more open to political and social ideas from the West' (Miles, 2005: 14-15). At home he initiated a string of political reforms shortly after assuming power. He took the crucial step of formally ending state censorship of the media by abolishing the Ministry of Information, considered a very 'unusual move for an Arab country' (Tatham, 2006: 65). As Mostefa Souag[63] described this decisive moment in the country's history:

> When we heard the Emir planned to abolish the Ministry of Information, we said to each other, this has got to be a joke […] This could not happen in the Arab world. When we first heard about Al-Jazeera, we thought this was another joke. Then we saw it and we finally realized that this administration, this elite which came with the new Emir, had genuinely decided to do something different. These are people who had been educated in the West, know what is going on in the world and wanted to apply their ideas in real life rather than be tied down by tradition" (Mostefa Souag in Miles, 2005: 30).

Abolishing the Ministry of Information as the body in charge of censorship no less than paved the way for Al Jazeera and was seen as symbolic of the new government's progressive stance. Amongst other reforms implemented by the ruler was the decision to separate the powers of the prime minister and the Emir, previously concentrated in the hands of the Emir (Lambert, 2011: 90), establish a new constitution in 2003 and introduce democratic elections for a range of authorities (Miles, 2005: 16), including the board of the Qatar Chamber of

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[62] Father of the current Emir, Sheik Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, and founder of Al Jazeera.

[63] In 2005 Mostefa Souag became Editor-in-Chief of AJA's London Bureau. He later moved on to become Adviser to the Chairman of AJN and in 2010 was appointed Director of News at AJA. In 2013 he became acting Director General when Sheik Ahmed bin Jassim Al Thani left Al Jazeera to join the new government of Sheik Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani after a short time at the helm of the network.

Commerce (Lambert, 2011: 92). Democratic municipal elections have been held every four years since 1999 and have seen women become engaged in the political process both as voters and as candidates. In addition to the championing of female candidates notwithstanding their marginal electoral successes[64], several strong female figures have emerged amongst Qatar's hereditary ranks, including the current Emir's mother Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser Al Missned, (Lambert, 2011: 92; Miles, 2005: 16), Sheikha Ahmad al-Mahmoud, who in 2003 was appointed Qatar's first female cabinet minister and Supreme Council of Education member Sheikha Aisha bint Faleh bin Nasser Al-Thani (Schleifer, 2011: 123).

However, the process of democratising *some* of the political structures within the monarchical country is far-removed from being comprehensive. Notwithstanding substantial reforms, Qatar remains an absolute monarchy with little tolerance for opposition. Elections on a *national* level, which would see the appointed Advisory Council or Majlis as-Shura be converted into a partially elected body, have been promised over a decade ago but kept being postponed to this day.[65] Decision-making power on home and foreign affairs essentially lies with a handful of people at the core of the ruling family (Khatib, 2013: 429), with little or no accountability or transparency with regards to their motivations and long-term objectives (which of course includes questions about the financial commitment to the AJN).[66] A national ban of political parties, trade unions and other bodies dealing with public affairs, coupled with monetary disincentives to dissent including 'huge welfare subsidies'

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[64] At the time of writing a single candidate, Sheikha Yousef Hassan al-Jufairi, won a seat on the Central Municipal Council (CMC) in 2003 and successfully defended it in the 2007 and 2011 elections.

[65] The constitution provides that thirty of the Council's 45 members will be directly elected, while the remaining fifteen will continue to be appointed by the Emir (Lambert, 2011: 94). However, until elections are actually being conducted, article 150 of the constitution stipulates that the current *appointed* Council will remain in power, effectively 'suspending the "legislative authority"' until such a time as the ruling monarch sees fit (Al-Kuwari: 2012: 101).

[66] As Khatib (2013: 429) observes, in addition to lacking in transparency this centralization of power also means that while decisions can be reached quickly and efficiently, follow-ups and implementation of decided-upon policy measures are often inadequate due to 'the lack of departmental deliberations, coupled with a limited foreign policy infrastructure.'

(Lowe, 05/04/2013) and 'significant salary increases' in the public sector (Khatib, 2013: 431), effectively render civil society 'all but inexistent' (Lowe, 05/04/2013).

Given the lack of a legal system that is fully independent from the executive, publicly disagreeing with the political system comes at great personal risk in Qatar and in several cases at the cost of personal freedom. In a recent example of the hardnosed approach of Qatari law towards any signs of potential dissent, the poet Muhammad Ibn al-Dheeb al-Ajami has been given a life sentence in late 2012 (Khatib, 2013: 430), later reduced to 15 years of imprisonment, for reciting a poem allegedly critical of the Qatari Emir at a private gathering in his flat. There is no doubt that despite the restrictions imposed on public debate about politics, Qataris are discussing these issues. As calls for democracy gained momentum across the region in the early months of the Arab Spring, a group of Qatari citizens regularly met to discuss political reform during the so-called Monday Meetings. A book resulting from these meetings entitled 'The people want reform in Qatar too' has been banned by the authorities (*The Economist*, 08/06/2013). This is notwithstanding the fact that its author Ali Khalifa Al Kuwari, far from advocating any kind of uprising, describes himself as an academic *rather than* an activist and has been clear about seeking political and economic reform *conducted by and with* the government.

Such systemic dichotomies – reform that is both substantial and selective, a constitution that states that 'the people are the source of power' (Al Kuwari, 2012: 89) while maintaining a firm grip on top-down policymaking, encouraging civil rights abroad and withholding them at home – are also evident in the mediasphere. This is apparent particularly when comparing the editorial freedom enjoyed by Al Jazeera with the situation of the local media. Critics argue that there remains a palpable difference between the kind of freedom enjoyed by Al Jazeera and the need to self-censor felt by journalists working for local Qatari media, maintaining that 'in reality, by Western standards, freedom of speech and a free press are severely restricted in Qatar', and that 'public criticism of the ruling family or of Islam is forbidden' (El-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003: 75). In this vein, Da Lage points out that when it comes to local journalism in Qatar, abolishing the Ministry of Information did 'not necessarily mean that journalists can write whatever they want,' but instead

triggered a shift from state censorship to self-censorship within the local media (Da Lage, 2005: 53).

A further example of Qatar's contradictory stance on media freedom – on the one hand taking for granted the local media's acquiescence with unwritten rules while on the other hand giving free rein to Al Jazeera – is the case of the Doha Centre for Media Freedom (Figenschou, forthcoming: 38). The centre was an initiative in 2008 by the royal family, in cooperation with Reporters Without Borders, to provide refuge for threatened journalists across the region. As Figenschou reports (forthcoming: 38), 'although the centre […] helped over 250 endangered journalists, they encountered difficulties when they criticized Qatari conditions', culminating in the resignation of the centre's director-general, Robert Menard, and the withdrawal of Reporters Without Borders from the project. Although the centre has since been re-opened and 'promised to push for greater media freedom in Qatar' (Figenschou, forthcoming: 39), the contradiction of initiating media freedom campaigns and backtracking on these when they get 'too close to home' further demonstrates the contradictory character of Qatar's relation to media freedom.

As the examples above show, to understand AJE and the journalistic risks and opportunities it entails, it is essential to recognise the role of the political sphere in Qatar that underwrites its very existence. The creation of AJA and reforms initiated by Sheik Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani are often mentioned in the same breath. Both have been portrayed as pragmatic efforts on the part of the Qatari government to increase its legitimacy within the international community (Figenschou, forthcoming: 34). And both have been presented as examples indicating that Sheik Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani has been serious about creating a progressive political climate. As Sheik Hamad bin Thamer Al Thani, chairman of the Al Jazeera Network, pointed out in an interview with Abdallah Schleifer and Sarah Sullivan, 'the direction of AJA is a natural one that corresponds with the strategy Qatar is taking at this phase' (Sheik Hamad bin Thamer Al Thani in Zayani, 2005a: 12). Many have argued that it is not least this bellwether function of Al Jazeera that sets the news network apart and largely insulates it from political interference in editorial matters, but given that public deliberation plays no role in any 'strategy Qatar is taking', it is worth

considering in more detail some of the implications of Al Jazeera's financial dependence on the state, as I will do in the following.

5.2.2 Financial Reliance on Qatar and Questions of Editorial Independence

Al Jazeera is not merely founded, but continues to be funded, by the government of Qatar. Commentators have always been divided about whether or not Qatar's overall ambitions can be seen as an indication of Al Jazeera's potential *editorial* dependence. In the following I will discuss a set of arguments frequently employed in relation to this question. At the one end of the spectrum, there are those convinced that Al Jazeera is inevitably and inadvertently implicated in Qatar's politics to a degree that renders genuine independence an illusion. At the other end of the spectrum, there are those convinced that journalists at Al Jazeera have the freedom and leeway to make their editorial decisions on journalistic and professional grounds only. Between these two poles, a plethora of positions has evolved.

In this context, three points are worth making. Firstly, as Da Lage (2005: 49) pointed out early on in the debate, 'though seemingly contradictory, these two claims are not irreconcilable'. Diplomatic fallouts complicating the Emirates domestic or foreign policy in the short term as a result of critical coverage may well be considered to be outweighed by the long-term advantages associated with the international acclaim and legitimacy attached to the project of Al Jazeera. In a nutshell, there is not necessarily an inherent contradiction in the subsistence of an editorially independent news channel and the fact that its existence affords the sponsoring government with long-term political clout. What there is, however, is a *persistent inherent risk* of overstepping on the part of the government and of self-censorship on the part of journalists[67]. Secondly, given that motivations and actions of the Qatari government,

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[67] As I will detail in the following, Al Jazeera journalists have time and again shown their resolve and ability to report about Qatar in a critical fashion and there is no doubt that the network gets away with stories that local Qatari media could not get away with. However, a story directly questioning actions and motives of members of the ruling family would be a different matter. Here, Seib (2012: 3) finds that 'in that

including the funding of Al Jazeera, are not subject to public debate or supported by publicly accessible data, hard evidence is a scarce commodity across the spectrum of the debate. There are ample *examples* supporting one side or the other of the argument, and I will present the most prevalent ones in the following, but given the overall low levels of transparency, these often fall short of being strictly conclusive from an empirical perspective. And thirdly, even where limited evidence *is* available, past performance is not a reliable indicator *if structural liabilities remain.* Therefore, what is important in this context is to highlight structural enablements and liabilities of the way AJE is funded to gain an understanding of inherent and *persistent* risks of (self)censorship as well as opportunities to prioritise a kind of journalism under severe pressure elsewhere in the industry (see also Chapter 8).

One way of analysing Al Jazeera and its embeddedness in Qatari politics is through the perspective of 'regional power play(s)' (Figenschou, forthcoming: 31). Since the early 1990s, large sectors of the region's satellite broadcasting have been linked to the royal family of Saudi Arabia, Qatar's geographically sizeable and influential neighbour. Notably, under the reign of Sheik Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, Qatar moved away 'from his father's acquiescence to Saudi hegemony' (Cooper & Momani, 2011: 117), giving further weight to the view that Al Jazeera had been created in part 'in opposition to the Saudi media dominance' (Figenschou, forthcoming: 31). From a geo-political perspective, Al Jazeera has proven to be a valuable asset to the Qatari government, right from the early days of the Emir's rule, when the channel was the first to give a voice to dissidents from across the region, including those opposing the governments of Egypt and Saudi Arabia, at a time when the Emir's legitimacy as head of state had been challenged in the press of those countries (Powers, 2012: 10). In this context, the circumstance that Qatar is a relatively small country wedged between larger and geo-politically influential

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regard this media empire is like those elsewhere in the world that are loathe to carry stories that might offend heir proprietors or commercial sponsors.' Accordingly, some journalists admitted adopting the pragmatic position that a limited degree of self-censorship with regard to the royal family is an acceptable compromise given 'the wider impact they have had in stirring up debate among an audience that reaches from Bedouin tribes to Saudi millionaires' (Beckett, 03/10/2006).

neighbours, had the effect – calculated or not – of directing attention away from domestic issues. As Shawn Powers puts it:

> The simple fact that the Qatari population was amongst the smallest in the region meant that there was always more demand for news about corruption and political scandals in almost any other country in the region, where there were more interested citizens and more well-known, controversial leaders than those located in Qatar (Powers, 2012: 10).

Under the rule of Sheik Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, Qatar also began actively pursuing the role of mediator in disputes across the region – a role enabled not least by the fact that the government has 'never followed simple alliance structures' in its diplomatic efforts (Cooper & Momani, 2011: 113-114), thus rendering it acceptable for actors from opposing camps to engage with the Emirate. With a growing reputation as 'the country that can talk to anyone' (Connolly, 27/01/2012), Qatar has repeatedly acted as a mediator between Israel and the Arab states and is widely known to entertain close relations with the US, as well as with the resistance movements Hamas and Hezbollah – euphemistically described as 'a far cry from a coalition of common interests' (Cooper & Momani, 2011: 127). More recently, Qatar facilitated the opening by the Taliban of an office in Doha, which provides Western powers including the US, whose biggest regional military base is also situated in Qatar, with an opportunity to 'openly contact legitimate Taliban intermediaries' to discuss Afghanistan's future (Rosenberg, 03/01/2012). As a result, Qatar's foreign policy has been described as at the same time moderate and maverick, even eccentric (Da Lage, 2005: 61).

In this context, the relative scarcity of coverage of Qatar itself (Zayani, 2005a: 9-10; Altermann, 1998: 24), combined with the observation that the existence of Al Jazeera provides Qatar with political leverage, means that the network has been perceived by some primarily as a diplomatic instrument. Allegations of potential tampering with the channel's output for political gain reached a climax when, in 2010, WikiLeaks published confidential US cables suggesting that 'the station could be used "as a bargaining tool to repair relationships with other countries"' (Booth, 6/12/2010), which was seen by some as proof that Al Jazeera's editorial independence had been compromised. Indeed, the connection between Al Jazeera's coverage and Qatari

diplomacy is stated in the cables in a manner that is persuasive in its casual bluntness. Others took the view that the cables had to be read in the context of the fact that 'representatives of numerous diplomatic missions regularly bring lists of complaints to Al Jazeera, but that doesn't mean they are heeded or given undue weight' (Chatriwala, 19/09/2011). Al Jazeera itself vigorously denied any allegations of political interference in editorial matters, pointing out that the leaked documents were assessments by US embassy staff (AJE, 06/12/2010).

Allegations of bias again intensified during the Arab Spring, as Qatar's direct involvement – giving financial and political support to protesters, supplying fighter jets to support the no-fly zone in Libya and from early 2012 repeatedly calling for Arab intervention in Syria – began to change its image from that of a 'detached mediator' (Khatib, 2013: 420) to that of 'a bold and assertive player' (Connolly, 27/01/2012). This increasingly active role on the global political stage had direct implications for Al Jazeera, since it made the strategy of ignoring news implicating Qatar on the grounds that they are not significant for an international audience – thereby sidestepping questions of potential self-censorship – somewhat less applicable (see also 9.4.1).[68] As a result, the relative weight given to coverage of the uprising in Bahrain on Al Jazeera and the coverage of stories relating to the Muslim Brotherhood, both issues where Qatar pursues discernible interests of its own, came under increased scrutiny.[69]

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[68] In many cases a degree of confusion is added to the debate by a failure to explicitly distinguish between the editorially distinct Arabic- and English-language channels, though some have been careful to point out differences, for example in their readiness to be 'openly critical' of Qatar (Lowe, 05/04/2013) – a stance I am not in a position to verify as the analysis of news content in this study compares AJE to its English-language counterparts rather than to AJA.

[69] Allegations of bias based on drawing links between Qatari foreign policy and Al Jazeera's editorial outlook have been with the network from the very beginning (see 5.2.3). In the particular context of the uprisings, observers expressed concerns that Qatar 'used Al Jazeera to express public support for the [Muslim] Brotherhood' (Khatib, 2013: 432) and linked the GCC's concerted effort, supported by Qatar, to 'quell the rebellion' in Bahrain (Khatib, 2013: 419) with the comparatively limited coverage of the uprising in the fellow Gulf state on Al Jazeera (Lynch, 2012: 20; Hashem, 03/04/2012). Al Jazeera did carry coverage critical of the Bahraini government, however, with regard to the question of whether or not the emphasis (or lack thereof) on Bahrain as compared to, for example, the uprisings in Syria or Libya was *proportionate*, opinions are likely to remain divided (Hasan, 07/12/2011).

Not entirely incompatible with arguments presented above, but certainly characterised by a decidedly different perspective, are arguments supporting the assumption that AJE has been allowed to operate freely editorially. Evidence in favour of this side of the argument is based on the fact that issues and opinions critical of the Qatari government have been given airtime on the channel *throughout* Al Jazeera's history. As Hugh Miles points out, when plotters in a failed coup against the Emir appeared in court in 1996, 'Al Jazeera's viewers had a front-row seat […] when a spokesman from Amnesty International […] attacked the Qatari criminal justice system' (Miles, 12/06/2006). In debates on Al Jazeera's talk shows, particularly during the height of the Second Intifada, on-air guests repeatedly attacked Qatar for hosting an American air base (Miles, 12/06/2006). Likewise, the exploitation of foreign workers in Qatar has recurrently been discussed on Al Jazeera, at the time of writing most recently in coverage citing a Human Rights Watch report criticising Qatar for prohibiting unions, not enforcing labour laws to protect those who fall prey to human traffickers and not having signed 'key international human rights agreements' (AJE, 12/06/2012). In terms of foreign policy, it has likewise been pointed out that Al Jazeera time and again has caused unwelcome diplomatic fallouts for the Qatari government both within the Middle East (Sakr, 2007: 128) and vis-à-vis Western powers (Sakr, 2007: 121). Indeed, coverage 'often incompatible or at least out of sync with Qatar's foreign policy' (Zayani, 2005a: 13) has been indicative of independent editorial decision-making on the basis of journalistic merit rather than political convenience.

Furthermore, the hiring of journalists with professional histories of working for broadcasters rooted in traditions of independent journalism meant that once Al Jazeera was up and running it instantly, at least in *some* ways, moved beyond the control of its creator, particularly as the channel's output was sanctioned by massive popular success.[70] In addition, structural deficiencies are at least partly counteracted by the structural advantage inherent in the fact that interfering with the content of

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[70] Egyptian political analyst Amr Choubaki made this point quite strongly when he maintained: 'Qatar created Al Jazeera. Now Al Jazeera creates Qatar. It's like when you build a robot and eventually lose control of it' (Choubaki in Powers, 2012: 11).

coverage would run counter to Qatar's medium- to long-term interests. Al Jazeera is frequently portrayed as a means for a small country to punch above its weight and 'to give Qatar prominence which is disproportionate to its size, military power and economic strength' (Zayani, 2005a: 13).

This effect hinges, however, on the network's international reputation as an independent journalistic enterprise. In this context, state intervention would not only be against the spirit of the organisation, but would also quickly prove to be counterproductive for Qatar because it would threaten the very cultural capital to which AJE owes much of the international recognition that in turn reflects positively on the country. As Da Lage concludes, 'The Emir has no longer free reign as his hands are tied with the very success of Al Jazeera […] taming Al Jazeera can only bring trouble [to him] without significantly receding the margin of freedom that has contributed to its existence' (Da Lage, 2005: 64-65). Put differently, Qatar has much to gain from protecting the journalistic integrity of the global news channel it created, since any long-term political advantage the country may gain from hosting the channel is conditional on a reputation built on journalistic independence.

As I have maintained earlier, none of the points presented here for either side of the argument does *conclusively prove* AJE's editorial independence (or lack thereof). The undeniable increase in diplomatic muscle Qatar gains from hosting the channel does not prove actual state interference in editorial matters. Meanwhile, pointing towards instances of coverage critical of Qatar, although these are a healthy sign, does not prove that (self)censorship does not happen in other cases, nor does it say anything about the *proportionality* of coverage critical of conditions at home and abroad respectively. More importantly, these arguments only address part of the story: they only deal with potential *symptoms* of the nature of the relation between the news network and the state of Qatar. One of the main causes of recurrent expressions of scepticism about the organisation's editorial independence is that – unlike financially independent commercial channels or public service broadcasters subjected to and protected by regulatory frameworks defining their precise relation to the government of the day – Al Jazeera is effectively a state-broadcaster dependent on the goodwill of one head of state in a country 'not known' for having had 'a long history of free press' (Da Lage, 2005: 49). Plans for becoming financially self-

sufficient have periodically been discussed and publicised,[71] but so far remain rather unrealistic.[72]

Overall, Al Jazeera's editorial independence is contingent on a number of factors, including structural considerations as well as the courage of individual journalists in continuing to assert their professionalism vis-à-vis potential pressures from political or economic considerations. Within the current set-up, the channel's financial dependence on the state will remain both an inherent risk, independently of whether or not its independence has been compromised in the past, and a protection mechanism against interference from neighbouring fields. This also means that Al Jazeera's editorial independence will continue to be the ultimate measure by which its credibility and influence are assessed as the channel matures. In the following I will give examples of some of the reactions that the creation and coverage of this 'quasi-governmental international broadcaster' (Powers, 2012: 25) evoked internationally and the impact it had on the fields of journalism and politics in the region and beyond.

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[71] There has periodically been talk over the years of selling the network (*The Economist,* 19/06/2003; O'Carroll, 16/08/2004; Weisman, 30/01/2005). In 2003 a spokesman said that they 'would consider any proposal that guaranteed editorial independence' (*The Economist*, 19/06/2003). In the lead-up to AJE's launch, Ernst & Young were commissioned to carry out a feasibility study of ways to privatise the network (Sakr, 2007: 126). Similar ideas were revived in mid-2008, when Wadah Kanfar, Director General of the network, said that it was hoped that a subscription-based premium sports service would eventually generate sufficient income to make a sell-off 'a medium-term option' (Sabbagh, 26/08/2008). At the time of writing there are no indications that privatising the network is on the agenda or has become more realistic in terms of financial self-sufficiency.

[72] For AJA, seemingly paradoxically, its success has proven detrimental to its commercial ambitions. Since the popularity of the channel has appeared to rest on the outspokenness of its journalists and their readiness to confront political elites, the very attributes that made the channel popular with audiences have been precisely what has scared away cautious advertisers who feared financial repercussions in a region then dominated by authoritarian regimes (and elsewhere in the world, where Al Jazeera Arabic was perceived as an anti-Western voice) (Tatham, 2006: 68; Powers, 2012: 10). Furthermore, this tendency has been exacerbated by a general lack of reliable data about audiences in political contexts where 'systematic surveys of public opinion, whether for ratings or other purposes, meet resistance from the politically powerful who fear that results will be detrimental to their interests' (Sakr, 2004: 153).

5.2.3 AJA's Impact in the Region and Beyond

When AJA started out, it sparked reactions ranging from enthusiasm to outright hostility. Its sudden success and its ability to set the media agenda across the region immediately attracted competition.[73] Importantly, what Al Jazeera initiated in an unprecedented way, as Marc Lynch has argued, was the formation of a pan-Arab public sphere promoted by hiring journalists from across the region and championing freedom of expression (Lynch, 2006). For Lynch, this evolving public sphere did not lead to less disagreement between opposing factions. Lynch's core argument is rather that a greater degree of pan-Arab identification, on the one hand, combined with a greater degree of expression of disparities, on the other hand, signified an important shift in public perception. By promoting this kind of debate, he further argues, AJA showed that disagreement does not stand in the way of a common Arab identity, hence strengthening an emergent Arab public sphere. It was this kind of argument that later led Mustafa Souag to state that Al Jazeera's 'real impact' as a broadcaster on the Arab Spring had been not only the channel's output during the uprisings, but its coverage in the years *prior* to the uprisings: "'We provided Arab citizens with knowledge and information, [political] positions and ideas… when you give people the right information you empower them'" (Mustafa Souag in *Hasan*, 07/12/2011).

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[73] News channels emerging in the wake of AJA's success include Iranian Al-Alam, which launched as the Iraq war began to unfold in 2003, and the Saudi Arabian channel Al-Ikhbariya, launched in 2004. The year 2003 also saw the launch of Dubai-based Al Arabiya, primarily sustained by Saudi investment, as arguably the most prominent competition to AJA (El-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003: 215-216; Tatham, 2006: 71; Seib, 2012: 191; Zayani & Ayish, 2006). Other Arabic-language news services that have since been launched include a host of channels run by broadcasters based outside the region, such as Deutsche Welle's Arabic-language service (launched in 2002), the US-funded Al Hurra (launched in 2004), France24's Arabic-language service (launched in 2006), Russia Today's Rusiya Al-Yaum (launched in 2007), BBC Arabic TV (re-launched in 2008) and CCTV Arabic (launched in 2009). In May 2012 a co-operation between British Sky Broadcasting and Abu Dhabi Media Investment culminated in the launch of Sky Arabia (Pfanner, 30/10/2011). Another news channel in the making is Alarab, to be hosted in Bahrain and based on a partnership between Saudi Arabian media mogul Prince Walid bin Talal (Cochrane, 2007) and Bloomberg (Pfanner, 30/10/2011).

In AJA's early years, the channel's reputation as the voice of the Arab street was also notably shaped by its coverage of the Second Intifada, which stood out for the unreserved and unprecedented way in which it depicted the human cost of the conflict. The Palestinian-Israeli conflict has long been a central issue for the entire region and, as Zayani points out, 'images of the brutality of the occupation, which had never been seen before in any significant way, directly touch the heart of Arab viewers and shape Arab public opinion' (Zayani, 2005b: 173). AJA also provided locals in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip with information about what was happening that could be difficult to obtain amidst curfews and other restrictions on the ground (Zayani, 2005b: 175). The emotionality of the images broadcast by Al Jazeera was often criticised as exacerbating the conflict by fuelling resentment, while at the same time Al Jazeera was criticised for giving airtime to Israeli officials (Zayani, 2005b: 180) – a decision that distinguished it from much of its regional competition.

Unsurprisingly perhaps, AJE also attracted opposition throughout the thoroughly heterogeneous[74] region and beyond, demonstrated in a long history of disputes over its coverage. To name just some examples, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Morocco and Libya all withdrew their national representations from Qatar on different occasions as a direct response to AJA programmes, Algeria allegedly cut the power in several cities in order to prevent the reception of an Al Jazeera report on the country's civil war, and the PLO accused AJA of partiality in editorial matters when the channel reported on its role in the Lebanese civil war (Tatham, 2006: 66-68). Famously, Hosni Mubarak, then Egypt's president, was heard to exclaim 'all of this noise from a tiny matchbox' (Tatham: 2006: 69), when first laying eyes on the comparatively humble appearances of AJA's offices in the media compound in Qatar, thus inadvertently creating a catch-phrase that came to characterise the underdog image that the channel had created for itself. In addition, for some, Qatar's close relationship with the US has provided further grounds for doubting the integrity of

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[74] As Srebreny points out, the fact that the *term* 'Middle East' (which originated in colonial times and reflects the geo-political thinking of Western powers at the time) continues to be used 'should not lead to assumptions about similarities between these countries', revealing as they do 'remarkable differentiation along almost any indicator one cares to choose' (Sreberny, 1998: 180).

AJA's reporting (Sakr, 2007:124-125). The combination of hosting on Qatari territory both a channel that is outspoken about human rights violations and political scandals of various Arab governments and the largest US military base in the region has meant that 'for some critics, AJA probes the affairs of other Arab countries to distract viewers from its host's own internal politics and its arrangements with the US' (Zayani, 2005a: 10) – a sentiment in sharp contrast with the fierce opposition that AJA encountered from US officials over its reporting in the wake of 9/11. Overall, by 2005 there had been over 450 occasions on which foreign governments officially complained to the Qatari authorities about Al Jazeera's coverage (Powers, 2012: 11), as well as numerous unofficial expressions of disapproval.

5.2.4 US Opposition after 9/11

In most of the Western world, AJA first achieved international recognition in the wake of 9/11 and during the ensuing war in Afghanistan. When US and British forces began the aerial bombardment of the country in the early hours of the war, Al Jazeera was the only network broadcasting from within Afghanistan. El-Nawawy and Iskandar recall the events as follows:

> Al-Jazeera's grainy footage of black sky with firefly flickers of white light […] represented some of the most significant news on a day when the American media struggled to monitor the rapidly unfolding events during the first hours of war. In fact, it was that very day – one marked by images of war action in Afghanistan, the video cloaked in surreal green haze – that heralded Al Jazeera's breathtaking rise to international acclaim (El-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003: 144).

Al Jazeera's exclusive access allowed its reporters to expose the human tragedy of the conflict, showing civilian victims in ways not seen on other international channels.[75] However, AJA's decision to broadcast exclusive statements and tapes of

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[75] The channel's function of bearing witness to otherwise unreported suffering was one explicitly appreciated by fellow journalists. BBC World presenter Nik Gowing defended Al Jazeera after their Kabul office had been hit by a US bomb, arguing that their 'only crime was that it was "bearing witness" to events that the US would rather it did not see' (Wells, 19/11/2001).

Osama bin Laden, who very quickly had become the prime suspect in relation to the terrorist attacks of 9/11, particularly irritated and angered both Western politicians and large parts of the Western media. Having had exclusive access to the Al-Qaeda leader in the past, AJA also made use of its archive, repeatedly replaying an interview one of the channel's reporters had conducted with Osama bin Laden in 1998 (Zayani, 2005a: 24). All of this triggered accusations that AJA was turning itself into 'bin Laden's mouthpiece' by offering him a platform – something Western media, in particular US media at the time, were exceptionally wary and ambivalent about, even though once AJA had broadcast the exclusive material they were 'extremely keen to use Al-Jazeera's pictures' (Miles, 2005: 115). Despite this ambivalence, condemnation of AJA in the Western media was unequivocal. The *New York Times* called AJA's coverage 'deeply irresponsible', CBS anchor Dan Rather contemplated on air whether there was 'any indication that Osama bin Laden has helped finance this operation' and the *New York Daily News* explained to its readers that Al Jazeera was 'an Arab propaganda outfit controlled by the medieval government of Qatar that masquerades as a real media company' and concluded that 'dealing with Al Jazeera is a job for the military' (Miles, 2005: 150-151). For many critics of the network, Al Jazeera was guilty of 'igniting the anger of Arabs and the fury of Muslims against the US' (Zayani, 2005a: 23).

This backlash was by no means restricted to critique from fellow journalists. US politicians, in particular members of the Bush administration, were also on the case. Then US Secretary of Defence, Donald Rumsfeld, repeatedly described Al-Jazeera's coverage as 'propagandistic and inflammatory' and accused the channel of faking footage of civilian victims (El-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003: 181).[76] Colin Powell, then US Secretary of State, asked the Emir of Qatar to tone down Al Jazeera's coverage, a proposition the Emir made public, announcing that the Americans were asking him to interfere with editorial decision-making at Al Jazeera (Miles, 2005: 123). Labels like 'Bin Laden TV' (Miles, 2005: 113) and 'Terrorist TV' (Rushing, 2007: 154)

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[76] In 2011, several years after having sharply dismissed Al Jazeera as 'vicious', Donald Rumsfeld came to publicly revise his opinion when he told David Frost in an interview that '[AJE] can be an important means of communication in the world and I am delighted you are doing what you are doing' (quoted by Lucas Shaw for Reuters, 30/09/2011).

stuck with the network, particularly in the US, making it virtually impossible for Al Jazeera to gain a foothold in the US market for years to come.

By the time the Iraq war started, reporters from Al Jazeera were seen as persona non grata by much of the US administration. AJA journalists felt disadvantaged and even put at risk when travelling with US forces: 'Those few Arab media that did embed with US troops left within days, believing themselves not only to have been cut out of the briefing process – a US officer explained to an Al Jazeera team that it would not be briefed because theirs was a "channel with a reputation" – but in at least one instance to have been exposed to danger' (Tatham, 2006: 10). This atmosphere of mutual distrust escalated on 8th April 2003, when Al Jazeera reporter Tarek Ayoub died when the channel's Baghdad office was hit by an US bomb despite AJA having publicly provided US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld with the coordinates of its Baghdad office in a move to prevent such an incident after a similar, though not fatal, bomb attack on its offices in Kabul less than 18 months earlier. The United States military insisted that both incidents had been mistakes.[77]

Therefore, when the English-language AJE launched, the network's reputation, particularly in non-Arabic speaking circles in the West, had been heavily influenced by public spats between Western governments and AJA over the channel's Afghanistan and Iraq war coverage. At the same time, the network had a high standing globally as the media outfit that had changed the culture of broadcast journalism in an entire region while also enjoying access that frequently surpassed that of Western news organisations. One core assumption of the new channel's management had been that broadcasting in English for the first time would significantly reduce the risk of international opposition based on misapprehensions of what Al Jazeera was about. As a consequence, notwithstanding the experiences of its parent channel in terms of some of the reactions it had received over its coverage on Afghanistan and Iraq, when AJE started, the channel's explicit goal of showing

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[77] On the same day, a Reuters cameramen and a Spanish cameramen working for Telecinco were killed in a tank attack on the Palestine Hotel, the preferred location for journalists in Baghdad since the 1991 Gulf War (Tatham, 2006: 180-181).

'the other side' was perceived by many as having a conciliatory effect rather than a confrontational one (El-Nawawy, 2012).

5.3 An Al Jazeera for the English-speaking World

Given the prominence that AJA had achieved by the time the English-language channel was being set up, AJE enjoyed a high international profile before it even went on air. At the same time, AJE from the start entered an entirely different media environment from the one that AJA had encountered in *its* early days. Firstly, having a high profile prior to broadcasting a single programme meant that AJE was confronted from day one with all the expectations and reservations that the network's legacy raised in various parts of the world. Secondly, while AJA had fulfilled a pioneering function in the Middle East, its English-language counterpart entered a mature market and faced from the outset comparisons with successful and long-standing channels. And thirdly, while AJA had created a global brand with a distinct focus on – and leading role within – one particular region, AJE's exceptionally diffused target audience of non-native and native English-speakers across the world essentially included anyone on any continent with a sufficient understanding of English to follow their programmes. This global approach was reflected organisationally, during the main period of fieldwork conducted for this study[78], in the fact that AJE was specifically designed to operate out of *four* main locations, which in addition to Doha included Washington DC, London and Kuala Lumpur – a structure that instantly distinguished it from its competitors and that was further supplemented by about 65 smaller bureaus around the world (Amin, 2012: 29).

5.3.1 Initial tensions between AJA and AJE

In order to succeed in this very different setting, AJE had to differentiate itself from AJA. Shawn Powers describes early conversations in 2003 about launching an English-language service as motivated precisely by the realisation that a mere

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[78] The organisational structure of AJE kept evolving throughout the research period and this particular element was subject to restructuring in 2011 (see also 9.4.1)

translation of AJA would not be able to penetrate certain markets, in particular the US, because 'cultural sensibilities' would prevent it from meeting the increasing demand for a different perspective on events in the Middle East (Powers, 2012: 12-13). Previous experiences with Al Jazeera Net, the network's English-language website launched in March 2003, gave an indication of just how sensitively Western audiences and officials in particular could react to Al Jazeera's attempts to fill information gaps in the English-language market (Powers, 2012: 13-18). Furthermore, this move towards an English-language outlet came at a time when the US, which in the past had been a close ally of Qatar *despite* critical coverage on AJA, was increasingly putting pressure on the Qatari government to step in and tone down some of AJA's coverage, putting 'the Qatari ruling family […] on the defensive in a way that seems to have altered the nature of the Al-Jazeera project' (Sakr, 2007: 129) and contributing to the decision to launch an English-language channel that was editorially independent of AJA. In other words, there was a realisation within the Qatari establishment that Al Jazeera International (AJI), as AJE had been called until about a month prior to its launch, had to become something other than a translation of AJA if it was to stand a chance of satisfying ambitions of becoming one of the world's major English-language news channels.

One of the ways in which this differentiation manifested itself was that, with rare exceptions, there was virtually no overlap between AJA and AJI in terms of editorial staff. Among those driving the set-up of the English-language channel were Managing Director Nigel Parsons, formerly head of APTN and a former BBCW journalist, and Director of News Steve Clark, who had also trained at the BBC and previously held senior management positions at MBC, ITN and Sky News. Other high-profile hirings included Sir David Frost, who left Sky News to join Al Jazeera; Riz Khan, with extensive experience at CNNI and the BBCW; Sue Phillips, who in the past had held managing positions at CBC as well as ABC News, and Nightline journalist David Marash (Powers, 2012: 20). As late as the end of 2005, almost a year *after* the channel was originally supposed to launch, AJI's pre-launch line-up of journalists and presenters did not include Arab staff in any of the high-profile management positions (Powers, 2012: 20).

Given the initial lack of formal or informal integration and the years of hard work and risk-taking invested by journalists working for AJA, the relationship between the two channels was not going to be without tensions. Journalists working for what had been labelled 'the British boys' networks' enjoyed the latest technology as well as substantially higher salaries than their counterparts at AJA (Powers, 2012: 21). Moreover, repeated assurances by AJI staff vis-à-vis the international media that the English-language service would differ editorially from AJA and 'won't be anti-Western' were perceived by AJA staff as thinly veiled allegations of bias from within their own organisation (Powers, 2012: 19; Figenschou, 2012: 366-367).

