The Development of Pan-Arab Broadcasting Under Authoritarian Regimes — A Comparison of Sawt al-Arab ("Voice of the Arabs") and Al Jazeera News Channel

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Abstract

This thesis examines the development of pan-Arab broadcasting under authoritarian regimes in the modern Middle East. It undertakes an historical comparison of radio broadcasting under former Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser, more specifically the influential radio program Sawt al-Arab ("Voice of the Arabs"), and satellite television broadcasting under current Qatari Emir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, particularly the renowned Al Jazeera News Channel. While Nasser and Al Thani may have employed their nations' broadcasting apparatuses as means by which to achieve their own ends, contemporary comparisons which imply that these authoritarian leaders have encoded their broadcasting content with similar pan-Arab rhetoric are unfounded. Rather, legitimate points of comparison are found in audience decoding responses, for both Sawt al-Arab and Al Jazeera have demonstrated the ability to transform the interactions of domestic, international and expatriate Arabs through new technological advancements, thus producing increasingly modern variants of previous communal imaginings.

Keywords: pan-Arab; broadcasting; media; Sawt al-Arab; Al Jazeera; Middle East
In memory of my uncle Fuad George Musteh
and my mentor William L. Cleveland.

You are both greatly loved and sorely missed.
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With this said, I would be remiss if I did not give my greatest thanks to Professor Cleveland, for rarely is a graduate student blessed with the guidance of such an intelligent, caring and inspiring senior supervisor. Not only was Professor Cleveland passionate about his work and teaching, but his dedication to his graduate students was unmatched. Although
heroically battling cancer for the duration of my graduate studies, Professor Cleveland never let this stop him from attending meetings, answering questions, reading chapter drafts or offering feedback and assistance. While I am deeply saddened that Professor Cleveland passed away just months before my thesis defence, I realize how truly blessed we all were to have enjoyed the time we did with him. His courage and passion has had a tremendous influence on my academic and personal life; for this I owe him a debt of gratitude that I am unable to repay. I can only hope that I have made him proud.

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# Table of Contents

Approval .............................................................................................................................. ii  
Abstract ............................................................................................................................ iii  
Dedication ........................................................................................................................... iv  
Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................... v  
Table of Contents ............................................................................................................... vii  

Introduction ......................................................................................................................... 1  
Chapter 1: The Transformation of the Arab Media Landscape — From Nasser to Al Thani ........................................................................................................................................................................... 19  
Chapter 2: The Dominant Encoding of the *Sawt al-Arab* and Al Jazeera Broadcasting Idioms ......................................................................................................................................................... 50  
Chapter 3: The Polysemous Decoding of and Response to the *Sawt al-Arab* and Al Jazeera Broadcasting Idioms ...................................................................................................................................................................... 74  
Conclusion ................................................................................................................................ 103  

Bibliography .......................................................................................................................... 109
Introduction

As historian Ami Ayalon explains, prior to the turn of the twentieth century the predominantly Muslim populations of the Arab world participated in a highly effective communication system that provided them with cohesion, stability and self-identification by way of two essential foundations. First was the all-encompassing ethos of the Islamic faith (and thus by association the Arabic language), which set forth prescribed guidelines not only for worship, but also for the ummah's (Islamic community) daily interactions; second was the territorially expansive and highly pragmatic rule of the Ottoman Empire (1350-1918). During this period, the major points of official government communication to the sultan's subjects were instituted by way of mosques, travelling preachers and public criers, while unofficial communication channels amongst the population centred on mosques, bazaars, cafes and other customary gathering places. Consequently, this predominantly oral culture would not see the advent of print in the form of a written press, nor feel an exigency for increased domestic or international news and information, until the mid-nineteenth century.¹ Yet once established the print medium found only a limited elite audience due principally to the tremendously high rates of illiteracy that characterized the region. Consequently, the populations of the Arab world did not feel the affects of a true mass communication medium until the introduction of broadcasting in the mid-twentieth century. This thesis investigates the emergence, evolution and subsequent impact of pan-Arab broadcasting in

the modern Middle East, particularly under authoritarian Arab regimes. More specifically, it undertakes an historical comparison between the ideological and propagandist nature of radio broadcasting under former Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser, especially the well-known pan-Arab program *Sawt al-Arab* ("Voice of the Arabs"), and the controversial character of satellite television broadcasting under current Qatari Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, particularly that of the renowned Al Jazeera News Channel.

Prior to the coup d'état of 1952, the Egyptian press expressed a plurality of viewpoints. However, once the Free Officers consolidated power they began to censor the Egyptian media (both print and electronic), eventually incorporating them into the Nasserite regime. Keenly aware of the potential that radio broadcasting held for overcoming barriers of illiteracy, distance and censorship — three of the deficiencies exhibited by the printed press — Nasser quickly established Egyptian radio broadcasting as his official voice and chief tool of state propaganda. The Egyptian radio service most successful in assisting Nasser in achieving his political ends was the extremely popular and yet highly controversial *Sawt al-Arab*. Launched as one of Radio Cairo's services in 1953, *Sawt al-Arab* allowed Nasser to communicate his anti-imperialist and pan-Arab policies to all segments of the

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2 Lisa Wedeen, Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria (Chicago, 1999), 26. For the purpose of this thesis, I have used the term "authoritarian" as defined by Wedeen: "...leaders are intolerant of people or groups perceived as threatening to the regime's monopoly over the institutions of the state, including those state-controlled institutions (the press, radio, television, schools) charged with symbolic production."

3 Simple convention was used in determining the appropriate transliteration of each media outlet's name. For instance, *Sawt al-Arab* will appear in italics, as it is a transliteration of the Arabic phrase "Voice of the Arabs," whereas Al Jazeera will not appear in italics, as it is instead considered the name of a specific news outlet and not a transliteration of the Arabic phrase "the island." Any deviation from this convention that appears in this thesis does so only within direct quotations or in the footnoting of other sources whose authors have chosen to observe other transliteration criteria.

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Although the program, which could be heard throughout the Arab world, found great success by building on pre-existing political and cultural sentiments of its Arab listeners, it also sought to create and encourage political change in Arab nations opposing Nasser's policies, as such Sawt al-Arab ultimately secured its place in history as the most infamous example of state induced broadcasting control and propaganda in the Arab world.

Conversely, the Qatari media system grew out of new government modernization policies rather than a national environment of political and social struggle. Along with the establishment of Al Jazeera the current Qatari Emir has undertaken a long list of innovative reforms that have helped define Qatar's position in regional and global economic, political and social domains. It is this new mentality, geared toward the modernization of Qatar and facilitated through new policies of economic and political liberalism that has allowed a news organization like Al Jazeera the opportunity to emerge. Hence, it has been argued that the Qatari government's communication philosophy has encouraged free and democratic media in the Arab world. With that said, however, it has been the station's graphic, bold and unapologetic coverage of current affairs in the Middle East that has garnered it a reputation as a provocateur of debate worldwide since its establishment in 1996. Not only does Al Jazeera represent a sharp departure from the traditional direct government control of news broadcasting in the Arab world, but it has also been credited with creating a new Arab public

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4 Douglas A. Boyd, "Egyptian Radio: Tool of Political and National Development," Journalism Monographs 48 (February 1977), 13. As Boyd notes, Egypt's radio services were often difficult to distinguish from one another chiefly because many of them began their transmissions with the phrase “this is Cairo.” Unfortunately, this has led some scholars to periodically label specific programs such as Sawt al-Arab simply as Radio Cairo when in fact it is more accurate to list Sawt al-Arab as one of Radio Cairo's many services. On the rare occasions when this problem was encountered, the information given was cross referenced with other historical sources in an effort to determine if Sawt al-Arab was the Radio Cairo service actually being addressed.
sphere. Undoubtedly, such interpretations are open to debate, yet it is not surprising that scholars, media analysts and journalists alike have been quick to label the revolutionary news outlet the ‘CNN of the Middle East.’

Historiography

Sociologist John B. Thompson argues that “if we wish to understand the nature of modernity — that is, of the institutional characteristics of modern societies and the life conditions created by them — then we must give a central role to the development of communication media and their impact” and thus criticizes social and political theory for routinely ignoring the “mediazation of modern culture.” Unfortunately, historical studies, especially those dealing with the Arab world, have been equally neglectful. In the past years important titles have been released which specifically address varied forms of mass communication in the Arab world; most notable are Douglas A. Boyd’s *Broadcasting In the Arab World: A Survey of the Electronic Media in the Middle East* (1982/1993/1999), Ami Ayalon’s *The Press in the Arab Middle East: A History* (1995), Naomi Sakr’s *Satellite Realms: Transnational Television, Globalization and the Middle East* (2001), William A. Rugh’s *Arab Mass Media: Newspapers, Radio and Television in Arab Politics* (2004), as well as edited volumes such as Yahya

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5 Jürgen Habermas characterizes the public sphere as a realm in which people assemble to generate, share and debate information free of state or commercial influence, thus leading to the formation of public opinion and eventually democratic conditions. While a highly useful theoretical tool, many have been critical of the exclusionist and elitist nature of this theory in its original Habermasian rendering. For instance, Nancy Fraser critiques Habermas for excluding certain segments of society based on gender and/or class and instead suggests that a multitude of public spheres be considered. For more on Habermas’ original theory of the public sphere, as well as Fraser’s critique of it, see Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” in C. Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, 1992) and Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, 1989).

6 John B. Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture* (Stanford, 1990), 11; John B. Thompson, *The Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media* (Stanford, 1995), 3. Thompson defines the mediazation of modern culture as “the rapid proliferation of institutions of mass communication and the growth of networks of transmission through which commodified...[and non-commodified]...symbolic forms were made available to an ever-expanding domain of recipients.” Here symbolic forms are defined as ranging from linguistic statements to complex images and texts.
R. Kamalipour and Hamid Mowlana's *Mass Media in the Middle East: A Comprehensive Handbook* (1994), Kai Hafez's *Mass Media, Politics, and Society in the Middle East* (2001) and Naomi Sakr's *Women and the Media in the Middle East: Power Through Self-Expression* (2004). Yet as this small list of fairly recent titles suggests mass communication, and broadcasting in particular, has generally been relegated to the wayside of historical consideration. Given the crucial role that broadcasting has come to play in transforming the daily interactions of the still highly illiterate populations of the Arab world (both amongst themselves and with their respective governments), as well as the recent unprecedented global success of Al Jazeera, there exists a vital need for increased scholarship regarding new Arab media. This point is further illuminated by the limitations evident in the English-language literature regarding both *Sawt al-Arab* and Al Jazeera.