A mere eight months before the launch of AJE, Al Jazeera's board of directors decided to counter the growing animosity by structurally incorporating all of Al Jazeera's channels[79] into the Al Jazeera Network. As Director General of the new superstructure they appointed AJA's director, Wadah Khanfar, a clear signal that AJA's achievements were to be honoured amidst the hype that had already formed around the English-language channel. This approach was further underpinned by the appointment of Ibrahim Helal, who prior to joining the English-language team served as editor-in-chief at the Arabic-language channel, as AJI's Deputy Managing Director under Nigel Parsons (Powers, 2012: 22). According to Powers, it was Helal who, on behalf of his colleagues at AJA and just weeks before the launch, requested the change in the channel's name from AJI to AJE in order to reflect the fact that the label 'international' in fact applied to both Arabic- and English-language channels and should not be used by one of them as a means of differentiation (Powers, 2012: 23). On 15th November 2006, after several delays and almost exactly ten years after AJA first went on air, AJE was launched.

5.3.2 Covering Gaza Under the Media Ban

Since AJE's launch a number of researchers have looked at the channel's output in order to gauge the degree to which it has brought genuine difference into the

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[79] Apart from AJA and AJI (as AJE was then called), these at the time included Al Jazeera Net, Al Jazeera Sports and Al Jazeera Documentary.

English-language news market (Barkho, 2007; Painter, 2008; Kolmer & Semetko, 2009; Figenschou, 2010a; Lawson, 2011; see also 4.3). Many found that the most straightforwardly identifiable points of differentiation were a moderately divergent geo-political perspective combined with a distinctively divergent geographical angle – at times, following in the footsteps of its parent channel, due to better access to an underreported aspect of a global story. One of the most prominent examples of AJE managing to live up to the expectations raised by AJA's access in the Middle East, however, had been the channel's coverage from Gaza in late 2008 and early 2009.

Arguably for the first time after the launch of the English-language channel, the network's on-the-ground presence prompted comparisons with its coverage from the beginning of the war in Afghanistan. As in 2001, Al Jazeera had been the sole international network with correspondents on-the-ground *prior* to the war. And with the Israeli government preventing international media from getting into Gaza as the military assault code-named 'Operation Cast Lead' unfolded, Al Jazeera, with correspondents from both its English- and its Arabic-language teams already stationed inside Gaza, provided valuable raw footage, packages, live interviews and otherwise inaccessible information (Bigalke, 09/01/2009). This footage was broadcast not only on Al Jazeera's TV and online platforms, but also picked up by other broadcasters as well as by numerous websites around the world.[80] The ensuing focus on the then relatively young English-language channel in particular has widely been considered a milestone for AJE (Merriman, 2012: 121-122).

Not everyone approved of the emphasis on civilian casualties that resulted from AJE's journalists being locked in with the population of Gaza during the air strikes (Gilboa, 2012), but for many, like Figenschou (2012: 360), 'AJE's editorial distinctiveness was epitomized in the channel's coverage of the Gaza war […] documenting and exposing the humanitarian crisis and the direct consequences of war and occupation for the people of Gaza'. Once again, Al Jazeera had been in a

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[80] As the first international broadcaster to take this route, Al Jazeera had decided to release exclusive footage under the most permissive Creative Commons licence available (Creative Commons 3.0 Attribution), making it free to publish, broadcast, remix and share their footage from Gaza on any commercial or non-commercial platform (Nanabhay, 13/01/2009).

position to provide first-hand accounts of a conflict that literally would have looked very different to international audiences without the channel's exclusive footage. This time, though, it did so in English as well as in Arabic, speaking directly to audiences who before the launch of AJE would only have heard about the coverage through the filter of other English-language media.

5.3.3 The 'Al Jazeera Effect' – AJE and the Arab Uprisings

When the Arab uprisings began in late 2010, the four-year-old AJE news channel (as well as its already well-established parent channel) became closely associated with the unfolding events. While in later stages of the uprisings, the 'initial surge in popularity' began to wane again in some quarters (Khatib, 2013: 428)[81], the early days particularly of events in Egypt were marked by a rare level of unanimity amongst 'English speakers around the world' about Al Jazeera's role as 'the indispensable, go-to source of information' (Seib, 2012: 1). Headlines such as 'The Al Jazeera Revolution' and 'Voice of the Arab Spring' emphasised the channel's prominence in covering the events, but also in providing a stream of information for the people on the ground (Hasan, 07/12/2011; Pintak, 02/02/2011; Seib, 2012). Marc Lynch has described Al Jazeera's role as the 'central node for public discourse and debate at arguably the most crucial moment for such discussions in recent Arab history' (Lynch, 2012: 20). Shawn Powers has declared that 'when the history of the Arab Spring is written, it will be noted that it was Al Jazeera that first broadcast the protests and violence in Tunisia that its reporters saw on Facebook, and it was Al Jazeera that drew the world's attention to Tahrir Square while Western networks were hesitant to parachute their reporters into Egypt' (Powers, 2011). In February 2011, Lawrence Pintak wrote: 'There is no chance that the world would be watching these extraordinary events play out in Egypt if Egyptians had not watched the Tunisian revolution play out in their living rooms and coffee shops on Al Jazeera' (Pintak, 02/02/2011). For many, this was the 'Al Jazeera moment' that shaped the

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[81] For example, for divergent opinions about AJE's role in covering the uprisings in Bahrain, see 5.2.2.

network's image and future development as much as, if not more than, events that unfolded in 2001 in the wake of 9/11 (Burman, 04/02/2011).

Journalists and academics, with reference to the 'CNN effect',[82] increasingly referred to the network's impact as 'the Al Jazeera effect' (Seib, 2008; Zingarelli, 2010; Miles, 08/02/2011; Ricchiardi, 2011). However, it is important to note that neither Al Jazeera nor the social media, which likewise have been hailed as a decisive force in the process (Cottle, 2011; Nanabhay & Farmanfarmaian, 2011; Khanfar, 19/01/2011), would have had any impact or anything to report if it had not been for the courage of the people on the streets. As Sreberny and Khiabany (2010: 175) demonstrate in the context of the so-called 'Green Revolution' in Iran in 2009 (which likewise had been discursively linked to particular media platforms, in this case Twitter): 'the "real" action remained on Iranian streets and rooftops, examples of the powerful "somatic solidarity" that had also driven the events of 1979'.

It is also important to note that, hyped or actual, Al Jazeera's perceived role had very real effects both within the region and in the West. The most palpable effect was felt on the ground, where a great number of people actively engaged with Al Jazeera through social media platforms. AJE correspondent Alan Fisher recounts, with reference to a camera attached to a satellite phone which provided 24/7 coverage of Tahrir Square during the uprisings in Egypt: 'People on Facebook and Twitter contacted the channel urging it not to switch it off. One tweet said if the screen goes blank, "the world will no longer be watching and they will kill us"' (Fisher, 2011: 154). Moreover, when people contacted the channel saying they wanted to be able to show the world what was happening where they were, Al Jazeera started distributing flip video cameras in order to help fill gaps in the coverage and to contextualise the

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[82] News organisations' histories and their (perceived or actual) power often become inextricably linked with their coverage of certain events and conflicts. Arguably the most frequently evoked example for this phenomenon is CNN's emergence as a key international media player during the 1991 Gulf War (Robinson, 2002; Gilboa, 2005).

reporting provided by professional journalists in ways that would otherwise not have been possible (2011: 156).[83]

However, the channel's reporting was also accompanied by unprecedented violence against Al Jazeera journalists. Far from being welcomed by all factions, Al Jazeera journalists have been harassed, arrested and put on trial in the course of reporting (Hasan, 07/12/2011; Fisher, 2011; Sultan, 16/05/2012). In Libya, cameraman Ali Hassan al-Jaber was killed when an Al Jazeera team was ambushed on their way back to the rebel-held city of Benghazi after reporting on an opposition protest (Wells, 14/03/2011). Al Jazeera was banned from reporting from Tunisia. In Egypt, Hosni Mubarak's government first closed the Al Jazeera office in that country, then blocked the channel's signals. Al Jazeera teams were targeted by regime supporters when they ventured into the streets. Fisher describes how 'knife wielding mobs' pursued Al Jazeera teams in Alexandria (Fisher, 201:154). He recounts how a colleague from a UK network confided in him that 'it was the first time he was happy to admit in a Middle East country he was not from Al Jazeera when confronted with an angry crowd' (Fisher, 2011: 153). The risks to the life and well-being of its staff, as well as the technological obstacles, were considerable, even for a network that was no stranger to opposition.

Meanwhile, some 5000 miles away from the uprisings, another effect quickly became apparent: Al Jazeera's superior on-the-ground presence, especially in relation to other English-language media, meant that Al Jazeera's virtual absence from large parts of the American television market[84] suddenly became the subject of

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[83] Given Al Jazeera's active role, 'many complained that it had veered from journalism into advocacy' (Lynch, 2012: 20-21). This was an advocacy that, according to Pintak, 'journalism purists in the West may object to', but that constituted 'a vast improvement' on the information available on state-controlled channels and, at times, to Western networks with limited manpower and access in the region (Pintak, 02/02/2011).

[84] In the past, image problems combined with a reputation for straightforward hard news made distribution an even more difficult undertaking than it would have been in an already crowded market under the best conditions (Macleod & Walt, 27/06/2005; Stroehlein, 20/11/2007; Manly, 26/03/2006). More than two and a half years after its launch the channel had still not been carried by any of the major cable

debates *within* the United States (Grim, 30/01/2011; Youmans, 2012) – something that had not happened to the same extent when Al Jazeera reported exclusively from Gaza during the 2008/09 Gaza war, despite a reported global increase in the channel's online viewership at the time of 600%, sixty percent of which originated in the United States (*The Guardian*, 26/01/2009). However, this time the debate was accompanied by a palpable shift in the tone and attitude of the US administration towards Al Jazeera. News of President Barack Obama watching Al Jazeera as events unfolded in Egypt in January 2011 (MacNicol, 29/01/2011) and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton praising Al Jazeera as 'real news' during a US Senate committee meeting on American foreign policy in early March 2011 made Al Jazeera acceptable in 'official' discursive contexts in the US (Youmans, 2012, Powers, 2011) and therefore helped pave the way for the network's latest ambitions (see also 9.4.1).

5.4 Conclusion

This Chapter served to show the intrinsically connected nature of the political development of the state of Qatar, of AJA's successes and the controversies they sparked across the world and of the establishment of AJE as a journalistic endeavour with the ambitious aim of redressing the 'current typical information flow'. As such it served to give an indication of the historic circumstances under which Al Jazeera has variously been subjected to accusations of being the 'mouthpiece of Osama bin Laden' (Bessaiso, 2005: 153) and the 'mouthpiece of the US government' (Chatriwala, 19/09/2011).

As I have shown in this chapter, the same frankness and often unrivalled level of access in the Middle East that provoked these contradictory and stark reactions also meant that Al Jazeera was uniquely positioned to cover some of the biggest stories of the past fifteen years, reporting on many issues that would otherwise not have had nearly the same kind of media exposure. The price of this unique position, as I have further outlined, has been the lack of any in-built structural mechanism to guarantee

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or satellite operators in the US and was only distributed by 'two tiny cable systems in Vermont and Ohio (Farhi, 29/04/2009).'

non-interference by the state, making a *continuous* scrutiny of Al Jazeera's editorial independence all the more important. At the same time, Al Jazeera's media muscle and its overall positive reflection on Qatar is precisely what potentially protects the news organisation's editorial freedom, since state interference would lessen the long-term positive impact that the network generates for Qatar.

As I have further pointed out in this Chapter, the Arabic-language channel had not initially been conceived as a counter-hegemonic project, but rather as a project pioneering a 'widely accepted model of pluralistic reporting' in the regional broadcasting environment. Over the years, however, the focus had shifted 'from its initial purpose of delivering news in Arabic according to criteria of newsworthiness widely accepted in the West […] to include […] reporting the "other side of the story" from that covered by dominant news media' (Sakr, 2007: 129). This shift in purpose meant that AJA began to be perceived as providing a counter-balance to the dominant Western news narrative. Its exclusive coverage from Afghanistan had rendered the network globally recognisable. At the same time, pressure from the US administration and being associated – often by audiences reliant on English-language (and therefore secondary) accounts of AJA's coverage – with being 'anti-Western' made it nearly impossible to gain real traction in the Western world.

Therefore, what ultimately came to shape the mission of the English-language channel was an effort to demonstrate that, far from taking sides and being 'anti-Western', the channel's aim was to address an apparent discrepancy in international English-language TV news stemming from the *predominance* of news originating from Western-based news organisations. And it is precisely this subtle yet crucial differentiation between (perceived) opposition and efforts to add a different perspective that Roger Silverstone (2007: 3) threw into sharp relief when he wrote shortly before the launch of AJE:

> The continuing dismay with which Al Jazeera is received in Western societies, most especially in the United States, is not only because of the graphic horror of some of its images (we provide those on a daily basis) or the ferocity of its political rhetoric (likewise). It is much more fundamental. It is based on the breaking of a media taboo and the reversal of the taken-for-granted nature of media representation, in which we in the West do the defining, and in which you are, and I am not, the other.

When AJE was launched, from the very beginning the channel was positioned as a counter-hegemonic channel, setting out to reverse 'the taken-for-granted nature of media representation' that Silverstone alludes to. Its explicit aim was to replicate the strength of AJA's local expertise in the Middle East[85] in other global regions, in particular in the developing world, as well as to focus on those not often heard or seen in international news.

In the next chapter, I will gauge the degree to which AJE lived up to these aims, in relation both to its own remit and to the interpretation thereof by its own staff, and vis-à-vis one of the main channels that it set out to challenge: BBCW News. In so doing, I am aware of the limitations that a comparative analysis of (a limited volume of) news content presents, in particular since mechanisms inherent in the organisation's structure or in journalists' reflections are contingent on context and do not always play out in the same way in actual news content, which renders the results in the upcoming chapter an *example* more than anything else, although, I hope, an insightful one. Therefore, in addition to the content analysis, I will analyse in-depth interviews I conducted in London, Doha and Kuala Lumpur with AJE staff in relation to Bourdieu's and Archer's works on the journalistic field and on reflexivity respectively in Chapters 7 and 8. Combined, the following three empirical chapters are designed to highlight the relational character of questions of news flows as well as the existing margins of difference within the highly consolidated field of international English-language news broadcasting.

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[85] AJA's level of local expertise also stemmed from the fact that the channel had from the start been operating a multi-national Arabic-language newsroom, something managers at AJE were keen to develop further by locating journalists 'in the farthest confines of the earth', as AJN's former managing director Wadah Khanfar put it in a official AJN publication (2006: 15-16). For more on AJE's recruitment strategy, see also Chapter 7.

Chapter 6   **Degrees of Difference: Examples of the Implementation of AJE's Remit in its News Content Compared with BBC World News**

We have in the sphere of politics become accustomed to equating 'voice' with the expression of opinion or, more broadly, the expression of a distinctive perspective on the world that needs to be acknowledged. This political use of the word 'voice' continues to be useful, especially in contexts where long-entrenched inequalities of representation need to be addressed.

Nick Couldry, *Why Voice Matters*, (2010: 1)

We defined ourselves as the voice of the South […] but in actually crystallizing that as a definition people have issues. What exactly is the voice of the South? […] We are still figuring that out.

AJE Journalist (Personal interview, Doha, 08/02/2008)

6.1   Introduction – Developing a Voice

Editorially AJE was still finding its feet when I first began my interviews. Years later that process of editorial evolution is very much ongoing, not least because there have continued to be substantial organisational and managerial changes, but it has moved on from a process of developing an editorial profile from scratch to a process of re-defining and refining. It is safe to say, however, that in the early years post launch the development of AJE's editorial profile was to a significant degree contingent on the collective imagination of its first generation of journalists. Their deliberations and daily discussions formed the basis for a set of shared assumptions that came to be associated with the channel's remit. Without a precedent to fall back on for guidance in their task of creating a journalistically competitive, geo-culturally distinct alternative to the two dominant international English-language networks, BBCW News and CNNI, there was palpable excitement about the possibility of being part of the formative years of an enterprise that proposed no less than a different way of reporting global news. As a Doha-based producer described her experience of joining the network: 'We are the other and all of a sudden we're telling the story and that's wonderful and brilliant and it is complicated' (personal Interview, Doha 13/02/2008). 'We do not quite know what our remit is, that is why it is exciting, that is why there are many debates and arguments' (personal interview, Doha, 08/02/2008), a presenter told me.

Described by virtually all interviewees as a welcome professional challenge, this lack of clarity, however, also brought with it high levels of uncertainty about how everyone was to go about their work. To my question about how they decided which stories and angles fitted AJE's remit of providing an alternative perspective, a senior journalist replied: 'How do you do it? Well, we spend most of our time wracking our brains as to how we do it differently' (personal interview, Doha, 13/02/2008). A reporter explained: 'We defined ourselves as the voice of the South […] but in actually crystallising that as a definition people have issues. What exactly is the voice of the South? […] We are still figuring that out' (personal interview, Doha, 08/02/2008). Similarly, a presenter asked about her definition of the South replied: 'It is a great line, isn't it? I'm not entirely sure what it means […] Everyone got a bit confused by that' (personal interview, Doha, 07/02/2008). And a senior manager told

me about two and a half years after AJE started broadcasting that '[the concept of The South] is one that we're trying to narrow down in terms of our editorial focus […] I think there's too much vagueness in what that means' (personal interview, Doha, 16/03/2009). This uncertainty resurfaced regularly when it came to the question of how best to distinguish themselves from their competitors. As a senior manager explained:

> I think a lot of people were struggling [with] how to go about competing with CNN and BBC – do we do it by doing the same kinds of things as they do, or we used to do when we worked there, but do it better? and then if so what does better mean? Or do you take a totally different approach? […] It's gradual, an evolution.
>
> Senior manager (personal interview, Doha, 16/03/2009)

This 'evolving' transformation of AJE's relatively abstract remit into concrete journalistic preferences and practices can be analysed with regard to two main interrelated aspects of its remit. Firstly, there is the aim of being the 'voice of the South', as interviewees frequently put it, which is referred to in AJE's corporate profile as 'reporting from the developing world back to the West and from the southern to the northern hemisphere' (AJE Website, *Corporate Profile*, 04/09/2008). And secondly, there is the element of being a 'voice of the voiceless' by 'providing a unique grassroots perspective (*Corporate Profile,* 2008).'

One of the challenges faced by AJE staff in their task of operationalising these core elements of their remit stemmed from the fact that there is a significant overlap between these two concepts. This overlap stems in part from the fact that both concepts are concerned with power imbalances and can be interpreted as going beyond geographical delineations, since the term 'global South' has become interchangeable with geo-political concepts 'also known, variously, as the Third World, the poor world, the less developed world, the non-Western world, and the developing world' (Rigg, 2007: 9). There quickly emerged a consensus amongst AJE staff that any concept of a 'global South' meant that, as one journalist put it, 'not all of it is a geographical line' (personal interview, London, 19/05/2008).

Interviewees emphasised that the concept of the South is related to power and, more specifically, to peoples' relative proximity or distance to political and economic power. 'The South could be America, the South is everywhere. In London there is a South' (personal interview, Doha, 13/02/2008), explained a senior manager. One correspondent said that his take on the South was that it 'is more often than not the underdog, politically the underdog and economically the underdog' (personal interview, Doha, 08/02/22008). For others, it was 'more than the developing world, but […] the world that exists outside the European and American power centres' (personal interview, Doha, 16/03/2009) or simply 'the margins' (personal interview, London, 20/12/2007). In as far as the aim of 'reporting back' references older debates on media imperialism (as outlined in Chapter 2), these descriptions correspond with Boyd-Barrett's (1998: 173-174) suggestion of extending the 'metaphor [of media imperialism] to media fostering of inequalities between men and women, different ethnicities and between capital and labour', arguing it had in the past not sufficiently addressed the 'systematic patterns […] that help to explain the extraordinarily limited opportunities for access to the means of production and transmission for addressing mass audiences'. In other words, just as the definitions of the 'global South' and the 'global North' have superseded geographical delineations of power, scholars are seeking to adapt the concept of media imperialism to a more complex geo-political context of asymmetries in global media.

However, as a result of this broadening of the definition of the South to include socio-political and economic factors, the concepts of 'the South' and 'the voiceless' inevitably become more intertwined. Notwithstanding such interrelations and overlaps, however, they are not synonymous. Most evidently, the concept of the global South, even without interpreting it in a literal geographical sense, 'happens to have some cartographic continuity' (Rigg, 2007: 3) or 'spatial resonance of where the countries concerned are situated' (Chant & McIlwaine, 2009: 11), whereas the notion of being the 'voice of the voiceless' carries an evident reference to individuals rather than geography. Consequently, in the following, I will discuss AJE's ambition to be the voice of the South with reference to the geographical emphases in its news programmes – albeit in a slightly adapted way where appropriate to fit the less

geographically rigid understanding of the South[86], as interpreted by AJE staff. Subsequently, I will elaborate on the degree to which AJE represents the 'voiceless' by looking at the question of *who gets to speak* on the channel's flagship news programme.

In the following I will add to existing research by juxtaposing themes emerging from my interview data with a quantitative comparative analysis of a selection of AJE and BBCW news programmes.[87] As the interview data formed the basis for the development of the variables for the content analysis, juxtaposing both types of data allows me to contrast conceptualisations of difference as an intellectual exercise by AJE staff and *actual* difference to the (limited) degree that it becomes visible (and measurable) as part of the channel's news output at a given time. While in the first part of the chapter I will look at news content with respect to channel's much evoked aim to address existing imbalances in international news by focussing on the South, the second part of the Chapter focuses on AJE's claim to be a 'voice of the voiceless'.

6.2   Implications of AJE's Aim to be the 'Voice of the South'

There is a strong belief within AJE that, geographically speaking, the channel reflects issues from the South to a greater degree than its competitors. As a senior manager maintained:

> We reflect the South and we reflect the fact that we are in the South by the significantly higher percentage of stories that are told from the South. Whether it is Latin America, Africa, Asia or the Middle East, I think that we do give prominence to a lot of stories that are truly neglected by our competition.
>
> Senior manager (personal interview, Doha, 16/03/2009).

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[86] For details of how news items were categorised as being about the South and/or the North, see Chapter 4.3.2.

[87] For details regarding the sample and coding process see Chapter 4.3.1.

In the following I will outline how far and in what ways AJE delivered on its ambition to be the voice of the South in relation to BBCW News. I do so with regard to the overall balance of news from the global South and the global North, as well as the relative representation of various regions. In addition, I also explore divergences between percentages of the number of items from the South and North, on the one hand, and percentages of airtime allocated to items from the South and the North, on the other hand, which will further point towards potential differences. This comparison (between the number of items and the time allocated) goes beyond questions of news selection, since it shows whether items from the global South and the global North, once they had passed the selection stage, were being allocated equal airtime or whether there were discernible patterns of disproportionate allocation of time to items from specific regions. Other factors I considered in relation to geographical focus in AJE's news programmes included the relative distribution of specific news genres and the number of stories not covered by the equivalent programme on BBCW News. Finally, I will illustrate some of the similarities and differences between AJE's and BBCW's news programmes with examples that (at the expense of being less representative) provide a more qualitative insight into the treatment of stories on the programmes analysed for this study.

6.2.1 Emphasis on Global South and Global North Respectively

To get a first overall impression, I looked at the number of news items (and the airtime these were being allocated) concerning issues from the South and from the North. AJE carried more coverage on the South than on the North on every single programme in the sample – adding up, as can be seen in Figure 2.1, to a significantly greater percentage of coverage on average of the global South than was carried on BBCW.

Emphasis on Global South / North (1)

AJE: Global South 76.29%, Global North 23.71%
BBC World: Global South 54.37%, Global North 45.63%
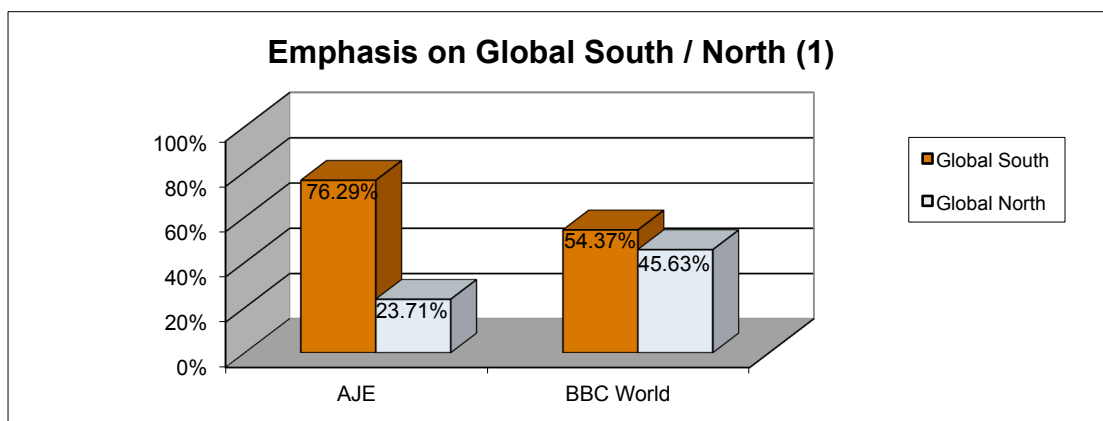
Figure 2.1 – Proportion of airtime spent on items from the global South / North respectively on AJE and BBC World (excluding sports and business news)

Excluding the sports section, the airtime spent on AJE on items from the South across the entire sample was just over 76%, with just under 24% of airtime spent covering issues from the North. In contrast, in the sample analysed, BBCW spent a little more than 54% of its airtime on stories concerning the global South, with nearly 46% on stories concerning the North (excluding WBR).

Furthermore, on all four days there was a discrepancy between the percentage of items and the percentage of airtime allocated to these that indicated that journalists at AJE allowed on average more airtime for an item from the global South than for an item from the global North, further emphasising the channel's geo-political profile. On BBCW this discrepancy between the percentage of items and the percentage of airtime spent per programme was almost reversed, in that on three out of four days the average time spent on an item from the global North exceeded the average time spent on an item from the global South. On *average* across the entire sample, as can be seen in Figure 2.2, news items from and/or about the global South on BBCW were allocated almost precisely the same amount of on-air time as items on the global North. Whereas, on AJE, an item on the global South was on average allocated slightly more airtime than an item from and/or about the global North.
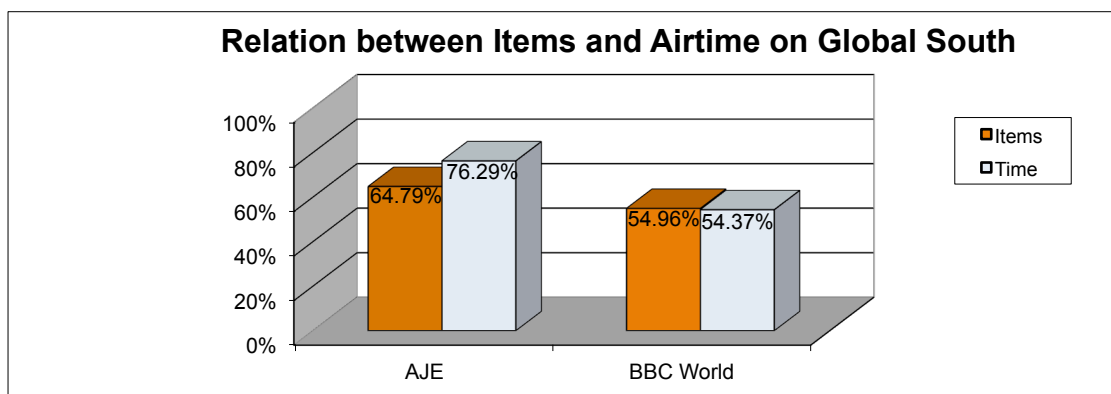
Figure 2.2 – Difference between the percentage of the number of items and the percentage of airtime spent on news from and/or about the global South on AJE and BBC World (excluding sports and business news)

These results correspond to shared assumptions expressed by AJE staff in interviews suggesting that, in the case of AJE, stories from the South are perceived to be of more value (and therefore worth more airtime) in relation to the channel's remit than stories from areas that are perceived to be well covered by the competition. As a London-based correspondent put it, 'stories that perhaps get big play in Europe, won't get such big play on the Al Jazeera network and I think that's right' (personal interview, London, 01/04/2009). The results also help to explain discrepancies between the outcomes of Painter's and Figenschou's respective analyses (see also 4.3). Painter (2008: 30) arrives at a higher percentage of coverage from the global South than does Figenschou (2010a: 91-92), which, as the results shown in Figure 2.2 substantiate, matches my findings of a corresponding variance between measuring the percentage of airtime (as Painter did in his analysis) and measuring the percentage of number of items (as Figenschou did in her research). As such, the above results help to build a common basis for content analyses of AJE that, however slightly, increases the comparability of existing and potential future research.

Furthermore, observing the percentage of airtime spent on items on the global South over the course of the nine months that made up the sample, it becomes clear very quickly that there were much greater swings in the balance of coverage from the South on BBCW than there were on AJE – a point to my knowledge not empirically validated in previous content analyses. Excluding sports and business news, the percentage of airtime spent on issues from the South on BBCW ranged from as little as 18% (16th Feb 2008) to a staggering 93% (16th Aug 2007) across the sample – a

difference of 75 percentage points. In contrast, on the day with the least coverage of the South (16th February 2008), AJE still allocated 65% of its airtime to issues from the South,[88] while the highest percentage of airtime spent on the South by AJE was 87% (15th May 2008) – a difference of 22 percentage points.
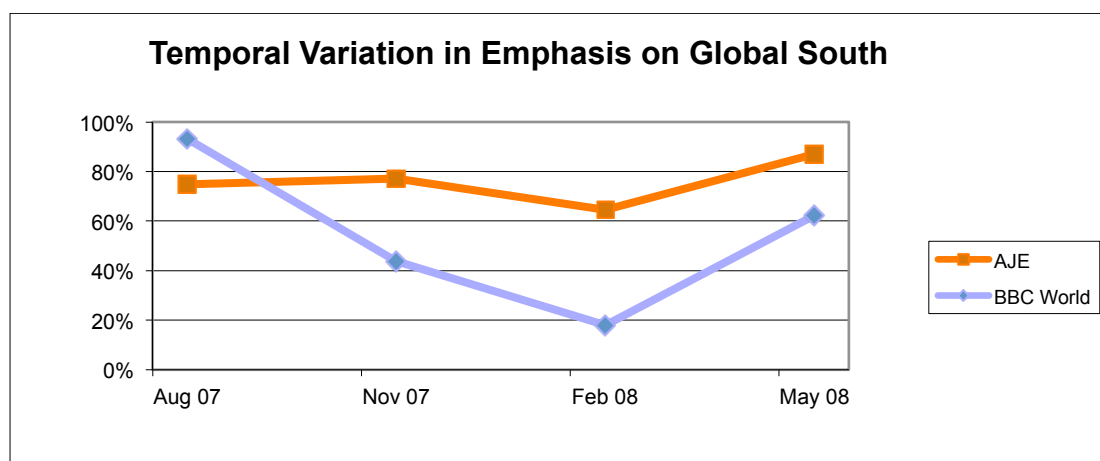
Figure 2.3 – Variation in proportion of airtime spent on items from the global South between August 2007 and May 2008 by AJE and BBC World (excluding sports and business news)

In other words, as can be seen in Figure 2.3, another indicator that AJE delivered on its mission of 'reporting back' from the South is that it was *comparatively consistent* in its emphasis on the South, while BBCW displayed greater variance across the sample, depending on major stories.[89] This finding is of particular relevance considering that authors analysing the relative neglect of foreign news in general, and news from the South in particular, have pointed towards a link between scarcity of foreign news and its (relatively more pronounced) dependency on large-scale events. As Franks (2004: 426) points out in the context of international coverage on UK

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[88] The highest and lowest percentages of airtime spent on the South in the sample, excluding sports on AJE and the business programme on BBCW, are highlighted in Table 1.1.

[89] It is important to note that BBCW's tendency to run fewer stories in any one news programme than AJE further contributes to this relatively high volatility in geographical emphasis. While AJE's tendency to have a greater number of overall items within the hour arguably helps to balance its geographical profile, BBCW's tendency to 'go big' on a comparatively small number of main stories makes it more susceptible to focussing on events of scale, although the number of items per programme does not suffice on its own to explain the differences that emerges from the data.

television, the relative airtime given to foreign news '[…] depends on what is happening' more than it does for national news. This is logical, because if the news values by which events are selected are skewed in favour of issues geo-politically more proximate to the global North, issues from the South only 'score highly' in terms of news values in the context of big events, leading to a higher volatility in the amount of airtime allocated. In contrast, AJE's more consistent coverage was indicative of a recalibration in favour of issues from the global South of what was considered newsworthy.

It is important to recognise that this is not simply a question of editorial preferences, but also a structural issue. This becomes particularly obvious when breaking news triggers coverage from different locales on different channels, because the immediacy of the news event forces journalists to rely on pre-existing arrangements for their first reactions, revealing glimpses of otherwise less visible structures within each news organisation.[90] But it applies more generally in the sense that those organisations that do not already have journalists based in a country or region, will have to think twice before investing in sending a team when events emerge, while organisations with permanent presences on the ground will seek to continuously produce stories from the location, so as to make the most of their investment.

Dividing the coverage by region further elucidates this phenomenon. Looking at the percentage of airtime spent on items across the entire sample helps to understand some of the ways in which individual events affected the regional emphasis on BBCW and AJE in different ways. For example, on 15th November 2007 as well as 15th February 2008, the coverage of Europe shows two very significant spikes. These can be explained by extensive coverage on both channels of the imminent independence of Kosovo in late 2007 and early 2008, but it is worth noting that this had a significantly greater impact on the overall regional balance on BBCW than it did on AJE. Similarly, the shooting of five people at Northern Illinois University largely accounts for the sudden increase of coverage of North America on BBCW from 0% during the first two days of the sample to 35% on day three of the sample,

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[90] For an example of such a case, see Lawson's comparative study of the coverage of the death of Osama bin Laden on 2nd May 2011 (Lawson, 2011).

whereas coverage of North America on AJE ranged comparatively consistently between approximately 6% and 10% on any given day.

An example from the South is the spike of coverage from the Middle East on BBCW on 15th August 2007 due to the deadliest bombing attack in Iraq for four years and, on the same day, a sharp increase in airtime spent on Asia as a direct result of the 60th anniversary of India's independence, which helps to explain the fact that BBCW broadcast a greater percentage of coverage from the South than AJE on that day (see Figure 2.3). Again, these particular events did receive considerable attention on both channels, but did not shift the overall balance of the regional distribution of news nearly as dramatically on AJE as they did on BBCW. In addition, across the entire sample, the average regional emphasis differed noticeably between the two channels. As can be seen in Figures 3.1 and 3.2, AJE spent less airtime on North America and Europe and more on Sub-Saharan Africa[91], Asia and Latin America, with North Africa and the Middle East featuring strongly on both channels. These results broadly correlate with previous studies of AJE's television content (Painter, 2008; Figenschou, 2010a).
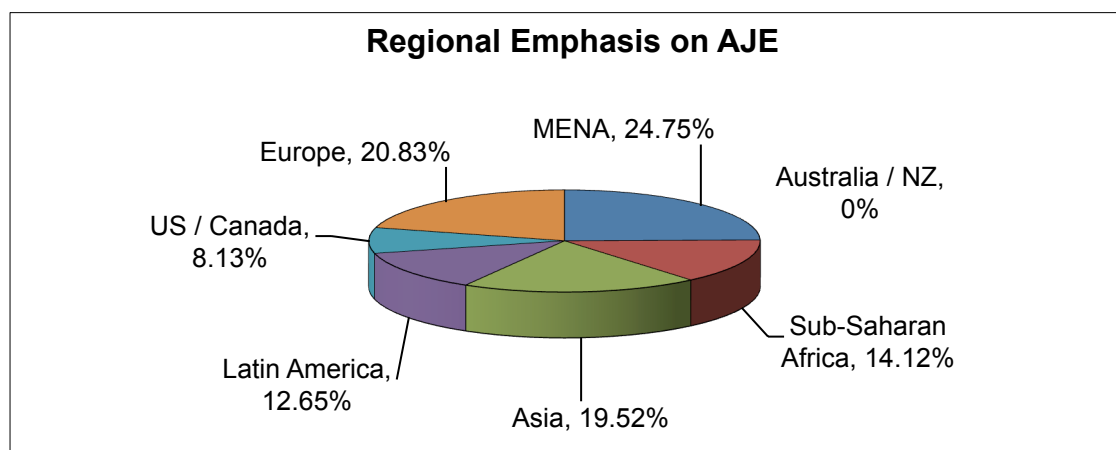
Figure 3.1 – Proportion of airtime spent on different global regions on AJE (excluding sports news)

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[91] A region particularly neglected by international news organisations in recent decades (see Franks, 2005).

Regional Emphasis on BBC World

Europe, 30.35%
MENA, 22.65%
Australia / NZ, 0%
Sub-Saharan Africa, 0%
US / Canada, 15.28%
Latin America, 4.83%
Asia, 26.89%
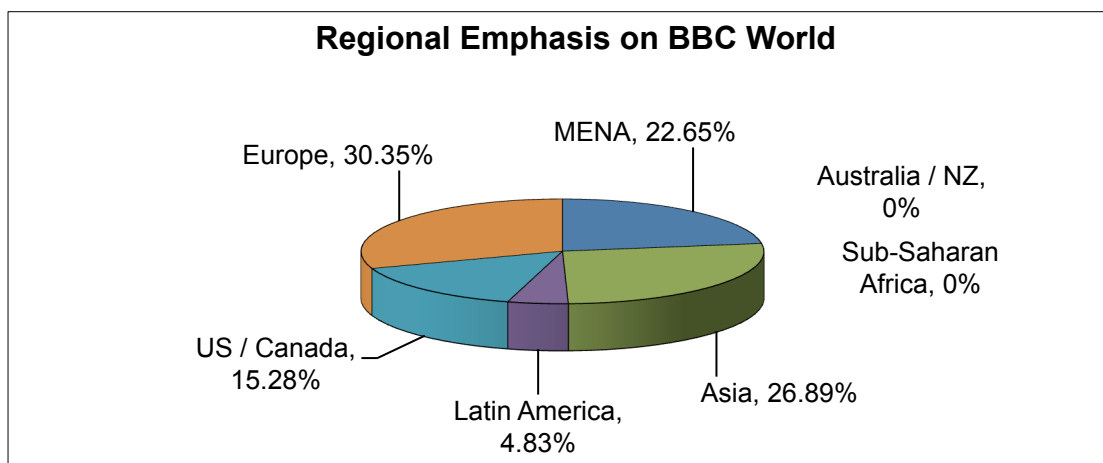
Figure 3.2 – Proportion of airtime spent on different global regions on BBC World (excluding business news)

It is worth noting here that research on coverage of Sub-Saharan Africa specifically suggests that further breaking down of the region into countries and sub-regions reveals relatively similar geo-graphical patterns between AJE and BBCW (Mellese and Mueller, 2012) – something I can neither corroborate nor contest through my study, given a sample that does not include any coverage of the region in question by one of the channels analysed (BBCW). In their account of analysing coverage on the respective websites of AJE and BBC, Mellese and Mueller (2012: 203) point out that more than half of the countries in the region were not mentioned on *either* channel, with BBC reporting on only seven countries in over 65% of their coverage and AJE devoting all of 69% of its coverage to just five of the region's 47countries. Suffice it to say that, in the sample I analysed, AJE reported on nine countries in the region (Sudan, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, Chad, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Tanzania), with repeated emphasis on Zimbabwe and Nigeria.

6.2.2 Geographical Emphasis in Terms of Original Stories and News Genres

In order to further assess degrees of difference and congruence between news on AJE and on BBCW, I looked at the geographical foci of news items that ran on only one of the two channels. I called items based on stories that ran on only one of the two channels within a given day 'original items', rather than 'exclusives', for the sole

reason that the term exclusive is commonly used for stories that do not run on *any* other channel, which is something that a comparison of just two channels does not show. In essence, BBCW had more extensive coverage of comparatively few main stories, many of which also ran on AJE, while AJE had a greater range of original items on any given day. Comparing the percentages of items on the South and on the North out of the original items on each channel again indicated significant differences in terms of their geo-political foci. As can be seen in Figure 4.1, AJE dedicated on average nearly 66% of all its original items to issues from the South, with over 34% on issues from the North. Meanwhile, on BBCW the analysis revealed an almost inverted ratio, with an average of a little over 39% of all original items dedicated to issues from the South and nearly 61% to issues from the North. To summarise, while major international events did have a certain levelling effect in terms of overall airtime spent on certain regions, AJE did report on a greater *range* of issues within its programme, a majority of which concerned the South.
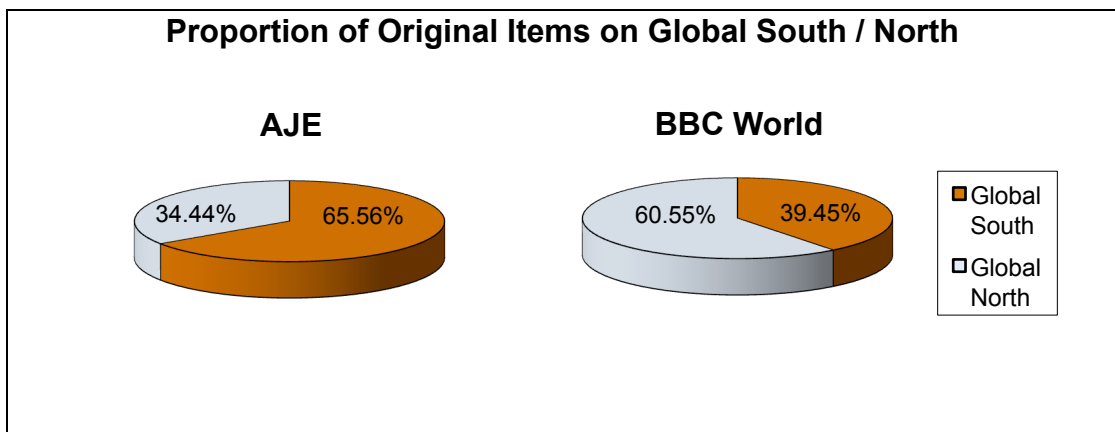
Figure 4.1 – Proportion of original items (not covered by the other channel) from the global South / North on AJE and on BBC World (excluding sports and business news)

Having a greater percentage of original items and not being so much led by major stories (which apart from elections and anniversaries often included high levels of destruction, conflict and disaster) could lead to the assumption that, as one correspondent put it, AJE did not cover the South 'just in times of war and death and disasters or famines' but 'all the time – in times of sorrows, in times of happiness' Interview with author, Doha, 11/02/2008). However, as can be seen in Figure 5.1, the percentage of items on AJE on the Global South concerning conflict, crime, poverty or natural disasters far outstripped the number of items on political processes and

diplomacy. In contrast, coverage from the North, both on AJE and on BBCW, on average entailed a greater percentage of items on political processes than on disasters or conflict. In relation to the context of other content analyses (which likewise based their sample on a period of time rather than analysing specific events or subjects), Figenschou's research corroborates the finding that news items on the global South significantly more often concerned internal political crises or armed conflict than did stories on the global North (Figenschou, 2010a: 97-98), but her research did not extend to comparing this result with that of a Western broadcaster, while Painter's comparative analysis (2008) did not consider questions of genre. Consequently, in my analysis I was interested to see how questions of genre with regard to different global regions played out on AJE and on BBCW respectively.
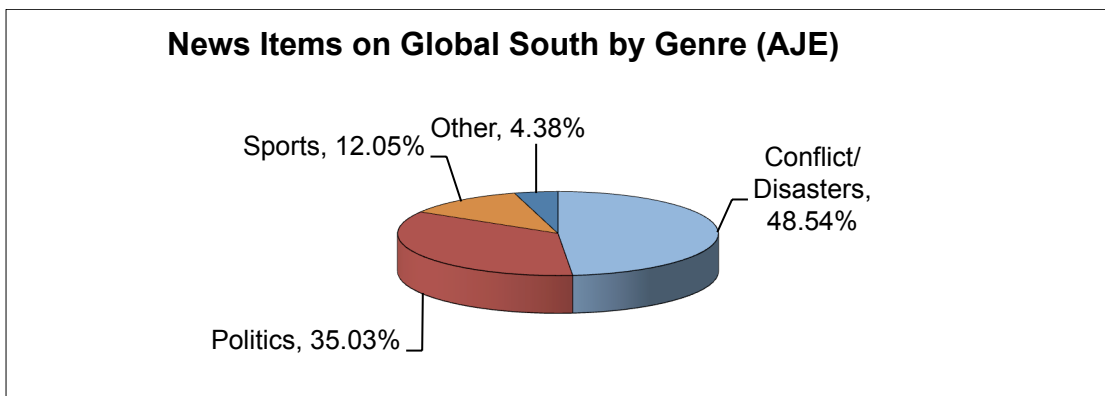
Figure 5.1 – Proportion of items in different news genres consisting of coverage from and/or about the global South on AJE
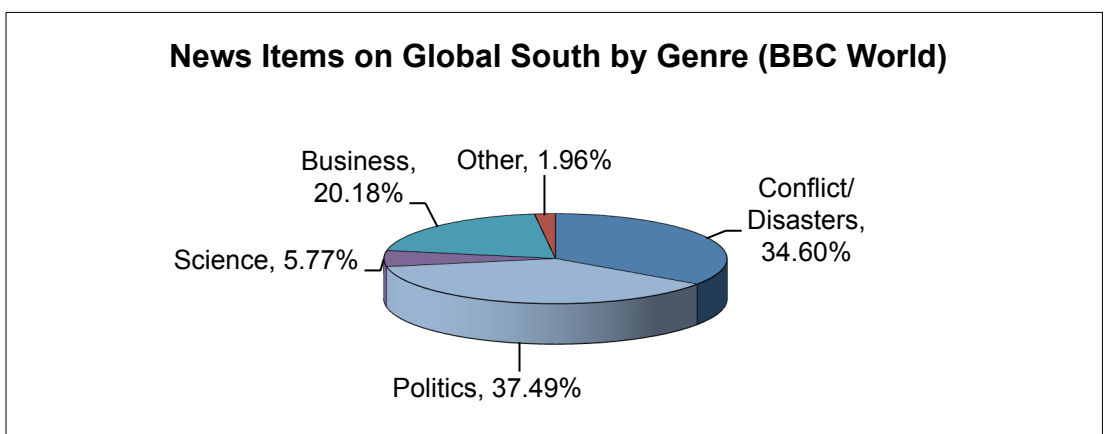
Figure 5.2 – Proportion of items in different news genres consisting of coverage from and/or about the global South on BBC World

One of the unexpected results was that in BBCW's coverage of the South, items on political processes slightly *exceeded* those on disasters (see Figure 5.2), in sharp contrast to AJE's emphasis on conflict and disasters in its coverage of the South (see Figure 5.1). Again, when comparing the percentages of the number of items and of airtime respectively, this discrepancy increases rather than diminishes (with about 62% of the airtime AJE spent on items on the South concerning stories about conflict, poverty and disasters, while only about 33% of airtime spent on stories from or about the South on BBCW matches this category). This correlates with Mellese and Mueller's findings (2012) that AJE carried slightly more negative online coverage than the BBC of Sub-Saharan Africa, and (taking into account a significantly higher percentage of coverage coded neither negative or positive in tone) a vastly lower percentage of coverage of positive developments in the region (Mellese & Mueller, 2012: 206) – contradicting their expectation that 'given the self-proclamation of [...] Al Jazeera as "the voice of the South," our first hypothesis […] is that we will find less negatively toned news on the non-Western Al Jazeera website than on the Western BBC website' (Mellese & Mueller, 2012: 198). The lack of 'positive' news from the global South has not gone unnoticed in AJE's executive ranks. According to one senior manager:

> Palestinians coming from Gaza and Ramallah said to media people in Al Manar and Al Jazeera "you are drawing a dramatic image of us. We Palestinians, we have festivals, we dance, we love, we have cinema, we are not only people who suffer from Israeli aggression. Yes, Israeli aggression affects us every day, but even Israelis and Palestinians, they talk to each other, there is some 'festival' side."

> Senior manager (personal interview, Doha, 13/02/2008).

This further strengthens the claim that AJE's focus on the South, which was evident in the channel's overall emphasis and which my analysis has also shown to be more consistent and less event-driven, was not coupled with a less conflict-driven approach, as some expected given the channel's ambition of resetting not just the volume of coverage but also the outlook on what constituted newsworthiness in the South.[92]

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[92] Again, it would be interesting to have further research on AJE's signature current affairs programmes, because long-form reporting entails more time to focus on

A different expression of this tendency, and one that immediately distinguishes AJE from its competition, was the categorical dismissal of celebrity journalism and other kinds of so-called 'soft news'. While well over a quarter of all news items within the hour on BBCW (17.5%) fell into the categories of entertainment, culture, science or technology, not a single item on AJE fitted these categories. These findings confirm observations by AJE staff. As a producer/presenter pointed out:

> Consider for a minute what you're not seeing. You are not seeing Paris Hilton, you're not seeing Britney Spears, you're not seeing – I was watching the channel on the day that Tom Cruise and Katie Holmes got married. CNN had a […] helicopter! […] It was a weekend. I watched Jazeera all day, not a frame of video.
>
> Producer/presenter (personal interview, Doha, 15/03/2009).

This penchant for hard news has become a trademark of the channel that has also been recognised in other studies. According to Painter (2008: 42-43), 'AJE rarely – if ever – runs stories about royalty or celebrities from the developed world in its news programmes' – a practice that, as Painter recounts, included ignoring the diamond wedding anniversary of Queen Elizabeth, which BBCW covered live.[93] And Figenschou (2010: 97a) found that, out of 1,324 news items analysed, only three fitted the 'soft news' category – including coverage of the funeral of Yves Saint Laurent and music and fashion launches by the Indonesian president and the Thai king respectively, again highlighting AJE's relative emphasis on the global South.

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processes. However, at the time of writing, no study on AJE's non-news programming had been published.

[93] In recent years there are indications that the channel's news editors may have become less persistent in ignoring celebrity events, though this observation remains anecdotal rather than empirically tested. One example is the wedding of Prince William and Katherine Middleton in 2011 in London, which did receive some attention on AJE.

6.2.3   Example 1: Coverage of Two Natural Disasters in Asia

To complement the quantitative results outlined above, two news stories on 15th May 2008 are worth looking into in more detail, since they provide examples where differences in the *treatment* of stories are particularly evident. They concern coverage of the aftermaths of a cyclone in Myanmar / Burma[94] and an earthquake in China, both devastating natural disasters resulting in serious humanitarian crises. AJE opted, after an opening piece from Nigeria, for comparing the responses to the two disasters in China and Myanmar. BBCW treated the two stories separately, with China as their opening story and the item on the cyclone aftermath in Burma fifth in the running order. Both AJE and BBCW had correspondents on the ground not only in China, but in Myanmar as well, and both stressed that this kind of access was rare and special. Broadcast more than two weeks after the cyclone hit in Myanmar and four days into the aftermath of the Wenchuan earthquake in China, coverage on the two channels had already begun to explore different political angles to the stories in addition to reporting the devastating humanitarian situation. On 14th May 2008, the day before the programme was broadcast, I spoke to one of AJE's political analysts about a range of issues, including internal editorial discussions about what angle to take in their coverage of the two natural disasters in Asia that were dominating the news across the networks. His remarks are worth quoting in full:

> If I was BBC or CNN, the first thing would be […] by an almost natural instinct [to] dump on the Chinese government, but because we are Al Jazeera and because we broadcast from Southeast Asia as much as the Middle East, we don't have a first instinct just to dump on China. We have a first instinct to compare China and other countries. We think perhaps the Chinese do have a better response than the Americans to [Hurricane] Katrina. We want to see how the response is on a humanitarian level before making judgments on the Chinese government, not because we want to release the Chinese government from its responsibility, but [because] our take will always be different from the other satellite networks.

> Political analyst (personal interview, London, 14/05/2008).

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[94] AJE referred to the country as Myanmar, while BBCW called it Burma. Officially the country's name had been changed from Burma to Myanmar by the ruling military junta in 1989. The change had been recognised by the United Nations and several countries, but not by the UK or the US. At the time of writing, CNNI used the term Myanmar, as did Reuters, AFP and AP. The *New York Times* used 'Myanmar, formerly known as Burma' (Reuters, Editors Blog, 23/10/2007).

Indeed the most pronounced difference between the coverage on AJE and on BBCW was the fact that AJE focussed on criticising the international community, the UN in particular, for letting 'diplomacy get in the way of saving millions' in Myanmar and in contrast reported positively on China's rescue efforts. In contrast, BBCW attacked the Chinese government for alleged negligence in enforcing appropriate safety standards during the country's recent construction boom and blamed the Burmese generals, and not the UN, for abandoning the people on the ground in Myanmar.

While there were sharp contrasts in the way the disasters were covered by the two rival channels, it is worth noting that the divergent accounts of AJE and BBCW were not necessarily contradictory. There is no inherent contradiction in stating that the Chinese rescue efforts were resolute and coordinated (AJE) and suggesting that some of the buildings worst affected by the earthquake had been built by people for whom profit was more important than safety standards (BBCW). Neither is there necessarily a contradiction in maintaining that the Burmese authorities were harming their own people by denying them international aid (BBCW) and maintaining that the international community was not exploring all legal routes available to them for helping the victims of the cyclone (AJE). This seemingly obvious point is worth making, because it again highlights the fact that this difference is a matter of *perspective* rather than one of accuracy. It therefore throws into relief the benefit of having a range of broadcasters with diverging geo-political emphases to cover different angles of a very complex reality, in particular with regard to the relatively limited format of news (limited to a much greater degree than other programming in its ability to accommodate complexities and therefore prone to picking one particular aspect and focussing on that).

As demonstrated in this chapter so far, overall, AJE delivered on its aim to emphasise the South in terms of the number of items, airtime, ratio of original items and treatment of stories, with the caveat that more extensive coverage of the South was not coupled with a less conflict-driven perspective. However, this constitutes only one component of AJE's remit. In the next part of this chapter I will look into the related concept of aiming to be, in AJE terminology, 'the voice of the voiceless'.

6.3   Who Speaks for the 'Voiceless'?

The second core theme in the way AJE's remit is perceived amongst its journalists is that of giving a 'voice to the voiceless'. As with the concept of the South, over time shared assumptions of a common definition developed that encompassed geographical as well as economic, political and social elements. In its broadest sense this interpretation was based on people's relative proximity to or distance from power. In this context, giving voice to the voiceless meant giving on-air presence to people who were disadvantaged in their comparatively limited access to capital (both economic and cultural) because of existing geo-cultural, political, economic and social inequalities. In other words, to reverse the global news flow, it was considered important 'to give equal if not more airtime to those outside the realms of power to be equally influential', as one journalist put it (personal interview, Doha, 08/02/2008). A senior AJE manager based in Doha offered an analogy that is worth quoting in full since it epitomises a shared assumption about the purpose of this particular aspect of the channel's editorial remit:

> Conceptually what I imagine is that the world runs as a consequence of decisions being taken by decision-makers, and there is a stage on which these decision-makers work, and up until recently they have been dominated by a particular kind of narrow class of decision-makers coming from a certain part of the world or reflecting certain elites. […] People want to climb onto that stage and want to be a part of this decision-making. Al Jazeera English sees itself as an enabler of that. So when we say we want to give voice to the voiceless, we're essentially saying we want to come up with ways of aiding and abetting the voiceless to get onto that stage.
>
> Senior manager (personal interview, Doha, 16/03/2009).

This characterisation of AJE's remit begs the question of who is meant by these 'voiceless' who are to be helped to disrupt outdated power structures and get onto the 'stage' of global decision-makers. My interview data suggests that, throughout journalistic and managerial levels at AJE, there appeared to be a consensus that the concept of 'the voiceless' should not be limited to *specific* groups of people, but flexible to encompass *any* group of people currently underrepresented in other media

due to their relative lack of influence in the wider sphere of politics, cultural or social life – whether they were 'people who are affected by conflict' (Reporter/presenter, personal interview, Doha, 08/02/2008), 'people in the South' (Senior manager, personal interview, London, 19/05/2008), 'the people politicians are talking *about*' (News editor, personal interview, London, 20/12/2007) or 'women' (Political analyst, personal interview, London, 14/05/2008). 'In Al Jazeera English, nobody is underreported' a Doha-based correspondent told me (personal interview, 11/02/2008). Whilst absolute statements like these are always susceptible to criticism, this chapter is concerned with finding out in more detail 1) *to what degree* and 2) *in what ways* this far-reaching definition of the 'voiceless' (as any group of people systematically underrepresented in the international media) applied to the AJE's news programmes in my sample relative to the representation of the 'voiceless' in the equivalent BBCW programmes. Consequently, the following questions emerging from AJE's remit (as well as interpretations by AJE staff of that remit) guided my quantitative enquiry: 1) Do news programmes on AJE focus to a greater extent than their equivalents on BBCW on people on the ground as opposed to politicians, industry representatives or independent experts? 2) Do news programmes on AJE focus to a greater extent than their equivalents on BBCW on non-Western actors? 3) Are women represented in a proportionally more adequate fashion on news programmes on AJE compared to their equivalents on BBCW?

As discussed in greater detail in the methodology chapter (Chapter 4.3.2), it is important to note that people's identities are far too complex for them to be reduced to being a representative of any one of these categories, let alone the more complex issue of geo-cultural representation. In addition, as I have pointed out, it is important to avoid the cultural relativist assumption that there is something integral to being a member of a particular culture that enables people to fully grasp certain local specificities in ways that others cannot. In this regard, the results of the content analysis remain somewhat superficial, inevitably and inherently, a trait they have in common with the very nature of televised news *in the sense* that audiences and researchers (as a particular part of the audience) have in common that many of the audio-visual signifiers they encounter cannot be scrutinised or appraised beyond the appearances they convey on screen. This makes it epistemologically unfeasible to tell whether differences identified in some of the categories are differences of substance

and/or of appearance. But it does allow to argue that the significance of appearances is in itself of some relevance in the context of television news – and in particular in the context of structurally uneven chances of being given a 'voice' on international news. I therefore understand any such categorisation to mean nothing more than that a protagonist, guest or reporter within a particular news programme and in a particular instant *appears in the capacity* as one of many possible representatives of a given geo-political, economic or social strata.

Furthermore, the question of whether or not people can be considered to have a presence or 'voice' in television news applies to a range of roles that can potentially serve to amplify the 'voice of the voiceless': protagonists in news items, interview guests and experts in the studio, presenters, correspondents, and of course the numerous people working out of sight of the camera lens in the newsroom and in the field. When coding the data, I addressed these questions with regard to three forms of on-screen presences: *reporters*, *protagonists* in edited news reports or packages and interview *guests*, both on location and in the studio.

6.3.1 Patterns of Reporters' On-Screen Presences and Absences

As can be seen in Figure 7.1, on average more than half (54%) of AJE's correspondents appeared to have 'non-Western' backgrounds,[95] compared with only about 10% of correspondents on BBCW – an average that in the case of BBCW included one particular news programme (15th February 2008) with a cast of correspondents that did not include anyone associated with a 'non-Western' background. As mentioned above, results like these have to be read bearing in mind that such an analysis is always complicated by the inherently superficial and imprecise factors that accompany the inevitably reductive nature of *quantitative* variables with regard to peoples' backgrounds. However, given the unambiguous results shown in Figure 7.1, it is safe to say that when it comes to fulfilling its remit of providing an alternative to Western networks by representing the global South,

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[95] The numbers for correspondents on AJE on 15 May 2008 exclude one correspondent in a report from Myanmar who remained unidentified in the programme for safety reasons.

AJE's conscious effort to recruit non-Western journalists delivered a marked difference on screen. In this regard, then, AJE was clearly living up to its self-professed aims.

Geo-cultural Association of Reporters

	AJE	BBC World
"Western" Background	45.65%	89.74%
"non-Western" Background	54.35%	10.26%
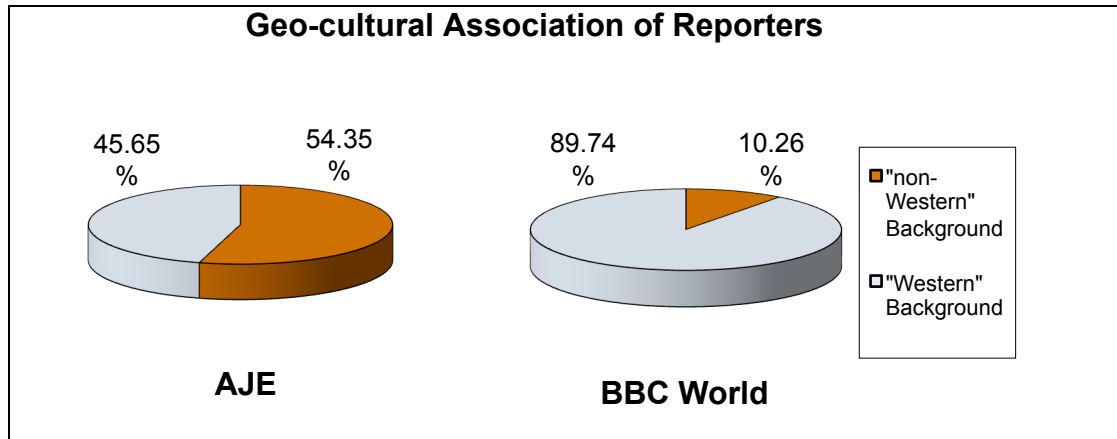
Figure 7.1 – Differences in patterns of geo-cultural background of reporters on AJE and BBC World

However, cross-referencing this variable with the category of gender gives an interesting twist to these results. Firstly, what becomes immediately obvious is that female reporters were significantly outnumbered by their male colleagues on both BBCW and AJE (with an average of female reporters of 26% on BBCW and 39% on AJE). Secondly, and perhaps even more significantly with regard to AJE's remit, while the dominance of male correspondents was fairly consistent (around 75%) on BBCW news programmes (see also Figure 8.1), my analysis shows that AJE did much greater justice to its self-declared aim of representing those underrepresented by its competitors – in this case women – *within the category of reporters associated with a 'non-Western' background* than amongst the sample of 'Western' reporters. To be precise, as can be seen in Figure 8.2, amongst correspondents with non-Western backgrounds on AJE, women were not just proportionally represented; they were *in the majority,* with an average of 68% across the sample. In sharp contrast, their Western colleagues were men in over 95% of cases.
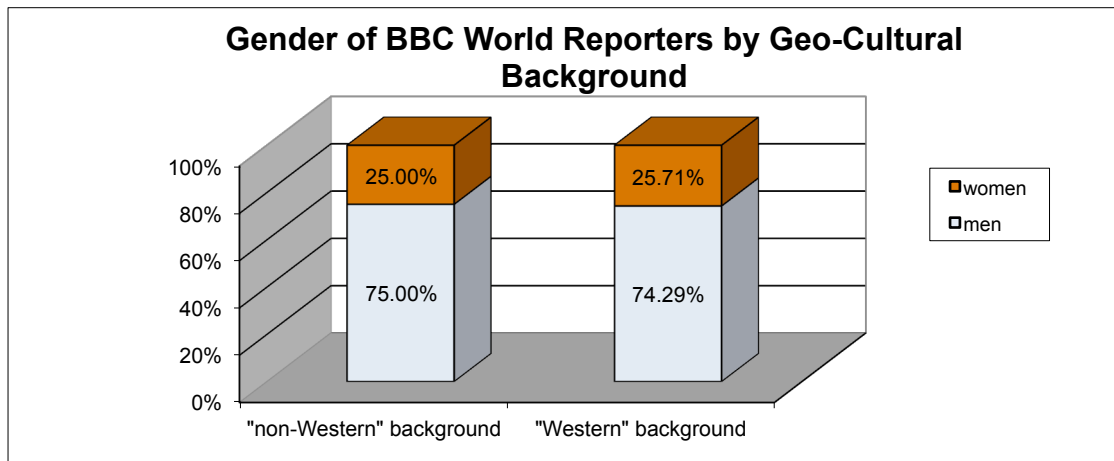
Figure 8.1 – Proportion of women amongst BBC World reporters with different geo-cultural backgrounds
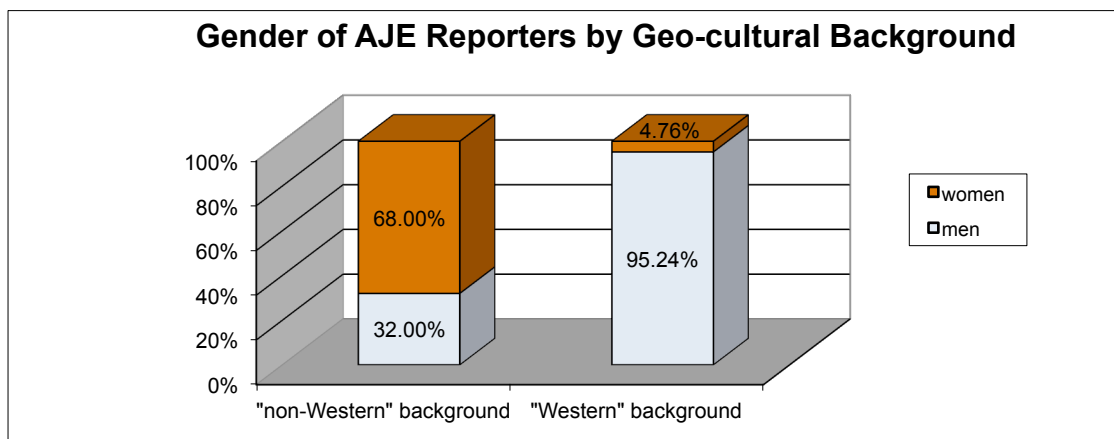
Figure 8.2 – Proportion of women amongst AJE reporters with different geo-cultural backgrounds

The results outlined above relate directly to AJE's remit in several ways. Firstly, the *overall* under-representation of women – while slightly less marked on AJE than on BBCW – is at odds with AJE's aim of giving a voice to the 'voiceless' (see also Figenschou, 2010a: 101). The circumstance that women were under-represented in Western international news and current affairs has been a routine subject of study and a well-established condition by the time AJE launched (De Swert & Hooghe, 2010: 69, see also 2.3.2 above). Consequently, gendered inflections of power imbalances (and their implications for AJE's remit) were actively pointed out to me in personal interviews with senior AJE staff. As a senior journalist emphasised in an interview: 'The South could be *women*, […] it could be children, it could be the maid next door, it could be minorities' (personal interview, London, 14/05/2008). This awareness, coupled with aims to give 'a voice' to those traditionally

underrepresented in international news, however, fell short of producing an on overage balanced gender ratio amongst reporters.

Importantly, one unexpected and significant finding is that on AJE specifically, this imbalance was not evident across the cast of reporters appearing in the sample analysed. Instead, the results clearly showed that under-representation of women as prevalent throughout the wider professional field was a non-issue amongst AJE reporters associated with non-Western backgrounds. However, it is the striking *contrast* with the prevalence of men amongst AJE's Western reporters, a dominance which exceeds by some length the already imbalanced gender ratio on BBCW in the sample analysed, that is at odds with AJE's remit. The juxtaposition of a largely female set of reporters with non-Western backgrounds with almost exclusively male Western colleagues indicates that short of tempering with the persistent male dominance in the field of Western-based international English-language broadcasting news, AJE's corrective was to *complement* it with a predominantly female cast of non-Western reporters. In other words, stark gender imbalances amongst reporters associated with Western backgrounds were at best left intact and at worst even further pronounced.

As media scholars have argued for decades, representational imbalances thrive in particular where they go unnoticed and become naturalised, or, where they do surface, are dismissed as an *inevitable* product of practicalities rather than intent.[96] As I will outline in more detail in the following chapter, successfully balancing the geo-cultural backgrounds of journalists at AJE took *decidedly conscious and sustained* efforts vis-à-vis an inherently unbalanced international news ecology. Similarly, if AJE management wanted to do the same for women as another significantly underrepresented group in international news, they would 1) have to acknowledge the existing imbalances in the wider field *and* the specific nature of gender imbalances within their own organisation and 2) to replicate the conscious effort they had made with regard to journalists with non-Western backgrounds in

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[96] It is also worth noting that some researchers established a link between gender imbalances amongst reporters and gender imbalances in news sources, suggesting that 'female journalists tend to use more female sources than do male journalists' (Rosenstiel & Mitchell, 2005: 17).

order to engage the female half of the world's population in a more representative fashion.

6.3.2 Patterns of Protagonists' On-Screen Presences and Absences

In the following I will discuss the question of whether or not the tendencies observed with regard to correspondents were replicated when it came to protagonists in news items. Here, in addition to Western or non-Western backgrounds and gender, the fact that protagonists also serve to represent certain socio-political strata increased the number of variables necessary in order to capture the degree to which AJE, as compared with BBCW, represented the 'voiceless'. Consequently, in relation to protagonists, I looked at the variables of geo-cultural backgrounds (Western / non-Western), gender (men / women) and socio-political positions (establishment / 'ordinary people' and grassroots opposition movements / independent elite).[97]

What can be seen in Figure 9.1 is that AJE in general delivered on its aim to give a greater voice to the voiceless when the voiceless overlapped with geo-cultural interpretations of the global South. A total of approximately 68% of all protagonists represented a non-Western background, both in terms of the frequency of individual on-screen appearances and in terms of the overall airtime allocated to them. At BBCW only about 47% of protagonists in reports represented a non-Western background and these were on average given less airtime than protagonists with a Western background, accounting only for about 35% of the total airtime given to protagonists. This is important not least because, as discussed earlier (see 2.3.2), the question of 'who speaks' and whether or not there are groups which are systemically 'disadvantaged in the scramble to secure access to the news media […] has an important bearing upon the question of *just how diverse* are the perspectives and interpretative frameworks that are presented through the news media' (Manning, 2001: 1, emphasis added).

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[97] For a more detailed delineation of these categories, see also 4.2.3.
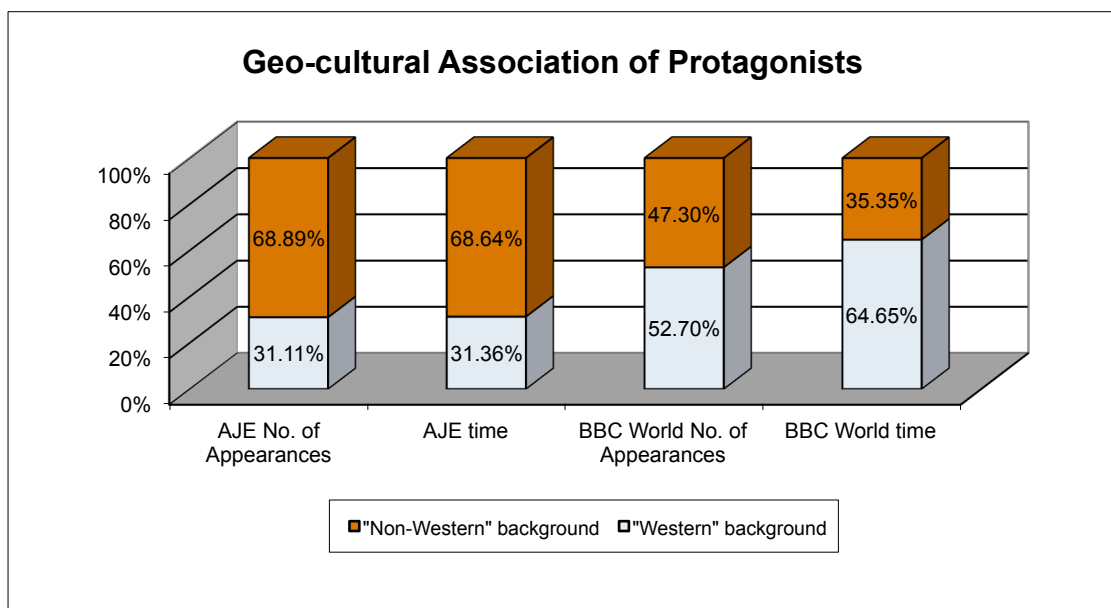
Figure 9.1 – Percentages of number of appearances and airtime allocated to protagonists with 'non-Western' and 'Western' backgrounds on AJE and BBC World.

Another shared assumption amongst AJE staff about what it means to give a voice to the voiceless is that on AJE 'you see many more sound bites of […] ordinary people than you do on other stations' (Reporter/presenter, personal interview, Doha, 08/02/2008). As Figure 10.1 shows, on AJE half of the airtime and therefore the single largest proportion of airtime given to protagonists, was allocated to people speaking in their capacity as 'ordinary people', as members of an opposition group or as those affected by conflict, closely followed by protagonists representing authorities or industry, with 44%[98]. In contrast to AJE, on BBCW the largest category, accounting for about 46% of total airtime allocated to protagonists, was that of officials and industry representatives. BBCW also featured a significantly higher percentage than AJE of independent experts and NGO representatives, leaving approximately 30% of allocated airtime for 'ordinary people' and others outside the realms of power. In terms of the socio-political backgrounds of protagonists in news items, AJE did therefore broadly fulfil the channel's aim of emphasising the presence of those relatively distanced from the centres of power and of moving 'further away from being stenographers for public officials', as Gans (2011: 4) had recently appealed for in his work on news journalism and representative democracy.

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[98] For a detailed delineation of categories applied in the coding process, see 4.3.2.

Socio-political Association of Protagonists (1)

		Independent elite
		■ "Ordinary People" / Grassroots
		■ Establishment

AJE: 5.92%, 50.00%, 44.08%

BBC World: 23.52%, 30.28%, 46.20%
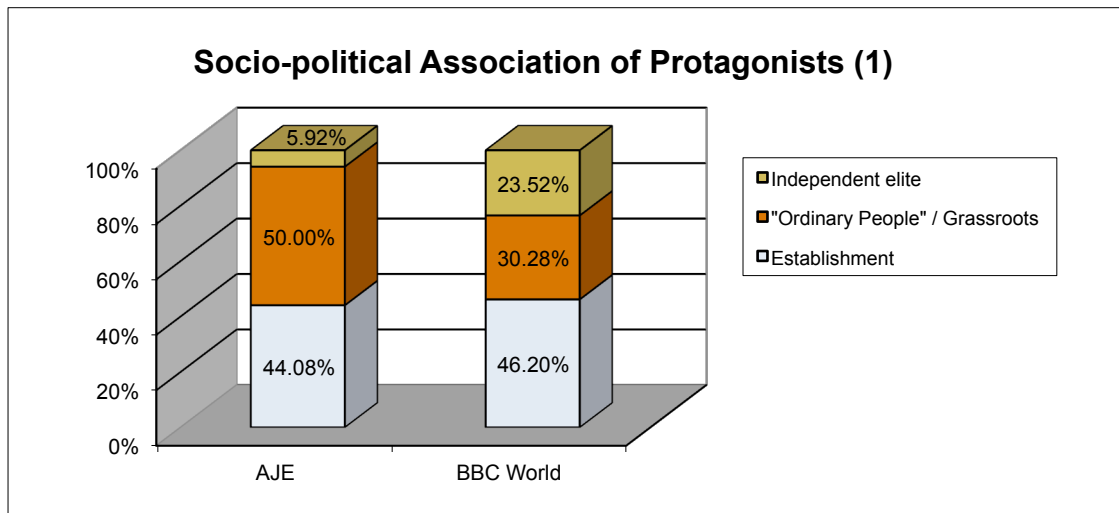
Figure 10.1 – Proportion of airtime allocated to protagonists representing different socio-political positions in news items on AJE and BBC World.