While the research undertaken for this thesis did uncover two short monographs which deal specifically with mass communication during the Nasserite era — Douglas A. Boyd's *Egyptian Radio: Tool of Political and National Development* (1977) and Munir K. Nasser's *Egyptian Mass Media Under Nasser and Sadat: Two Models of Press Management and Control* (1990) — no studies were found which focused exclusively on *Sawt al-Arab*. At best, these two studies pay the program only brief attention and simply by way of descriptive narratives — a problem characteristic of the previously noted lengthier studies by Sakr (2001) and Kamalipour and Mowlana as well.

The aforementioned titles were supplemented and/or buttressed by a number of historical works focusing on the political history of Nasser's reign, the Egyptian state and other Arab nations that had been targets of *Sawt al-Arab*'s propaganda campaigns. Examples

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7 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Arab Human Development Report 2002: Creating Opportunities for Future Generations* (New York, 2002), 3, 51-52. UNDP notes that as of 2002 about 65 million Arabs were still illiterate, at least two thirds of which were women.
of such works include Charles Issawi’s *Egypt in Revolution: An Economic Analysis* (1963), Patrick Seal’s *The Struggle For Syria: A Study of Post-war Arab Politics, 1945-1958* (1965), the third edition of Malcolm H. Kerr’s *The Arab Cold War: Gamal ‘Abd al-Nasir and His Rivals, 1958-1970* (1971), Robert Stephen’s *Nasser: A Political Biography* (1971), Kirk J. Beattie’s *Egypt During the Nasser Years: Ideology, Politics, and Civil Society* (1994) and the second edition of Charles Tripp’s *A History of Iraq* (2002). Although none of these studies addresses *Sawt al-Arab* at length they do situate the program (and Egyptian broadcasting more generally) in relation to key historical events of the period, with some also providing evidence of the regional masses and governments’ reactions to *Sawt al-Arab*’s broadcasts. Rather than simply presenting basic details that divorce the program from larger issues in Arab history, these titles legitimate the program as an important factor in the unfolding of historical events during the Nasser era. Unfortunately, at the same time that these authors allude to the significance of *Sawt al-Arab* they also take for granted the reader’s familiarity with the program, its mandate and significance, thus generally ignoring the narrative details provided by the broader studies mentioned earlier.

Thankfully a small number of authors have taken the best qualities of the previously mentioned titles and combined them with lengthier analytical examinations that *Sawt al-Arab* surely warrants. For instance, in his study *Egypt Under Nasir: A Study in Political Dynamics* (1971) Hrair R. Dekmejian undertakes a content analysis of Egyptian radio from January 1, 1952 to December 31, 1959 in an effort to trace its rise in Arabist ideology and how this increase was reflective of Nasser’s ideological shift from Egyptian nationalist to pan-Arab leader. Although not focusing on Arab broadcasting exclusively, Julian Hales’ *Radio Power: Propaganda and International Broadcasting* (1975) examines Egyptian radio propaganda as a tool of modern diplomacy, positioning it in relation to other world broadcasting models
including, but not limited to, those of Nazi Germany and Britain’s public broadcasting system the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). In a somewhat similar vein, Adeed Dawisha’s *Egypt in the Arab World: The Elements of Foreign Policy* (1976) pays particular attention to *Sawt al-Arab*’s role as a propaganda device utilized by the Egyptian elite to achieve and reinforce their foreign policy objectives. Dawisha’s later work *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair* (2003) supports his 1976 arguments, but focuses the bulk of its attention on Nasser and *Sawt al-Arab*’s role in the rise and fall of pan-Arab nationalism. Both James Jankowski’s “Arab Nationalism in ‘Nasserism’ and Egyptian State Policy, 1952-1958” (in *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East* (1997) which he edited with Israel Gershoni) and *Nasser’s Egypt, Arab Nationalism, and the United Arab Republic* (2002) briefly address Egyptian radio’s role in supporting Egyptian policies as well, but pay special attention to Nasser’s political and ideological evolution from the time of his youth to the trials of his leadership of the United Arab Republic (UAR). Finally, the third edition of Boyd’s aforementioned study *Broadcasting in the Arab World: A Survey of the Electronic Media in the Middle East* (1999) positions Egypt as the Arab world’s leader in broadcasting through his examination of the developments, trends and problems which have faced radio and television broadcasting in the Middle East and North Africa over the past decades.

Equally important as these academic works, but not nearly as objective, are the memoirs and autobiographies of the period’s participant observers. These documents provide crucial first hand accounts of the policies behind the establishment, expansion and development of *Sawt al-Arab*, as well as the impact it had on its listeners and enemies. Nasser’s 1953 publication *The Philosophy of the Revolution (Falsafat al-Thawra)* provides the best understanding of his rise to political maturity, how he came to so ardently support pan-Arab unity and what he felt the future held for the Egyptian state and people — all elements
crucial to the understanding of *Sawt al-Arab*. Additionally, in a rare English-language audio interview with CBS Chief European Correspondent Howard K. Smith in 1956, Nasser speaks directly to Western accusations that the broadcasts of *Sawt al-Arab* proved his ambitions to build an Arab empire — invaluable evidence for a thesis of this nature. Furthermore, famed Egyptian journalist and Nasser confidante Mohamed Hassanein Heikal’s *The Cairo Documents: The Inside Story of Nasser and His Relationship with World Leaders, Rebels, Statesmen* (1973) provides few, but extremely rare, insights into Nasser’s control of and views on radio broadcasting. Former Egyptian minister of information and deputy prime minister Dr. M. Abdel-Kader Hatem’s *Information and the Arab Cause* (1974) gives a detailed account of the ‘public relations’ campaigns he helped design and implement under Nasser’s leadership, as well as the more socially responsible media philosophy he helped introduce under Nasser’s successor Anwar Sadat. The late King Hussein of Jordan directly discussed the affect *Sawt al-Arab* had on his citizens, as well as his foreign policy decision-making in his autobiography *Uneasy Lies the Head* (1962). From a Western perspective former British prime minister Anthony Eden’s *The Suez Crisis of 1956* (1960) and former British diplomat Anthony Nutting’s *Nasser* (1972) both briefly address the influence *Sawt al-Arab* had on both British foreign policy and the affect they perceived it to also have had on the Arab masses.

Finally, the BBC’s *Summary of World Broadcasts* must be noted. Although they are not part of the academic literature as such, these English-language transcripts of *Sawt al-Arab* and Radio Cairo’s transmissions are an invaluable resource for any historian concerned with
Egyptian broadcasting. Because it is believed that any documents or recordings pertaining to Sawt al-Arab were likely destroyed after Nasser's death, these transcripts — while only documenting a few hours of Radio Cairo services' daily transmissions — serve as the greatest standing record of Egypt's most notorious radio broadcasts.

While each of the aforementioned titles contains useful information regarding Sawt al-Arab and Radio Cairo, the most extensive of their examinations fills only a few pages. Given that Nasser was the first Arab leader to attempt to reach the whole of the Arab world through his nation's radio broadcasts, it is surprising that the legacy of Sawt al-Arab has become dissociated from examinations of broadcasting following his death. For instance, aside from Munir K. Nasser's comparative study of mass communication under Nasser and Sadat, no other study provides a thorough examination of the impact Sawt al-Arab had on the Arab media landscape and its evolution from Nasser's death on. Given the influence that Sawt al-Arab had on the Arab world and the legacy that it has left for its successors, it was felt that a more comprehensive analytical and comparative study of the program was urgently needed.

While there are few titles which address Al Jazeera, those that do are generally dedicated exclusively to it. This singular focus can be attributed to the controversy that has surrounded Al Jazeera since it first became known internationally following the events of September 11, 2001 and the subsequent airing of its exclusive interview with Al Qaeda leader

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8 Although Simon Fraser University's Bennett Library does carry the BBC Summary of World Broadcasts their collection begins only with the 1965 volumes. While it was thought that I may be able to access earlier editions through interlibrary loan, this proved to be extremely difficult if not impossible as these reports were released on a daily basis. Thus without a precise date, volume or page number, I was unable to request the documents. To rectify this problem, the works of authors who had access to pre-1965 instalments were used (for instance, studies by Boyd, Dawisha, Jankowski and Seale). It was felt that in researching the same time period these scholars had almost certainly referenced the most vital portions of Egypt's broadcasts in their works. With that said post-1965 transcripts from Bennett library were used wherever possible.
Osama bin Laden. Unfortunately, these published works have often been of a very
descriptive, rather than of an historical, theoretical, or analytical nature.

The first title to deal exclusively with Al Jazeera was Mohammed El-Nawawy and
Abdel Iskandar’s *Al-Jazeera: The Story of the Network that is Rattling Governments and Redefining
Modern Journalism* (2002/2003). Although this study provided the most comprehensive and
thorough discussion of Al Jazeera available upon its release, it is almost wholly descriptive,
providing little analysis or historical context. Although Hugh Miles’ more recent release *Al
Jazeera: How Arab TV News Challenged the World* (2005) provides more analysis it is also not
academic in nature, a fact that can be attributed to Miles’ journalistic background. The
narrative character of these two studies is also problematic as their lack of criticism and
analysis positions their studies as highly support of Al Jazeera. Yet regardless of their faults,
these two works still provide invaluable full-length studies of Al Jazeera and the issues
concerning it and as such were enormously helpful in the researching of this thesis.

Fortunately in the past few years scholars have recognized and worked to fill the
holes that exist in the scholarship on Al Jazeera, the most encouraging results being
Mohamed Zayani’s edited volume *The Al Jazeera Phenomenon: Critical Perspectives on the New
Arab Media* (2005) and Marc Lynch’s *Voices of the New Arab Public: Iraq, Al-Jazeera, and Middle
East Politics* (2006). Contributors to Zayani’s anthology provide much needed critical analysis
of such diverse topics as Qatar’s relationship with Western powers, as well as Al Jazeera’s
contribution to the development of an Arab public sphere, its flagship program *The Opposite
Direction*, its role in women’s development, its coverage of the Palestinian Intifada and the
war in Afghanistan and Aljazeera.net, the channel’s Arabic-language website. Lynch, on the
other hand, examines Al Jazeera’s contribution to the formation of what he calls a new Arab
public through a critical case study analysis of Arab political debates surrounding the current situation in Iraq.