However, as can be seen in Figure 10.2, exploring the data in more detail by cross-referencing the variables of geo-cultural and socio-political background also reveals that this emphasis on 'ordinary people' and those affected by the decisions of the powers that be is asymmetrically distributed between protagonists with 'non-Western' and 'Western' backgrounds, which is particularly apparent on AJE. In terms of airtime allocated to these, on AJE 67% of the airtime allocated to Western protagonists featured people speaking in their capacity as official or industry sources, while only about 35% of the airtime allocated to non-Western protagonists featured people speaking in their capacity as representatives of authorities or industry. In turn, a majority of the time allocated to protagonists with non-Western backgrounds (close to 62%) featured representatives of those *outside* realms of power, including citizens or those opposing the government of the day. Meanwhile, less than 29% of airtime went to protagonists with Western backgrounds falling into the same category with regard to their relative proximity to political or economic power.
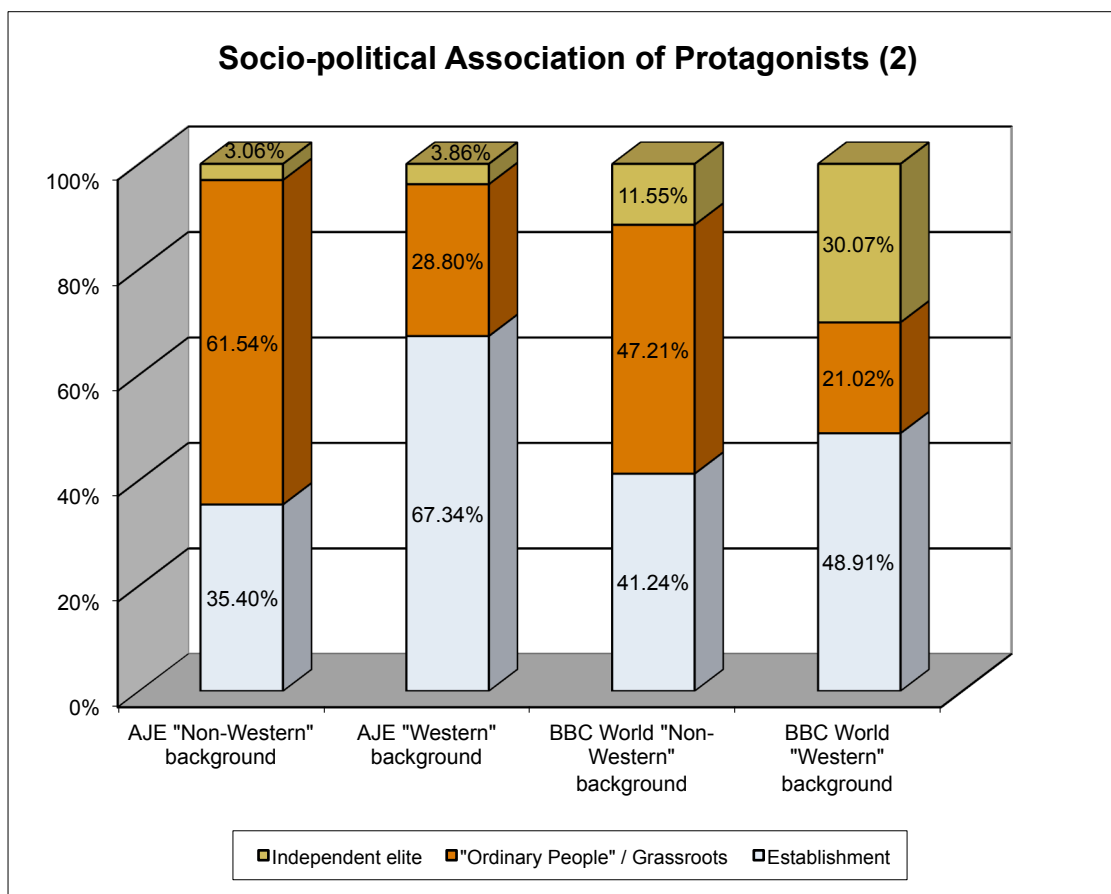
Figure 10.2 – Patterns of socio-political associations of protagonists with different geo-cultural backgrounds expressed in airtime allocated to these on AJE and BBC World.

As with the question of gender, this disparity throws into relief an interpretation of the global South that carries the risk of further reinforcing traditional power imbalances by linking geo-cultural interpretations of the South with relative distance from positions of power – an association that contradicts AJE's strive to reset the parameters born out of Western imaginations guiding international coverage. As can be seen in Figure 10.2, this disparity also existed on BBCW, but was slightly less pronounced than on AJE (although the fact that a significantly higher percentage of independent elite representatives in the category of protagonists associated with a 'Western' background means that the difference between the relative attention given to 'ordinary people' again was significantly higher in non-Western contexts).

Furthermore, as with reporters, the area where AJE and BBCW turned out to be remarkably similar was in their considerable under-representation of women overall, who made up between 16-20% of all protagonists on both channels and overall were given even less airtime (under 15%). And, as with reporters, this under-

representation was significantly more pronounced amongst protagonists with 'Western' backgrounds. Unlike with reporters, this was the case in news programmes on AJE *and* on BBCW. On both channels the percentage of female protagonists with 'Western' backgrounds ranged between approximately seven and eleven percent, while the percentage of women amongst protagonists with 'non-Western' backgrounds ranged between about seventeen and twenty-six percent.

Cross-referencing gender and other socio-political variables also shows that the general pattern of under-representation of women was significantly more pronounced amongst protagonists who spoke in their capacity as professionals, be they officials or independent experts, than amongst protagonists who spoke in their capacity as 'ordinary people' or others considered to be outside the current realms of power – a trend reminiscent of similar findings in relation to Western news broadcasters (Cann & Mohr, 2001: 171). More specifically, as represented in Figures 11.1 and 11.2, amongst the category of those speaking *outside* the realms of power, men and women were almost equally represented on BBCW, with a less balanced picture on AJE, where women only received about 25% of the overall airtime given to protagonists in that category. However, this picture turns out to be far less balanced when it comes to the category of independent elites. Here, all protagonists on BBCW were men and on AJE only about 21% of the airtime given to those representing independent elites was allocated to women. Meanwhile, in the category of official and industry representatives, nowhere in the entire sample across both channels did the percentage either of number of appearances or of airtime allocated to women rise above a meagre 3%.

Gender of Protagonists by Socio-Political Role (AJE)

Establishment: Men 98.41%, Women 1.59%
"Ordinary People" / Grassroots: Men 74.94%, Women 25.06%
Independent elite: Men 78.49%, Women 21.51%
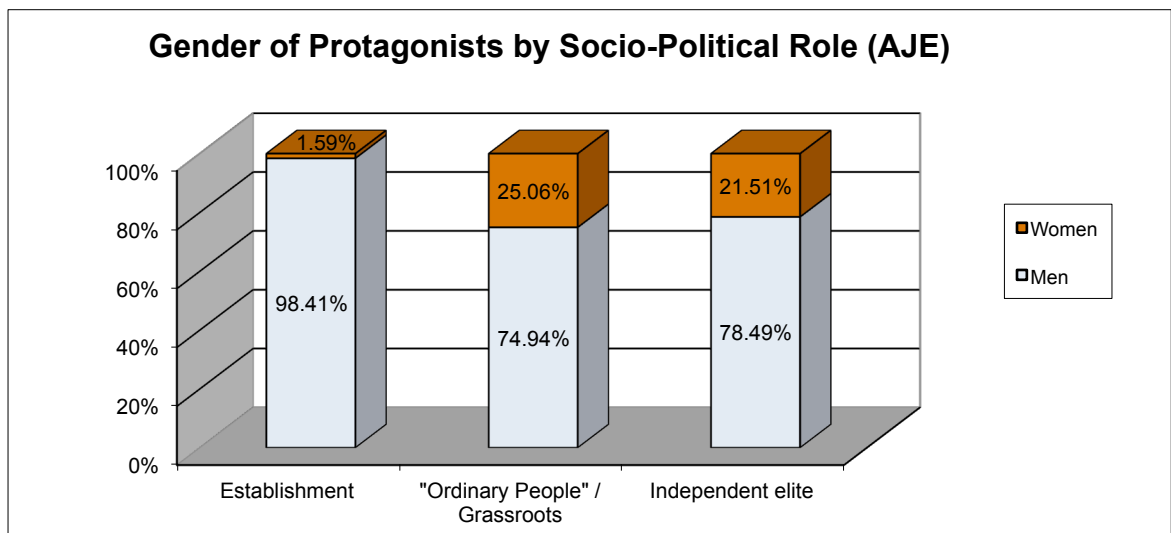
Figure 11.1 – Proportion of airtime allocated to women and men representing different socio-political positions as protagonists in news items on AJE.

Gender of Protagonists by Socio-Political Role (BBC World)

Establishment: Men 97.56%, Women 2.44%
"Ordinary People" / Grassroots: Men 50.93%, Women 49.07%
Independent elite: Men 100%, Women 0%
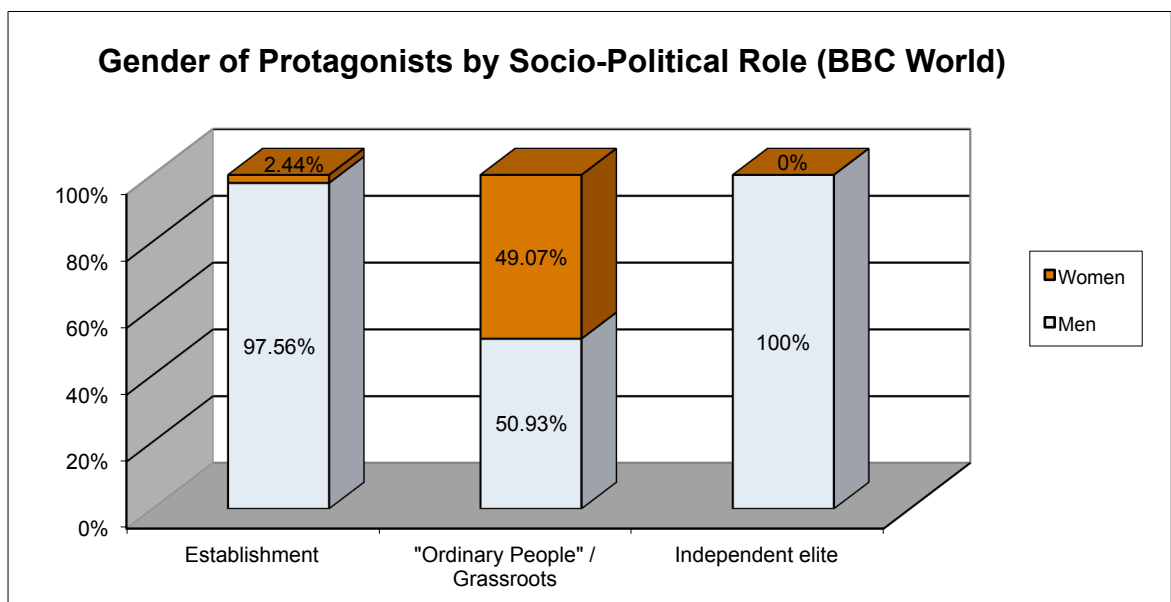
Figure 11.2 – Proportion of airtime allocated to women and men representing different socio-political positions as protagonists in news items on AJE.

It is of course methodologically impossible to evaluate in a content analysis how far this unambiguously unbalanced picture emerging from the data results from a relative neglect in international news of those women who do hold positions of power, or how far this imbalance is the by-product of a reality where women are, on a global scale, still relatively scarce in positions of power. Whether one of these scenarios or, as I would be inclined to argue, a combination of the two applies, however, has little relevance for AJE if the channel's remit and the interpretation

thereof by its staff is the yardstick against which its news programmes are to be evaluated: If women were sufficiently represented in official and economically powerful positions, then a failure to represent them as protagonists in news items would expose a gendered bias in favour of traditionally more empowered groups of society and would be at the very least at odds with AJE's remit.

If, on the other hand, there is an argument to be made that this bias reflects a reality in which women in many places and professions are effectively still under-represented (an under-representation that, as this data throws into sharp relief, evidently encompasses the field of international news journalism) then AJE's remit of giving a 'voice to the voiceless' should have the effect of promoting conscious efforts to give more airtime to women in general and in their capacities as experts and officials specifically – in particular if AJE management and journalists are serious about wanting to 'come up with ways of aiding and abetting the voiceless' (Senior manager, personal interview, Doha, 16/03/2009) and to 'give *equal if not more airtime to those outside the realms of power* to be equally influential' (Reporter/presenter, personal interview, Doha, 08/02/2008), as another interviewee put it.

6.3.3   Patterns of Interview Guests' On-Screen Presences and Absences

Similar tendencies can be observed in Figure 12.1 when looking at the channels' respective profiles in terms of people invited as interview guests in the course of the programmes. Guests appear much less frequently and are allocated a much greater share of airtime than people appearing in reports as protagonists. And it is because of this function of guests as 'experts' that people speaking as ordinary members of the public or victims of violence are much less likely to be selected. Therefore both channels had a guest profile largely consisting of either officials and business people or independent experts and NGO representatives.

However, AJE and BBCW differed fundamentally with regard to which of these two dominant categories they emphasised. On AJE the single largest group of guests (more than 70%) were representatives of what Figenschou (2010a: 99) called the

'independent elite', meaning experts *not* affiliated with governing bodies or industry representatives. In addition, as can be seen in Figure 12.1, independent elite experts were on average given more time than others, taking up close to 84% of all airtime allocated to guests. Interestingly, unlike BBCW, AJE did not on any of the four news programmes sampled invite guests from the category of grassroots or opposition members, who in the category of protagonists within news items were the largest group on AJE. Consequently, 29% of guests on AJE represented official or industry voices, but they were only given a total of 16% of the airtime. Taken together, these results confirm AJE's strong emphasis on non-official sources – with potential implications in terms of, as Gans (2011:6) puts it, 'perspectives other than those of the party hegemons and ideologues who dominate television and cable news panels' – although, other than within news items, this was expressed by an emphasis on independent experts rather than on 'ordinary people' or grassroots opposition members.

Socio-political Association of Interview Guests (1)

	Independent elite	"Ordinary People" / Grassroots	Establishment
AJE No. of Appearances	70.59%		29.41%
AJE Time	83.94%		16.06%
BBC World No. of Appearances	40.00%	6.67%	53.33%
BBC World Time	35.34%	9.05%	55.61%
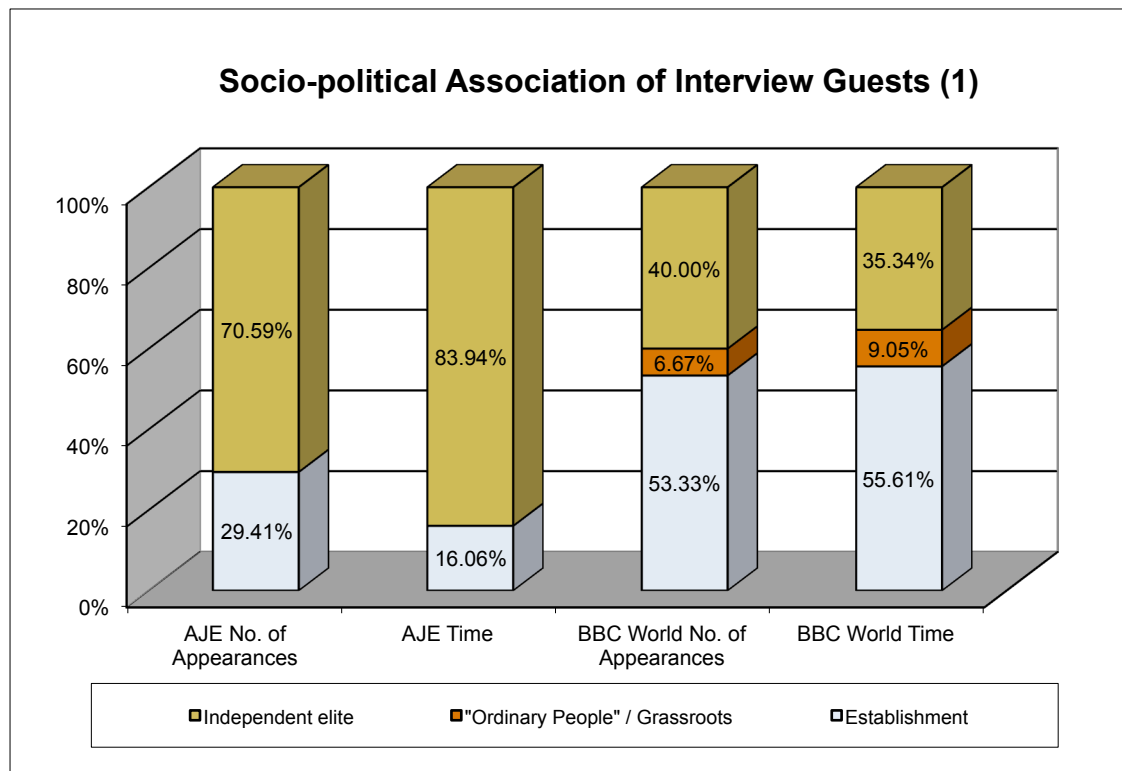
Figure 12.1 – Percentages of number of appearances and airtime allocated to interview guests speaking from different socio-political positions on AJE and BBC World.

Meanwhile, on BBCW the single largest group of interview guests (more than 53%) represented official voices, business or industry bodies and these were given slightly

disproportionate time on air, with close to 56% of the time allocated to all guests. Unlike on AJE, representatives of 'ordinary people' and grassroots opposition members were given a presence as guests, if only a marginal one, with about 7% of appearances and 9% of airtime. Independent sources were invited as guests in 40% of cases, but were only allowed approximately 35% of the overall time. Compared to AJE, this provides a picture of more emphasis overall on official sources, in terms both of guest selection and of the time they were given on air. To summarise the results regarding socio-political factors in source selection with regard to both protagonist and interview guests, AJE featured a much smaller percentage of *protagonists* who fell into the 'independent elite' category than did BBCW, emphasising ordinary people and grassroots opposition above all other categories, closely followed by officials – but where and when the requirement of the potential for in-depth discussion makes experts, official or independent, more likely contenders than 'ordinary people', as it does with interview *guests*, AJE opted for independent experts and NGO representatives to a greater extent than did BBCW.
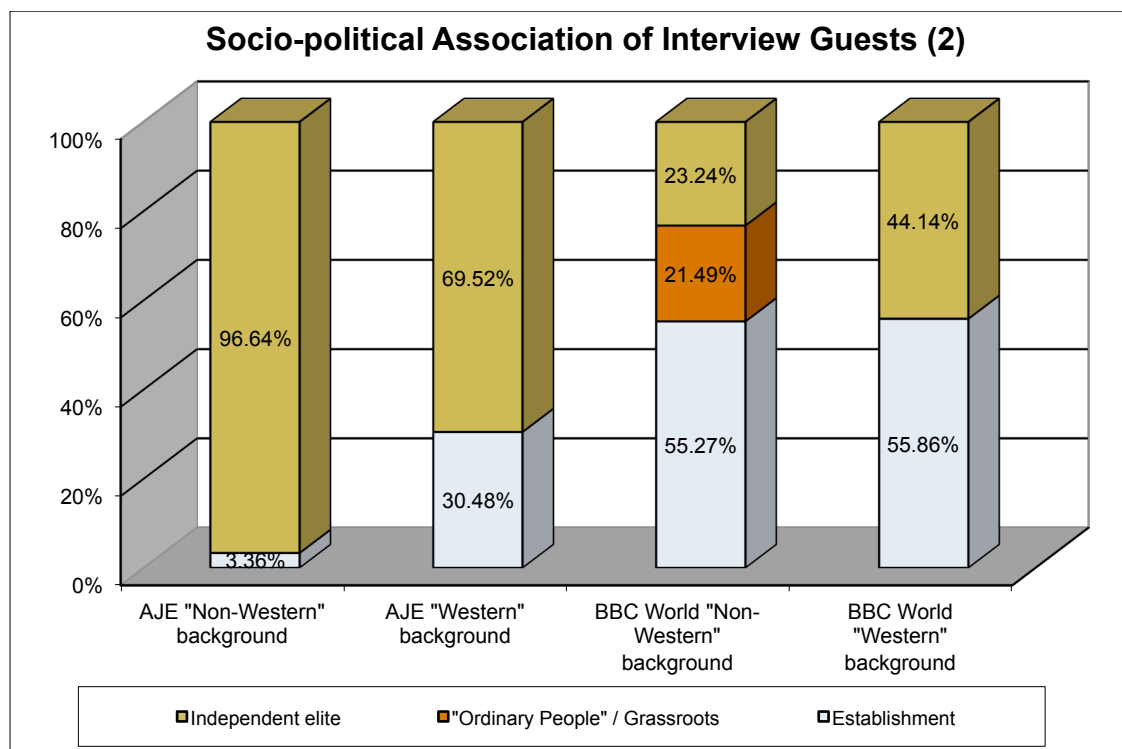
Figure 12.2 – Patterns of socio-political associations of interview guests with different geo-cultural backgrounds expressed in airtime allocated to these on AJE and BBC World.

Again, going into more detail indicates patterned asymmetries in source selection on both channels, if in different ways. For example, as can be seen in Figure 12.2, cross-referencing the categories of geo-cultural backgrounds and socio-political position shows that on AJE, in terms of airtime, there was a higher percentage of establishment sources amongst guests with 'Western' backgrounds than amongst guests with 'non-Western' backgrounds.

Although it is important to recognise this apparent pattern, which echoes the results described earlier with regard to protagonists, it is also important to note that even within the category of interview guests with 'Western' backgrounds, establishment sources were in a clear minority (making for only just over 30% of the airtime given to interview guests in this category), while the category of interview guests associated with 'non-Western' backgrounds was almost entirely taken up by members of the independent elites, leaving scarcely more than 3% of airtime within the category to those holding positions political or economic of power. In contrast, on BBCW establishment sources were the single largest category for interview guests (reaching approximately 55%), independently of their geo-cultural background, while 'ordinary people' and those representing grassroots politics had a chance to speak only in the category of interview guests with 'non-Western' backgrounds, where they accounted for about one fifth of the interview guests.

As with protagonists, the contrast becomes more pronounced when cross-referencing socio-political positions with gender. As can be seen in Figures 13.1 and 13.2, on both channels 100% of guests speaking in their capacity as representatives of authorities, industry or business were men. Women were given a voice as independent experts on about 31% of the allocated airtime on AJE and about 21% on BBCW.

Gender of Interview Guests by Socio-political Role (AJE)

Establishment: Men 100%
"Ordinary People" / Grassroots: Women 0%
Independent elite: Women 31.32%, Men 68.68%

Legend: Women, Men
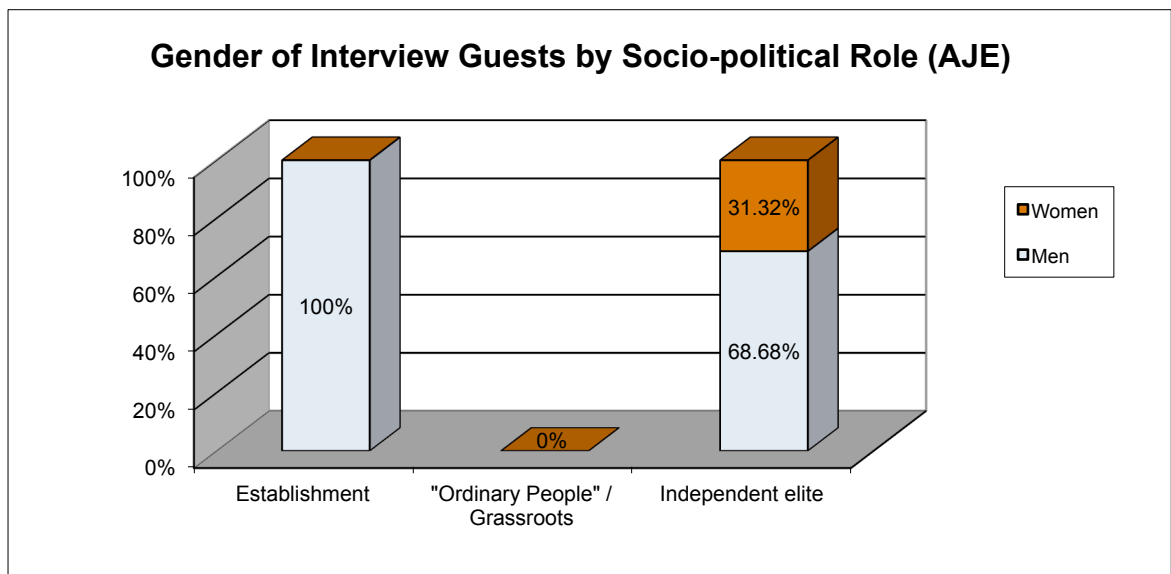
Figure 13.1 – Proportion of airtime allocated to women amongst interview guests with different geo-cultural backgrounds on AJE.

Gender of Interview Guests by Socio-political Role (BBC World)

Establishment: Men 100%
"Ordinary People" / Grassroots: Men 100%
Independent elite: Women 21.46%, Men 78.54%

Legend: Women, Men
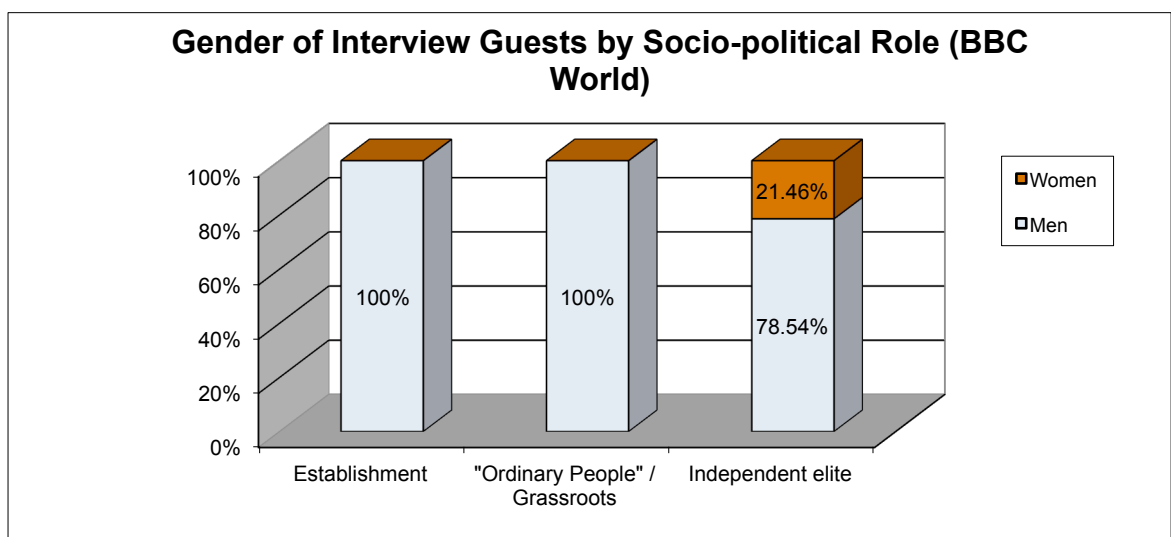
Figure 13.2 – Proportion of airtime allocated to women amongst interview guests with different geo-cultural backgrounds on BBC World.

Lastly, giving a voice to the voiceless was also seen amongst AJE editorial staff as a matter of avoiding official language and press conference quotations where possible. The expressed aim was to give less voice to those who already had the means to get their message across to the media, particularly in the case of 'governments, who attempt to define and manage the flow of information' (Tumber, 1999: 215), as had been expressed in the literature long before this issue became relevant in the context

of AJE (see also 2.3.2).[99] Going 'beyond the official language and official positions', as a political analyst and presenter at AJE put it, was widely seen as a key distinguishing factor for the channel (personal interview, London, 14/05/2008). In the words of a Doha-based presenter, 'one of the things Al Jazeera said was that it would not just be spoon-fed news from state departments, from government press offices and politicians, and to a large extent we have managed to stay true to that' (personal interview, Doha, 07/02/2008). And a news editor explained that while this was 'a difficult thing to do' and they sometimes had to 'cover men in suits […] making announcements', their 'stated aim – more than with any other channel – is that we won't tell the story of the conference, we'll tell the story of the people whom the conference is designed to discuss' (personal interview, London, 20/12/2007). In my analysis I found that on average AJE made use of sound bites from press conferences[100] in a marginally lower percentage of *items* than did BBCW, with both channels ranging between a quarter and a third of items. However, AJE did on average use sound bites from official statements slightly more in terms of *airtime* attributed to them in proportion to the overall airtime of all items in a programme. On balance, then, the presence of official language on AJE turned out to be rather similar to that on BBCW when looking explicitly at the use of official statements, even though it was far less prominent when looking at the profiles of protagonists and guests (see Tables 2.2 and 2.3 above).

6.3.4 Example 2: Coverage of Northern Iraq and China

A comparative example of two of the main stories covered by both channels on the same day further illustrates this tension. On 15 August 2007 the first news item on both channels, the bomb attack in Northern Iraq with record numbers of casualties,

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[99] The increasing media-savviness of NGOs and humanitarian organisations that has been discussed elsewhere (Franks & Seaton, 2009: 18) calls into question assumptions that pro-active PR strategies and attempts to influence the media are confined to officials and industry, but in the case of AJE press statements and conferences appeared to be largely associated by journalists with government press offices and official language.

[100] In my analysis I only included official statements and *sound bites* from press conferences and not footage of a conference accompanied by the journalist's voice.

used the same press conference footage of a US military official and the same Al Jazeera archive material from a mountain stronghold of the Yezidis, who were the single most affected community. They both recounted the story of previous tensions between local Muslims and the Yezidis over the stoning of a Yezidi girl who had wanted to convert to Islam in order to marry a Muslim man. However, while BBCW only summarised the case in a voice-over showing AJ footage, AJE then went on to show an exclusive interview with the Yezidi's religious leader about that case, both reaffirming its reputation as the channel of reference for the Middle East and letting people in the South speak for themselves.

However, while AJE is in a unique position that allows it, with more people on the ground, to make a more conscious and pronounced effort to give more voice to the voiceless, the idea and ideal behind this mission is far from being unique to the channel. And for some items on some days this is shown very clearly. The same news programmes that opened with the attack on the Yezidi community in Iraq included items further down the running order on a worldwide recall of toys produced in China, which it was feared were painted with dangerous substances. On AJE the report appeared to depend largely on archive and agency material of generic images of toyshops and company buildings and on footage from press conferences given by the US Consumer Products Safety Commission and by Mattel, the company at the heart of the scandal. In addition, the reporter quoted statements from government and industry bodies. The AJE report also contained an interview with the Managing Director of another industry body, China Knowledge. In stark contrast, and conceptually much closer to what AJE officially regards as its own strength, was BBCW's coverage, provided by a correspondent on the ground in China sending back a report investigating the factories in question, speaking to laid-off workers perplexed by the developments and looking into the effects of the recall on the local community.

6.4   Conclusion – Differences and Similarities

In essence, both of AJE's organisational aims – providing a 'voice of the South' and a 'voice of the voiceless' – are reflected to varying degrees in the data generated in

the quantitative comparative content analysis. In addition, exploring the data in more detail at times revealed that, as a Doha-based correspondent observed in one of the interviews, 'it is very easy in terms of rhetoric to claim that you are representing the underdog – in practice it is very difficult' (personal interview, Doha, 11/02/2008).

With regard to representing the South, AJE displayed a greater overall percentage of coverage of the South than did BBCW and a greater proportion of original items on the South. Going into more detail, the data also suggests that BBCW was more strongly influenced in its geo-political balance by large-scale events, in part because it had a lower overall number of items within the hour than AJE. Therefore one main finding of this chapter is that AJE displayed a comparatively more consistent geo-political profile, which was influenced to a lesser degree by the presence or absence of big international stories. AJE's strive to provide a different perspective was also reflected in its treatment of the coverage of the two natural disasters in Myanmar and China, but failed to manifest itself with regard to a less conflict- and disaster-driven approach to news from the South.

With regard to 'giving a voice to the voiceless', the results were more mixed. AJE did deliver on its remit when looking at some of the variables in isolation. The channel provided a greater emphasis than BBCW on people with non-Western backgrounds, as well as on people speaking in their capacity as 'ordinary citizens' or those affected by conflict, rather than giving a voice to politicians or industry representatives. With regard to studio guests, AJE showed a strong inclination to invite independent experts much more often than official spokespeople and allowed these to speak for longer on average. However, while the South and those socio-politically removed from the centres of power did have a voice on AJE, this was barely the case for women. The results from the analysis clearly show that AJE and BBCW differed fundamentally in their overall geo-cultural emphasis, and to a more limited degree in their socio-political outlook, but when it came to the category of gender I found that AJE seemed to echo the tendency of the wider industry to considerably and consistently under-represent women.

Moreover, cross-referencing various variables further revealed how deep-rooted inequalities present within the wider field of international news were at times

reproduced or even amplified on AJE. Cross-referencing gender and geo-cultural backgrounds of reporters provided a very unbalanced picture of a majority of women amongst correspondents with non-Western backgrounds vis-à-vis a nearly exclusively male cast of Western colleagues. Cross-referencing gender and socio-political backgrounds of protagonists (and to a lesser degree studio guests) showed that the only area where women came close to being represented equally on either channel was the category of those who were affected by the decisions of the powerful while themselves residing outside the realms of power. With regard to protagonists, on both channels, people featuring in their capacity as officials or industry representatives were men about 98% of the time, a percentage only surpassed by that of officials and industry representatives invited as studio guests, which in this sample of four days, spread over nine months and including two TV stations, did not include a single women.

Likewise, cross-referencing geo-cultural and socio-political backgrounds with regard to people featuring in news items revealed that the majority of Western protagonists appeared in their capacity as representatives of authorities or industry, while the majority of non-Western protagonists appeared in their capacity as those outside the realms of power. All in all, the results across different groups of actors (correspondents, protagonists and guests) were broadly consistent in their general emphasis, suggesting editorial preferences rooted in the professional habitus prevalent within the wider field as well as conscious attempts by AJE journalists to counter at least some of them. In the following chapter, I will look into these two divergent influences in more detail.

The differences and conformities described above – both between the two news organisations and between AJE's perception of itself and the results from the sample – give an indication of the dependence of any editorial difference on managerial choices as well as a shared awareness amongst AJE staff of exactly how and *with regard to which factors* they were striving to depart from the underlying professional assumptions prevalent throughout the industry. In this context, the data discussed in this chapter is suggestive of (without explaining) an ongoing process within AJE of negotiating degrees of difference and similarity that delivered on the channel's remit in some areas very effectively and less so in others. As I will argue in the following,

this process is also symptomatic of the dynamics at play at an organisation aiming to carve out space for genuine editorial difference while operating within a heavily interconnected industry within which organisations constantly relate to one another through competition as well as through shared professional values. The following chapters will discuss the organisational environment out of which shared assumptions about AJE's editorial characteristics emerged, as journalists joining the comparatively young channel began to negotiate ways of achieving editorial difference within the set-up of the journalistic (sub)field at the time.

Chapter 7 Employing Difference: Professional Habitus and Journalistic Agency

The hiring function I think is one of the biggest challenges that a station like this faces.

Senior journalist (personal interview, Kuala Lumpur, 05/06/2009)

I think who the channel chooses to recruit, from where, defines their editorial policy.

Producer (personal interview, London, 20/12/2007)

7.1 Introduction

In this Chapter, I will address the question of how *employing difference* – in the senses both of recruiting and of applying difference – situates AJE as an organisation within the wider realm of the international news ecology during its early years. This chapter is primarily about the juxtaposition of journalistic habitus (in the form associated with the field of international English-language news and current affairs broadcasting) and journalistic agency, and not about cultural backgrounds of journalists or crude dichotomies of 'Western' and 'non-Western' voices.[101] However, I found there to be an overlap between these two different issues – not due to any essentialist assumptions about people's personal powers, but due to widespread perceptions about an unequal distribution of a particular journalistic habitus across the world[102] – that to ignore would be to ignore precisely the asymmetries in international news AJE was set up to challenge. This intersection directly links

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[101] It is important to state that, as with definitions of 'the global South' and 'the global North', categories of 'Western' and 'non-Western' 'are complex, deeply contested, dynamic and changing' (Hardy, 2008: 1). However, as with those earlier definitions, these concepts are frequently employed with regard to Al Jazeera by observers both within and outside the news organisation and therefore become immediately relevant to the way Al Jazeera is being positioned within the field of international news.