Given the contemporary nature of Al Jazeera and the controversy that has surrounded it, it is not surprising that television and documentary directors have also sought to better understand its international influence. Both Ben Anthony’s television special *Wide Angle: Exclusive to Al Jazeera* (2003) and Jehane Noujaim’s feature documentary *Control Room* (2004) give viewers an insider’s perspective of Al Jazeera’s operations and pay particular attention to its coverage of the current war in Iraq and the American military’s opposition to the station’s reports. Filmed during the early stages of the U.S.’ current operation in Iraq, both videos document history in the making — events that print literature can only discuss and speculate upon after the fact.

I supplemented these titles and documentaries with various press clippings, journal articles and Internet sources, plus regularly consulted Al Jazeera’s English-language website. While video footage of Al Jazeera was acquired for this study, it was the station’s website that was most useful in accessing the station’s broadcasting mentality. Much as the *BBC Summaries of World Broadcasts* acted as the primary source documents for *Sawt al-Arab*, Al Jazeera’s website serves as the most easily accessible record and archive of the station’s coverage of current events. Aside from providing online documentation of Al Jazeera’s daily news coverage, the website also offers exclusive features, public opinion polls and the station’s indispensable Code of Ethics.

Again because the history of Al Jazeera is still unfolding, the previous lack of academic research is slowly being rectified by the continuous publication of more critical research, for it would seem that scholars are only beginning to truly assess the magnitude of Al Jazeera’s significance and potential. Furthermore, recent works have sought to relate the
station back to *Sawt al-Arab*. Although usually brief and lacking in nuanced historical discussion, these works have at least made an effort to draw a historical lineage between the two broadcasting outlets. Thus the rise of Al Jazeera has seemingly reawakened new debates about the influence *Sawt al-Arab*’s legacy has had on the contemporary Arab media landscape. Unfortunately, while both Zayani and Lynch dedicate space in their works to discussing the relevance of *Sawt al-Arab* to the understanding of Al Jazeera, neither author affords the station more than a page and a half of their text.9

**Methodology**

Studies concerning mass communication often focus on only one characteristic, function or consequence of the medium or outlet under examination, but because mass communication produces a fundamental separation between sender and receiver a unique multi-layered methodology must be adopted. Thompson suggests that a “tripartite approach” be used to investigate the key aspects of mass communication: 1) the production and distribution of mass mediated symbolic forms, 2) the construction of media messages; and 3) the reception and appropriation of media messages.10 While this thesis borrows this larger theoretical framework from Thompson, it also supplements it with communication scholar Stuart Hall’s well-known “encoding/decoding” model. Closely echoing the second and third stages of Thompson’s “tripartite approach,” Hall’s model also seeks to examine the ideological messages encoded within media messages and how these

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10 Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture*, 23.
same messages are decoded by their audiences. Therefore in order for this thesis to present a comprehensive historical comparison between *Sawt al-Arab* and Al Jazeera, it must first consider who established the media outlets under examination and why, what messages have been embedded within the content they broadcast and how audiences have understood and responded to these same messages. The chapters that make up this thesis are reflective of this three-stage methodology.

**Chapter Summaries**

Chapter one traces the evolution of the Arab media landscape by undertaking a brief investigation into the political and economic policies and/or imperatives that inspired Nasser and Al Thani to expand their respective nations' broadcasting systems. While few strong correlations can be drawn between the two, this chapter demonstrates that both authoritarian leaders utilized the latest broadcasting communication technology available as a means by which to reach their political and developmental ends. In doing so, it seeks to expand on previous authors' less than complete discussions of the historical events that ushered in the fall of *Sawt al-Arab* and the rise of Al Jazeera.

Furthermore, as Boyd asserts, the growth of broadcasting in Egypt under Nasser's leadership must be understood before broadcasting in other Middle Eastern countries can be addressed, as Egypt was the first state to construct high-powered mediumwave and shortwave transmitters aimed at reaching not only its domestic population, but also the rest

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11 One of the greatest contributions of Hall's "encoding/decoding" model is that it works to deconstruct the notion of 'the masses' by asserting that audiences are able to produce their own readings and meanings of media content by way of various decoding positions. Thus while this thesis (particularly chapter three) may refer to how the Arab masses decoded the value-laden messages Nasser encoded into the broadcasts of *Sawt al-Arab*, this should not be understood as a misinterpretation or misunderstanding of Hall. Rather, the literature covering the Nasser era, and specifically the time of *Sawt al-Arab*, continually refer to the "Arab masses" due to the audiences' predominantly favorable reception of Nasser and his policies. Surely not all Arabs understood and read the broadcasts of *Sawt al-Arab* in exactly the same way, however, it would seem that their primarily dominant-hegemonic decoding of *Sawt al-Arab* has lead scholars to believe that its audiences were responding en masse. For the original version of Hall's "Encoding/Decoding," see Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe and Paul Willis, eds. *Culture, Media, Language* (Hutchinson, 1980).
of the Arab world. Thus, because the study of broadcasting and its political, economic and social affects on the Arab world can only truly be understood within the historical and communicative context in which it originates, it is only fitting that any Arab broadcast medium under consideration be viewed in light of Radio Cairo and the influence of Sawt al-Arab.

Chapter two examines the values encoded within the broadcasting content of both Sawt al-Arab and Al Jazeera. It is hoped that an investigation of this nature will finally put to rest misguided assertions that Sawt al-Arab and Al Jazeera's broadcasts are similar in their pan-Arab rhetoric. Although it was not unanticipated that Middle Eastern commentators and academics would attempt to draw a correlation between Sawt al-Arab and Al Jazeera once the latter made its entrance onto the world stage, such comparisons are unfounded. It would seem that this association appeared logical given the presence, both in the early and late twentieth century, of the introduction of a relatively new communication medium and a political climate rife with anti-imperialist and nationalistic sentiments. In other words, for many academics, journalists and audience members the rise of Arab satellite television combined with the political climate that Al Jazeera both debuted within and is now continually helping to shape, was reminiscent of the age of Nasserite propaganda.

However, as Mohamed Zayani asserts, "...Al Jazeera is not Sawt al Arab. [Although] it may be vaguely reminiscent of the heyday of Nasser's Arab nationalism" it is very different in its style and content. Zayani goes on to assert that while it is still regarded by some as Sawt al-Arab's nearest heir, Al Jazeera's "pan-Arab overtones are not only subtle, but different and less contrived. [It] has come to play an important role in broadening pan-Arab

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12 Boyd, Broadcasting in the Arab World, 16.
interaction. As such, it projects an inclusive identity which crosses national boundaries."

Thus, it would be wrong to assume that the founding of Al Jazeera was undertaken with the intention ofreviving and promoting pan-Arab sentiments of a Nasserite character. In fact, Al Thani has been quite forthright in asserting that the establishment of Al Jazeera has served Qatar’s overall developmental and modernization campaign, which was designed to boldly announce the arrival of this tiny Gulf state onto the global political and economic scenes. Hence, any pan-Arab sentiments that Al Jazeera may have rekindled amongst domestic, expatriate or transnational Arab communities is not only remarkably different from Nasser’s failed dream of Arab unity, but would also seem to be an unintended by-product of one authoritarian Arab regime’s determined drive toward modernization.

Finally, chapter three assesses the impact that new broadcast media have had in transforming the unpredictable “Arab street” into a new “public sphere” by examining how Sawt al-Arab and Al Jazeera’s messages have been decoded by their audiences. Often ignored in academic fields outside of communication, but ultimately felt in any population’s daily life, the enormous impact that broadcast communication media have on both the interactions of their populations, as well as their governments, cannot be ignored. As stated earlier, comparisons of Sawt al-Arab and Al Jazeera have so often been drawn due in large part to the enormous, yet divergent, impact each has had on global Arab populations. Of course, given the nature of the programming available to both media’s audiences, it is understandable that Sawt al-Arab and Al Jazeera’s programming content have been decoded in dissimilar ways, thus resulting in a varied continuum of public reaction. Yet, they have

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15 Eickelman, “New Media in the Arab Middle East and the Emergence of Open Societies,” 37, 47-50; Lynch, Voice of the New Arab Public, 73-76.
also both allowed for modern variants of Benedict Anderson’s “imagined communities” to emerge.

In *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983/1991) Anderson defines the nation as an imagined political community that is both naturally limited and sovereign. As he explains, these communities are not nations created where they never truly existed, but rather are those differentiated through the means by which they are envisioned, for “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.” As a result, these nations, which exist within defined yet flexible boundaries, become communities that share feelings of profound camaraderie and sovereignty — emotions Anderson proposes account for some individuals’ willingness “to die for such limited imaginings.” While widely recognized as one of the most influential studies on nationalism in recent scholarship, Anderson’s thesis has also been criticized, particularly by academics focusing on subaltern studies, for treating the origins and spread of nationalism as a universal phenomenon. This criticism holds true for this study as well, particularly with regard to Anderson’s assertion that one of the principle means by which these imaginings were constructed was through the formation of print-capitalism.

Anderson draws a fundamental linkage between the death of human linguistic diversity and its relationship to capitalism and technology. For instance, he asserts that the newspaper — whose dissemination was continually expanding due to capitalist desires to create new markets — “provided the technical means for ‘re-presenting’ the kind of

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imagined community that is the nation.” In other words, by ‘consuming’ a newspaper, itself a cultural product, groups otherwise unaware of each other become connected through ceremonious and concurrent imaginings facilitated by shared print-languages. But what of oral cultures like those of the Arab world whose earliest imaginings generated through print would have been limited solely to members of the educated elite? This aspect of Anderson’s Western-focused “modular” forms of imagining cannot be comfortably transposed onto the Arab world where an all-inclusive imagining of the ‘Arab nation’ did not take place until the introduction of broadcasting technology during the Nasser era. Furthermore, the notion of the imagined community can now be extended to broader or multiple forms of national and cultural belongings — a multiplicity of imaginings brought into existence, at least in part, by new media technology. If Anderson’s thesis is expanded upon, thus taking into account heterogeneous and more contemporary, mass mediated cultural forms of national imaginings, Sawt al-Arab and Al Jazeera can be considered to have introduced progressively modern variants of his proposed imagined communities.