[102] It is beyond the empirical scope of the present study to assess the *actual* distribution of the particular professional habitus specific to the field of English-language news broadcasting that is dominated by the likes of BBCW and CNNI in different regional and national contexts. Instead, the interviews conducted for this study serve as an indication of the *perceived* imbalance in the distribution of this particular kind of journalistic habitus on a global scale. Here, two points need to be made: Firstly, seeing how this perception was widespread amongst AJE management, it would have had actual effects on the organizational environment even if reality on the ground differed in some contexts, as it was one of several factors informing decision-making processes. And secondly, existing academic research tentatively supports this perception in that several empirical studies suggest that despite tendencies of convergence and an abstract notion of 'a general cultural understanding that is shared by most journalists around the world (Hanitzsch et al., 2011: 287)', notions of professionalism differ significantly both in ideological and practical terms across different regional contexts (Weaver, 1998; Deuze, 2005; Hallin, 2009; Pintak & Ginges, 2009; Pintak & Setiyono, 2011; Weaver & Willnat, 2012), with a broad distinction between journalistic environments leaning towards the 'western journalism culture' and those closer to traditions associated with development journalism (Hanitzsch et al., 2011: 287).

questions of habitus and agency to questions of news flows in that it highlights the structural challenges that AJE encountered in its aims of rebalancing international news.

At the centre of AJE's striving to 'challenge established perceptions' (AJE Website, Corporate Profile, 04/09/2008) [103] is the channel's recruitment strategy, which consists of two central tenets. The first central criterion was that of being journalistically on a par with BBCW and CNNI. In this context, the extensive poaching of high-profile international staff from rival channels made it clear from the beginning that the aim was to enter the field of international news with the highest possible initial impact. The second part of the strategy was to employ local staff in as many parts of the world as possible, not just as fixers and producers, but as local reporters and correspondents, which was seen as an intrinsic element of the channel's aim of reversing the flow of information. In the context of news flows, the first part of AJE's strategy meant that despite their 'counter-hegemonic' properties (Carpentier, 2005), alternative models of professionalism such as development journalism or peace journalism were rejected from the outset for the project of AJE. This in turn had consequences for the second part of AJE's recruitment strategy, since it substantially reduced the number of journalists matching the channel's requirements across the world, but arguably disproportionately so in some areas of the global South (see also Hanitzsch, 2011; Pintak & Setiyono, 2011; Pintak & Ginges, 2011).

In the words of a senior manager, 'the recruitment strategy that evolved from the very outset of the English channel was a combination of *experience* and *local talent*' (personal interview, Doha, 24/05/2010). As I will argue, the fact that 'experience' and 'local talent' was frequently juxtaposed in interviews tells something about the perceived *composition* of the field, because, needless to say, there is nothing about 'Western' journalists per se that allows them to be more experienced in a particular *kind* of journalistic practice, and there is nothing about local journalists in non-Western countries that by default allows them to better explain news events in non-

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[103] The profile has since been marginally amended on the website. However, to arrive at a coherent picture I am using the version that correlates with the time-frame of my fieldwork.

Western contexts. As Khiabany (2010: 3) points out in the context of attempts to 'de-Westernise' media studies, there is a danger that *cultural* differences may be invoked, 'whether intended or not', to deflect from the real issues and differences that lie in the global asymmetries of *distribution* between 'rich and poor, haves and have nots, developed and underdeveloped, North and South'. Instead, what this juxtaposition of 'experience' and 'local talent' makes clear is that there is a strong perception that 'experience' in a particular subfield of international journalism is decidedly unequally dispersed globally, with direct consequences for newsroom diversity.

In the previous chapter I outlined areas of similarity and difference with regard to AJE's news output in relation to both a rival channel and its remit as interpreted by its staff. In this chapter I shall explore the dialectic of similarity and difference that characterises AJE through the lens of a Bourdieusian analysis that relates organisational themes emerging from the data (such as recruitment patterns) to themes characteristic of the wider journalistic environment (such as the dispersion of specific journalistic habitus internationally). Questions include: To what degree does industry-specific habitus constrain and enable editorial difference? And to what degree does agency impact on the emerging habitus of the organisational field in an environment devised to challenge existing practices (see also 4.2.1)? This approach will be complemented by a focus on journalistic agency as a means of explaining difference and change vis-à-vis the wider professional field.

As I have argued earlier, taking into account individual agency is crucial when looking at practices at AJE, particularly in its early years. Firstly, the channel's reflexive remit of challenging established perceptions encouraged a break with dominant routines within the field. And secondly, as I will outline in more detail in the third part of this chapter, people made *deliberate* decisions to join a channel with a given remit and by doing so to actively engage with questions of editorial decision-making processes in relation to their individual dispositions. Many joined, amongst other reasons, because they *anticipated* the structural enablement of working in a relatively autonomous journalistic environment that at the time encouraged breaking out of routines – something that could not result purely from a clash of different

kinds of habitus within the organisational field, since it *preceded* the exposure of the individual journalist to the organisational working environment of AJE.

In the first part of this Chapter, I will explore the impact of the inter-organisational context that constrained and enabled what AJE could achieve in the period analysed. Notwithstanding the channel's aspirations of 'reporting back', the simultaneous aim of becoming a major player subjected AJE to limitations of the field. These limitations were exacerbated by the rush of the launch, which meant that instead of training people from scratch, AJE management relied to a significant extent on journalists with experience working for major Western-based broadcasters and news agencies for their recruitment of staff with 'non-Western' backgrounds. In short, in terms of 'employing difference' AJE depended on the pre-existing composition of an already imbalanced field.

In the second part of the chapter I will describe how similarity in terms of practices achieved by prioritising a certain kind of journalistic habitus carries both the *causal power* to increase the initial impact on the field (which is why this particular kind of professionalism was embraced by AJE) and the *causal liability* to encourage similarity in terms of *editorial* decision-making practices to a potentially greater degree than AJE's remit warrants. At the same time, as I shall argue, similarity was to a certain degree a precondition for pursuing the ambitious aim of changing the 'current typical information flow' (AJE Website, Corporate Profile, 04/09/2008) – because it created a shared approach that could serve as a basis on which editorial difference could be meaningfully evaluated vis-a-vis the dominant players in the field. In other words, for difference to have an impact and to change some of the 'rules of the game' there needed to be sufficient similarity to qualify as a viable player in the first place. As Benson notes (1998: 468):

> '[…] entry into the journalistic field requires acceptance of the basic rules of the game, which themselves are a powerful force of inertia. Thus, while the opposition of "old-new" has the *potential to transform the power between heteronomy-autonomy* within the field […] it is only under certain conditions.'

In this vein, my interview data suggests that there was an awareness within AJE that similarity with Western networks in terms of a particular kind of shared professional habitus could not be separated entirely from the liability to arrive at a greater degree of editorial similarity than AJE staff was trying to achieve in pursuit of fulfilling AJE's remit of 'reporting back'.

However, while these factors had a very real impact on the organisation in the sense that they had the power to aid or complicate AJE's aims, they *do not determine* what journalists do. As I discuss in the third part of this chapter, such constraints were mediated and in part mitigated by journalists' motivations and reflexive powers. The degree to which this kind of agency inspired difference is important not least because practices adopted during these formative years established precedents for later practice and became constitutive parts of the emerging habitus of the organisational field. A senior Doha-based manager described this process of an emerging shared understanding of editorial matters as follows:

> It's only when you're on air that you kind of realise that ah, this is what this means, and this is how this turns out, and this is how we deal with Kosovo or this is how we deal with that.
>
> (Personal interview, Doha, 16/03/2009).

In the following I will provide examples of structural challenges and implications both of journalistic habitus and of agency from the interviews I conducted between November 2007 and May 2010 and discuss some of the potential repercussions of this dialectic of similarity and difference for AJE's ability to live up to its remit of 'reporting back'.

7.2 Structural Challenges: Combining Local and International Experience

The aim of becoming the 'voice of the South' found its organisational expression in a conscious effort by AJE's management to hire as many local journalists as possible – in particular in areas underlining AJE's commitment to the global South. Since this

was an official part of AJE's identity, interviewees across the channel time and again emphasised the relevance of this effort. A senior manager recalled:

> When I set about hiring our staff I was very conscious that we needed black journalists to cover black Africa, we needed Asians to cover Asia, we needed Latin Americans to cover Latin America […]. It is important to us that wherever we are in the world we have local people reporting local issues.
>
> (personal interview, Doha, 10/02/2008).

A presenter and programme host said he loved the fact that 'Kenyans cover Kenya, we have a Somali who is based in Somalia, we don't have to fly people in every time [something happens]' (personal interview, Doha, 15/03/2009). And a London-based correspondent described it as an achievement that others were beginning to draw inspiration from:

> I think people have watched Al Jazeera [English] and realised that if you want to call yourself a global channel you need to have more than white, Western European faces. That you do actually need to represent the world. […] And other broadcasters who looked at that thought yes, we want a bit of that.
>
> (personal interview, London, 01/04/2009)

It is important to stress at this point that there is considerable evidence that this element of AJE's organisational identity has had palpable on-screen effects. As outlined in the previous chapter (6.2.1), over half of the reporters featuring in the sample of news I analysed appeared to have a 'non-Western' background, as opposed to only a little over ten percent in the same period on BBCW News.[104] Likewise it is important to point towards areas that resisted the deliberate efforts of AJE's senior

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[104] Of course, AJE was hardly the first news channel looking to diversify its staff profile. International broadcasters have likewise come increasingly to recognise the value of local journalistic expertise (Sambrook, 2010: 49). National public service broadcasters in the UK and other countries have for many years sought to represent more adequately the culturally diverse profile of their respective viewerships (Baracaia, *Guardian Online*, 23/11/2009), albeit with varying success (see also Phillips, 2008). However, as the first international news channel expressly dedicated to developing countries and under-represented voices, AJE had particularly high stakes in managing to reflect in its staff profile its ambition of being a channel where – as one programme editor put it – 'internationality overrides anything' (personal interview, London, 12/12/2007).

managers to create a workforce that reflected on an organisational level the channel's remit of 'giving a voice' and a presence to those underrepresented in international news.

Firstly, it is necessary to point out that diversity on screen does not by default match diversity off screen. Statistics on the backgrounds of people working off screen are less accessible and have not been released by AJE or Qatar. In this context interviewing senior management provided me with the opportunity to get access to informed estimates, although these have to be read with caution as I have no means of verifying them independently. And, given the lack of statistical evidence, they are potentially more prone to being influenced by divergent opinions and strategies within management ranks at the time. According to one source, between 30% and 40% of the journalists working for AJE in the *Doha newsroom* in 2008 were 'either from the UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand or the USA'. At the same time another source estimated that the ratio of Western journalists *throughout the channel* (including other offices) was more likely to be as high as 70%.[105]

From the very beginnings of AJE, diversity was a central theme. Critics frequently voiced concerns for the 'potential for Western influence to be exerted through recruitment choices' (Sakr, 2007: 125).[106] A related concern about a potential perpetuation of global asymmetries was conveyed through the impression that an unequal distribution of primary habitus was also reflected in *hierarchical* terms. As one interviewee acknowledged, 'most of the managers and the editorial staff are

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[105] The difference might reflect the circumstance that the Doha office is arguably most likely to employ former staff from its parent channel AJA as well as other journalists from the region, but again, this cannot be verified. And, as mentioned earlier, if it could be established that it was a factor, it may not be the only reason for the significantly different estimates presented to me in personal interviews with AJE management at a time of transition within AJE (see also 4.4.1).

[106] A concern widely commented upon in the press across the world around the time of the launch. Pintak cautioned in the *Turkish Daily News* that there was a risk that the channel 'could turn out to be a CNN retreat, whose staff has traded Western corporate masters intent on the bottom line for Eastern masters' (15/11/2006) and the *New York Times* warned that a 'perception that despite the Middle Eastern base, Westerners once again are dictating the news' posed a very real threat to the channel (26/03/2006).

Westerners and Western journalists' (Presenter, personal interview, Doha, 2008) – a claim sustained by Figenschou (2012: 365-366), who found indications that 'although hiring local correspondents is one of the key editorial strategies of the channel […] the executive producers are still the same professional elite (middle-aged, white men) that runs mainstream, global newsrooms'. In addition, as outlined in the previous chapter (6.3.1), gender imbalances prevalent throughout the field of international news journalism were also reproduced in highly asymmetrical patterns amongst AJE's reporters, with a majority of female reporters in the sample analysed being associated with a 'non-Western' background, while over 95% of 'Western' reporters in the sample were men.

In short, without wanting to detract from evident achievements and the explicit appreciation for local expertise prevalent in AJE's newsrooms, it becomes clear that in their efforts to create a staff profile sufficiently diverse to reflect AJE's remit in organisational terms, senior staff faced some apparent challenges. And that their actions were limited by these challenges in significant ways. As I shall argue, this is worth addressing, not least because these challenges go beyond the particular case of AJE. As such, they help to understand some of the wider and *continuing* difficulties faced *across organisations* in overcoming historically established asymmetries within the professional field of international English-language news broadcasting.

7.2.1   Limitations of the Field

The tendencies described above led to a perception by some within AJE's management ranks that there was a difficult balance to be struck between employing local journalists in as many parts of the world as possible and employing expertise specific to Western news channels that was perceived as necessary in order to make a mark within the industry. A London-based news editor found that 'there will definitely be countries where there won't be many people who can cut it on an international channel, because it will stand out' (personal interview, London, 20/12/2007). And a senior journalist explained that maintaining international standards meant that the 'default position' could not be avoided altogether:

There is not a universe of English speaking journalists in the world who do not come from [a Western] background, or there's not a big enough universe of them that we can hire in an organisation like this such that we can avoid the default position.

(personal interview, Kuala Lumpur, 05/06/2009).

Of course, with the 'global South' being a term that was used to cover extremely diverse regions across several continents, the picture across the South was far from homogenous. As a Doha-based manager remarked: 'There are some countries you can go to, Kenya, Venezuela, China, and get some fantastic journalists who've already worked in the international marketplace [...] Then there are other countries. If you want to recruit in Afghanistan it's a challenge to find someone who is at the level of storytelling' (personal interview, Doha, 14/05/2010). In AJE's Kuala Lumpur office, staff found that it was 'very difficult coming to Malaysia and saying right, let's bring in people with Malaysian experience or Southeast Asian experience. In most cases they simply are not there' (personal interview, Kuala Lumpur, 05/06/2009).[107]

Put differently, given the prioritisation of a particular kind of professionalism within AJE,[108] the 'differential distribution of practices' (Emirbayer & Johnson, 2008: 27) within the field was constituted in such a way that 'reporting back' in the sense of employing local journalists across the world – and across the South in particular – was constrained by precisely those structures that people joining AJE were

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[107] In his comparative analysis based on 1,800 interviews with journalists from six continents and different political and economic contexts, Hanitzsch (2011: 478) argues that difference within the journalistic field is expressed in 'professional milieus' that are unevenly distributed across the globe. His findings support the perception that there was a tendency amongst journalists in the particular national contexts of some developing countries to diverge from the dominant 'detached watchdog' model that 'represents the professional mainstream of news people in most parts of the western world' (2011: 491).

[108] Notwithstanding the implicit and near complete consensus within AJE about the choice to prioritise a certain kind of professionalism as well as the function this fulfilled in terms of 'being on a par' with other major networks, it is important to point out that this was not a 'natural' choice without alternatives, as discussed in the second chapter of this thesis (2.4).

determined to challenge. More specifically, there were several factors that constituted 'preconditions of choice' (Vaughan, 2008: 78) for those aiming to recruit local journalists to AJE – all of which were *contingent on the existing makeup of the field* of English-language international news and its (asymmetric) dispersal in terms of production across the globe. It is also important to note that, as with some of the other structural constraints, these preconditions of choice were a limiting, but *not determining* factor, as their influence was in turn contingent on the agential powers of the individual people who encountered them.

Firstly, the demands of the medium of television, not only for basic mastery but for fluency and enunciation of spoken language, inevitably meant that AJE as an English-language service depended to a substantial degree on English native speakers. In the words of a senior manager involved in the recruitment process, 'because we are an English language channel, we do have a huge number of journalists whose first language is English, so they may be British or American or Canadian or Australian or New Zealanders' (personal interview, Doha, 10/02/2008). Another interviewee went on to argue: 'If you were Reuters, because you are not going to straight to air, you don't need the same standard of written English. But we have got to have the highest standard of written English' (personal interview, Doha, 13/02/2008).[109]

For example, in the Middle East, AJE profited enormously from the wealth of professionalism and expertise that its parent channel AJA had built up over more than a decade. Even there, however, it was felt that, as a senior Doha-based journalist put it, 'there are not that many people out there who can write, broadcast and analyse the Middle East in English […]. There's a handful of them' (personal interview, Doha, 13/02/2008). Likewise, speaking from the London office, one news editor said that there was 'a very English bias in Europe, unsurprisingly, because we're an English-language channel' (personal interview, London, 20/12/2007). This is despite the fact that AJE's European office in the United Kingdom serves a immensely diverse region of which the UK is only one element. Particularly on the continent,

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[109] Richard Sambrook also remarks that news agencies 'may be exceptions' in that they 'have a long history of employing local staff, often reporting in their own languages' (2010: 49).

English is fairly prevalent as a second and third language, but only spoken as a first language by a minority of people, making it more challenging to find local journalists who were perceived to have the linguistic skills to match the English-language field of international news production.

A second factor was the lack of press freedom in many regions from which AJE sought to recruit. This posed a structural problem in two ways. Firstly, there is the issue of safety. Particularly when it comes to investigative stories, local journalists are inevitably more vulnerable. A few months before our interview, one journalist had been to Sri Lanka to make a film about the country's civil war. Before that, she had been to the Niger Delta, investigating corruption and violence ahead of the general elections that marked Nigeria's first transition from one elected government to another. Neither film, she explained, could have been made by local journalists without serious concerns for their safety: 'They could not have said what I was saying, so there is a role for an external reporter going in' (personal interview, London, 24/10/2007). As Sambrook (2010: 51) writes, 'local journalists will inevitable be directly affect by the issues they report in a way "foreign" correspondents are not'.

The second (related) way in which lack of press freedom structurally impinges on the field is that it inevitably limits the number of journalists in some regions who are socialised within the confrontational media culture characteristic of international broadcasting. In the words of a London-based programme editor: 'In a lot of countries there is no press freedom, so we're not going to get them to express and tell their stories this year. Maybe not next year. It's a long term game' (personal interview, London, 12/12/2007). This structural problem is exacerbated by the fact that broadcasting media can be more vulnerable to censorship and control than other media. Southeast Asia is a case in point. While critical and relatively independent media are comparatively accessible in large parts of the region, critical voices are more likely to be found within sections of the print and online media than in broadcasting. In *Media and Politics in Pacific Asia,* Duncan McCargo (2003: 6) writes: 'In times of crisis, broadcast media across the region have proved easier to muzzle'. As a presenter in AJE's Malaysian newsroom explained, 'the sort of media culture here is not necessarily confrontational. Not the kind of journalist that they

want in Al Jazeera, but there are people who *could* do it' (personal interview, Kuala Lumpur, 05/06/2009).

At the same time, *prioritising* professionalism over local experience was part of this medium- to long-term strategy. A Doha-based journalist explained that, although employing local journalists was one of AJE's main objectives, it was thought that this should not be pursued at the expense of a particular kind of professionalism. Often, this kind of professionalism was discursively linked with notions of 'good' journalism, as in the following example:

> No compromise, you need the best. If it means that if there is, god forbid, a civil war in Papua New Guinea, and we cannot for the moment find someone who is good enough for a correspondent in Papua New Guinea then we send in someone who is diverse and intelligent enough to go in and grasp the story well enough to tell it. You are not just going to pick up somebody from Papua New Guinea and say "it is your country, you know, go and report on it".

> (personal interview, Doha, 08/02/2008).

In other words, while actively seeking to employ as many local journalists as possible, *where it was perceived to collide with the emphasis of a particular professional habitus*, the latter was the dominant factor. A senior London-based manager reiterated the stance that 'we have only ever hired anybody for their experience, not for any other reason' (personal interview, London, 19/05/2008).

These factors were amplified by a third factor: The pressure of getting ready to launch simultaneously in four continents. In 2007 a London-based journalist observed that AJE was still 'too new to get young journalists with no experience, we had to start an international news channel, which means that everybody needs to pretty much know what they are doing' (personal interview, London, 12/12/2007). The then Director of Media Development for the AJ Network maintained that 'you couldn't put a brand new channel there today and get people from their regions and have a respectable channel, because there is a difference in experience in the markets' (personal interview, Doha, 24/05/2010). AJE's Managing Director at the time put forward a similar explanation:

As a viewer of Al Jazeera English, before it even occurred to me that I would one day work for it, I used to scratch my head and wonder why is this news channel so conventional, when it doesn't have any of the pressures on it that force other broadcasters, including public broadcasters like CBC and BBC? It mystified me, and I think part of it has to do with […] the turbulence of the launch.

(personal interview, Doha, 16/03/2009).

As Vaughan observed with regard to the adaptation of habitus in a different context, 'schedule […] concerns had a subtle but powerful effect' (2008: 75).[110] In the case of AJE, these concerns also meant that the initial team of a handful of Western journalists turned to people they knew from their previous work places, deepening the channel's dependency on existing patterns within the wider industry. In short, AJE's ambition to emulate and be on a par in terms of professional practices with leading Western networks presented a rare opportunity for a broadcaster based in and with an emphasis on the global South to actually have an impact in the field, but it inevitably also limited AJE's scope for difference in crucial ways. Ultimately this meant that it was arguably more likely for media professionals with 'Western' backgrounds to be employed than otherwise might have been the case given the remit of the channel.

7.2.2 The Disconnect between Primary and Professional Habitus

However, as Jenkins observed, people encounter a number of different fields in their lives. As they do, they may both appropriate the habitus specific to the field they enter and bring to the field a habitus acquired in other fields (Jenkins, 1992: 90). A Western journalist may have lived for extensive periods in non-Western countries, learning to distinguish nuances of local and regional knowledge and adapting his or her habitus to the cultural sensitivities of the location. As Sambrook (2010: 48) observes, 'by painting Western correspondents as underinformed and transitory it

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[110] As in the case of the project Vaughan had been analysing in her study, at AJE there was also added pressure due to the fact that the channel's launch had been repeatedly delayed over the course of 2006, for which the channel cited technical problems.

overlooks genuine journalistic or specialist expertise, talent to communicate and bridge cultures, and deep experience, which many of them possess'. Likewise, a journalist may well have acquired her or his primary habitus in a non-Western environment and a specific or professional habitus in the particular environment of a Western media organisation.[111]As Figenschou (2012: 364) observes with reference to her research on AJE, 'also those employees of non-western ethnic backgrounds that have worked with Anglo-American news channels emphasize the necessity of unlearning the practices and perspectives adopted from mainstream newsrooms'.

Quite simply, in an increasingly interrelated world it is increasingly common for there to be a geographical and cultural disconnect between people's early lives and their working lives – unsurprisingly this is particularly the case in the realm of international news. One result was that AJE managers were looking for Western journalists with *professional experience in the regions the channel wanted to focus on*. As a London-based manager explained:

> […] English journalists, directors and lower down, who have come from Sky, they come from ITN, they come from BBC, CNN, all kinds of organisations, […] have worked internationally within their own organisations before they joined AJ. So they were chosen as good leaders for AJ, but they in turn have bought on a host of other people from other organisations around the world.

(personal interview, London, 19/05/2008).

Another result was that many of the local journalists were originally hired from other international broadcasters. A London-based news editor explained that 'there are people who to us seem like old faces because they've come from our rivals, like Kamal Hyder in Pakistan' (personal interview, London, 20/12/2007). And both journalists and managers reflected on the fact that hiring local journalists often meant hiring them from other international broadcasters.

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[111] Here, primary habitus can be seen as an expression of intuitively understanding the rules of the game in the cultural and social setting of a person's early life, while specific habitus in the context of AJE is made up of journalistic practices shaped by working for one or several media organisations (for a theoretical discussion of the differentiation between primary and specific habitus, see also 3.3.1).

A lot of people we have hired – including people from the Middle East, from the Subcontinent and the other places – have actually come to us from international broadcasters. So they aren't all stepping out of local TV, most aren't. Most have worked for AP or Reuters or Al Jazeera or somebody.

Senior journalist (personal interview, Doha, 13/02/2008).

We have more than 40 ethnicities. That means a lot, but it does not mean that we brought people from 40 different countries, because many of them came from one country, from the UK […]. We have the UK way of thinking, the British journalism way of covering.

Senior manager (personal interview, Doha, 13/02/2008).

In *this* sense, the aim of 'reporting back' may well be(come) compatible with historically Western forms of specific habitus. As a Doha-based producer remarked: 'I question the whole notion that the style of reporting that has become dominant in global television is Western. […] By that logic […] every form of global media that we have is really Western at the end' (personal interview, Doha, 13/02/2008). From that perspective, reducing the Western dominance of the particular specific habitus of international TV news to its *historical* role was precisely what people working for AJE implicitly endeavoured to achieve. The vision of AJE, in other words, was not so much one of altering the kind of professional habitus practiced by Western broadcasters, but of *challenging their claim to this particular habitus* and *adjusting* it to encompass less geographically and geo-politically asymmetrical definitions of news values.

This shows that, when it came to the specific *professional* habitus, notwithstanding the manifold influences of diverse professional experience within various AJE newsrooms, journalists with diverse geo-cultural backgrounds and experiences tended to have in common a set of basic principles specific to the field of international English-language news. From the perspective of AJE's emphasis on editorial difference, this shared specific habitus came with both causal powers (of having an impact on the field) and liabilities (of potentially ending up with higher degrees of editorial similarity to other channels than originally envisaged). In the following I will address the implications of shared elements of a habitus derived from Western news broadcasters – implications that are *contingent* on the balance between habitus and reflexivity, as I will demonstrate in the third part of this chapter.

7.2.3 The Causal Powers and Liabilities of Inter-organisational Habitus

Links between the practices of different institutions can be difficult to conceptualise empirically (as I outlined in the methodology chapter), but can be analysed *on the level of individual journalists migrating between organisations* within a particular journalistic subfield. Here, Bourdieu's concept of habitus – which 'only exists in, through and because of the practices of actors' (Jenkins, 1992: 75) – offers a conceptual bridge between the social structures of inter-organisational journalistic practices and the daily routines of individual journalists at AJE. As Emirbayer and Johnson remark in the context or organisational practices, 'each member of an organization brings to it a habitus formed under specific past conditions' (2008: 4). For a new organisation starting out on a sizeable scale, such as AJE, the fact that initially virtually all staff had to come from other institutions meant that the professional habitus, including internalised interpretations of news values, could be expected to be influenced by the habitus specific to the rival organisations from which it had emerged.

This link between practices specific to the professional field and practices specific to the organisational field of AJE[112] was underscored by responses of journalists I interviewed for the purpose of this thesis. As a London-based presenter put it, 'journalists […] expect that the practices that they take from one place will transfer ultimately into their next job' (personal interview, London, 12/12/2007). In the words of a reporter working in programming in the London office: 'I regard myself as an individual entity, who gets hired for what I come with' (personal interview, London, 24/10/2007). Here, the specific habitus that 'came with' the individual journalists who joined AJE was not primarily seen as a risk of reproducing similarity by emulating the implicit rules of a set of organisations from which AJE wanted to differentiate itself. Rather, it was seen as an asset that allowed AJE to function in a way that created a level playing field.

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[112]A link that obviously does not presuppose uniform practices across the industry, but merely establishes a connection between the practices of organisations within the same field, reproduced through competition, shared standards and staff circulation across the field.

Consequently, despite what Pintak called the channel's 'self-conscious – sometimes excruciating – emphasis on being the non-Western voice' (Pintak, *Der Spiegel*, 16/11/2006) *not* being different from Western broadcasters in terms of practices and professionalism was generally regarded as an achievement. On the basis that AJE was not attempting to revolutionise the profession, but rather to alter *some* of the rules *from within* a given field, this insistence on similarity in terms of practice provided a common ground on the basis of which difference could became meaningful. According to Bourdieu, 'struggles [within fields] are always based on the fact that the most irreducible adversaries have in common that they accept a certain number of presuppositions that are constitutive of the very functioning of the field' (Bourdieu, 2005: 36). As managers at AJE realised from the beginning, entering the field 'on a par' in terms of journalistic practices was the precondition for editorial difference to have an impact within the field'.[113]

Accordingly, journalists working for AJE emphasised the ways in which they were applying the specific habitus they brought from other organisations. News editors said they would 'choose the stories that I want to do in the same way that I would choose stories if I was at Sky, if I was at the BBC, if I was at anywhere, [which is to] tell people things they didn't know (personal interview, London, 20/12/2007). Presenters explained that their interviewing styles were 'not dependent on the station at which I find myself' (personal interview, Kuala Lumpur, 05/06/2009). And a senior journalist asserted that had she been producing the programme for BBCW, 'I would have done the exact same thing' (personal interview, Doha, 11/02/2008). There was a general assumption that on some level, in the words of one presenter, 'if you're a journalist you're a journalist' (personal interview, London, 12/12/2007).

However, this strategy was not without challenges, given that the remit of AJE was based on difference, because it inevitably carried some risk of becoming similar to a

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[113] This is in part what distinguishes AJE from several of the other relatively novel news channels positioning themselves as a counter-balance to the 'BBC/CNN approach' (such as Russia Today, Chinese CCTV-9, Venezuelan Telesur or Iranian Press TV). As Painter noted in a Financial Times article, amongst these channels AJE is one of the few organizations that genuinely embraces the concept of impartiality as an ideal, a concept that is being rejected by others as a 'cover for western hegemonic power (Financial Times, 05/09/2008).'

greater degree than had initially been envisioned by inadvertently following, in the words of a senior AJE manager, 'conventional news paths' (personal interview, Doha, 10/02/2008). Accordingly, there was a perception amongst journalists that there was a relation between degrees of similarity to other channels and the habitus that journalists from these organisations brought with them. As one interviewee put it, 'people come with their own experiences and ways of doing things and ways of reporting the news' (personal interview, Doha, 08/02/2008).

A London-based presenter reflected on the homogenising force of habitus when he said that 'unfortunately a lot of people who are here have come from other organisations that do things in the stereotypical way' and commented that 'I don't believe after a year on air, that we are different enough' (personal interview, London, 20/12/2007). Reflecting the channel's first couple of years on air, a senior Doha-based manager argued that to a certain degree it was 'inevitable that this would have happened. Coming into the organisation, until you really get immersed in it, you are still bringing your past with you' (personal interview, Doha, 16/03/2009). Given the perceived prevalence of Western journalists at AJE, this liability of reproducing professional practices reminiscent of the dominance of Western broadcasters, was frequently discursively linked by journalists I interviewed with questions of culture rather than with the unequal dispersion of habitus across the professional field. As a Doha-based journalist noted:

> [Western journalists] have been covering news in their own cultures […] for years and years. Of course they are faced with challenges. When you come from, let's say Australia, New Zealand or Western Europe, where you've been working for twenty years, and you come to Doha to cover news with Al Jazeera English, you would have your own set of patterns that determine the way you think about reality.
>
> (personal interview, Doha, 11/02/2008).

A British journalist who had previously worked for AJA described initial clashes of habitus between journalists from different cultural backgrounds with regard to questions of terminology:

> In one of the first weeks […] the term "Israeli Defence Force" was used. I know immediately that that is a term that should not be used. We should just

say Israeli Army. […] Once you say Israeli Defence Force, you are using the language of one of the protagonists. And yet, in the Western media the term Israeli Defence Force is used many times. It is being used so much that many people regard it as normal. [It is] a term they will use, because it is a term they have heard quite often. […] Some people here, because they do not have such experience with the Middle East, might editorially use something like this for want of better knowledge. Not deliberately, innocently.

(personal interview, Doha, 14/02/2008).

Here, the link between habitus ('the term […] is used so much that people regard it as normal', 'it is a term they will use, because […] they heard it quite often') and the unconscious aspect of its reproduction ('for want of better knowledge', 'not deliberately') is made quite strongly. Specific habitus, being derived from previous work experience and modified in present working conditions, intrinsically links practices of one institution to those of other institutions. As a result, people will use the kind of terminology that 'they hear quite often' even where it conflicts with AJE's remit, albeit 'not deliberately'. Again, the novelty of the channel further increased this particular challenge. A journalist based in Kuala Lumpur partially attributed the structural problem to the fact that the unifying force of habitus was potentially more dominant in the environment of a sizeable, yet young, organisation that had yet to establish mechanisms for internally reinforcing its aims in a consistent and continual way:

In the absence of any continual reinforcement of the fact that we're trying to do this slightly differently, the people that we have on board – being white, middle-class, Western-educated people – would tend to default to their previous positions as employees of the BBC and CNN and various other English-language news organisations. And so the gloss, if you like, the angle, the interpretation, the choice of stories that we began to move towards was beginning to show increasingly that we'd fallen into this pattern of reflecting the cultural background of the people who were working here. And that was not necessarily in line with the kind of aims we had articulated at the start.

(personal interview, Kuala Lumpur, 05/06/2009).

This causal liability of specific professional habitus – a habitus which had been courted as an entry ticket to a highly specialised field – did not escape AJE's management ranks. As became apparent in the interviews I conducted, there was an awareness that there could be no quick solution to the inequalities inherent to the wider field. And that one way to address (and simultaneously to reduce the

dependency on) these asymmetric structures in the long term would be to reduce the near complete dependency on already fully trained broadcasting journalists by focussing on training within AJE, thereby considerably widening the pool of people they could recruit from. For example, a senior journalist based in Kuala Lumpur recalled that when Tony Burman joined as Managing Director in 2008 and first visited the Malaysian office, 'one of the issues that came up was the absence of local people in this office. It is a problem. And Tony was very aware of this and very committed to the idea of training' (personal Interview, Kuala Lumpur, 05/06/2009).

Another effort of AJE's management was the creation of a working group[114] assembled from a cross-section of staff that focussed on staff development and suggested, as one possible way forward, creating a network-wide structure where 'each center has a dedicated team for Training and Development to address the needs of the individual *and the region concerned*' (Al Jazeera Network, 2009, Working Group Nr. 5: 5, emphasis added). With this suggestion they recognised the benefits of region-specific training for the remit of AJE. During the time of the fieldwork for this study, however, the focus remained on training programmes in Doha for existing staff. In short, the tasks – first of the launch, then of training existing staff – still at that stage consumed a lot of the attention of those managing and guiding the organisation. As a senior Doha-based manager had pointed out earlier, 'we have enough burden, we have enough journalists to train' (personal Interview, Doha, 13/02/2008). Another senior manager emphasised the need to train existing staff, 'because so many people were in positions they had never been in before' (personal Interview, Doha, 16/03/2009). Setting aside resources to systematically and *proactively* train aspiring journalists from the developing world who had not yet had the opportunity to work with international broadcasters would have helped to address

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[114] This group was one of several groups that were part of the so-called Al Jazeera Renewal Project (Al Jazeera Network, 2009)*,* designed to identify structural problems and draw on a cross-section of staff to come up with potential solutions. The project was initially intended to be 'a permanent feature of life at this channel'. After Burman left in 2010 the project was not formally continued, even though, in a conversation conducted five months before replacing Burman as Managing Director, the then Director of Media Development for the AJN told me the Renewal Project had helped to focus discussions and would continue 'to push us forward' (personal interview, Doha, 24/05/2010).

the causes of some of the structural inequalities within the field, but was not part of the measures felt to require instant attention.

7.3   Examples of Agency: Journalists' Motivations for Joining AJE

However, the unifying force of habitus is not the only factor impacting on AJE's editorial line. And in and of itself, it would not allow to explain the degrees of difference I did identify between AJE's and BBCW's news content (see Chapter 6). As Sakr (2007: 126) reports from a private conversation with a senior executive in 2005, one of the reasons AJE attracted high-profile journalists from across the field was that 'many Europeans had grown bored and disillusioned in their former working environments and were eager for a more innovative news agenda'. Surely, striving to be different – deliberately and reflexively – will have some kind of impact. The motivations of people who actively chose to join AJE, as I will argue, are a factor that should not be underestimated. After all, the specific habitus of an organisation, other than for example primary habitus, is acquired in a community of one's choosing – even if, as with any career choice, this choice is contingent on a number of external factors. It is this element of (limited) choice that makes some kinds of collective identities – and this I would argue includes those based on the specialised settings of international broadcasting news – 'reflexive in the sense that members of the new communities are typically quite aware of the symbols central to the creation of the new identities (Lash, 1993: 205)'. Or as Dickinson (2009: 522-523) argues, journalists' practices are 'co-produced' by organisational and professional structures on the one hand and journalistic agency on the other.

In addition, the balancing act between the twin ambitions of achieving similarity in terms of journalistic standards and difference in terms of content necessitated a constant negotiation of how to be different and how to be similar that promoted a high level of conscious deliberation and reflexivity for everybody involved – a circumstance reflected in many of the interviews. In other words, the measure of instability that was an inevitable side effect of this balancing act carried the causal power – and by that I mean the potential, *not* a predictable effect – to promote

editorial difference. In a new environment, particular one that had not yet established all of its ground rules, 'journalists may potentially come to understand how their social experiences and positions unconsciously shape their work, and thus consciously compensate for such influences' (Benson, 2006: 195). This awareness of the force of habit in turn promoted reflexivity that led people to question their habitus. A senior Doha-based journalist explained:

> I think we all definitely changed our views of how the world looks, because the world looks different from the Middle East than it does from the West. And remember most of the managers here and journalists are from the West. And our views changed, you know. […] Sitting here the Israel-Palestine conflict looks different, the role of the US looks different, the power games that go on, you know, poverty in Africa, looks different. You question your own assumptions.
>
> (personal Interview, Doha, 13/02/2008).