19 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 25, 33, 35, 44. Emphasis appears in original text.
21 Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski, “Print Culture, Social Change, and the Process of Redefining Imagined Communities in Egypt; Response to the Review by Charles D. Smith of Redefining the Egyptian Nation,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 31:1 (February 1999), 89. In debating with Smith over whether or not Anderson links “imagined communities” directly to land and boundaries, Gershoni and Jankowski assert that “[h]istorically, the absence of a state has not been a barrier to nationalist imaginings. To insist on the existence of a state as the essential criterion for genuine nationalism would deny the appellation “nationalist” to huge bodies of ideologues and activists — all Pan-German, Pan-Slavic, and Pan-Arab nationalist spokesmen; all advocates of diapora nationalisms; Zionists as well as Palestinian nationalists — who are conventionally and properly regarded as the creators of new imagined communities.” This same logic has been adopted in this thesis.
22 Charles D. Smith, ““Cultural Constructs” and Other Fantasies: Imagined Narratives in Imagined Communities; Surrejoinder to Gershoni and Jankowski’s “Print Culture, Social Changes, and the Process of Redefining Imagined Communities in Egypt,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 31:1 (February 1999), 100,102 ft.24. Again, during his debate with Gershoni and Jankowski, Smith accuses them of misinterpreting Anderson’s argument and suggests that they would have been less susceptible to criticism had they initially explained that they sought simply to supplement or extend Anderson’s argument. Correspondingly, this thesis proposes to expand upon Anderson’s thesis so as to better understand the impact broadcasting has had in facilitating the creation of imagined communities in the historically illiterate Arab world.
In conclusion, it is hoped that the historical examination of the political, economic and social factors that have shaped the Arab broadcast media landscape over the past decades, combined with in-depth and critical analysis of the encoding and decoding of Sawt al-Arab and Al Jazeera's media content, will allow this thesis to stand as an interdisciplinary and comparative contribution to the growing and much needed literature on Arab media in both the fields of historical and communication scholarship.
Chapter 1: The Transformation of the Arab Media Landscape — From Nasser to Al Thani

For the majority of people living in today’s media saturated world the term Arab broadcasting was not only irrelevant, but likely unheard of prior to the turn of the twenty-first century. However, this all changed following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, when Western media outlets began running footage from a relatively unknown Arab satellite news channel which showed exclusive coverage of the United States’ retaliatory attacks in Afghanistan. While the station’s special access in Afghanistan may have initiated the earliest international rumblings about this new medium, the station then aired the now infamous Osama bin Laden tapes, in which the Al Qaeda leader explained to Americans why they had been targeted — with this programming Al Jazeera was solidified as a household name. However, Arab broadcasting did not suddenly materialize with the advent of Al Jazeera nor can the true significance of the Arab satellite broadcasting phenomenon be reduced solely to the challenge it seems to pose to Western interests in the region. Much to the contrary, Arab broadcasting has a long and diverse history in the Middle East — a history to which Al Jazeera and its imitators are only the latest instalment.

It is thus imperative to view new Arab media within the historical context from which they were spawned, for the history of Arab broadcasting under authoritarian regimes — beginning particularly with the expansion of Arab radio broadcasting in Egypt during the 1950s and arriving at the rise of satellite television throughout the Arab world in the early 1990s — is visibly marked by a shift of concentration away from state ideological and
political concerns towards that of political and economic liberalism. It is this historic modification in the direction of broadcast communication in the Arab world that has allowed a news organization like Al Jazeera not only the appropriate environment in which to emerge, but has also given it the freedom to operate and flourish as no other Arab broadcasting service has in the past. In order to illustrate this changing context, this chapter undertakes case study analyses of Nasser's political ambitions which inspired Sawt al-Arab's ideological and propagandist radio broadcasts and Al Thani's liberal economic and political policies that led to his establishment of Al Jazeera. For by flanking the spectrum of divergent stages of broadcast media development in the Middle East, Sawt al-Arab represents the point at which Arab broadcasting truly began in the region and Al Jazeera the direction in which it is currently headed.

While Arabic-language broadcasting was available to the Arab populace prior to Nasser, it was undertaken predominantly by Western powers broadcasting radio signals into the Arab world. More specifically, radio broadcasting was utilized as a weapon of modern diplomacy by several European powers prior to and during World War II. For instance, Italy's Radio Bari began broadcasting in 1934; the British Broadcasting Corporation's (BBC) Arabic Service first went to air in 1938; the clandestine Nazi radio station The Voice of the Free Arabs commenced broadcasting into Egypt in 1941; and finally, the covert British operation known as Sharq al-Adna (The Near East Broadcasting Station, later The Voice of Britain) was established in 1942. This is not to say that the Arab countries did not

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undertake broadcasting initiatives themselves. Although the radio remained somewhat of a novelty in its early years, various Arab countries did make meagre attempts to employ the medium for their own purposes. However, in Egypt's case, local efforts at radio broadcasting prior to Nasser merely resulted in failed commercial ventures that could achieve little success when later overshadowed by Radio Bari, which dominated Arabic-language broadcasting once it went to air.⁴

While commonly owned by businessmen and financed by commercial advertising, Egyptian radio operations were often located in simple rooms or undersized apartments.⁵ Not unpredictably, by 1930 most of these one hundred plus stations had closed down — some because the operators themselves had lost interest, but most because they could not generate sufficient revenues due to the small number of radio receivers owned by the public and the fact that the Egyptian economy was simply not favorable to commercial radio ventures.⁶ As a result, private radio broadcast operations in Egypt ceased on May 29, 1934, only to be replaced two days later by government broadcasting. It was during this period that the Egyptian service is said to have become professional in quality, attracting many of Cairo's finest broadcasters, actors, musicians, and writers, which resulted in an increased attraction to radio and a concurrent rise in radio receiver ownership said to number approximately 86,477 in 1939.⁷

With early domestic Arabic-language stations finding it hard to compete with Western efforts at broadcasting diplomacy in the region, some scholars and commentators have been too quick to credit early European projects in international broadcasting with

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⁶ Boyd, Broadcasting in the Arab World, 16.
⁷ Boyd, Broadcasting in the Arab World, 17. Boyd also notes that each receiver had a yearly license fee of about four dollars. However, this still meant that ownership was financially out of reach for the average Egyptian. Rather, coffeehouse and restaurant owners purchased the majority of sets.
playing a predominant role in founding the broadcasting medium within the Arab world. For instance, Douglas A. Boyd has asserted that these broadcasts slowly reduced the Arabs’ early suspicions of the radio receiver, thus allowing them to begin embracing the new medium as a popular social and cultural custom. Nevertheless, Boyd himself acknowledges that a dearth of survey data from this historical period makes it nearly impossible to substantiate the impact that British, Italian, or German external Arabic-language broadcasting may have claimed in the Arab world prior to and during the Second World War.8

Thus, it is more crucial to acknowledge that the introduction of shortwave radio broadcasting into the Middle East by Western powers unquestionably revealed the potential for a clash between national sovereignty and freedom of expression across frontiers.9 By filtering information primarily from the top down (for instance, from one government transmission point to targeted masses) radio exhibited the ability for cross-border broadcasting to serve imperialistic and propagandist ends, revealing radio as a unilateral communication technology whose very nature was authoritarian.10 It would be this broadcasting mentality, geared toward the propagandist and ideological use of the radio medium in the service of foreign policy ventures, which would dominate the airwaves of the Arab world from the beginning of Nasser’s authoritarian rule in 1952 until his ultimate disgrace in 1967.

On the fateful morning of July 23, 1952 the Free Officers seized control of the Egyptian government’s broadcasting facilities. While taking possession of a state’s mass media is an action characteristic of many revolutionary movements, a distinction must be

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8 Boyd, Broadcasting in the Arab World, 295.
10 Wade Rowland, Spirit of the Web: The Age of Information From Telegraph to Internet (Toronto, 1999), 18; Sakr, Satellite Realms, 1.
made between the status of the Egyptian press and that of its broadcasting services. Whereas the Egyptian press had maintained an impressive degree of freedom prior to the coup d'état, it was quickly censored and then later nationalized by the Nasser regime in 1960. As previously mentioned, however, radio broadcasting was already a state run system when the revolution began and thus immediately became the official voice of Nasser and his fellow Free Officers.

While the radio broadcast system inherited by the Free Officers included pre-established and conventional government programming, most notably The Main Program (also known as Radio Cairo), it was not until almost a year after the revolution that Nasser's most contentious political instrument was unveiled. Saut al-Arab ("Voice of the Arabs"), which debuted on July 4, 1953, not only became the most popular radio program in the Arab world, but also ultimately served as the main channel for Nasser's anti-imperialism and pan-Arab propaganda. Beginning as a mere half hour daily program and quickly expanding into a twenty-four hour service by 1960, Saut al-Arab was beamed from both short and medium-wave transmitters, thus enabling the program to cover the whole of the Arab world. Its block format consisted of news, commentary, satirical parodies and dramas, reviews of newsprint content, speeches, interviews and talks given by prominent figures, as well as wataniyyat (patriotic songs) performed by the country's most famous singers, particularly Umm Kulthum, Muhammad 'Abd al-Wahhab and 'Abd al-Halim Hafiz.

Yet, those who listened to Saut al-Arab could hardly have mistaken its content for objective programming, for as Charles Issawi commented in 1963 "[it] has to be heard to be

11 Adeed Dawisha, Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair (Princeton, 2003), 148.
believed: for sheer venom, vulgarity, and indifference to truth it has few equals in the world." Sāwt al-'Arab's programming was strictly controlled by government censorship and was increasingly used by Nasser as a propagandist means by which to serve political and ideological ends, particularly the elimination of Western imperialism and Egypt's increasing leadership of the pan-Arab movement. Not only was the venture established and overseen by Nasser himself, but it was also directed and frequently hosted by Ahmed Said, a close associate of Nasser's and a man described by one former Sāwt al-'Arab employee as a:

Goebbels-like figure who refused to allow contradiction, who conceived every single programme, even music, in political terms, and censored everything himself. He would choose announcers for the emotional quality of their voice, and would give regular broadcasts himself, haranguing the people for about ten minutes a day at the top of his voice...He was always shouting, cursing, agitating.¹⁴

In the early years of Sāwt al-'Arab, Said's audience saw him as the emerging voice of the Arab people and as such responsible for both creating and capitalizing on a sense of united identity that was said to have taken a newly energized populace by surprise.¹⁵ Nevertheless, during the Six Day War of 1967 — in which Egypt, Syria and Jordan suffered a staggering defeat at the hands of Israel — Said's overzealous and increasingly embellished broadcasts misled the Arab populace to believe that victory was at hand. Not unpredictably, this deception signalled the ruin of Sāwt al-'Arab. Although Said represented the verbal embodiment of the program, the masses understood Nasser as the inspiration and guiding force behind the broadcasts' uniting rhetoric. Hence, any attempt at illuminating the purpose behind the establishment and expansion of this program must first and foremost seek to understand Nasser, the man himself, and his personal and political transformation

¹⁴ Unnamed former Sāwt al-'Arab staff member, as cited in Hale, Radio Power, 72.  
¹⁵ Hale, Radio Power, 72.
from a committed Egyptian nationalist to, arguably, the solitary architect of Egypt's late, yet commanding, leadership of the pan-Arab movement.

A full account of Nasser's conversion from his beginnings as a member of the Free Officers, to president of the Egyptian state and finally to the leader of the Arab world cannot be reiterated here. It is, however, essential to note that the overthrow of King Farouk in the July Revolution of 1952 authenticated Nasser and his fellow Free Officers as a brand of leadership new to the Arab world. Aside from their preliminary figurehead, General Mohammed Neguib, the group's members were middle rank officers in their late twenties or early thirties who had come from lower to middle class families and who had become friends either while studying at the War College or serving in the Sudan in the late 1930s and in the Palestinian campaign of 1948. Furthermore, they all suffered under British occupation, resented the power of Egypt's indigenous political and land-owning elite and were frustrated by the shameful reign of King Farouk. Thus, this new generation of nationalists called for the complete independence of Egypt from foreign imperialism, as well as social reform and eventually greater unity of the Arab world. Yet these were general ideas that left the Free Officers with seemingly vague ideas about what political or ideological course Egypt should take. Consequently, it was Nasser who swiftly became the group's true leader and whose charisma and political tenacity would catapult both him and the Egyptian

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nation to the forefront of Arab politics and onto the world stage.\textsuperscript{17}

Initially the Nasser-led Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) turned its attention to domestic issues — most specifically the popular, albeit somewhat flawed, land reforms of September 1952 and the evacuation of British military forces from Egyptian lands in April of 1956 — but as regional circumstances changed so did the regime’s focus. By 1955, Nasser had begun his gradual transformation from an ardent Egyptian nationalist to an esteemed pan-Arab leader. While a detailed account of the regional events that were the impetus for his transformation, as well as their corresponding impact on the formation of \textit{Sawt al-Arab}’s broadcasting idiom, has been left to chapter 2, at present it is important to briefly note the key events that marked this historical period as the age of Nasser.

Nasser’s outward expression of pan-Arabism began with his opposition to the U.S.-led Baghdad Pact in 1955. With the assistance of \textit{Sawt al-Arab} Nasser coerced Arab states such as Jordan, Lebanon and Syria to not sign the Cold War agreement, which sought to restrain Soviet influence in the Arab world. Ultimately, Nasser rendered the alliance null and void by purchasing arms from Czechoslovakia — a blatantly aggressive act that enraged the U.S. causing them to go back on their commitment to fund the Aswan Dam project, which was to assist Egypt both politically and economically. In response, Nasser nationalized the

\textsuperscript{17} Daniel Brumberg, \textit{Reinventing Khomeini: The Struggle for Reform in Iran} (Chicago, 2001), 14-15; Max Weber, \textit{The Theory of Social and Economic Organization} (New York, 1957), 358-59. As Weber states, “[t]he term ‘charisma’ will be applied to a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader... It is very often thought of as resting on magical powers.” However, Weber also goes on to argue that “[h]ow the quality in question would be ultimately judged from any ethical, aesthetic, or other such point of view is naturally entirely indifferent for purposes of definition. What is alone important is how the individual is actually regarded by those subject to charismatic authority, by his ‘followers’ or ‘disciples.’” In other words, and related directly to this thesis, it was not simply Nasser’s personal qualities that resulted in his being viewed by the majority of Arabs as the leader of the Arab world, but rather that his “charisma filled a preexisting emotional void... [during a time]... when conditions had already predisposed people toward charisma’s charm.” Emphasis appears in original. It was the hopes and expectations that the Arabs transposed onto Nasser, rather than the qualities inherent to the man himself, that made him seem to have possessed an aura.
Suez Canal, winning the hearts and minds of the Arab public. Such a bold move in opposition to Western imperialism certainly increased Nasser's prestige, but so did his ability to maintain control of Egypt and the Suez Canal after facing a secret attack by Britain, France and Israel, which resulted in the Suez Crisis of 1956.

Seen as a nationalist hero in the eyes of the Arab masses, Nasser and Egypt became the embodiment of the triumph of Arab dreams of sovereignty, dignity and unity over Western imperialism. Only two years later in 1958, the pan-Arab rhetoric that Nasser had espoused became reality with the announcement of the United Arab Republic (UAR), a complete union between Egypt and Syria. Although the ill-fated UAR would dissolve only three years later, Nasser's popularity did not abate until the humiliating defeat of Egypt, Jordan and Syria at the hands of Israel in the June War of 1967. Not only had they lost valuable territory, but as mentioned previously, Nasser and Said had let the Arabs believe that their victory was imminent. Regardless, for the majority of the eighteen years that he was in power, Nasser epitomized the hopes and aspirations of the Arab populace.

Although brief, this summary highlights the events and actions that endeared the Arab masses to the Egyptian president, thus leading them to perceive both Nasser and Egypt as almost interchangeable symbols of pan-Arab leadership. Nonetheless, Nasser was never wholly committed to Arab nationalism outside of its utility for the Egyptian state, as “Egypt lay at the center of Nasser's emotional universe.” In fact, the formation of Nasser's political consciousness was heavily couched in the Egyptian nationalist struggle against foreign occupation in which he had come to political maturity. Hence, his leadership of the pan-Arab movement developed only gradually and chiefly in response to the regional events.

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discussed above, beginning most particularly with the Baghdad Pact of 1955 and reaching its apex with the formation of the UAR in 1958.

This is not to say, however, that Nasser’s political consciousness developed devoid of Arab awareness or affiliation. In his 1953 publication *The Philosophy of the Revolution (Falsafat al-Thawra)*, Nasser explains that after serving in the devastating war of 1948 he came to understand how the fate of Egypt and the rest of the Arab world were linked:

> After the siege and battles in Palestine I came home with the whole region in my mind one complete whole...An event may happen in Cairo today; it is repeated in Damascus, Beirut, Amman or any other place tomorrow...One region, the same factors and circumstances, even the same forces opposing them all. It was clear that imperialism was the most prominent of these forces; even Israel itself was but one of the outcomes of imperialism.... I thus began to believe...in one common struggle and repeated to myself, “As long as the region is one, and its conditions, its problems and its future, and even the enemy are the same, however different are the masks that the enemy covers its face with, why should we dissipate our efforts?” The experience of what followed [the Free Officers Revolution] increased my faith in a united struggle [to unify the Arab regions] and its necessity.\(^\text{19}\)

Consequently, following the Egyptian Revolution of 1952 Nasser represented a marked exception to the majority of his colleagues who held fast to a well-defined policy of putting Egypt first and who believed that putting energy and resources into the Arab cause was a luxury that Egypt could not afford.\(^\text{20}\) Nasser, however, saw no contradiction in his allegiance to both Egyptian and Arab nationalism and regularly professed that the two could co-exist harmoniously, yet his dedication to each was not equal.\(^\text{21}\) No matter the outward expression of his support for or leadership of the Arab nationalist movement or his almost singular support for the notion to serve as the newest driving force behind Egyptian’s foreign policy,


Nasser always put his deep love and admiration for Egypt before his pragmatic utility of pan-Arab nationalism.

For Nasser there was inevitability to Egypt's leadership of the Arab world due to its place at the intersection of his three circles of influence — those of the Arab, Muslim and African worlds:

The annals of history are full of heroes who carved for themselves great and heroic roles and played them on momentous occasions on the stage. History is also charged with great heroic roles which do not find actors to play them on the stage. I do not know why I always imagine that in this region in which we live there is a role wandering aimlessly about seeking an actor to play it. I do not know why this role, tired of roaming about in this vast region which extends to every place around us, should at last settle down, weary and worn out, on our frontiers beckoning us to move, to dress up for it and to perform it since there is nobody else who can do so.22

Nasser's decision to occupy this role satisfied his objective of maintaining and strengthening Egyptian dominance in the region by way of guiding the Arab nationalist movement. Consequently, the adoption of a pan-Arab policy in the 1950s was almost entirely Nasser's judgment and was implemented due to his personal understanding of Arab solidarity's significance as a weapon in the battle against imperialism.23 For the Nasserite regime "[t]he application of Egypt's values to the Arab world [gave] rise to Egypt's aspirational goal...[of Arab unity, which]...constitute[d] the means for asserting the strategic implications of anti-imperialism, the ideological manifestations of Arabism, the political orientations of leadership, and the psychological needs of prestige."24 As we will see in chapter 2, it would be these four values — anti-imperialism, Arabism, leadership and prestige — that were at the heart of Sawa' al-Arab's broadcasting idiom.

23 Jankowski, Nasser's Egypt, 38.
Consequently, although *Sawt al-Arab*'s initial focus centred on revolutionary movements in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia — with Nasser even allowing Egypt's broadcasting facilities to be used to further these movements' causes — by 1955 this early support of Egypt's African neighbours was almost wholly overshadowed by the president's subsequent policy shift to pan-Arabism. Nasser's dedication to opposing Western imperialism and colonialism in the whole of the Arab world, tempered with his overriding primary commitment to the security of Egypt was clearly demonstrated in an interview with CBS Chief European Correspondent Howard K. Smith on February 7, 1956 in Cairo. When asked by Smith what Nasser made of his critics' charges that the broadcasts of *Sawt al-Arab* were evidence of his ambitions to create an Arab empire, Nasser stated that:

> Our Voice of the Arabs is against imperialism and colonialism. The Voice of the Arabs is supporting the liberation of the people and at the same time supporting...self-determination...if anybody says that we are working for imperialism and colonialism he may be misleading himself, misleading the world [and] public opinion. We want the liberation of Egypt, we want our neighbours [to] be liberated also, because [if] they'll be dominated or occupied, it will affect the safety and the security of our country.  