Furthermore, many felt that it was precisely the *centrality* of the subject of habitus that meant that journalists more *actively* tapped into the local expertise of their colleagues. The two examples below are drawn from interviews with a Doha-based presenter and a London-based reporter respectively:

> They learn from each other. […] Here you have Arabs, you have the British, you have Americans, you have Chinese, you have people from Latin America, and [when there is] a Hugo Chavez story, we go to our Latin American experts and say okay, what does this mean? So they steer each other in the right direction.
>
> (personal interview, Doha, 13/02/2008).

> We have a wide spread of nationalities, I think that's quite refreshing, because it tempers the way you write something. Sometimes I will pipe up to someone across the room, "if I said x or y, would you understand it?" And he'll say "no, that's a British colloquialism, it's not a good idea". So that helps.
>
> (personal interview, London, 01/04/2009).

This awareness was heightened by the fact that virtually everybody was starting out in a new role. As Elder-Vass (2007: 342) points out, 'when we adopt a new role, we may have to think carefully about *how* to perform it, and this may be guided not only by the dispositions arising from our previous social positions, but also by consciously

absorbed new information' (emphasis in original). In the following I will discuss journalists' motivations for joining AJE as specific accounts of agency with reference to different modes of reflexivity as identified by Archer.[115]

7.3.1 Motivations for Joining – Accounts of Agency

As the content analysis in Chapter 6 demonstrated, despite efforts to emulate international journalistic practices and to be on par with BBCW and CNNI, there were important editorial differences between AJE and BBCW. These differences went beyond a mere geographical approach, as illustrated by the example of the coverage of the cyclone in Myanmar and the earthquake in China.[116] And while journalistic standards and practices do potentially have a levelling effect, it would be precipitate, not to mention determinist, to presume that they are the only factors involved and on their own have the power to enforce conformity. As Archer (2003: 7) points out, 'influences of constraints and enablements will only be tendential because of human reflexive abilities to withstand them and strategically to circumvent them'. In other words, human projects are not reducible to the objective circumstances that enable or constrain them. In order to understand AJE and the editorial difference described in Chapter 6, it is crucial to take into account other organisational factors.

One of these factors was the way in which journalists joining the channel saw the launch of AJE as a structural enablement of reflexive personal projects. In fact, in the interviews I conducted, greater scope for individual agency was itself one of the reasons most frequently given for joining the channel. In other words, they joined because they wanted to 'help shape a new global news channel' (News editor, personal interview, London, 20/12/2007), 'put my mark on something from the start' (Member of the creative division, personal interview, Doha, 12/02/2008) or 'be

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[115] For a discussion of the ontological compatibility of Bourdieu's and Archer's theoretical concepts, see Chapter 3.5.

[116] Both disasters were part of the coverage of BBC World and AJE on 15th May 2008 and were discussed as part of the content analysis in Chapter 6.2.3.

involved in how the editorial direction would be shaped even in a small way' (Correspondent, personal interview, London, 01/04/2009). Scope for individual agency therefore played an important part in decision-making at AJE from the start. In the following I will discuss journalists' motivations for joining AJE as examples of reflexivity that help to understand relative difference in AJE's editorial output.

Archer distinguishes between four modes of agency (Archer, 2007: 93). These modes are not mutually exclusive. In contradistinction, 'the four modes overlap' and individuals tend to practice all of these modes to varying degrees at different times. However, within Archer's sample of interviewees, 'the vast majority (93 per cent) showed an inclination towards one mode in particular' (Archer, 2007: 94). Two of these modes – 'communicative reflexives' and 'fractured reflexives' – do not fit very closely the data from the present study. They are both described as modes of reflexivity that result in people refraining from purposeful causes of action, which does not resonate with the context of having left a previous job to join a newly founded organisation. Elements of the two other modes of reflexivity identified by Archer were more clearly present in the interview data and suggested strategic as well as (sometimes at the same time) reflexively idealistic motivations for deciding to join the organisation (for a delineation of Archer's modes of reflexivity, see also Chapter 3.4.2).

7.3.2 Taking 'Reporting Back' Seriously

The first mode of reflexivity, 'meta-reflexivity', as the term suggests, 'entails reflecting upon one's own acts of reflexivity' (Archer, 2007: 95). The main characteristic of meta reflexives is 'the importance they attach to living up to an ideal' (Archer, 2007: 230). Archer uses the term largely to describe individuals who are prone not only to change jobs within a professional field in search of new challenges, but to change jobs between professional fields (Archer, 2007: 229). These lateral changes are often fuelled by 'the impossibility of realizing their value-commitment in a given structural context' (Archer, 2007: 305). In short, they are looking for a vocation, not 'just' a job. Despite the fact that Archer uses the term to

describe changes between different professional fields, it does in many ways fit essential motivational aspects described by journalists joining AJE. One aspect was that there often was a strong belief in AJE's vision of representing underrepresented voices and providing a different perspective on world news. A journalist based in Kuala Lumpur described himself as being 'one of those who believe that the CNN, BBC and the broader world of English-language news had become so formulaic and so anodyne and so one-sided that the promise of a fresh perspective was very appealing' (personal interview, Kuala Lumpur, 05/06/2009). A London-based programme editor said that peoples' reasons for joining AJE were at times 'horrendously idealistic':

> Many people who joined at the same time as I did and still do join are very idealistically driven in terms of what AJE represents politically, which is this other voice, a different point of view. And then we sort of stuck in to guide it and to make sure that it happened.

(personal interview, London, 12/12/2007).

More specifically, the notion of 'reporting back' was central to many people's motivations for joining AJE. A senior promotion producer said that he had been motivated to join by AJE, because he shared the organisation's core concerns: 'What excited me was […] very much the […] democratisation of the media, giving voice to the voiceless and reverse flow from South to North. It is an important thing to me' (personal interview, Doha 12/02/2008). In a similar vein, a Doha-based field producer said 'I genuinely believe in what we're doing, as a journalist and as an Arab. I think that it's very important to diversify the mediascape' (personal interview, Doha, 13/02/2008). As a result, many reflexively perceived AJ's mission as an enablement of personal projects that existed long before AJE was conceived. As a Doha-based programmes editor described his transition from working for various Western-based media organisations to joining AJA before moving to the English-language channel:

> I joined because I felt it was more *in tune* with my experience and my mindset at the time. I had been very disillusioned by Western media over the years. Particularly during the difficult days in Beirut: I was in Beirut when there were hostages, civil war, car bombs, killings, kidnapping. And I had a lot of experiences when I was working with Western media where I became sick and disillusioned by what I saw was their distorted view of Lebanon.

That stayed with me many years and so I was very happy to join AJA. Having worked for the Western media and having lived in the Middle East […], I guess when I joined AJA I was in the kind of mindset of Al Jazeera. I do believe it is a kind of mindset. […] It is the sort of missionary mindset of wanting to present things in a different way.

(personal interview, Doha, 14/02/2008).

Here, the point is made very clearly that joining AJ was seen as something that was aligned with *previous* perceptions. As Archer (2003: 6) points out, 'reflexive agents […] may *anticipate* the ease with which [some] projects could be advanced, and the benefits they would accrue, and thus be encouraged to adopt them' (emphasis added). Similarly, a senior journalist working in programming in the London office answered my question about what it was like to adjust to the organisational environment and remit of AJE: 'Like a breath of fresh air really, very easily, it was like coming home' (personal interview, London, 12/12/2007). For some, then, the motivation for joining was based on anticipation of the ways in which AJE's remit would be *in tune* with their own convictions and projects in life.

7.3.3 Embracing a Challenge

The second or 'autonomous' mode of reflexivity is present in practitioners who 'display confidence in relying upon their own mental resources', prone to pursuing actions that are 'often innovative' and 'risky' (Archer, 2007: 95). This mode of reflexivity emerged from many of the conversations and interviews and it fitted decisions to join a channel that declared its intention to 'challenge established perceptions'[117] in its corporate profile.[118] As a London-based presenter said, 'some people said it was a bit of a gamble, [but] I didn't think it was a gamble' (personal interview, London, 12/12/2007). The preparedness to take a risk was also evident in that these decisions frequently entailed leaving another job and in many cases

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[117] *Corporate Profile* on AJE website, updated 04/09/2008.

[118] It is important to remember that at the time AJE was a new entrant with a novel approach that had yet to prove itself in an international environment that in parts thought it to be rather radical (with diverging, at times strong opinions whether that was a thing to be welcomed or not).

moving to a different continent. A Doha-based programmes producer recalled her decision as follows:

> I had to be part of it. I left the BBC to come here, which is not peanuts, it's not something you do on a daily basis, but I did it. I was working in some pretty good current affairs programmes then and I sort of came here without a job description. The person who hired me is in London and she said we'll give you the title of producer […] one day you're going to be stuffing envelopes and sending back DVDs to freelancers, the other day you'll be out in the field with a cameraman and you're just going to have to wing it. And I said okay and that's what I did.
>
> (personal interview, Doha, 13/02/2008).

This mode of reflexivity was also coupled with a strategic approach to career planning (Archer, 2007: 293), where people took into consideration issues of pay or promotion. In the specific case of AJE, the attractive salaries and benefits that were offered in order to draw high-profile journalists to Doha, which in many cases included uprooting their families and moving with them to another continent, undoubtedly played a role amongst other factors. Likewise, the newness of the channel offered certain career opportunities, and so the circumstance that a job 'came along kind of at the right time' (personal interview, Kuala Lumpur, 05/06/2009)' or that 'you don't get that opportunity more than once perhaps in a career' (personal interview, Doha, 14/02/2008) was another factor for some.

However, according to Archer (2007: 290), what is most important to autonomous subjects is '*intrinsic satisfaction*'. This desire was expressed by interviewees who felt that 'you do get a bit sick of being spoon-fed stories, of cutting endless agency pictures to some lines that have come out on wires. And you want to go and make some *proper* news and cover some *proper* issues, and that's the motivation for a large number of staff here' (personal interview, Doha, 07/02/2008). In a similar vein, a presenter based in Kuala Lumpur described how the fact that some people 'made a very convincing argument about how Al Jazeera English would go down to the brass tacks of journalism' (personal interview, Kuala Lumpur, 05/06/2009) contributed to her decision to join the channel. Following this description, one important factor in her decision was the anticipation that the job would offer the intrinsic satisfaction of an engaging task and a potential for professional expression (Archer, 2007: 291).

According to Archer's definition of the autonomous mode of reflexivity, this reflexive striving to be good at the job was related to a continuous search for new challenges and the intention to avoid 'finding themselves in a cul-de-sac named boredom' (Archer, 2007: 290-1). Avoiding repetitive work patterns clearly was part of the motivation for joining for many journalists to whom AJE appealed:

> You spend eleven years at ABC News or however many years in Canada and you come to this place, it's like you're in a new relationship.
>
> (personal interview, Doha, 15/03/2009).

> I'm not here by default. I think I have a low boredom threshold, like most journalists. And I'd been around sort of a long time. And this was supposedly the pariah of international broadcasting. […] The fact is, nobody had seen it in the West.
>
> (personal interview, London, 20/12/2009).

To summarise, a relatively high degree of autonomy was what attracted many journalists to AJE. At a time of shrinking budgets AJE had the financial freedom to launch a large-scale operation focussing precisely on the kind of geographical, political and social areas that more heteronomous media found increasingly hard to sustain. A London-based senior manager expressed this niche as follows:

> Those people who joined us were so excited at joining a new challenge […] AJ was a completely open page. And they had come from – no disrespect – BBC, Sky, and they were very set in their ways in some of those organisations and they wanted the freedom to join an organisation that said: 'Yes, go cover that, go cover this, we cover everything around the world, we don't have restraints, we are lucky, because the funding is there and we are able to spend the money on the journalism.
>
> (personal interview, London, 19/05/2008).

In the following chapter I shall therefore look at the constitution of the field in relation to another of Bourdieu's core concepts – capital. There, I will discuss the impact that AJE's relative autonomy has on the kind of content it literally can afford from a financial and professional perspective.

7.4 Conclusion – Institutional Spaces for Reporting Back

As outlined in this chapter, AJE's scope for employing difference – as an organisational expression of AJE's aim of being the 'voice of the South' and providing a 'voice for the voiceless' – cannot be understood fully without relating it to the *structural* and *agential* forces within the journalistic (sub)field within which the channel was set up to compete. What AJE's management and editorial staff experienced was that being a novel channel coming 'without baggage', as a Doha-based presenter put it (personal interview, Doha, 13/02/2008), did not mean that the 'baggage' of the field was not structurally impinging on the organisation. In the words of Emirbayer and Johnson (2008: 5), 'organizations must always be situated within the matrices of relations, the relational contexts, within which they are constituted […] and with which they are ever dialogically engaged'.

In particular, as described in the first part of this chapter, decision-makers at AJE found that, from a recruiting perspective, aims of rebalancing the information flow were complicated by imbalances within the wider field. These 'preconditions of choice' (Vaughan, 2008: 78), even if mitigated by conscious efforts that led AJE to be arguably one of the most diverse news channels in the world, were in part reflected in the composition of AJE's staff profile. In the second part of this Chapter I therefore explored the degrees to which similarity in terms of journalistic practice is a prerequisite for changing the 'rules of the game' or specific habitus, while it is also endowed with a liability to replicate cognitive conventions that can be an obstacle to going beyond routine.

As described in this chapter, preconditions for both journalistic routines (habitus) and reflexivity (agency) co-exist in a field of tension that in turn was influenced by the balance of AJE's twin strategy of seeking a particular kind of professional habitus and in-depth local knowledge from areas typically underrepresented in global news. This tension can be seen as an organisational expression of the dialectic of difference and similarity that lies at the heart of what constitutes AJE – a constant negotiation of being similar enough to compare with and different enough to truly challenge 'existing paradigms guiding international news broadcasters' (El-Nawawy & Powers, 2008). Therefore, in the third part of this Chapter I discussed how journalists at AJE

reflexively worked with the constraints and enablements they encountered. Here, the nature of the various motivations of journalists poached from Western networks to work for the channel – be they strategic, idealistic or a combination of the two – are evidence of the intensely reflexive trajectories that brought people into this particular organisational environment in the first place.

This shows that questions of 'reporting back' become intrinsically linked to relations of power within fields. Other than the macro theory of political economy, Bourdieu's field theory (adapted to be compatible with a critical realist understanding of the relative significance of agency) provides a theoretical framework that allows an appreciation of these structures *on the level of experiences and practices of individual journalists*. What is important about this conceptual step is that it highlights the central dilemma of an organisation aiming to address inequalities and asymmetries within a given field: the fact that in order to have an *impact* on the field a certain degree of similarity is necessary (if the aim is, short of revolutionising the field, to change its composition from within), while in order to *alter* some of the rules within the field, this very similarity potentially becomes a liability.

What this chapter also demonstrated is that the historically Western kind of professionalism that AJE employs is, on its own, not inseparably entwined with the reproduction of unequal news flows through journalistic routines, but proves flexible enough to incorporate at least *some* alternative interpretations of newsworthiness in international news. However, it also showed that the structure of the field is such that only long-term strategies can help to address historically asymmetric patterns of news. Hiring as many local journalists with experience in international news as possible, while guaranteeing *some* immediate impact, was largely a step based on getting the most out of existing conditions. Long-term strategies of training journalists in the South irrespective of their previous exposure to English-language mainstream news environments (or for that matter non-English native speakers in neglected areas of the North) would address some of the causes of the unequal distribution of habitus in a way that would be in tune with AJE's aims to 'report back' and could benefit the channel and the entire field in the long term.

To summarise, this chapter has thrown into relief the degree to which the directionality of media flows is bound up with matters of training, professional practices and ultimately the presence of organisations that have the will and financial ability to provide individual journalists with an institutional space for reflexively realising difference. It demonstrated how a desire to change some of the 'rules of the game' that is international news broadcasting was present well before AJE was conceived. And that therefore the launch of AJE was perceived as an *enablement of pre-existing personal projects* by many of its first generation of staff. Both habitus and agency are endowed with causal powers – importantly their balance, and therefore the question of whether they are being applied to 'report back' or to reproduce existing inequalities inherent in the wider field, hinges on the presence of organisational spaces that allow for a relatively high degree of experimentation and journalistic autonomy. In turn, the ability to sustain institutional spaces that allow for editorial difference is inadvertently linked to questions of capital. More precisely, it is linked to the relation between what Bourdieu termed *cultural* and *economic capital* respectively. Consequently, in the next chapter, I will explore AJE's specific position within the field through the dynamic of different kinds of capital and the potential impact of this dynamic on AJE's ability to provide and sustain editorial difference.

Chapter 8 The Cost of Difference: AJE's Position in the Field and the Chance to Prioritise Cultural Capital

My feeling is that here we have a perfect opportunity to build a market of our own. […] There was nothing to stop us going to try and create an entirely new paradigm.

Senior AJE journalist (personal interview, Kuala Lumpur, 05/06/2009).

I don't even know our reach here in the UK, which is strange for me, because at ITN and ITV of course it was ratings, ratings, ratings.

Senior AJE journalist (personal interview, London, 12/12/2007).

My focus would be on the content, getting the content right and then the audience hopefully comes.

Programmes producer (personal interview, Doha, 14/02/2008).

8.1 Introduction – Journalistic Implications of Funding Journalism

News has widely been accepted as difficult to monetise (Utley, 1997). This is even more the case with foreign news focussing on countries in the developing world, since sending teams abroad is expensive and many have found there to be a 'near-universal belief among those working in the industry that international programmes get lower ratings than domestic ones' (Harding, 2009: 6). As a consequence this kind of news is particularly vulnerable where commercial principles outstrip journalistic considerations, a growing tendency in a field where competition has increased dramatically in the past years and decades. Public service broadcasting finds itself under mounting pressures to redefine its reason d'être in a multi-channel and multi-platform environment. Commercial broadcasters are reducing the number of foreign bureaus and are arguably drifting further to the heteronomous pole of the journalistic field. State broadcasters like AJE depend more than ever on the generosity of their benefactors, with all the uncertainty that encompasses for the long-term future. In this environment, many are wondering on the basis of which business models journalism (and not least the particularly vulnerable subfield of international news) can secure its financial basis going forward. This is a pressing question that practitioners and academics have been asking for many years without coming up with obvious answers.

At the outset of this chapter I therefore want to be unambiguously clear that this thesis is not about attempting to find solutions to this question. It is not an economic analysis, it does not suggest alternative business models, nor does it aim to pick and choose between existing ones. If anything, the (in many ways unusual) example of AJE helps to highlight two matters related to the debate, namely 1) that journalistic practices are affected by whatever business model underpins their financial survival and 2) that, in addition, journalistic practices are affected by the forces of the wider professional field, which in turn are driven by the dominant form of field-specific capital in ways that go beyond the specific model of the individual organisation. These factors may not be the only or even the main ones for those who are in a position to contribute to decisions on future steps for funding journalism – nor, in my opinion, should they be – but it is important to explicitly acknowledge their impact on the nature of international news and to take their effects seriously. In this vein,

this chapter is an exploration of the *journalistic* implications of the way the AJE is being funded.

In the first part of this chapter, I will outline some of the particularities of AJE's position in the field. This includes the comparatively marginal role of commercial imperatives as well as the lack of the availability of ratings. This absence sharply distinguishes the channel from any comparable broadcaster within a field where ratings play a role even within the most autonomous of organisations. Not having ratings as a yardstick by which to judge and adjust content on a daily basis therefore immediately distinguishes the channel's evolving journalistic culture from that of its competitors.

In the second part of this chapter, I will look into the ways in which this position interacts with elements of both habitus and agency within the organisational environment of AJE. Again, this will highlight some of the roots of the 'structural contradictions' of AJE Figenschou (2012:354) identified in her research. Following the empirical data emerging from the research interviews, I will argue that, on the one hand, there was a sense amongst journalists that in order to compete they needed to be similar enough to compare. As a result, practices reminiscent of business models that depend on ratings continued to be effective even within an organisation that did not provide, as part of its journalistic practice, the data necessary for measuring success by ratings. Here, causal mechanisms inherent in the habitus of the professional field effectively countered in part the causal mechanisms inherent in the organisational field. In this context I shall give examples of how the role of commercial thinking at AJE – encouraged by some and eschewed by others – was subject to ongoing developments and change within the relatively young organisational culture of the channel.

On the other hand, there was a contrasting influence to habitus reminiscent of more ratings-oriented environments. As I will argue, the early years of AJE in particular served as a platform for journalistic agency, in that the channel's position offered a space for experimentation where journalists dissatisfied with the limitations of the field could try and put their desire for change into action. The formative years of AJE

were characterised by a reflexive awareness on the part of many journalists that at times the only things standing between them and journalistic innovation were shared assumptions cultivated in other corners of the industry. This awareness on the part of many AJE journalists did not in itself determine which direction the channel should take in terms of content (in this regard perhaps causing more chaos than consent), but it certainly created debate and high levels of journalistic autonomy within a weakly autonomous field. In this context I will discuss how the way that AJE is funded created an opportunity to prioritise cultural over economic capital, journalism over commercial considerations. In short, being able to, for example, put people on the ground in as many 'under-reported' places as possible without having to follow ratings-oriented judgements *in the short term*, gives the channel a competitive edge journalistically.

Lastly, the fact that AJE's economic capital is not being expressed in the conventional currencies of the field – in the case of broadcasting most commonly ratings and audience shares – makes it harder for AJE to have an impact on the field, because other broadcasters dependent on ratings have no means of 'assessing' AJE's output vis-à-vis the market. In other words, managers at more ratings-oriented channels may, for example, like what they see on AJE, but still doubt that this kind of content would work in the contexts of their respective business models. As BBCW producer Richard Lawson cautions, 'Al Jazeera English […] is in a position to be able to provide a fundamentally international product. […] All the same, it will be interesting to see how Al Jazeera English's editorial agenda develops once it has a better sense of who its real audience is' (Lawson, 2011: 56). Therefore, without indicators such as ratings and a 'sense of who the real audience is', economic capital (invested in purportedly substantial amounts by AJE in order to, for example, create permanent journalistic presences in the field) may not translate readily into the kind of symbolic power that the channel might otherwise wield.

What does translate into symbolic power, however, is whatever cultural capital AJE can cultivate in the absence of market pressure. For a channel aiming to 'reverse current dominant news flows' this is particularly relevant, because in order to defy conventional wisdom and take creative risks the organisation requires financial staying power that is not reliant on short- or medium-term financial imperatives. And

while AJE's unprecedentedly autonomous position may complicate its ability to influence other organisations, over time its presence may help, however slightly, to pull other international broadcasters closer to the autonomous pole of the field. In the final part of this chapter, therefore, I shall look at the way in which the channel's potential impact on the industry has been perceived both within the organisation and by outside observers.

8.2   AJE's Position Within the Professional Field

The issue of funding had immediate consequences for AJE's very ability to serve as a journalistic counterweight to what it calls 'conventional news flows from the North to the South' (AJE Website, *Corporate Profile*, 04/09/2008). In the realm of international news and current affairs money can translate into access in that it allows a journalistic presence to be established in regions where other networks only fly in journalists when a crisis has reached the status of breaking news. Explicit acknowledgement of this evident link was fairly common amongst journalists at AJE, who explained that 'the attention we give to stories [that] you don't see [elsewhere] unless you are regionally based, is a function of our design as well as money' (personal interview, Doha, 13/02/2008). The public perception, reiterated by fellow journalists and academics, that the channel's budget was 'healthy' (Sabbagh, 04/06/2005), 'purportedly substantial' (Guider, 07/10/2005) or even 'what amounts to […] unlimited' (*Daily Variety*, 16/08/2005) created immense pressures to deliver, or at least to get close to an idealistic vision of what journalism should be like in a world without commercial imperatives. As Stroehlein (20/11/2007) reported, AJE staff 'realize this opportunity also saddles them with a great responsibility: If they cannot get television news right with this amount of money and such top staff, then perhaps no one can'.

As I will argue, this focus on the (purported) size of AJE's funding[119] – while an absolutely vital aspect – led some to become distracted from another crucial factor

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[119] AJE's budget was the subject of much speculation (Lawson, 2011: 19-23). In the run-up to the launch of the English-language service and since, and in line with my fieldwork experiences (see Chapter 4.4.2), AJE's budget was 'a closely guarded

regarding the relation between funding and journalism at AJE. Its relatively autonomous position within the field means that the channel could afford to spend whatever budget the organisation does have at its disposal in a way that is much closer to a purely *journalistic* understanding of organisational priorities. From a journalistic viewpoint, this freedom from commercial considerations means there are greater chances of getting the green light for journalistically worthy stories, irrespective of concerns for market share and ratings. In other words, what sets AJE apart as an organisation within the industry is that funding – not just in terms of the size of the budget, but crucially in the *way* it is provided – eradicates any immediate pressures to conform to established industry wisdom.

8.2.1   Relative Autonomy in a Weakly Autonomous Field

Given that AJE derives its funding virtually entirely from the state of Qatar,[120] in effect making it a state broadcaster, there are two main points to be made about the way that this business model potentially impacts on the kind of journalism that the channel can sustain. What comes to mind immediately is that direct state sponsorship without an accompanying regulatory framework comes with the inherent risk of state censorship, since there is no structural mechanism in place to help ensure that

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secret' (Macleod et al., 27/06/2005), which the channel consistently 'declined to disclose' to the international media (Guider, 07/10/2005; Sabbagh, 26/08/2008.) Some estimates of numbers did nonetheless emerge – it has been estimated that the set-up cost between 2006 and 2009 was approximately £670 million (Henery, 2010: 17; Lawson, 2011: 20). The *Morning Herald* referred to a suggestion in the *New York Times* of 'a budget of more than $US1 billion' (Coultan, 01/04/2006), a number reiterated in El-Nawawy and Powers's study of AJE's potential for mediating conflict (2008: 33) and said to be supplemented by an annual grant of approximately $100 million (Powers, 2012: 8) – but these vary significantly and given the lack of transparency in terms of state-funded projects in Qatar in general and AJN specifically, there is no way of confirming them independently.

[120] At the time of writing, the channel is estimated to generate about 15-20% of its budget through revenues, according to Al Jazeera sources (see also Figenschou, forthcoming: 39).

financial and editorial matters are always dealt with separately.[121] This *risk* exists independently of whether or not there has so far been any form of censorship (see also Chapter 5.2.2). In critical realist terms, this is a *liability* that may or may not become effective in what Bhaskar (1975: 13) calls the *'domain of actual'*, and hence may or may not lead to actual events. What makes the question of whether or not there have been cases of governmental influence on editorial matters difficult to answer with any element of certainty is of course that, even if such censorship does occur, it would not necessarily become part of the *'domain of empirical'* (1975: 13), being very difficult for outsiders to observe, let alone to prove. Conversely, it is possibly even more difficult to conclusively prove the absence of state influence on editorial matters. As a result, precisely because the structural *liability* inherent in AJE's funding is part of reality and therefore poses a *persistent* structural risk, academics and journalists have highlighted the issue time and again (Lawson, 2011:21; Figenschou, 2012: 368).

Secondly – and this aspect is much less fully explored in the context of AJE – what this funding *enables* is an opportunity to place journalistic principles before commercial considerations. This is possible to a degree that would be very difficult for other broadcasters to afford, including public service broadcasters who depend on being able to justify public funding in ways that AJE does not (Lawson, 2011: 42). It is this second aspect that I intend to focus on in the following[122] in order to look at the unique position that AJE occupies within the journalistic field as a direct result of *the way* it is being funded, as well as of the kind of journalism this opportunity (potentially and actually) enables.

In doing so, Bourdieu's concept of the journalistic field offers a useful way of understanding some of the limitations and opportunities that AJE's particular position presents in relation to other broadcasters. As discussed in Chapter 3,

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[121] As Duval reminds us, 'the flipside of independence with respect to political forces is almost always dependence on economic forces' (Duval, 2005: 136) and vice versa. In the case of AJE, independence from commercial pressures is a direct result of the funding it receives from the Emir of Qatar. For a debate on the channel's dependence on the state see also Chapter 5.

[122] Without in any way wanting to diminish the *ongoing importance* of scrutinizing AJE's editorial independence from the state.

according to Bourdieu the journalistic field oscillates between a heteronomous pole that marks the field's associations with other fields, notably the economic field, and an autonomous pole that indicates the journalistic rules and standards intrinsic to the field. The position of any media organisation within that field can be described in relation to 'two forms of power' – autonomous 'cultural capital' (indicated for example by attachments to journalistic traditions, levels of training of journalists, geographic locations of offices) and heteronomous 'economic capital' (expressed in the case of broadcasting in ratings and audience shares) (Benson, 2006: 190). Bourdieu saw a real danger in what he observed to be an increasing dominance of economic capital over cultural capital in journalism – a trend towards commercialisation pulling media organisations ever closer to the heteronomous pole of the field and even threatening the autonomy of related cultural fields, such as literature, politics and arts. What is particularly relevant in the context of this study is that AJE's relative autonomy from the economic field positions it closer to the autonomous pole of the journalistic field than any of the news organisations it aims to challenge.

8.2.2 News Without Ratings

One of the most striking manifestations of AJE's position in the field – and one of the most tangible differences between AJE and its competitors in organisational terms – is that there are no audience ratings as a means of gauging the channel's success.[123] In his televised lecture, 'On Television', Bourdieu once emphasised that '*even in the most independent sectors of journalism*, ratings have become the journalist's Last Judgement' (Bourdieu, 1998b: 27, emphasis added). AJE is a rare

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[123] All editorial staff I interviewed assured me that they had not seen any ratings for the programmes they produced. The media relations office in Doha recently maintained that audience 'research has been done and is still being done for current and future channels' (written answer to information request by author, May 2013), but, if there were ratings, these were certainly not part of day-to-day-workflows of editors and mid-level management (with direct and indirect consequences for editorial staff) as common as at other networks.

exception to this regularity of the field.[124] However, interviews with AJE management consistently suggested that this exception did not come about because an absence of ratings was actively encouraged as a kind of experiment in autonomous journalism. A senior Doha-based manager explained that audience ratings would be desirable but had not been introduced, 'because [audiences] are scattered in so many places in the world, it would cost us more than we're spending on programming' (personal interview, Doha, 16/03/2009). AJE managers frequently emphasised that audience research would be particularly costly for AJE, because in its assumed core markets outside the Anglo-American markets there was comparatively little infrastructure in place for assessing audience ratings. Many of the developing regions that AJE considers to be among those of its main audiences had no existing facilities for comprehensive audience research. As a result, in the words of another senior AJE manager based in Doha:

> If you go to Afghanistan and Pakistan and many African countries, you'll see Al Jazeera English in particular being watched, but if you ask me how many people are watching and I was honest with you, I'd be sticking my finger in the air and guessing'

> (personal interview, Doha, 10/02/2008).

It is reasonable to assume that, had ratings been operationally essential to the running of the channel, cost would not have been an effective deterrent for long. Instead, as a direct result of AJE's position in the field, ratings (one of the drivers of heteronomous tendencies in the field of broadcasting) were simply not considered indispensable. In short, the way that the channel was funded happened to make them

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[124] Other than actual ratings, numbers for audience *reach* are readily available for most channels, including AJE, but these merely indicate how many households could potentially receive the channel and give no indication whatsoever of how many people may in fact be watching. Roughly, at the time of writing AJE was available to 'more than 260 million households in more than 120 countries' (written answer to information request by author, May 2013). To put this into context, according to Lawson (2011: 23-25), BBC World News has a reach of over 295 million homes in more than 200 countries. CNN International has a reach of approximately 275 million homes in 200 countries.

expendable (Lawson, 2011: 24). Therefore, despite the fact that senior managers repeatedly said they thought it would be desirable to have ratings in my interviews, a claim I am in no position to independently verify as I was not privy to decision making processes at the helm of the channel, over the course of the period analysed no systematic audience research materialised.

Whatever the precise combination of causes, the fact that a sizeable international news channel has been operating for years without using audience ratings as a measure of success is in itself remarkable. In the context of this thesis, an international news channel that operates without the necessary data available to express success in terms of concrete ratings for individual programmes creates a journalistic sub-field that can provide insights into what international news may look like in an environment that is largely shielded from the commercial pressures of the field.

This poses questions about *how* success is measured within the industry, which crucially determines the relative value of different kinds of capital. Assessing AJE's chances of success at the time of its launch, BBC Global News Director Richard Sambrook cautioned that a 'Third World focus could backfire' and that 'it will take some time to see' whether they could 'differentiate themselves […] by representing developing countries […] and *still* keep broad appeal' (Krane, 15/11/2006, emphasis added). The issue here is that the specific public value of international news is not reflected in the dominant currency of the field, which is expressed in audience ratings. In a study commissioned by POLIS, Oxfam and the International Broadcasting Trust (IBT), Phil Harding suggests that in order to preserve international news in the market one would have to find ways of measuring the *kind* of value it generates. This would require broadcasters to include much more stringently in their definitions of what makes a successful programme factors that measure programme quality and audience *appreciation* (as opposed to numbers). Adapting the ways in which success is measured to a model less dependent on quantitative methodology would in turn have an effect on commissioning patterns (Harding, 2009: 33-34). As one senior executive is quoted as saying: 'The only way you will get people to do things is if they have it written down and it is included in

the objectives. Too many controllers and commissioners are still judged by audience size, share and reach' (senior executive quoted in Harding, 2009: 29).

In short, there is a perception that international news can therefore only thrive within a business model that acknowledges its social, cultural and political value (generated through cultural capital) in addition to – or even rather than – its economic value. And while public service broadcasting goes a long way towards reflecting a value orientation that does not hinge on market-imperatives and considers its output to be 'story-driven' as opposed to purely ratings-driven (Lawson, 2011:23), international news appears to be in decline throughout the industry (Figenschou, 2012:364; Ricchiardi, 2006; Utley, 1997; DFID, 2000: 4). The most visible organisational impact of this has been that, as Lawson puts it, 'almost all news organisations in the "global North" have been rapidly shedding their foreign bureaux' (Lawson, 2011:18).

8.2.3   Marginal Role of Commercial Imperatives

Another indication of AJE's unusual position in the field of broadcasting is, for example, the relatively low priority given in the months and years around the channel's launch to the establishment of a commercial division. The sales and marketing arm, in the shape of a commercial division, was still recruiting and getting started when the channel had been on air for months. Although AJE had been in preparation for years prior to its launch in November 2006, the commercial division 'really started to be pulled together [at the] beginning of 2007' and as late as February 2008 a senior network manager said it was 'fair to say that [the] process is still ongoing' (personal interview, Doha, 14/02/2008). In May 2008 a London-based senior manager described the commercial endeavours of the channel as a 'commercialisation thought' but 'nothing concrete' (personal interview, London, 19/05/2008). Since then, the organisational structure underpinning possible commercial approaches has altered several times, but the prevalence of organisational expressions of cultural capital over expressions of economic capital has persisted as one of many (in part contradictory) currents within the organisation.

As with (the absence of) ratings, the overall relatively tentative approach to commercial thinking during AJE's early years did not appear to be based on any active decision made at any particular point to discourage a more commercial outlook. Rather, it appears, it came about as a combination of the sheer enormity of the task of getting the channel on air and the lack of any immediate pressure to be self-sustaining. In a personal conversation with AJE's managing director in May 2010, he emphasised that there had been a stated aspiration to monetise the channel as well as possible. One symptom of the wish to become more commercial is the periodically occurring discussions about privatising the channel (for more detail see 5.2.3). Advertising may be minimal, but continuous attempts to build audiences and create potential revenue streams show that Hugh Miles has not been far off the mark when he maintained that 'if Al Jazeera has a bias, it is a commercial one' and that, despite its generous funding, it 'wants to win audience share and it wants to sell advertising' (Hugh Miles, 12/06/2006). Prioritising cultural over economic capital – a tremendous competitive edge from a purely journalistic perspective – therefore appeared to be largely a result of AJE's *position in the field* rather than a deliberate design.

However, triggered by the financial crisis of 2007 and 2008, the extemporaneous nature of this prioritisation of cultural capital may have temporarily shifted towards a more deliberate recognition of the potential long-term value of a non-commercial outlook. When AJE's management was running through potential scenarios of what would have to happen if severe cuts were required due to the crisis in mid-2008 (scenarios that in the end were not substantiated)[125] the channel's emphasis on cultural capital over economic capital appeared in a different light. According to the then Managing Director, the global financial crisis was a 'wake-up call' because it made apparent the ways in which content would have to change if they were to

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[125] While other Arab countries had been 'rattled by the global economic turmoil', Qatar turned out to have bucked the trend (*The Economist*, 27/05/2010). As the financial crisis deepened, Qatar's growth rate diminished slightly, but overall remained far above average, 'exceeding any of the other emerging market economies and dwarfing the troubled but hyped Emirate of Dubai' (Cooper & Momani, 2011: 113).

increase revenue in the short term (private conversation with author, May 2010). This awareness was coupled with a 'stronger sense' that keeping 'commercial contamination' to a minimum could pay off in the long run in terms of journalistic reputation and potentially also commercially, since it would give AJE breathing space to develop a distinct profile over time.