Although no documentation could be found in which Nasser directly expresses the influence early domestic or international broadcast operations may have had on his media policies following the 1952 revolution, it is safe to conclude that the pioneering medium's ability to transcend national boundaries while at the same time eliminating barriers of illiteracy were not lost on the young leader. He understood that radio could significantly expand his power base by encouraging all sectors of Egyptian society, including the illiterate and rural populations, to participate in the political development of Egypt. Consequently, by the mid to late 1950s Nasser permitted the mass importation of radio receivers from both

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Syria and the Gaza Strip, dropping the cost of a set to one Egyptian pound (about $3) — a price decrease that encouraged many Egyptians to forfeit money for food so they could purchase the "magical instrument."27 It has also been documented that the Egyptian government distributed radio receivers through various domestic programs. Munir K. Nasser notes one such initiative, the establishment of cultural centers in rural Egypt that seem reminiscent of the People's Houses established by Atatürk in Turkey during the 1920s and 1930s. These centers — each equipped with a radio receiver, government materials, a film projector and, after 1960, a television — were primarily established to expose villagers to Egyptian radio programs, familiarize them with the ideas of the revolution and educate them about personal hygiene through films produced by the Ministry of Health. Munir K. Nasser also notes that the powerful anti-imperialist and pan-Arab messages transmitted through these community radios began to challenge the traditional power of the Omda (village leader) and the Imams (religious leaders) as villagers began to increasingly identify with the policies and emotional rhetoric of the Egyptian regime.28 No longer excluded from the realm of political, cultural and religious knowledge and debate, all segments of Arab society could now simultaneously and instantly partake in Nasser's electronic and pan-Arab revolution. For the first time village peasants, including previously disregarded women, felt that they mattered; after all they now found themselves the object of the government’s concern and assistance and as such prized members of its targeted listening audience.29

It must be remembered, however, that the all-encompassing 'magic' of Cairo's broadcasts was not limited to the national boundaries of the Egyptian state. By the time other regional leaders caught on to the power of radio, large numbers of their citizens were

29 Boyd, Broadcasting in the Arab World, 327.
already listening to the broadcasts of Radio Cairo, specifically *Sawt al-Arab*, as they frequented the community cultural center, grocery store and coffeehouse, worked in the fields and factories or visited friends and family in their homes. Thus Nasser’s reputation as one of history’s most eminent orators was undoubtedly assisted by the ‘transistor revolution’ of the 1950s. Accordingly, Adeed Dawisha states that, “[l]ike no other Egyptian or Arab leader before him, or among his contemporaries, [Nasser] recognized the immense power of radio, a power which, as a dazzling orator, he used vigorously and effectively.”

Following *Sawt al-Arab*’s role in the Arabs’ defeat of 1967 and Nasser’s premature death in 1970, Anwar Sadat put Egypt’s mass media, including *Sawt al-Arab*, under the constraint of more conservative and Egyptian focused media policies. For its part, the Arab world was still reeling from its 1967 defeat and as a result the majority of Arab broadcasters followed Sadat’s example, avoiding controversy and keeping tight control over the content produced and disseminated. However, television had begun to make an impact on the Arab world by the 1960s — hints of a global change were afoot that would render Julian Hale’s 1975 prediction that “[n]o technical revolution is likely to replace radio as the principle medium of international communication” obsolete.

What was beginning to occur was a shift in the global media landscape from the functioning of radio broadcasting as the primary method of modern regional diplomacy to a more liberal global media landscape focused on the new technology of satellite television. In other words, the combined influence of three specific global events opened the way for

31 Dawisha, *From Triumph to Despair*, 147; Jankowski, *Nasser’s Egypt*, 54. Much like Dawisha, Jankowski notes that the new Nasserite regime “was keenly aware of the potential of radio as an instrument of state influence and power.”
“economic competition [to] replace ideological rivalry” as the driving force behind the continued establishment and maintenance of broadcasting communication systems in the Middle East, particularly by authoritarian Arab regimes.34

The first of these global events was the introduction of the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) in the 1970s. The NWICO’s roots stemmed from the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM) of 1955 and the decolonization of a number of the world’s less industrialized countries mainly in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Simply put, the NWICO sought to address imbalances in the political economy of the media and information systems, as it was feared that Western influences would culminate into a form of cultural domination and imperialism that would affect national identity, cultural integrity, and political and economic sovereignty.35 In 1976 the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) convened the MacBride Commission to investigate global communication issues and to find a solution to the disparities present between Western nations (particularly the U.S. and the United Kingdom) and those nations of the NAM. Although the MacBride Commission’s resulting report, Many Voices, One World released in 1980, was criticized for its use of vague language, ineffective recommendations and insufficient comprehension of social realities, disputes over NWICO symbolized the first time that communication and media issues were deliberated on a global stage.36 Tourya Guaaybess argues that the NWICO’s struggle had strong resonance in the Arab world, for

34 Guaaybess, “A New Order of Information.”
these nations were also demanding "a re-balancing of communication flows and for autonomous means of communication: they [too] had to provide the world with their own image of themselves."37

These sentiments were most apparent in the formation of the Arab Satellite Communications Organization (Arabsat) by the Arab League in 1976 — the second catalyst in the shift on the global media landscape. Following the devastation of the Six Day War and Sawt Al-Arab’s breach of trust with its audience, the Arab League assembled to formulate a strategy that would amalgamate the cultural and social activities of its member states.38 Although these meetings resulted in the establishment of Arabsat nine years later, scholars note that the shared satellite system sat mostly idle, using only 10% of its overall capacity, until the end of the 1980s due to numerous technical, economic and political difficulties.39 However, Arabsat’s lack of exploitation would not last following the rise to prominence of the U.S.-based twenty-four hour news channel Cable News Network (CNN) during the 1991 Gulf War — the third and final event needed to complete the transformation of the international media scene.

CNN’s format of offering twenty-four hour news coverage in real-time with live reporting from international event sites and little incidental commentary was a marked departure from the “stale, turgid and censored coverage” of the traditional government controlled Arab media.40 Knowing that CNN broadcast worldwide and that it was quickly becoming the most watched news station in the world, the U.S. government used the network’s innovative format as one of its chief instruments of international telediplomacy —

37 Guaybess, “A New Order of Information.”
the result being that diplomacy's methods of gathering and reporting information were displaced during the first Gulf War. In the end, CNN became the main medium of communication between U.S. president George Bush Sr. and Iraqi president Saddam Hussein. Thus, the arrival of CNN disproved Hale's assertion that no technological revolution was likely to ever replace radio as the primary means of communication and diplomacy. Rather than simply complementing radio broadcasts, satellite television quickly began to edge radio out as the means by which authoritarian regimes sought to protect and promote their counties' political, economic and social interests in the global arena.

Thus, it was the influence of the NWICO's struggle for equality, the formation of the communal satellite system Arabsat and the rise of CNN as the leader in global news coverage that not only changed the global media landscape, but also set the stage for Al Jazeera's emergence. Unlike Sawt al-Arab which was shaped and controlled explicitly by Nasser's personal and political objectives, Al Jazeera's media policies have instead been only indirectly influenced by its founder and chief benefactor, Qatari Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani. Unlike Nasser, Al Thani has allowed for a new and unprecedented form of broadcast media freedom to emerge in the Arab world. However, he has done so because the formation of Al Jazeera has worked toward the achievement of his own political and developmental goals. Hence, while our analytical examination of Sawt al-Arab called for a focus on the personality, charisma and legend of Nasser, our investigation of Al Jazeera must examine how the channel is reflective of the groundbreaking political and economic liberal reforms undertaken by Al Thani since the beginning of his reign. For while Nasser's iron grip on Sawt al-Arab led to its ultimate disgrace and discredit, the unprecedented freedom

41 Royce J. Ammon, Global Television and the Shaping of World Politics: CNN, Telediplomacy, and Foreign Policy (Jefferson, 2001), 73.
42 Ammon, Global Television and the Shaping of World Politics, 70.
afforded to Al Jazeera's staff has been credited with the creation of the Arab world's first independent media outlet.

While the Egyptian broadcasting system underwent numerous transformations from its inception until Nasser's death, the Qatari broadcasting system emerged a great deal later, free of colonial influence and at an accelerated rate. Whereas the first Arabic-language broadcasts available to Egyptians were those undertaken by European powers prior to and during World War II, broadcasting in Qatar began only once Great Britain announced their plans to leave the Gulf region, thus terminating the Treaty of Protection that they had signed with Qatar in 1916.\(^3\) Hence, the Qatari government began experimenting with domestic broadcasting on March 15, 1968, resulting in the establishment of the Voice of Qatar on June 25 of the same year.

Although relative latecomers to the technology, Qatar's initial efforts at broadcasting were successful, albeit modest compared to Egypt's, and thus expanded quickly over the coming decades. However, by the 1960s television had been established in many Arab countries and was continuously being developed and expanded particularly in Saudi Arabia. Qatar would inaugurate domestic television services on August 15, 1970, just one year before it gained status as an independent sheikdom on September 3, 1971. Like radio, the development of the Qatari television system also began modestly, with the most relevant changes taking place in 1974 when monochrome transmissions were replaced with colour, three new television studios were added and stronger transmitters introduced. As for content, the bulk was an amalgamation of predominantly Western programs and

\(^3\) Mohamed M. Arafa, “Qatar,” in Y.R. Kamalipour and H. Mowlana, eds. Mass Media in the Middle East: A Comprehensive Handbook (Westport, 1994), 230; Boyd, Broadcasting in the Arab World, 184. The establishment and later expansion of the Qatari broadcasting system was also assisted by increasing oil revenue that came with the exploration of oil in 1949.
domestically produced news, entertainment and religious programming.
Although the Qatari television system would continue to expand moderately throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, the introduction of satellite technology and the subsequent establishment of Al Jazeera marked the most drastic, and yet fruitful, metamorphosis the electronic media of Qatar had seen in its brief history.

As stated earlier, Al Jazeera first made international headlines when it gained exclusive access in Afghanistan and to Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden following the 2001 terrorist attacks in New York City. Yet, Al Jazeera’s story did not begin there. Rather, the station was established in 1996 by the Qatari Emir, who only a year earlier had overthrown his father in a bloodless coup d’etat. Al Thani, assuming the station would be able to stand on its own feet within five years of its unveiling, also provided the initial funding for the station estimated at $137 million. At the outset, Al Jazeera began broadcasting only six hours a day. However, due to its successful reception, by January 1997 it increased its coverage to eight, later twelve and, by November of the same year, to seventeen — it was

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44 Arafa, “Qatar,” 237; Boyd, Broadcasting in the Arab World, 185-87.
45 Joel Campagna, “Arab TV’s Mixed Signals,” Foreign Policy, 127 (November/December 2001), 89; F. Gregory Gause III, Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States (New York, 1994), 57; Michael Massing, “The Bombing of Al Jazeera,” Columbia Journalism Review 41, No. 7 (May 2003), 37; Hugh Miles, Al Jazeera: How Arab TV News Challenged the World (London, 2005), 28; Naomi Sakr, “Women, Development and Al Jazeera: A Balance Sheet,” in M. Zayani ed. The Al Jazeera Phenomenon: Critical Perspective on the New Arab Media (Boulder, 2005), 132; Rick Zednick, “Inside Al Jazeera,” Columbia Journalism Review 40, No. 6 (March/April 2002), 45; Sakr, Satellite Realms, 57-58; The Economist, “All that Jazeera,” 60; Zayani, “Al Jazeera and the Vicissitudes of the New Arab Mediascape,” 14. The amount of money the Qatari Emir actually invested in Al Jazeera when it was first established varies in amount and the nature of financial assistance depending on the source, as it has been cited as a $140 million grant and as a $150 million loan. However, the sum of $137 million seems to be the amount most often cited. Furthermore, most sources do not clearly distinguish between the Emir’s private purse and the state’s public treasury. As Gause notes, while family members of the Gulf monarchies have been known to use their enormous private purses for private sector investment, the Al Thanis have had a much more pronounced history of mixing politics and business than their neighbours. Thus, while most sources suggest that Al Jazeera’s initial funding likely came from the public treasury, Sakr asserts that the Emir agreed to provide Al Jazeera with annual funding from his own money in order to maintain the channel’s operation when the aforementioned five year deadline was extended in 2002.
not until January 1, 1999, however, that the station took to the airwaves twenty-four hours a day.\footnote{Miles, \textit{Al-Jazeera}, 34. Rugh, \textit{Arab Mass Media}, 218.}

Although initially broadcasting solely on Arabsat's Ku-band, which covered only a portion of the Middle East, on November 1, 1997 Al Jazeera switched to Arabstat's C-band transponder, thus significantly expanding its reach globally — an impressive increase over, what now seems, the limited regional reach of \textit{Sawt al-Arab}.\footnote{William A. Rugh, \textit{Arab Mass Media: Newspapers, Radio, and Television in Arab Politics} (West Port, 2004), 216; Miles, \textit{Al-Jazeera}, 34-36, 57, 344; Sakr, \textit{Satellite Realms}, 13-4.} Due to a serious dearth of accurate viewing data in the Middle East — most likely attributable to the fact that Al Jazeera is free-to-air in the region — it is impossible to provide an accurate estimate of Al Jazeera's viewership. The only figures currently available date back to 2002 when it was suggested the station's audience numbered upwards of thirty-five million — even if accurate, this number has no doubt increased significantly in the past four years.\footnote{Miles, \textit{Al-Jazeera}, 65-66; Zednick, “Inside Al Jazeera,” 62.}

Although similar in look and feel to CNN, Al Jazeera has distinguished itself from its Western predecessor by promoting itself as a forum open to diverse opinions relating to Arab issues, no matter how controversial. While its format also consisted of live news coverage and varied topical programs, Al Jazeera's talk shows have taken the lead in unapologetically confronting previously unmentionable issues. For instance, they have examined government corruption, the appalling human rights records of various Arab regimes, the persecution of political dissenters, Islamic law (\textit{Shari'ah}), the perceived incompatibility of Islam and democracy and Islamic fundamentalism.\footnote{Zayani, “Al Jazeera and the Vicissitudes of the New Arab Mediascape,” 2.} Thus, Al Jazeera has undoubtedly set itself apart from other Arab satellite channels that emerged in the late 1990s, which concentrated predominantly on entertainment and religious-based programming. As
we will see in chapter 2, although Al Thani has not taken a personal and direct interest in the editorial decisions of Al Jazeera he does represents a new generation of Arab leadership focused on building a modern state worthy of international recognition.

Much like its broadcasting history, the political history of Qatar is less complicated and more straightforward than that of Egypt. Although, as mentioned previously, Qatar did sign a Treaty of Protection with Great Britain in 1916, the British role in Qatar did not generate a nationalist movement or fervent struggle for independence. Instead the independence of Qatar and the establishment of the Al Thani dynasty were tightly linked, as the rise of the latter signaled the independence of the former. Thus it was the handling of domestic and regional affairs by the Al Thani that shaped the character of the Qatari state and its media system, rather than a struggle against Western imperialism and colonialism.

Prior to the founding of the Al Thani dynasty by Muhammad bin Thani (1868-1876) Qatar had been a dependency of Bahrain and the Al Khalifahs — a situation that resulted in long running territorial disputes between the two families over Zubarah and later the Hawar Islands. Sheikh Qasim bin Muhammad (1876-1913) managed to put more distance between Qatar and Bahrain when he allowed the Ottoman Empire to station a garrison in Doha as a means of protection. Yet this relationship proved unstable and resulted in the battle of 1893 that the Qataris won, thus strengthening the authority of the Al Thani dynasty. Shortly thereafter Qasim, who had converted to Wahhabism in a show of friendship to a young Abdel Aziz ibn Abdel Rahman Al Saud (Ibn Saud), believed Qatar susceptible to a potential territorial dispute with its new and militarily superior ally due an undefined boarder between

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50 Rosemarie Said Zahlan, *The Making of the Modern Gulf States: Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman* (Reading, 1998), 99. There is little historical English-language work on the state of Qatar, thus the discussion of its history prior to the reign of the current Emir is based on the research and writings of Rosemarie Said Zahlan. Also see: Rosemarie Said Zahlan, *The Creation of Qatar* (London, 1979).

51 For a detailed discussion of the Ottoman's role in Qatari history see: Frederick F. Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf: The Creation of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar* (New York, 1997).
it and Hasa after Wahhabi forces expelled the Ottomans from the area in 1913.\textsuperscript{52} In order to ensure Qatar’s safety, in 1916 Sheikh Abdallah bin Qasim (1913-1949) entered into the aforementioned protective deal with the British which also effectively cut all ties with Bahrain. Again, whereas Egypt had struggled to rid itself of its British occupiers, Western protection was welcomed in Qatar.

By this point the dominance of the Al Thani dynasty had been well established, but was periodically disrupted by familial friction that proved to be a thorny issue for the dynasty over the coming decades. Until the rule of the current Emir, the process of succession was based on merit rather than birth alone, often prompting aggrieved family members (encouraged by the Saudis) to instigate periods of lawlessness. However, with the reign of Sheikh Ahmad bin Ali (1960-1972) came not only independence and increased political stability, but also astonishing wealth precipitated by increased oil revenues. Not only was Qatar’s new found wealth hard for the previously poor pearling peninsula to come to terms with, but the abuse of this prosperity was evident in a change in stature, most apparent in Ahmad’s spendthrift ways.\textsuperscript{53} More concerned with extravagant displays of wealth, Ahmad was unconcerned and unable to lead Qatar, especially after gaining independence. As a result, Ahmad was replaced by his heir apparent, Sheikh Khalifah bin Hamid (1972-1995) who had in effect been running the country during his predecessor’s reign. Interestingly, history would repeat itself, for by the middle of the 1980s, Khalifah began leaving the daily operations of the Emirate to his heir apparent, the current Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifah (1995-present) who seized power while his father was out of the country in 1995. Because until this point none of the five Qatari rulers had begun to build the foundations of a

\textsuperscript{52} Today Hasa comprises the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia.

\textsuperscript{53} Prior to the discovery and exploration of Qatar’s oil reserves, the population of Qatar made their living predominantly via the country’s pearling industry.
modern state, Hamad took it upon himself to do so, drastically breaking with tradition along the way.

Since the Emir overthrew his father he has dedicated himself to undertaking mass reforms that he hopes will improve political representation and has repeatedly affirmed his belief that instituting democracy is the best political path for Qatar.54 Representing a new form of leadership in the region, the Emir has taken several untraditional steps towards defining Qatar's position in global and regional economic, political and social domains. First, the pioneering reforms of the Qatari Emirate began with the introduction of a new constitution in 2003. The constitution, which was all but unanimously approved by a national referendum (96.6%), established the separation of judicial, executive and legislative authority. Thus, the Shura Council has been given an enormous amount of power and is to be elected by a two-thirds popular vote.55 Furthermore, Article 8 of the new constitution altered the previously troublesome rules of succession. As noted earlier, historically succession was not based on heredity, but on the ability of the most aggressive member of the ruling family to prove his worth. However, heredity now plays a role by allowing the ruling Emir to choose which of his sons will take his place.56 Secondly, women's rights have been vigorously promoted by the Emir and his wife Sheikha Mouza bint Nasser al-Misned. In 1999, Qatari women gained the right to vote (at the same time as men) and hold public office. Since then a number of women have run for office — the first to triumph was Sheikha Ahmad Al Mahmoud who was appointed Qatari Minister of Education in 2003 —

56 Zahlan, The Making of the Modern Gulf States, 102, 104. By proclaiming his fourth son, Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani, his heir apparent Al Thani has demonstrated that, although based on heredity, succession to the Qatari Emirate is not automatically reserved for the first born male.
and today make up forty percent of the nation’s workforce. Thirdly, women have also benefited from the royal couples’ emphasis on education — a passion that was likely kindled by the Emir’s graduation from Sandhurst Military Academy in England in 1971 and his wife’s completion of a degree in sociology from the University of Qatar in 1986. The focus of the government’s educational reforms has been the strengthening of Qatari participation in the workforce, a goal that they hope can be achieved by making education more relevant to workplace needs. The result was the opening in 2003 of the $300 million Education City in Doha, which serves as a branch campus for several universities located internationally, thus allowing students to remain in Qatar while acquiring a Western-style education. Fourthly, in an effort to bolster its growing tourist industry, Qatar has played host to numerous events including scientific, political, cultural and academic conferences, as well as film festivals and numerous sporting events. Finally, from an economic perspective, Al Thani has announced his plans to continue opening up the state’s economy in an attempt to make it as flexible as possible and therefore a means by which to “maximise growth, attract new investors and increase competitive capabilities.” Al Thani’s commitment to an open economy is apparent in his willingness to establish amiable economic relations with Israel, a move almost unheard of in the Arab world. It is this approach that has put Qatar at the forefront of economic liberalization in the Arab world.