To the degree that editors realised (and managed to operationalise) the fact that what is worthy can be judged to a much greater degree on journalistic than on commercial grounds, AJE has the potential to accommodate a comparatively high level of journalistic autonomy and ultimately difference on screen. And with plans to break even financially not realistic in the medium term, there was an increasingly strong sense in some quarters of the organisation that AJE's financial dependence on the state brought with it a rare opportunity to consciously cultivate a journalistic culture based on cultural capital. In the words of a Doha-based senior manager:

> So we have the fact that we've got a network that has some advertising, but not much – to me that is a great thing. The Emir probably would sit here and interrupt me and say: "But don't count on it […] because I think there still is a real interest in creating a network that is self-sustaining". I just think practically […] it's not going to turn around in a couple of years. So, if anything, I see the pressure is on us to take advantage of that.
>
> (personal interview, Doha, 16/03/2009).

In other words, at that time there was a current – though not necessarily the most dominant current – within AJE's senior management which was in favour of strategically endorsing the prioritisation of cultural capital as a competitive edge in ways they may not have done to the same extent earlier, when the subordination of economic capital was largely perceived to be a side-effect of AJE's position in the field.[126]

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[126] Even though it is not possible to establish a causal connection here, it is worth noting that shortly after this perceived shift in the evaluation of AJE's journalistic strengths, the commercial division ceased to exist in its previous form, as it was being restructured and disintegrated into its constitutive departments.

8.3 Forces from the Professional Field and Scope for Reflexivity

Whether circumstantial or strategic, the ability to prioritise cultural capital as a result of AJE's funding and position in the field was particularly important with regard to AJE's remit of 'rebalancing' international news, since it allowed staff to concentrate 'on the journalism first', as a London-based senior manager put it (personal interview, London, 19/05/2008).[127] However, while an exceptional case in this regard, AJE as an organisation cannot be seen as an isolated entity. As the dominant currency of the field, ratings also contribute to shaping the dominant professional habitus of the field, which in turn could potentially impact on practices at AJE even in the absence of commercial pressure. Interviews from AJE's early years therefore provide a rare opportunity to gauge 1) the degree to which professional habitus generated within a ratings-oriented field impacted on the organisational environment of AJE and 2) the degree to which journalistic autonomy could emerge in the absence of ratings. These two points, while seemingly contradictory, are not mutually exclusive. Rather, both elements contributed to the shifting dynamics that very much characterised AJE's early years, as journalists at AJE aimed to produce content that was decidedly different from the likes of BBCW and CNNI, yet sufficiently similar to be considered to be on a par.

8.3.1 Perceived Impact of Ratings-oriented Habitus

Ratings-oriented habitus is so entrenched in television news production that a complete lack of ratings can have a rather disorienting effect. Without ratings, AJE journalists may have gained enormous professional freedom, but were also left to

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[127] It has to be noted that 'concentrating on the journalism first' not only affected positively a journalistic environment relatively autonomous from interference from non-journalistic fields – at the same time it affected the formation of administrational structures in much less positive ways. This became apparent, for example, when structural assimilations between AJA and AJE were conducted relatively late in the process and unannounced benefit cuts and less than transparent administrative processes led to disenchantment in many quarters. As a senior manager put it in 2008, 'we made a bit of a mistake. It is no secret. We should have concentrated a bit more on our HR and our Finance and our PR and all sorts of things' (personal Interview, London, 19/05/2008).

judge their work without one of the most common yardsticks of journalistic performance within the industry. An AJE director described the lack of ratings as one of the most pronounced differences he experienced at AJE in relation to his previous working environment:

> At CBC in Canada when I walked in, I would have not only the audience figures from the night before but I'd have them minute by minute, so I would know that when we moved from this item to this segment the audience crashed or the audience didn't crash or all of a sudden you would see the audience shoot up after a commercial and you realise it's been ten minutes after the hour so a lot of people have been watching some entertainment show and they've just totally gotten bored and moved over to the news. So you do have a sense of it, it's almost like an orchestra, a conductor, you're able to play with the environment. Whereas here, you have no sense at all.

(personal interview, Doha, 16/03/2009).

This uncertainty of 'not getting a sense' is indicative of the reliance on ratings in other parts of the field. Not knowing who watches, in addition to going against the journalistic instinct of wanting to produce content *for* audiences,[128] also goes completely against the grain of the more commercial aspects of professional habitus that journalists had acquired in other organisations throughout the industry. Without ratings, staff at AJE had to make decisions on an entirely different basis from before, whether they worked in management or as editors, producers, reporters or researchers. As one presenter previously working for ITV said when asked about audiences:

> I don't even know our reach here in the UK, which is strange for me, because at ITN and ITV of course it was ratings, ratings, ratings.

(personal interview, London, 12/12/2007).

In the increasingly heteronomous field of broadcast journalism, a sensitivity to ratings is such a core element of the prevalent professional habitus that it can outlive

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[128] For journalists the assumption that their work has some kind of impact is an intrinsic part of the profession just as it forms the basis of many assumptions in the discipline of media and communications studies. In the words of a London-based producer, 'what is the point of us doing the best stories if nobody watches?' (personal interview, London, 24/10/2007).

the structural limitations that once gave rise to it. Accordingly, a ratings-oriented habitus, and the practices generative of it, were perceived by some to be so prevalent that they were seen as seriously endangering the ability of AJE to be sufficiently different from the channels it set out to counterbalance:

> Unfortunately this is part of the existing framework […] Managers come from stations where the business model is a key part of how we do things and that is a revenue and expenditure model.

(personal interview, Kuala Lumpur, 05/06/2009).

This perception throws into relief the fact that difference on screen is not merely a function of AJE's position within the journalistic field as a comparatively autonomous organisation, but crucially depends on a range of factors that influence whether or not this position can be fully used to advantage, one of which is the predominance of ratings-oriented habitus in the field of broadcast journalism as a whole. In other words, even in the absence of immediate commercial pressures the mere fact that the creation and running of a news channel of this size requires routine and experience means that practices at times will be reminiscent of the commercial imperatives of other organisations.

In addition, I found that there was a degree of concern at AJE that ignoring the logic of the current make-up of the field would pose the risk of not being considered to be on a par with the established players. This view is supported by Figenschou (2012: 361), who finds that the spectre of 'irrelevance' as a result of being too different was one that AJE staff have been wary of from the beginning. Indeed there are indications that 'too much' difference can be perceived by some as a liability. As BBCW producer Richard Lawson (2011: 44) cautions, 'being able to reflect a broad plurality of geographic locations is editorially invaluable, but it is essential that each element is focussed and relevant, and I suspect that this is one area where Al Jazeera English's freedom not to think about its audience weakens its output rather than strengthening it'. Many AJE journalists therefore disputed the notion that in the absence of commercial pressure cultural capital in the form of journalistic autonomy triumphed by default over the demands of economic capital. On the contrary, in a bid to discard notions that AJE 'may operate in a more permissive financial environment,

where *efficiency* is not much of a concern' (Lawson, 2011: 42, emphasis added), they felt the need to stress that journalistic practices, including commissioning processes, often were not any different from those at other, much more ratings-oriented, channels.

> Everybody thinks the Emir has these deep pockets and that anything you want you can go and do. It's not quite like that, you have to go through the same process that we had at ITN of saying, well this is the story I want to cover, why I want to cover it, and give a pitch.
>
> (personal interview, London, 12/12/2007).

> We have checks and balances over whether stories are worth paying for or not, and so in one sense it's exactly the same as Sky. You have a certain amount of money and if a story is going to cost twenty thousand dollars to do one two-minute story, that's not worth doing, but if it's going to cost twenty thousand dollars and maybe you'll get five three-minute exclusive stories, then yes, let's do it.
>
> (personal interview, London, 20/12/2007).

These examples again demonstrate that, in the absence of an established set of practices at the then newly launched channel, journalists applied their experience from *other* organisational environments to making decisions about how to spend money on newsgathering at AJE. How prevalent commercially inclined habitus was within the organisation therefore also depended on the balance between those for whom a more commercial outlook was seen as a matter of staying competitive, even where not necessitated by immediate economic considerations, and those wanting to focus on protecting and harnessing the cultural potential of AJE's position at the autonomous margin of the journalistic spectrum. In the following I shall give examples of the reflexive ways in which journalists engaged with the opportunities that AJE's position provided.

8.3.2 The Role of Cultural Capital and Journalistic Agency

However, monetary efficiency as part of the professional habitus does not on its own necessarily contradict the idea that unusual projects may have a greater chance of

being realised at a channel that does not depend on ratings. The crucial factor for AJE was (and continues to be) journalists' definition of what constituted a story that was 'worth paying for' *in the context of AJE's remit*. As many journalists stressed:

> We can do foreign stories by importance irrespective of ratings. I did three films on Sri Lanka, which nobody, no BBC, no Channel 4 would ever do.
>
> Producer / presenter (personal interview, London, 24/10/2007).

> You're more likely to get approval for stories that are difficult and expensive to cover if they editorially believe it's a justifiable story, which is just, it's a luxury you don't get in many organisations.
>
> Presenter (personal interview, London, 12/12/2007).

Here, the additional expense of a 'difficult […] to cover' story is described as being outweighed by journalistic merit, clearly indicating a prioritisation of cultural over economic capital. Indeed, there is evidence that AJE's organisational environment is favourable to a more comprehensive approach to international issues (see Chapter 6) that is less driven by concerns for ratings. Reflecting on the first news broadcast on the day of the launch, Pintak noted that 'while it has been refreshing to see reports from places like Darfur, Myanmar and Zimbabwe, the channel was crammed with so many obscure features from forgotten corners of the world that it was beginning to resemble a UN video service. News flash: There's a reason some of these stories are "ignored" by other channels' (Pintak, 30/11/2006). Polemics aside, he does touch on an important point, and *one* of the reasons for other channels to ignore them, indeed one of the reasons these places have been 'forgotten' in the first place, is that these kind of features are at the autonomous end of the journalistic spectrum and seen as interfering with ratings targets and the need of almost any news organisation to *generate* an income, either in the form of securing and justifying public funding or in the form of attracting advertising revenue.

In contrast, some were convinced that the unique opportunity for AJE consisted in its potential to break out of the circle of short-term, ratings-driven editorial decisions and to gradually cultivate an audience that appreciated the non-commercial hard news attitude they could afford in the absence of ratings.

> I don't want audience research, it is a nightmare. I've worked at news organisations who spend money on audience research and focus groups and then a bunch of guys who are accountants and non-news people say these are the stories that you should do in order to pander to your audience. Why would we do that? Why would we pander to an existing audience instead of doing the news and trying to grow the audience? It's the absolute wrong way to go.
>
> Producer / presenter (personal interview, Doha, 15/03/2009).

> My feeling is that here we have a perfect opportunity to build a market of our own. […] We could have created that audience and there was nothing to stop us going to try and create an entirely new paradigm.
>
> (personal interview, Kuala Lumpur, 05/06/2009).

As the senior xecutive quoted by Harding remarked, 'there's a very "purist" view of what international coverage *should* be' (Harding, 2009: 3, emphasis added). For many journalists, then, the transfer from an organisational environment dominated by pressures to maintain audience shares to one where they were judged almost exclusively on journalistic standards enabled them to focus on this 'purist' perception of international coverage. As a programme editor put it:

> My focus would be on the content, getting the content right and then the audience hopefully comes.
>
> (personal interview, Doha, 14/02/2008).

This prioritisation of cultural capital over economic considerations would not have been possible without the unique position occupied by AJE within the journalistic field. However, I shall argue that it would be reductionist to understand it *purely* as a result of this position. Habitus reminiscent of commercial priorities was rejected in many cases not least because journalists actively and explicitly *anticipated* the subordination of commercial demands to editorial decision-making as an asset. As a result they actively looked to AJE as an organisation where they hoped to find greater professional autonomy than in other, more established, corners of the industry. As with other motivations for joining discussed in Chapter 7, this anticipation on the part of journalists could not have been the result of a clash of habitus, as it existed prior to their joining AJE and therefore prior to the experience

of any difference they may have encountered within the working environment of the channel. Indeed, several interviewees expressed how relative independence from market pressures, and the journalistic potential this position opened up, had been one of their critical reasons for joining the organisation in the first place:

> One of the things that really attracted me [to AJE] is [that] we don't spend too much time in trying to generate revenue in this station. [...] It can't get any better than that for a journalist.

> (personal interview, Kuala Lumpur, 05/06/2009).

Whether a channel like AJE in its early days tended to attract a certain type of journalist, or whether reflexivity concerning the limitations of a weakly autonomous field such as broadcasting is fairly common amongst broadcast journalists, my interviews clearly displayed a strong sense of reflexivity with regard to AJE's position in the field. What is central here, however, is that unless and until a professional environment offers the space for manoeuvre to turn this reflexivity into agency, very few journalists are in a position to act upon their reflexive awareness. AJE's position in the field offered just that space for manoeuvre, particularly in the years when journalists were still establishing amongst themselves how to operationalise the channel's remit in terms of daily journalistic practice and what exactly that meant for the stories they could cover. As one journalist recalled:

> The people I met from Al Jazeera English made a very convincing argument [for joining them] [...] I said, if you're not worried about ratings, if you're not worried about profits, what is going to be the standard of your success? And they said: high quality journalism.

> (personal interview, Kuala Lumpur, 05/06/2009).

Therefore, a more productive way of explaining the relatively high levels of journalistic agency and reflexivity of the channel, I shall argue, is to acknowledge the multiple ways in which AJE served as a *platform* for agency in ways that more mature rival channels did not, and could not, given their position in the field. This agency existed independently of AJE, and in many cases pre-dated its existence, as a causal power of individual journalists, but required an environment like that of AJE

in its early years to manifest itself in *actual* practise – and ultimately news content. In an industry under increasing pressure in a fragmenting market, some journalists found themselves looking to a state-funded broadcaster like AJE as an opportunity to escape increasing commercialisation. As a consequence, there was a strong sense in some interviews that journalists were hoping AJE could pick up the threads where other broadcasters, in their perception, increasingly struggled as a direct consequence of a pull across the industry towards the heteronomous pole of the field. One interviewee explained:

> I never wanted to work for a state-funded broadcaster before, but if you look at what's happened to television [it] has never mattered more than it does now, because the commercial guys have never been in as much trouble as they are now. They don't have the resources to open seventy-five bureaus overseas, they do not have the money to properly do stories even in the UK or the US[…].
>
> Producer / presenter (personal interview, Doha, 15/03/2009).

This tendency within the wider field opened up a niche for AJE to position itself as a counterweight to prevailing trends. Asked whether the *way* the channel was financed had an influence on commissioning content, a London-based programme editor answered:

> Yes it does and I think it's positively, or at least you have to commission and behave as if it was positively. We are in the remarkable position that the sort of films that we commission and broadcast in UK broadcasting terms is a tough area and there are less of those on UK broadcasters. So the kind of documentaries that I commission and that we show on the strand that I work on, I know they are under threat in other places.
>
> (personal interview, London, 12/12/2007).

This statement not only reiterates the perception that AJE at least had the potential to serve as a kind of refuge from the detrimental effects that a dominance of commercial imperatives could have on certain kinds of programming. It also highlights the precariousness of any potentially positive impact of the channel's unique position in the field: it demonstrates how a potentially positive effect depends entirely on the conscious actions – the imagination, trust and belief of the journalists working there – for the editorial opportunities presenting themselves. By describing

how she deliberately acted on the assumption the effect was positive, the interviewee quoted above consciously acknowledges the volatile and constructed nature of the practices involved. Yet the reflexive nature of her observation, her realisation of the relevance of her and her colleagues' role in making use of the degree of journalistic autonomy that this comparatively young channel provided, shows precisely what potentially enables distinctive content in the first place. As such it is one of many examples showing the important role that journalistic agency played, particularly in the early years of the channel, in creating shared assumptions about editorial decision-making.

AJE's independence from commercial pressures also meant that it was sufficiently detached financially to allow journalists to reflect critically on the industry without fear of repercussions. Journalistically, this isolated position had an enormous advantage. In the following a producer and presenter describes the role that AJE's position in the field played in his consideration of the channel for his media watch show:

> I was at ABC when I first had the idea [of doing a media watch show] but how do you do a no-holds-barred, critical cross section of media coverage when the company you are working for is owned by Disney, and they're connected to forty-seven different companies, fifty-five different ways. [I thought] maybe NBC, they have money, although they're owned by General Electric, who, if they're not making fruit juice and stoves are making guidance systems for the Pentagon, that's not an option. So I started thinking about doing it on Al Jazeera. My first reaction was: no, it's Al Jazeera, so it won't work. And then my second reaction was: maybe it'll work and then gradually my third position evolved to not only can it work, it's the only place where it can work, because they are a standalone organisation that is not compromised six ways to Sunday by video deals.

> Producer / presenter (personal interview, Doha, 15/03/2009).

These examples show that the relation between economic and journalistic considerations – expressed in economic and cultural capital respectively – has been at the heart of AJE's ability to attract high-profile journalists from across the world. Ultimately, in addition to its promise to develop a different perspective on international news and current affairs, it offered an escape in the eyes of many from

an environment where journalism suffered from being subjected to increasing commercial pressure.

8.3.3 AJE's Impact on the Wider Field – Changing the 'Rules of the Game'?

In the previous parts of this thesis, influences from the wider professional field on AJE's organisational culture have been considered from a range of perspectives. Some of these influences led to similarities in practices and content that are reminiscent of environments operating under different, in many ways more constrained, conditions than AJE. The question remains whether any differences that have been cultivated within the organisational environment of AJE potentially transfer back into the wider field. This part of the chapter therefore deals with the question of how far the professional habitus generated within the organisational field of AJE – partially shaped by the channel's relatively autonomous position and (enablement of) journalistic agency – potentially impacts on the professional field.

As I have pointed out throughout this thesis (and in particular in Chapter 6), AJE lived up to its ambitious aims of re-balancing asymmetries in international news in some regards and less so in others. There is a tendency in media studies to focus on the limitations and shortcomings of journalism, which is a vital aspect of the field's critical capability, but, as Cottle (2005: 109) suggests, it would also be insightful 'to develop a sharper sense of "the possible" as well as "the problematic" in our evaluation of media performance'. In this spirit, focussing on the potential impact of areas of *difference* in this part of the chapter is not to ignore aspects where AJE falls short of its own aims, but to begin to explore how those practises that diverge from the dominant journalistic habitus of the professional field in productive ways (for example in terms of the relative newsworthiness of countries in the global South) potentially affect the composition of the field.

Looking at journalistic implications of the relation between economic and cultural capital with regard to AJE, it would be tempting to dismiss the ensuing focus on cultural capital as a luxury that bears little meaning for the wider industry, especially

since AJE operates under conditions not readily replicable across the field. However, while some of the discussions above may have a commercially naïve ring to them in the short term, they open up possibilities for genuinely changing some aspects of journalistic practice. From a long-term perspective the channel's position embodies an exceptional opportunity, allowing it to develop distinctive content over time before subjecting it to market pressures. By resulting in more of the kind of journalism that in many competing organisations is under intense financial pressure, this difference in priorities that distinguishes AJE from its main competitors could help to shift the dynamics in the field, however slightly.

Two main arguments are to be made with regard to potential knock-on effects of any changes developed at AJE. Firstly, there is the position that AJE's lack of ratings and relative lack of commercial considerations may mean that their de facto economic capital does not readily translate into the kind of currency conventionally associated within the industry with success, therefore reducing the chances that others will think it worth investing in similar practices. As Michelle Henery points out, 'critics cite the lack of audience research as a major flaw in AJE's business practice, arguing, how can they ever hope to catch up to its competitors if they continue to have little idea who its audience is' (Henery, 2010:21). This line of argument takes a pessimistic outlook on the chances of AJE making much of an impact on journalistic practices in the wider industry.

Secondly, there is the view that, independently of how AJE came to attain this relative independence from market forces, the editorial decisions that stem from this lack of commercial pressure will make themselves felt in other organisations. This argument is based on the assumption that the mere *presence* of different content invariably changes the international news ecology, compelling others to replicate *some* of the practices in order to stay competitive. Put simply, as a new entrant AJE alters the composition of the field, pulling it closer to the autonomous spectrum of journalistic practices. Whether this suffices to shift *significantly* the dynamics of the field is very much open to question, but it is safe to say that this line of argument assumes a much more optimistic stance on the channel's chances of making its mark in the field as a whole.

At the heart of AJE's dilemma of aspiring to challenge the rules of a system while at the same wanting to be part of it is the condition that the very factors that enable difference, not least AJE's autonomous position within the field, potentially slow down its impact on other broadcasters. As Benson points out, the likelihood of practices from any one organisation being adopted by others is very much a function of their position in the field. He maintains that 'those news organizations that are able to accumulate both forms of [economic and cultural] capital, such as the *New York Times* or the *Wall Street Journal*, are precisely those which […] play a crucial role in establishing or modifying the dominant "rules" of journalistic practice' (Benson, 2006: 190, emphasis in original).

And while AJE appears to have generous financial resources at its disposal, it employs no conventional measures to assess its economic capital vis-à-vis the market. To some extend that means that without ratings and audience shares AJE cannot transfer this economic capital readily into the symbolic power that economic capital wields under conventional market conditions. In other words, the very prioritisation of cultural capital that *enables* some degree of genuine change is what potentially *reduces* the likelihood that rival, ratings-orientated organisations will feel that investing in similar practices is becoming a necessity in order to compete for audiences. In short, there is a risk that, while AJE may impress fellow journalists, any difference it injects into the industry will not be seen as significantly changing the economic imperatives that shape journalistic practice elsewhere.

Judging from interviews and conversations, AJE's top management was very aware of this catch-22. Consequently, one manager hinged his optimism concerning AJE's ability to influence other broadcasters on the assumption that the wider field in its current make-up *could* accommodate more diverse practices than it actually did. According to this stance, more diverse practices (for example, changes in news values) would not by default run contrary to a ratings-oriented culture, but most organisations could not afford the *risk* or the *staying power* involved in finding out whether or not this was viable in the long run. Therefore, in his response to the opportunities and liabilities of AJE's exceptional yet commercially somewhat isolated position, he emphasised AJE's desire to stay compatible with industry

practice as a whole while trying to 'push the envelope' and see how much difference they could carve out *within the limitations* of the field:

> I would hope that we would be far more experimental and innovative […] and I think that there would be a positive influence on other broadcasters, because a lot of [it] are things that viewers and audiences would welcome. It is not as if we are aspiring at Al Jazeera English to create a kind of a programme model that is so unique that no one wants to watch it, we are not idiots here, but the fact that we are not kind of in these artificial constraints means that we can push the envelope more. And I said this when I was at CBC for years, there are a lot of things that "conventional" broadcasters can do that can break away from the conventional model and do it in a way that isn't a disincentive to audiences for ratings.
>
> Senior manager (personal interview, Doha, 16/03/2009).

Coming from an organisation occupying a different position in the field, he was aware that any influence that AJE potentially exerted had to be compatible with the economic imperatives of other organisations to translate audience interest into income, be it through public money or commercially. His hope for a knock-on effect from what AJE was doing was not so much based on idealistic assumptions that journalistically 'worthy' practices would prevail whatever the circumstances as *on the assumption that industry had not been as diverse as it could have been under current market conditions, because it was inherently averse to risk*. In other words, 'by marginalizing international coverage and reinforcing public stereotypes – all on the [fallible] assumption that the "public doesn't care" – many news organizations have created a "self-fulfilling prophecy"' (Burman, 2009: 135). Now that a channel not under the same financial pressures has been testing the ground, the assumption goes, adaptations to existing editorial conventions may very well be realistic.

This links with the second line of argument, which is based on the assumption that the mere presence of another broadcaster offering content that others find difficult to afford gives those working in other organisations one more argument in favour of the kind of foreign affairs formats that Harding (2009) described as being at risk. In other words, different content, however financed, changes the rules of the game for everybody in that it changes the composition of the field. Given that 'most foreign news-gathering operations have been shrinking, and news outlets have been closing

their overseas bureaus', hope had been expressed that the fact that 'Al Jazeera English has set out on the opposite course [establishing] a field presence [that is] exceptional in the world today, perhaps second only to the BBC' would over time 'offer a healthy challenge to American television news outlets, pressuring them to invest in their international coverage once again' (Stroehlein, 20/11/2007).

As a result, the fact that AJE competes journalistically without for the time being competing economically in the market may eventually have an effect – however slight – on the way success is measured within that particular journalistic field.[129] As a London-based correspondent put it:

> I think other broadcasters who looked [at AJE] thought "yes, we want a bit of that". They always say there are no new ideas in television, but I think [there are] and others are nicking it.
>
> News correspondent (personal interview, London, 01/04/2009).

One indication that this might be taking place to some degree was the way that CNNI in particular was perceived to be monitoring, perhaps even emulating, some of AJE's characteristics. There certainly were shared assumptions amongst AJE staff that they were having an effect on other networks, as the following interview excerpts exemplify:

> I think that CNNI feels particularly threatened by AJ and the proof of that, although there is no official reason, is that they just pumped an amazing amount of money into stepping up their international coverage.
>
> News producer (personal interview, London, 12/12/2007).

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[129] Emirbayer & Johnson have described this effect as what they call a 'subversion strategy […] on the part of the dominated organizations in which their […] aim is to transform the system of authority within the field, including potentially the very rules of the game according to which it ordinarily functions' (2008: 11). In the case of AJE time will tell whether any such 'subversion strategy' – which is probably too strong a proposition for a channel so much at pains to balance difference with similarity and compatibility – will work in its favour. If it does, however, the field as a whole would benefit from a strengthening of cultural vis-à-vis economic capital, long-term rather than short-term thinking in terms of foreign affairs coverage, and a less asymmetric approach to news from different parts of the world.

> If you look at what CNN has done since we've been on air, it's a lot. This is just observation, but first of all I think it's done a concerted effort in the way it markets itself to bring down the American aesthetic of it. […] It has also deployed a lot of journalists in key parts of the world that we cover. So you can already see a shift both within organisations and across, if you look at the macro level.
>
> Programmes field producer, (personal interview, Doha, 13/02/2008).

Clearly these strong perceptions give an indication that it was thought within the organisation that AJE's position in the field, rather than isolating the channel, helped to create the kind of content that others might feel they wanted to emulate in order to stay competitive.[130] This perception is cautiously supported by observations made by Tony Maddox, Executive Vice President and Managing Director of CNNI. Three years into AJE's on-air presence, he was paraphrased as saying that at CNNI they were looking at what AJE was doing as closely as they were looking at what happened at the BBC and Sky News. The US National Public Radio reported that 'among journalists, Al-Jazeera English has won some respect' and quoted Mr Maddox as saying that AJE was 'serious in intent, and they've invested in a very sizable international infrastructure […] so their presence has been felt from an editorial point of view', adding that 'certainly, within the industry, there's a significant awareness of them' (Folkenflik, 24/02/2009).

Another indication that AJE's presence might contribute to shifting the dynamics of the journalistic subfield of international news broadcasting away from the heteronomous pole of the field are reverberations felt in the political field. When US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton famously expressed the view that on Al Jazeera 'you feel like you are getting real news' – a significant change of tone in the public discourse on Al Jazeera in the United States after the channel had been branded by the previous administration as a 'mouthpiece of Osama bin Laden' (see also Chapter 5) – she went on to substantiate her claim with reference to AJE's *distance from the commercial outlook* of US broadcasting:

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[130] It is important to emphasise that these examples remain anecdotal. An investigation into changes in editorial priorities in other organisations as a result of the emergence of a new player would need to include fieldwork at other broadcasters in addition to researching AJE, and as such is well beyond the scope of this study.

You may not agree with it, but you feel like you're getting real news around the clock *instead of a million commercials* […] and the kind of stuff that we do on our news which, you know, is not particularly informative to us, let alone foreigners.

(Hillary Clinton quoted in the *Huffington Post*, 03/03/2011, emphasis added).

As this quote again corroborates, AJE's capacity to 'report back' is closely tied to its relatively autonomous position in the field and to the channel's ability to prioritise cultural capital over commercial considerations.

8.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed some of the journalistic implications of AJE's relatively autonomous position within a weakly autonomous field. In the first part of the chapter, I described AJE's position with regard to the lack of ratings and the marginal role of commercial imperatives. I considered how this position came about as a side effect of the scale of the launch and the way the channel was funded, rather than as a deliberate experiment in autonomous journalism. However, during the first years of AJE there were divergent opinions and currents amongst staff on all levels of the organisation as to whether this circumstantial exception to the (to varying degrees ratings-oriented) rules of the field was limiting AJE's advancement or could and should be harnessed in order to build a more pronounced and distinctive editorial profile and potentially to have a greater impact over time.

In the second part of the chapter, I showed that the balance of a more ratings-oriented habitus and journalistic autonomy has very practical implications for day-to-day editorial decision-making. I explained how habitus reminiscent of ratings-driven organisational environments had an impact on AJE even in the absence of ratings, while the channel's relatively autonomous position presented an opportunity for the emergence of shared assumptions that went beyond the current conventional wisdom in the field. As a dynamic, mediated by individuals within the objective circumstances which they find themselves in, this is precisely what limits or pushes the degree of difference AJE as an organisation can sustain.

Managers' and journalists' views in relation to AJE's relatively autonomous position within the field, and the relevance of practice specific to the wider field, underlines how perceptions had a huge influence on the development and direction of the organisation, particularly in its early stages when there were no precedents to fall back on. In this sense, AJE's relative independence from the economic field was very much part of the channel's organisational culture and influenced shared assumptions about the journalistic scope of the organisation. In addition, I explored how AJE's position in the field potentially affects the degree to which changes to journalistic practices, including changes in what is being considered newsworthy, feed back into the wider journalistic field. On the one hand, the fact that AJE does not trade in the dominant currency of the field – audience ratings – makes it less likely that its practices will be taken on board by organisations dependent on ratings. On the other hand, the mere presence of AJE affects the dynamics of the field, since others over time may feel compelled to adjust, however slightly, in order to compete journalistically.

What is certain is that AJE's position runs counter to the heteronomous tendencies within an industry under increasing pressure. It is this presence that eventually – even when other broadcasters are currently not in a position in which they can afford to follow suit – helps to question, and potentially even alter, some of the 'rules of the game' in international news and current affairs broadcasting. Despite the structural limitations of the field, reflexivity is not limited to organisations where habitus from one organisational environment happens to clash with a different organisational environment. However, while reflexivity may be an inherent and frequently underestimated feature of journalistic practice – in particular in academic literature with a focus on structure – it does not result by default in change. Turning reflexivity into action can be helped or hindered by the professional environments in which journalists find themselves. In an environment that specifically called for deviance from established routines, a strong sense of journalistic agency in the early years of AJE compelled many to make use of the relative autonomy by providing a news profile that went against wider tendencies of domestication and increasing commercialisation in news and current affairs.

Chapter 9   Conclusion

The objective of this thesis has been to answer the questions of 1) how far AJE delivered on its declared aim to challenge asymmetric global news flows and 2) how this aim was aided or obstructed by the interplay of agential forces and structural mechanisms residing within both the organisational field and the wider professional field. As such it addressed the lack of studies looking at underlying mechanisms that have been identified with regard to foreign news production (Hanusch & Obijiofor, 2008: 14) and AJE specifically (Figenschou, 2012: 355). The concise answer to the two-part research question above is that AJE has delivered on *some* of its editorial aims (for details see Chapter 6 as well as a summary in 9.2.1). Furthermore, the constant balancing act of negotiating structural constraints and agential forces (see Chapters 7 and 8) means that difference on screen continues to be *contingent* on the ongoing *structural facilitation* of translating journalistic agency into actual practice.

The main research question cited above was further divided into three areas of investigation: a) representational issues, b) questions of journalistic practices, journalistic agency and the unequal dispersion of specific kinds of professional habitus and c) AJE's position in the journalistic field as expressed through the relative importance attributed to cultural and economic capital. The first area of investigation served to describe AJE's news content in relation to equivalent programmes on BBCW as a 'snapshot' of the effects of *those* causal powers which happened to be activated at that particular time and in that particular context. The second and third areas of investigation served to explore the balances of structure and agency that made certain editorial choices more likely than others. As Sakr (2007: 117) points out with regard to news flows debate and Al Jazeera, 'for the contra-flow concept to have explanatory value in respect of a phenomenon like Al-Jazeera, it has to refer to changing power relations in the *production* of media messages and not just superficial changes in the geography of media flows (emphasis added)'. As I have argued, looking into news content, structural mechanisms and journalistic practices allowed me to examine macro-level debates around news flows on the level of AJE as an individual organisation.

Furthermore, the critical realist position advanced in this thesis helped to underscore the way in which acknowledging the constructed nature of social aspects of reality – a sine-qua-non in the discipline of media studies, which is concerned with analysing discursively constructed objects and the way they relate to society – does not exclude a realist ontological and epistemological position. Rather, as I argued in line with Elder-Vass (2012a), a critical realist position would benefit (certain kinds of) constructivist accounts. And conversely, only a realist approach that also acknowledges the constructed nature of social aspects of reality, as critical realism does, is apt to analyse *social* phenomena. Again, analysing some of the data through the lens of Bourdieu's field theory and Archer's account of agency elucidates this position. With regard to Bourdieu's structural constructivism, the interplay of objective structures and what he called 'the social genesis […] of the patterns of perception' (Bourdieu, 1990: 123) plays out in the way that the habitus is simultaneously constitutive of socially constructed 'patterns of perception' and also reminiscent of objective structures specific to the field it emerged from. Archer's work, meanwhile, is explicitly based on a critical realist ontology that recognises reflexivity as an inherent causal power of human individuals with a mediating function between personal projects and objective enablements and constraints. In short, as I have argued, relating data to an external reality and accepting that certain aspects of this reality are concept-dependent and have constituting as well as constitutive functions are not mutually exclusive positions. With regard to media studies this opens up the possibility of reconciling the constructivist leanings of this academic (sub)field with realist traditions – without compromising the centrality of social construction for the study of media and communication.

In the following I shall summarise the main empirical findings and discuss how the theoretical framework, designed to answer the questions above, contributes to the theory of news flows. First, however, I shall reflect on methodological issues in terms of the merits of combining quantitative and qualitative research, the development of original variables for the content analysis, the analytical status of the interview data and the implications of theoretical choices for the relation between media scholars and journalists.

9.1 Reflection on Research Design and Multi-Method Approach

In the field of research on news, several authors have highlighted the need for a multi-method approach in order to capture both underlying mechanisms and examples of potential effects (Hanusch, 2008; Lavie & Lehman-Wilzig, 2005). In the case of this study, content analysis served to identify degrees of differences and similarities between the news content of AJE and BBCW – and therefore some of the potential manifestations of the structural tension between AJE's twin aims (of being on a par professionally with established Western networks while also providing editorial difference). While in-depth interviews conducted in London, Doha and Kuala Lumpur enabled an investigation of some of the underlying mechanisms that influence editorial decision-making. Combined, these two methods add to an understanding of the implications of AJE's position within the journalistic (sub)field of international news broadcasting for the degree of difference that journalists working at the channel are able to carve out in an interplay of routines and reflexivity.

While the potential empirical merits seem relatively clear, the ontological issues that come with combining quantitative content analysis and qualitative research interviewing pose a challenge – not least because one is geared towards observable patterns and the other towards teasing out underlying mechanisms, which may or may not result in observable patterns. In this particular sense, it is precisely this challenge that also triggered contestations between empirically-minded and macro-theory-oriented scholars in the heyday of theories of media and cultural imperialism (see 2.2.3). What I have suggested in this thesis is that a critical realist approach offers a way of bridging these two perspectives: approaches with empirical and theoretical emphases as well as quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches. Here, the concept of a stratified ontology that analytically distinguishes between the level of observable phenomena (the realm of the empirical) and the level of phenomena that may or may not be rendered observable (the realm of the actual) – all part of one reality – helps to understand and theorise what appears common-sensical but might otherwise have been difficult to combine on ontological grounds: namely that observing empirical manifestations and theorising about their potential causes are not mutually exclusive research options.

9.1.1 Comparing Content in Relation to AJE's Remit

In terms of content analysis, in addition to including variables not featured in previous research on AJE, I improved the comparability of existing content analyses (which, like the present case, are based on a period of time rather than on specific events) by combining a greater range of variables, as seen in Figenschou's work on AJE (2010a) with a comparative approach, as applied by Painter (2008). Variables not previously applied in comparative content analysis of a sample of AJE coverage based on time (rather than specific events) included, for example, the variable of the 'geo-cultural background' of protagonists. This was challenging methodologically, because any empirically workable delineation of the individual values for the variable (in this case 'non-Western background' and 'Western background') were bound to be somewhat superficial.

However, given AJE's remit I felt it necessary to include this variable in the analysis, in the least reductive way possible. To acknowledge the potential lack of fit between this crude distinction and the complex reality of people's backgrounds, I decided to base my decision on the specific role or function that actors came to represent *in the instant and context of the particular news item*, rather than claiming to have captured actual aspects of their off-screen identity. Incidentally, this put me as a researcher in the same position as any other viewer who happens not to personally know the people depicted. As the unambiguous results have shown, it apparently continues to be necessary to face this challenge in order to expose persistent inequalities in international news.

Much less challenging from a qualitative standpoint, but all the more time-intensive, was my decision to compare the proportion of news items with the proportion of airtime in relation to any given variable. This double coding for time and number of items, however, engendered some surprising results and, far from being a futile exercise, did much to help generate a more calibrated analysis than would otherwise have been possible.

Furthermore, codes for the analysis were developed in relation both to the remit of AJE (as outlined in the channel's editorial profile on the official website) and to the

interpretations thereof by AJE staff as these began to emerge from the interview data. This was in line with Sayer's observation (1992: 193) that the analytical value of *quantitative* research needs to be augmented by combining it with 'realist appraisals based on *qualitative* structural analysis (emphasis added)'. The resulting analysis then served as a subtext to the qualitative discussion by providing a tentative understanding of degrees of similarities and differences between AJE and BBCW.

9.1.2 Interviewing Journalists about their Work

In terms of the interview data (in the form of transcripts of 28 in-depth interviews conducted in London, Doha and Kuala Lumpur), the objective of this study was to tease out individual motivations of journalists and causal powers both of the organisation of AJE and of social entities specific to the wider field. This in turn required taking into account the double hermeneutic (Sayer, 2000: 17) of a 'transitive' or 'thought object' (interview talk) that at least in part, while also addressing extra-discursive elements of AJE, referred to other thought objects (such as editorial concepts or the organisational culture of AJE). In line with the critical realist framework of this thesis, the thought object of interview talk was not conflated with the thought object that was the content or subject of that talk – either by taking statements in interviews as straightforward 'evidence' of external elements of reality or by reducing the issues discussed to their textual representation. Rather, a reciprocal relationship between the discussion and the thought objects it referred to was assumed in that the latter limits what can be meaningfully said about it, while also being susceptible to change through discourse itself.

Another point emerging from this thesis is that the relationship between journalists and academics could benefit from theoretical frameworks that acknowledge journalistic agency to a greater degree than many news sociologists have been willing to concede in the past.[131] This is not to negate the fact that both professions

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[131] For calls for a greater appreciation of journalistic agency, see also Dickinson (2007), Dickinson & Bigi (2009), Dickinson, Matthews & Saltzis (2013).

have accumulated (often justified) reasons for mistrusting the other.[132] Rather, the point I am making is that appreciating agency as a causal power of human beings – and thereby moving away from a position that largely assigns the ability to recognise the pull of hegemonic social forces to the realm of social science – not only helps to conceptualise change in a more convincing fashion, but also puts journalists (some of whom are well aware of the structural and ideological limitations they face) in a position that allows them to interact with media scholars in a way that is potentially more productive for the respective objectives of both professional fields.

9.2   Key Empirical Findings

In the following I shall outline some of the main empirical findings as they emerged from the quantitative and qualitative analyses. These include the identification of areas of similarity and areas of difference in AJE's news content in relation to its remit and in comparison with BBCW News. As shown in Chapter 6, AJE's wide-ranging and complex remit has been subject to debate *within* the organisation and – in the sample analysed for the purpose of this thesis – this remit has been reflected decisively in some areas while remaining relatively neglected in others. As shown in Chapter 7, another key element of this thesis is to highlight the link between (organisational space for) journalistic agency and AJE's remit (as challenging the dominant habitus of the field by definition requires reflexive awareness of existing limitations.)

However, the activation of journalistic agency depends on an interplay between a desire to be different and a desire to be on a par with leading 'mainstream' news organisations, which encouraged the perpetuation of pre-existing professional habitus characteristic of the wider field. These two aspects were by no means mutually exclusive, but rather engaged in constant competition which produced an ongoing

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[132] Academics tend to be weary of the misrepresentations that frequently stem from popularised and highly selective extracts of their work. While journalists tend to feel patronised by accusations of unwittingly contributing to the perpetuation of imbalances inherent in the elite-oriented and routinised character of news production practices – and of misjudging their own role in it.

state of (re)negotiating degrees of similarity and difference with regard to AJE's remit. As I have argued throughout the thesis, this dialectic of similarity and difference became a core characteristic of AJE itself, particular during the channel's early years.

Lastly, the room for (editorial) manoeuvre implied in this dialectic of similarity and difference would not have been possible without AJE's unusual position within the journalistic subfield of international English-language news broadcasting. Notably, the opportunity to prioritise cultural capital over economic capital, at least in some areas of journalistic production, was no doubt conducive to the journalistic freedom that helped to alter some of the dominant news values of the field, including, for example, the geo-politically informed hierarchy of place employed across the field.

9.2.1 Degrees of Difference on Screen

By its own official account, AJE set out to 'challenge established perceptions' (AJE Website: *Corporate Profile*, 04/09/2008). The corporate profile does not elaborate what such 'established perceptions' entail in any detail. For the purpose of this thesis, then, I looked into descriptions of recurring themes as identified in academic research into news flows (see Chapter 2.4). This includes, for example, a geo-politically influenced news hierarchy (Miller, 2007; Franks, 2004; Chang, 1998), a gendered selection of news sources in a traditionally male-dominated professional field (Rosenstiel & Mitchell, 2005; Lavie & Lehman-Wilzig, 2005), a focus on disasters and conflict rather than on political processes in particular when it comes to news from the global South and a general disposition to rely on official sources (Hafez, 1999; Kalyango, 2011; Golan & Wanta, 2003). As shown in Chapter 6, these factors broadly correspond with some of the interpretations of AJE staff of what it means to challenge 'established perceptions', indicating a general awareness of the imbalances embedded within their professional field.

Crucially, when analysing AJE's content in comparison with that of BBCW news programmes, I found that some 'established perceptions' had been successfully and

vigorously challenged, while others had been left almost entirely intact or even become more pronounced on AJE than on BBCW News. In addition, some news factors were superficially countered, but when cross-referenced were found to correlate with other variables in ways that reflected longstanding asymmetries in the depiction of the global South.

More specifically, I found that AJE delivered on its promise to cover the global South more extensively. One main finding with regard to AJE's proportion of news from the global South was that it was much less affected by the occurrence of large-scale news events (such as, for example, the 60th anniversary of India's independence or natural disasters in Asia) than were the individual news programmes on BBCW. For the qualitative empirical chapters this result in particular raised the question of how the primary and professional habitus of AJE staff that had been generated in various areas of the global South potentially affected editorial sensitivity towards stories from under-reported regions that had not yet assumed breaking news status on other channels. In addition, AJE's focus on the global South was reflected within the structures of its news programmes in terms of running order, of time allocated to items from the global South as opposed to items from the global North, and of the number of stories not carried on other networks.

The channel also delivered on its other core promise to provide a grassroots perspective on news events and to be a 'voice for the voiceless'. However, this aspect of AJE's remit found its expression in some regards more than in others. For example, non-Western voices, as well as people speaking in their capacity as 'ordinary citizens', were represented to a significantly greater degree than on BBCW, while the prevalence of official statements and gender inequalities prevailing in the wider field were left largely untouched by AJE's ambition to provide a platform for those under-represented in mainstream news media. In short, AJE's aim of re-dressing geo-political inequalities was more consistently evident in its emphasis on stories from the global South than with regard to components of the channel's remit that did not have a geographical aspect.

Particularly strong *correlations* in AJE's news coverage were found when cross-referencing geo-cultural and socio-political backgrounds of protagonists (where a

majority of Western protagonists represented authorities and industry, while a majority of non-Western protagonists represented victims of violence or disasters, 'ordinary people' or oppositional voices); cross-referencing gender with the backgrounds of reporters (where, on AJE, a majority of non-Western reporters were women, while reporters with Western backgrounds turned out to be almost exclusively male); and cross-referencing gender with socio-political backgrounds of protagonists (where on AJE a unambiguous 97% of protagonists speaking in their capacity as representatives of authorities, industry or other positions of political or economic power were men). These correlations appeared to be specific to AJE as they were not reflected with the same intensity in the broadcasts of BBCW News.

It could be argued that such imbalances might well represent unequal realities on the ground, in which case the discrepancies between AJE and BBCW could arguably be amplified by AJE's focus on countries lacking long traditions or politically enforced mechanisms of social or gender equality. However, I would argue that, in as far as AJE journalists perceived the remit of the channel to involve giving equal access to those not usually heard or seen, the remit does entail a degree of deliberate disregard for inequalities on the ground by giving disproportionate access to those generally under-represented in the public realm.

9.2.2 Employing Difference, Professional Habitus and Agency

As discussed in Chapter 2, the transfer of specific notions of professionalism has been identified as an inherent part of the dominance of Western organisations in international media (Golding, 1977). Challenges to this dominance included approaches to journalism that questioned the 'givenness' of professional values like objectivity, such as development and peace journalism. Notably, as reiterated by interviewees cited in Chapter 7, despite the channel's self-declared counter-hegemonic remit, it was never in question for AJE's leadership that the aim was not to contest, but to emulate, the brand of professionalism practiced by the dominant organisations in the field of news broadcasting. It became clear very early in the channel's development that AJE did not want to radically alter the presuppositions

upon which the field of international English-language news broadcasting is based. Rather, it was concerned with a struggle to alter some of the rules *within* this journalistic (sub)field. Being similar in terms of professional standards allowed the channel to establish areas of disagreement, for example in relation to the prominence given to stories from developing countries.

As I argued in Chapter 7, this decision *enabled* AJE to create a level playing field on the basis of which any difference the channel could carve out had a chance of having a potentially greater impact on the field as a whole, but it came at the price of having to make do with the limitation of the field in terms of the unequal (Western-centric) global dispersion of specific professional habitus. In addition, as demonstrated in Chapter 7, professional habitus that had been cultivated in the very segments of the field that AJE set out to challenge was perceived by some AJE journalists as a cause of similarities (some intentional, some inadvertent) between AJE and its Western-based rivals. Effects of this pull towards more conventional news values materialised in linguistic details and editorial perspectives at odds with AJE's remit, examples of which can be seen in the varying degrees of difference and similarity described in Chapters 6 and 7.

However, at the same time, AJE did succeed, if perhaps not in employing local staff from the global South throughout the hierarchy of the organisation in proportion to the ambitions set out in its remit, then arguably in hiring a substantially greater overall proportion of local staff from the South than comparable news channels. This was perceived by staff as a core characteristic of the channel which helped editorial teams to operationalise AJE's remit by serving as a corrective to the liability to resort to 'default' positions reminiscent of Western perspectives on international events. Moreover, primary and professional habitus, while endowed with causal powers and liabilities, do not *determine* news output. As Jensen (2002: 256) stresses, 'media practitioners […] bring *intentions* into mediated communication. Hence, it becomes necessary to ask specifically how […] their motivated actions are coordinated, and become *causes'* (emphasis in original). In other words, journalistic agency has the causal power to partially counteract the effects of habitus. And the fact that AJE was launched as a counter-hegemonic project means that it arguably from the beginning attracted in particular those journalists whose personal motivations were already

aligned with the demands of reflexively challenging 'established perceptions' within their profession.

In particular, two modes of agency as identified by Archer were especially widespread amongst the AJE staff whom I interviewed for this thesis: 1) 'meta-reflexives', who are characterised by Archer as being idealistically driven and basing their 'occupational projects' on value-commitments (Archer, 2007: 233) and 2) 'autonomous reflexives', who largely depend on their own judgement and display a strategic attitude towards professional choices (Archer, 2007: 214). Both types of reflexives, while not immune to purposely and/or unwittingly following routines, are arguably less prone than others to complying with the dominant habitus of a given field as a default reaction to adapting to a new environment. What the case of AJE therefore brought to light was that reflexivity in journalism is not as marginal to news production as some news studies focussing on structural limitations would have it, but that, in order for dispositions towards certain modes of reflexivity to become effective, there needs to be a platform which provides the organisational breathing space in which to exercise these powers. To summarise, the concept of habitus fundamentally underlines the relevance of questions of practice for the study of news flows. The dissemination of specific professional values has to be acknowledged as historically Western, but the degree to which these perpetuate the Western-centric imbalances of the field is *contingent* on a range of other factors, including the motivations of AJE staff both for getting involved in the first place and for achieving difference on screen in their day-to-day work.

9.2.3   The Cost of Difference and AJE's Position in the Field

As another of Bourdieu's core concepts, the notion of capital complements the focus on habitus and agency. Essentially, it *underlines the economic dimension* of news flows in that it allows to demonstrate how heteronomous tendencies in the professional field affect *even a relatively autonomous organisation* like AJE *to the degree* that its staff support degrees of similarity in order to be considered on a par with the dominant players in the field. At the same time, the concept of capital helps

to explain the substantial differences found in AJE's news content in Chapter 6, because it illuminates how AJE's position in the field provides AJE staff with the freedom to prioritise cultural over economic capital in ways arguably not feasible at other large-scale international English-language news broadcasters.

As a structural characteristic of the channel, AJE's relatively autonomous position found its expression in the comparatively marginal role of a commercial rationale and the fact that AJE operated without providing ratings statistics as a minute-by-minute measure of success incorporated into daily decision-making processes. This difference immediately distinguished AJE from its competitors. Interviewees variously described this phenomenon as causing a lack of orientation and focus (compared with their previous experiences at other channels) and/or as a tremendous opportunity to put journalism first and to experiment with content not produced by other organisations. To the degree that the latter perception 'won out', AJE's position in the field has been a critical factor in creating the level of journalistic autonomy essential to producing genuine difference on screen. The process of developing a shared imagination and shared assumptions about what the channel *could* look like had an immense influence on the degree of difference AJE journalists could carve out within the field. It also exemplifies the precariousness and fluidity of a process that had been shaped, but not determined, by the channel's extraordinary freedom from commercial pressures and by a desire to be at the same time fundamentally different yet similar enough to be compared with the dominant international players in the industry.

As I argued earlier, AJE's potential to prioritise cultural capital does *not* suggest that the channel (or other journalistic endeavours with a remit to challenge dominant practices) *by definition* cannot be self-sufficient as a direct result of a counter-intuitive editorial remit. It does mean, however, that any channel attempting to be both different from the *currently* dominant make-up of the field *as well as* economically successful (at some stage), requires a great deal of staying power in order to try and build audiences over a potentially very long period of time by virtue

of its distinctiveness (with uncertain prospects of success).[133] The fact that AJE has the capacity to go down that road offers a rare example within the current global economic climate. By virtue of the inter-related nature of the industry, this throws into sharp relief not merely intra-organisational matters concerning AJE, but also dynamics and *margins of difference* within the wider field.

9.3   Contribution of Empirical Findings to Theory

I shall argue that, in the case of researching AJE, the apparent association of the channel's remit with debates on unequal news flows triggered *two divergent conceptual needs.* The pull of the existing (asymmetric) conditions of the field (and the dominant form of field-specific habitus associated with it) makes it necessary to conceptualise potential causes of similarity on screen across organisations. While the possibility of breaking the mould and altering at least certain aspects of journalistic practice makes it necessary to conceptualise potential causes of difference on screen. In order to capture both elements and thus to avoid applying a theoretical framework that preconceives AJE's practices and output either as 'more of the same' or as radically different, the theoretical framework of this thesis needed to reflect both elements.

For the purpose of this thesis the first need is met by applying Bourdieu's field theory to the empirical context of AJE. The second theoretical need is met by Archer's theoretical treatment of the concept of agency. Combined, these two approaches serve to complement each other's emphases on different aspects of practice and to capture the dialectic of similarity and difference that came to

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[133] This phenomenon is not unique to AJE's situation. Historically, CNN, today a variously successful part of mainstream news, was once considered 'revolutionary' (Hirschorn, 02/04/2010) and to be operating 'against the odds' (McDowall, 2012: 16) (albeit in a much less crowded market space). Despite its different remit, the following quote taken from a manual given to CNN newcomers in the early 1980s could just as well have been from a manual given to AJE newcomers in 2006: 'We are creating an alternative to the [existing] networks. [...] We'll be putting on news when other networks are offering entertainment. We'll be the alternative for millions of viewers. If we attract them and inform them, if we do our job, we will be successful. And television will never be the same' (McDowall, 2012: 11).

characterise the organisational environment of AJE. As outlined in Chapter 3, the ontological basis on the grounds of which the two approaches can be combined is critical realism. While Archer's work has contributed in important ways to critical realist literature, Bourdieu's framework fits critical realist approaches in that it focuses on 'invisible structures and their effects' and 'explanatory mechanisms' (Bourdieu, 1998b: 39) and, as I have argued (see Chapter 3.5.1), is ontologically flexible enough to be compatible with a critical realist ontology. The stratified ontology of critical realism has precisely the purpose of describing as real mechanisms that escape purely empirical observation (because they exist whether or not they are activated and therefore become observable), but because of their dependence on objective structures cannot be described in constructivist terms either. There has been disagreement as to whether or not the two different emphases (on structure and agency respectively) present in Bourdieu's and Archer's works are compatible. However, as I have outlined in Chapter 3, I agree with and follow accounts that call for their combination on empirical grounds (Sayer, 2009) and demonstrate on what ontological basis they *can* be combined (Elder-Vass, 2007).

9.3.1 Theorising Asymmetric News Flows through Field Theory

By the time the English-language channel launched, the Al Jazeera brand had already 'become synonymous with ambitious media innovation on behalf of the global South' (Sakr, 2007: 118). As I have argued, AJE therefore from the outset linked its objectives to debates on asymmetric news flows. News flows, however, have often been investigated with regard to the macro level of political economy or limited to empirical case studies that looked at particular phenomena and, while citing macro theory, refrained from *theorising the links* to wider structural issues. In this thesis I addressed this gap by presenting a way of conceptualising some of the wider structural issues at stake *on the level of journalistic practices*. Here, I found that Bourdieu's relational theory helped to span empirically grounded research and overarching news flows debates by teasing out links between, on the one hand, concrete practices within one (sub)field (in this case the organisational field of AJE) and, on the other hand, their influences from and potential effects on fields of which

they are part due to the stratified nature of fields (in this case the professional field of international English-language news broadcasting).

As the interview data presented in Chapters 7 and 8 has shown, Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus and capital are well suited to incorporating relational aspects of media flows into the analysis of particular organisations, professions or other journalistic sub-fields. In other words, as I have argued, questions of 'reporting back' have to take into account the fact that, even under near ideal circumstances (such as an organisational environment with an editorial remit explicitly designed to address inequalities in international news and the near lack of commercial pressures), the interconnectedness of organisations through *indirect abstract relations* (which can be made explicit through Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus and capital) means that relative difference in one concrete empirical case study is always subject to relatively durable structures that go beyond the organisational field. This is the case not least because, in order to have any significant impact on the field and therefore a chance to alter *imbalances inherent in the dominant field-specific professional habitus*, a relatively new organisation like AJE needs to be sufficiently similar to be taken seriously as competition and sufficiently successful for others to emulate any new practices it may have succeeded in establishing.

As the data presented in this thesis has shown, the issue of asymmetric international news flows goes beyond matters of journalists' good intentions or asymmetric story selection processes entrenched in professional routines. The causal powers of individual people and individual organisations are limited by the causal powers of wider structures, which do not just go away even where, as in the case of AJE, an organisation throws considerable amounts of capital (economic and cultural) at the problem. However, the relation between structures and practices is not a straightforward one (Elder-Vass, 2012b). Structures can change *over time* as practices become increasingly aligned with the project of 'reporting back'. The mechanisms by which this happens were the subject of the other element of my theoretical framework: a focus on the causal powers of agency as a mediating factor between habitus and actual practices.

9.3.2 Theorising 'Contra-flows' through Accounts of Agency

Notwithstanding structural constraints, the acknowledgment of increasingly complex media flows and contra-flows bears particular relevance with regard to AJE. Again, contra-flows have been construed in terms of exports to the North of media produced in the South. The simple fact that AJE as an organisation is *physically* based in the global South while being received across the world, including in increasingly sizeable sways of the global North, means that it qualifies *in this basic sense* as contra-flow. However, if the question is whether AJE qualifies as a contra-flow with counter-hegemonic tendencies, as suggested in the channel's editorial policy and remit (see also 2.2.4), contra-flow becomes a question of countering dominant representations of the world. As I have argued, in this sense, counter-hegemonic contra-flow is not a mere matter of directionality, but necessarily also concerns the presence of an organisational environment within which the causal powers of individuals to change geo-politically uneven representations in news have a chance to play out (in the realm of the actual) by virtue of being shielded from some of the causal powers of structural constraints embedded within the professional field. This ability to encourage agency then becomes an emergent causal power *of the organisation* itself – emergent 'in the sense that [causal powers] are powers that would not exist if the parts concerned were not organised into a certain type of whole' (Elder-Vass, 2012a: 10). As a causal power, it '*can* be explained by learning the mechanisms' that produce it, but – and this is what I am arguing in this thesis – these do not 'cease to be a power of the whole thing' (Elder-Vass, 2012a: 11, emphasis in original).

This point is crucial because it contravenes approaches that lay their focus on identifying one or several distinct 'core capabilities' that 'distinguish a company from its competitors and make it *unique*' because it is the characteristic of a core capability that it 'cannot be easily or readily copied' (Zayani & Sahraoui, 2007: 43). In other words, *the approach applied in this thesis contravenes views that acknowledge difference merely in terms of unique constitutive parts of the organisation and not in terms of unique constellations of its constituent parts (which may or may not themselves be unique) as being generative of emergent causal powers*. In their organisational study of AJA, Zayani and Sahraoui use the notion of

core capabilities as a starting point, but they conclude from their research that 'Al Jazeera falls short of a distinctive and significant core capability that brands it' (2007: 48). Therefore, they too argue ultimately that Al Jazeera's distinctiveness rests with a combination of non-exclusive 'attributes', which 'can arguably thrive only within a certain *configuration* of these concepts' (48, emphasis added), but they do not proceed to explore potential ontological implications of this claim. What the critical realist framework proposed in this study allows to do is to underpin this assumption with a cohesive ontological foundation.

Furthermore, Archer's critical realist approach to agency allows agency to be acknowledged as a causal power that is an inherent feature of human action. The way this links to Bourdieu's theory is that the 'activation' of this causal power is not a matter of course, but contingent on circumstances that may obstruct or enable its efficacy. As the case of AJE shows, this is particularly relevant to the study of news flows because it highlights the fact that there is an ambition amongst many journalists to alter practices reminiscent of wider global power imbalances. While at the same time (often for very practical reasons) the realisation of this ambition is at least in part *contingent on the presence of journalistic environments*, be it in the form of individual organisations or other structures, *that facilitate the activation of this particular kind of journalistic agency*. This is indispensible for individual reflexive powers to bear results in the domain of the actual in the shape of practices (as described in Chapter 7 and 8) and potentially in the domain of the empirical – in this case, on screen (see also Chapter 6).

9.4   Discussion and Outlook

AJE continues to evolve at a rapid pace. The channel has expanded its reach from an initial 80 million to more than 260 million households (written answer to information request from AJE Media Relations Office, May 2013). In its sixth year at the time of writing, AJE has seen several staff shake-ups across the organisational hierarchy, three different Managing Directors and the same number of Director Generals at the network level (see also footnote 136). Many of the more recent developments could not be included here. This does not mean that the lessons learned from analysing AJE's formative years do not continue to carry relevant implications for the channel

going forward – particularly since many of the structural liabilities described in this thesis persist and being aware of them helps to activate those causal powers of the organisation that might mitigate their effects. It does mean, however, that, empirically speaking, there is a steady flow of topics and questions for further research (which in turn may encourage the deployment of new theoretical angles).

9.4.1 Organisational Change and Suggestions for Further Research

One such question for further research is an analysis of AJE's distinct focus on programming, either on its own or by looking at the qualitative nuances in the coverage of a given region or country *across news and current affairs*. I would argue that this would be a particularly relevant field of enquiry, because of the greater conceptual leeway programming affords in relation to the rigidity news formats. Regrettably, I found that such a focus was beyond the scope of this study. Not least given the methodological difficulties in comparing current affairs programmes of different broadcasters due to greater dissonances in their formats and in the issues addressed, programming has remained under-researched with regard to AJE. Addressing this gap empirically and on a theoretical level through research devoted to programming has the potential to usefully complement the present focus on news in assessing relative difference in international television with regard to AJE.

Another suggestion for further research stems from the continuing change in Qatar's role in the world. AJE journalists' mantra of not being influenced by Qatar because the small Gulf state 'is of little interest to the world', and by implication to an international news channel (personal interview, Doha, 10/02/2008), arguably becomes increasingly difficult to uphold with Qatar's progressively hands-on foreign policy, not least in terms of the Gulf state's support for various factions during and after the Arab revolutions. *Not* reporting the Emirate's rising regional influence is arguably less of an option than it was just a few years ago. AJE's ability to critically assess domestic Qatari affairs will also be put to the test when international attention focuses on the Emirate as the host of the 2022 FIFA World Cup, which at the time of writing already prompted renewed interest in Qatar's human rights record in relation

to trafficking and working conditions for guest workers (see also 5.2). In addition, journalists need to re-emphasise their position vis-à-vis both Qatar's new political leadership[134] and changing managers at the top of AJN.[135] Again, these developments occurred after the empirical data for this thesis had been generated and it is for future studies to assess whether or not changes in the composition of the political field potentially affect issues of self-censorship or even state interference at AJE. As I mentioned earlier, due to the structural liability built into what is essentially a state broadcaster behaving like a public-service broadcaster, this question will stay with the channel and requires continuous assessment.

With regard to the organisation of AJE itself, one of the most substantial changes, occurring *after* the main period analysed for this thesis, has been the end of AJE's trademark structure of 'following the sun', which was characterised by broadcasting in turn from Kuala Lumpur, Doha, London and Washington. This structure was credited with adding a uniquely international flavour to AJE's news, since the same feed was broadcast across the world and had a distinct regional perspective depending on the time of the day. As such, this structure was seen as contributing to the channel's aim of being 'truly cosmopolitan', 'more international' than its competitors (Ackerman, 01/05/2006) and 'a channel without a nationality' (Lindsey Oliver in Coultan, 01/04/2006). As of early 2011, AJE started to broadcast full time out of Doha. For future research it would be interesting to compare the regional focus

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[134] In a statement in June 2013 Emir Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani – who had founded Al Jazeera in 1996 and whose nearly two-decade rule transformed the Gulf state's position in global politics – announced the peaceful transfer of power to his son, Sheik Tamim bin Hamid Al Thani.

[135] After the resignation in September 2011 of the longstanding Director General of the network, Wadah Khanfar – who has widely been credited with 'revolutionising the Arab media landscape' (Black, 20/09/2011) – the post was re-staffed by a member of the ruling dynasty, Qatargas executive Sheikh Ahmed bin Jassim Al Thani. In a discussion with Jon Snow at the Frontline Club in London on 18th January 2012, Khanfar reiterated his confidence that Al Jazeera would be able to sustain its editorial independence under a Director General who does not come from the field of journalism and is linked through family ties with the government. In July 2013, Sheik Ahmed bin Jassim Al Thani resigned to join the government of the new Emir, Sheik Tamim bin Hamid Al Thani (see footnote 135), as Minister of Economy and Trade. At the time of writing, Mostefa Souag, previously Director of News at AJA, serves as acting Director General of the network.

in AJE's news programmes *before* and *after* this restructuring of offices in order to evaluate the impact of organisational structural change on content.

In a written answer to my question about the reasoning behind these changes, AJE's Media Relations office stated that 'these broadcast studios were changed so that we are able to expand out newsgathering presence in other areas' (Media Relations, personal communication, May 2013). Where those 'other areas' were located became apparent when Al Jazeera announced early in 2013 that it had bought the US channel Current TV[136] – co-founded by former US Vice-President Al Gore – in order to launch a new channel under the Al Jazeera Network called Al Jazeera America (or AJAM).[137] Buying Current TV was the latest and boldest move in a series of attempts to obtain a foothold in the notoriously competitive US market.[138] Although *some* at Al Jazeera embraced the channel's remit of focussing on the South to the extent of holding the view that the US market was 'not crucial' to their success (Waller, 14/11/2006), many observers regarded the penetration of the largest English-speaking market as 'a key factor in the success or failure of Al-Jazeera International is distribution' (*Business Day*, 21/02/2006).

Reports that AJAM will have a distinctively *domestic* agenda (Stelter, 26/05/2013) create a whole new set of future research questions. (How) will this new focus on the United States affect AJE (where journalists had already felt the pressures of restructuring) as the only *international English-language outfit* of AJN in the medium to long term? Given the downsizing of AJE's Kuala Lumpur office and the

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[136] Al Jazeera allegedly paid $500 Million for the channel, a sum that has not been confirmed by the network.

[137] In addition, at the end of the 7th Al Jazeera Forum held in Doha in March 2013, plans were announced for the launch of Al Jazeera UK (AJUK) and Al Jazeera France, although at the time of writing no further details or time-frames have emerged.

[138] In the past, image problems combined with a reputation for straightforward hard news made distribution an even more difficult undertaking than it would have been in an already crowded market under the best conditions (Macleod & Walt, 27/06/2005; Stroehlein, 20/11/2007; Manly, 26/03/2006). More than two and a half years after its launch the channel had still not been carried by any of the major cable or satellite operators in the US and was only distributed there by 'two tiny cable systems in Vermont and Ohio' (Farhi, 29/04/2009).

network's ambitions in the US, will these developments, as former Managing Director Tony Burman (01/06/2013) cautioned, come at the price of jeopardising AJE's hard-won counter-hegemonic character and ' "brand" of fearless, provocative international journalism'? Or will it – as Al Jazeera journalists in the US 'are fanning out to report news stories from parts of the country rarely visited by camera crews' (Stelter, 26/05/2013) and reporting from 'bureaus in cities they considered underserved such as Nashville and Detroit' (Baker & Richwine, 20/08/2013) – help to implement those very values on a global scale?

Perhaps the most crucial difference between AJAM and all prior Al Jazeera projects, including not least AJE, lies in the way its success will be measured. As AJE reporter Catch Turner stated in a report about AJAM that ran on AJE on 20th August 2013 at 21:20 GMT: 'Money has not been a concern in the past. Now, for the first time, executives will have to consider a new set of numbers: ratings'. From the start, AJAM received much praise from print media colleagues for its 'serious' journalism (Stelter, 18/08/2013) and the 'amount of contextualised information' (Cox, 21/08/2013) it offered. In contrast, success as measured in ratings, should it materialise, will be hard won: two of Current TV's former distributers dropped the channel shortly before the launch and ratings for the launch hour hovered 'below Nielson's minimum accuracy threshold' (Chasmar, 28/08/2013, Washington Post). For now AJAM is selling its relatively non-commercial outlook[139] as a virtue. The question will be: if AJAM manages to attract higher ratings and increases its value for advertisers, will this – now necessary – virtue be still seen as such?

What these issues already show is that questions regarding AJE's positioning in the journalistic field are as relevant today as they were when AJE was launched. It also means that the observations made in this thesis come at a time when the era of a ratings-independent Al Jazeera is coming to an end. Media scholars and social scientists cannot usually set up experiments in their field of study, but sometimes, as Chomsky (1994) once put it, 'history was kind enough to set one up for us'. The chance to study the formative years of the ratings-free environment of a major

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[139] This means relatively non-commercial compared to other U.S. networks, while already significantly more so than AJE with an average of six minutes of advertising an hour.

international broadcaster certainly felt like just such a rare experiment and an opportunity to contribute, however slightly, to the understanding of the margins of difference in international broadcasting news.

9.4.2 Contra-flow and the Dialectic of Similarity and Difference

As I have argued in this thesis, AJE seems to closely match theories of counter-hegemonic media, but it also in many ways defies categorisation. As shown in Chapter 2, it would be reductive to categorise AJE as transnational (with a core regional base), as geo-cultural (with culturally-specific target audiences) or as global (with a near-global audience). In part this is the direct result of the current lack of audience research, but it is also, I shall argue, a result of the fact that AJE's organisational composition is generative of a culture (and ultimately of content) that does not seem to comfortably fit categories of either North or South, mainstream or alternative, conventional or counter-hegemonic. What AJE provides, rather, is a combination of conventional practice and new territory (literally and metaphorically) and an unconventional, in parts marked, contrast to *some* traditional news values within an overall culture that is still comparable with that of the Western broadcasters it initially recruited from.

However, difference is not a given. How and to what degree AJE will provide difference in the future, as a relatively autonomous organisation in a weakly autonomous field, will depend on a host of variables. These notably include the political field in Qatar, management decisions at AJE and AJN, and the courage of journalists to defend pockets of journalistic autonomy vis-à-vis precisely those dominant conventions of practice that run counter to aims of creating a more balanced and more genuinely international perspective in news. As Franks (2004: 425) argues, 'the effects of globalisation, the inter-dependent nature of modern society and the precarious state of international relations post 9/11 make the case for […] developing an international perspective more important than ever'. And, I would like to add, this increases the importance of understanding and holding to account media that make it their business to explain the world to audiences around the globe.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Consent Form for Research Interviews

<div style="border:1px solid black; padding:1em;">

Consent FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Working Title of Research Project
The Culture of Al Jazeera English

Details of Project
This PhD project looks specifically at the early years of Al Jazeera English (AJE) and the ways in which AJE's remit of 'reporting back' and challenging long established geopolitical hierarchies in international news impacted on the channel's evolving organisational culture and vice-versa.

Contact Details
For further information about the research or your interview data, please contact:

Nina Bigalke
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Media and Communications
London School of Economics and Political Science [LSE]
ninabigalke@me.com

Confidentiality
Interview tapes and transcripts will be held in confidence. Your contact details are kept separately from your interview data.

Anonymity
Please tick the appropriate box:

☐ I agree for my full name to be attributed to my statements from the interview(s)

☐ I wish to stay anonymous when quoted or paraphrased

Consent
By this, I agree to be interviewed by Nina Bigalke as part of her research at the London School of Economics and Political Studies. The content of the interview(s) may be used in the context of Nina Bigalke's research and research-related publications.

Date of Interview:……………………..   **Printed Name:**…………………………

Signatures: …………………………...

</div>

Appendix 2: Codebook for Comparative Content Analysis

1) General data about programme

Programme ID	
Channel	
Date of broadcast	
Time of broadcast (GMT)	
Overall number of items (incl. sports / business)	
Overall number of items (excl. sports / business)	
Overall time of items in seconds (incl. sports / business)	
Overall time of items in seconds (excl. sports / business)	

2a) Ratio of news items from 'global South' and 'global North'

	TOTAL incl. sports / business		TOTAL excl. sports / business	
	Number of items	Airtime (sec)	Number of items	Airtime (sec)
Items 'global South'				
Items 'global North'				

2b) News items from the global South and North respectively, cross-referenced with news genre

		Conflict/ Disasters	Political /Process -driven	'Soft' news	Science / Tech- nology	Economy /Business	Sport	Other
Global South	Items (No.)							
	Airtime (sec)							
Global North	Items (No.)							
	Airtime (sec)							
TOTAL	Items (No.)							
	Airtime (sec)							

3) Regional emphasis

	Including sports / business		Excluding sports / business	
	Number of items	Airtime in seconds	Number of items	Airtime in seconds
Middle East and North Africa (MENA)				
Sub-Saharan Africa (incl. Sudan and South Sudan[140])				
Asia (South, Central and Asia Pacific)				
Australia and New Zealand				
Latin America				
North America (US and Canada)				
Europe				

4) The relative weight given to stories from the 'global South' and 'global North' respectively as expressed in the RUNNING ORDER of the programmes

Items from the 'global South'			
Position in running order of 1st item	Minutes into the programme of 1st item	Number of items within first 15min	Airtime of items within first 15min
Items from the 'global North'			
Position in running order of 1st item	Minutes into the programme of 1st item	Number of items within first 15min	Airtime of items within first 15min

5a) Number and time of *items containing* original stories, cross-referenced with categories of 'global South' and 'global North'

		TOTAL	Items 'global South'	Items 'global North'
Original stories (not part of the comparative	No.			

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[140] Geographically, Sudan and South Sudan, which gained independence from Sudan in 2011, are part of Sub-Saharan Africa. Because of Sudan's majority Arab population, they are however, depending on context, variously considered as being part of Sub-Saharan or North Africa. For the purpose of the content analysis, I included reports from or about Sudan and/or South Sudan in the geographical category of Sub-Saharan Africa.

programme of the other channel in the sample)	Sec.			

5b) Number of *items containing* official statements and on-air time of official statements, cross-referenced with categories of 'global South' and 'global North'

		TOTAL	Items 'global South'	Items 'global North'
Press conferences and official statements	No.			
	Sec.			

6) Reporters – cross-referencing gender and 'Western' / 'Non-Western' background

	TOTAL	Women	Men
'Non-Western' background			
'Western' background			
TOTAL			

7a) Protagonists – 'Non-Western' / 'Western background', cross-referenced with gender and socio-political role in which they appear on screen

	Total		'Non-Western' background		'Western' background	
	Appearances	Airtime	Appearances	Airtime	Appearances	Airtime
Establishment						
Independent elites						
'Ordinary people' / grassroots opposition						
Women						
Men						
TOTAL						

7b) Protagonists – 'Non-Western' / 'Western background', cross-referenced with the role in which they appear on screen

	Establishment		Independent elites		'Ordinary people' / grassroots opposition	
	Appearances	Airtime	Appearances	Airtime	Appearances	Airtime
Women						
Men						

8a) Studio Guests and Interviewees – 'Non-Western' / 'Western background', cross-referenced with gender and socio-political role in which they appear on screen

	Total		'Non-Western' background		'Western' background	
	Appearances	Airtime	Appearances	Airtime	Appearances	Airtime
Establishment						
Independent elites						
'Ordinary people' / grassroots opposition						
Women						
Men						
TOTAL						

8b) Studio Guests and Interviewees – 'Non-Western' / 'Western background', cross-referenced with the role in which they appear

	Establishment		Independent elites		'Ordinary people' / grassroots opposition	
	Appearances	Airtime	Appearances	Airtime	Appearances	Airtime
Women						
Men						