57 Ford, “A Trailblazer for Democracy?” 21; Miles, Al Jazeera, 19.
59 Neil Ford, “Qatar: Building on Success,” The Middle East 352, (January 2005), 50. The Qatari government hopes that this latest approach will allow the state to become less dependent on oil and gas revenues.
60 Olivier Da Lage, “The Politics of Al Jazeera or the Diplomacy of Doha,” in M. Zayani ed. The Al Jazeera Phenomenon: Critical Perspective on the New Arab Media (Boulder, 2005), 57-58; Nawawy and Iskandar, The Story of the Network, 36, 76, 82. Qatar’s relationship with Israel began in 1994 with negotiations to provide Israel with natural gas. By September of 1996, Israel had established a trade office in Doha. Although it has often been reported that this trade office was shut down after Iran and Saudi Arabia threatened to boycott the 2000 Islamic Organization Summit if it the Israeli agency was allowed to remain open, Da Lage asserts that the two Israeli diplomats were never forced to leave the country and instead continued operations from their hotel rooms.
Yet make no mistake, while the Emir publicly asserts his desire for democracy in Qatar and displays ease in challenging tradition, as Hugh Miles asserts, “...Qatar is still not a democracy. But then it is not a police state either: it is an autocratic state subject to the whim of one man, the Emir, who, although fortunately not a tyrant, is unelected, unaccountable and all-powerful.”61 Thus it must be remembered, while Al Thani’s exposure to Western values and institutions during his time at England’s Sandhurst Military Academy and his desire to distinguish Qatar from its Gulf neighbours can be presumed to have been catalysts for introducing such regionally innovative reforms, by changing the rules of succession in the 2003 constitution he clearly demonstrates that he has no intention of eliminating the ruling family or releasing power to anyone other than those of his direct bloodline — the Al Thani dynasty is unquestionably here to stay. It is here that the Emir’s seemingly contradictory desires for centralised political control on the one hand and democratic reform on the other coalesce to create a new twist on a tradition characteristic of the Gulf States.

The enormous oil revenues of the Gulf monarchies has allowed them to establish direct, albeit still top-down, relationships with their citizenry, which secure not only the governments’ political power, but also the loyalty of state nationals.62 Provided that citizens’ political and social activities remain within the limits set by their governments, they enjoy the benefits of state employment, direct and indirect financial benefits and assistance, free education, free health care, as well as subsidized housing, consumer goods and public services. By providing these key social benefits at little or no cost (all of which are administered by increasingly large state apparatuses) these monarchies have been able to

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61 Miles, Al-Jazeera, 16.
62 Jill Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf: Rulers and Merchants in Kuwait and Qatar* (New York, 1990), 1,2,10; Gause, *Oil Monarchies*, 43,58-61.
maintain their political power by "convinc[ing] the citizenry that their personal well-being is tied up with the existing political system."\textsuperscript{63} It would seem that the Emir's liberal reforms, while certainly daring and contributing to a more open Qatari society, may have also served the same political purpose, for as one Qatari citizen explains:

Democracy would not work well in Qatar... We have a small, family-based country and if someone runs for a political position then, of course, their whole family backs them. This means larger families can use the system legitimately to secure power for themselves, which is what has happened in Kuwait, where families act like lobby groups. We have a strong leader, with a moral conscious, good values and a pile of money. Qatar is a special case. Democracy is not the best system for us.\textsuperscript{64}

Where Al Thani's path of political and economic liberalization will take Qatar next is anyone's guess. However, after instituting the previously mentioned successful reforms, he notified the Advisory Council in November 2004 that political, social and economic reforms would continue both in Qatar and the rest of the Arab world, hence now was the time to take their development and modernization plans to the next stage. Furthermore, there is every indication that Al Jazeera's development is meant to follow suit.\textsuperscript{65} Much in the same way that the character of Sawt al-Arab was formed in relation to Nasser's policy objectives, Al Jazeera's development has clearly been linked to the domestic and international objectives of the Qatari Emirate. This corresponding relationship between the development of both Qatar and its most popular television station was addressed by Sheikh Hamad bin Thamer Al Thani, Chairman of the Board for Al Jazeera, in a 2001 interview:

\textsuperscript{63} Crystal, Oil and Politics in the Gulf, 10-11; Gause, Oil Monarchies, 60-61.
\textsuperscript{64} Miles, Al Jazeera, 22-23.
\textsuperscript{65} The Middle East, "Al Jazeera: A Brand Recognized the World Over," The Middle East 354 (March 2005), 50-53; Zayani, "Al Jazeera and the Vicissitudes of the New Arab Mediascape," 6. Although Al Jazeera News Channel has become a globally recognized household name, the corporation has not stopped there. Already in command of bilingual websites, Al Jazeera also launched Al Jazeera Sports Channel in November 2003 and Al Jazeera Children's Channel in 2005. They are also currently in the process of readying another new channel for release by the end of 2006, the controversial Al Jazeera International, which is set to broadcast in English. Al Jazeera also recently set up the Al Jazeera Mobile News Service and in February 2005 the Al Jazeera Media Training and Development Center, which aims "to increase awareness of the media, its role and message," was founded.
Al Jazeera is going in the same direction as the state of [Qatar's] recent developments... I think this direction corresponds with the direction of the media, be it Al Jazeera, or lifting censorship on local Qatari newspapers. The two go together in this stage, and I think the direction of Al Jazeera is a natural one that corresponds with the strategy Qatar is taking at this phase.66

The liberal reforms undertaken by Al Thani have allowed an Arab media outlet to step outside the shadow and constraints of the Sawt al-Arab legacy. Rather than being designed to benefit the political and ideological necessities of the nation's authoritarian ruler, Al Jazeera has instead served more domestic needs geared toward the development and promotion of Qatar. For instance, many scholars agree with William A. Rugh's contention that there are three primary reasons why Al Thani founded Al Jazeera: 1) as we have seen, its establishment was one of the many pioneering decisions undertaken by the Emir in the early years of his rule as part of his "pro-active and somewhat liberal trend" in the leadership of the nation; 2) the formation of an innovative broadcasting outlet would serve as a form of positive exposure and publicity for Qatar in the Gulf region and throughout the world, thus putting this extremely small state "on the map," and 3) even before the current Emir took power the country's foreign policy was geared towards differentiating itself from its neighbours, especially Saudi Arabia.67 As the Emir has publicly stated, Qatar should be "known and noticed."68

Thus, while both Sawt al-Arab and Al Jazeera have been credited with providing an Arab perspective on political, economic and social issues relevant to their listeners or viewers, Al Jazeera has not taken on the ideological and propagandist mentality of Nasser, for as it has been demonstrated, Al Thani did not come to power with such aims. Rather he

67 Boyd, Broadcasting in the Arab World, 184; Miles, Al-Jazeera, 15, 20-21, 27-29; Rugh, Arab Mass Media, 215; Sakr, Satellite Realms, 58.
68 As cited in Miles, Al-Jazeera, 15.
has put his own mark on the media policies developed by his predecessors, who constructed Qatar’s media philosophy from the amalgamation of development, social responsibility and authoritarian models. Our discussion to this point has clearly demonstrated the Emir’s adoption of the development and authoritarian media models to suit his needs. Chapter 2, however, will also demonstrate that Al Thani has supported a social responsibility model, if only indirectly, by allowing the station’s staff to shape the channel’s broadcasting idiom.

Although Middle East based transnational television services had previously debuted in the early 1990s, it took more than just the launching of an Arab-language satellite news channel to catch the world’s attention. What it took was the unprecedented freedom given to the station by Al Thani beginning in 1996 when he made the high-risk decision to abolish the office of the Ministry of Information - an agency with a historic reputation for its strict media control and extensive press censorship within Middle Eastern countries. On a more personal level, it has been reported that an agreement was struck between Al Thani and Al Jazeera’s editorial board very early on, the terms of the bargain being that the Emir promised the channel’s staff complete journalistic independence or he would face their mass resignation. If this understanding, as well as the establishment of Al Jazeera and the abolishment of the Ministry of Information was not enough to prove Al Thani’s change of broadcasting policy from that of previous Arab leaders — particularly Nasser — enshrining

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69 Araf, “Qatar,” 230-31. Al Thani’s predecessors took from development theory the idea that media should not only support the development policies of the Ministry of Information, but also ensure their content encouraged Qatar’s link to other Gulf, Arab and Muslim states. Second, they borrowed from the social responsibly model the notion that media should balance their desire for media freedom with their obligation to society. Finally, from the authoritarian model they stressed that media should not release anything that in any way criticized the ruling emir or put the political order or regime in danger, effectively allowing authorities the right to censor the Qatari media at their discretion.

70 Da Lage, “The Politics of Al Jazeera or the Diplomacy of Doha,” 53; Miles, Al Jazeera, 29; Rugh, Arab Mass Media, 215; Sakr, Satellite Realms, 56; Zayani, “Al Jazeera and the Vicissitudes of the New Arab Mediascape,” 1-2.

71 Miles, Al Jazeera, 28.
the “freedom of press, printing and publication” in Article 48 of the new Qatari constitution should have been.\textsuperscript{72}

Not unpredictably, the Emir’s efforts have still not convinced everyone. Cynicism remains high mainly because Al Jazeera continues to operate on Qatari government backing even though the five-year funding deadline passed almost five years ago. Unable to raise enough advertising revenue to cover its estimated annual operational budget of approximately $25-30 million dollars (mainly due to many Arab leaders and advertisers viewing it as a “suspicious channel”) Al Jazeera has had to rely continually on the Emir’s generosity.\textsuperscript{73} Simultaneously, concerns have also arisen regarding the station’s rather uncritical coverage of the Qatari government. In their own defence, Al Jazeera officials have pointed to instances in which they have broadcast stories accusing the government of torturing imprisoned Qatari rebels and questioning the state’s relationship with Israel.\textsuperscript{74} Not surprisingly, such few instances of critical coverage have not been enough to silence Al Jazeera’s greatest detractors. The main concern voiced is that Al Jazeera’s attacks on the policies of other Arab nations are simply meant to divert attention away from Qatar’s own internal discretions and its controversial ‘arrangement’ with the U.S., which allows the Western power to maintain its largest military base in the region, as well as its Central Command in Qatar. As Olfa Lamloum notes, “Al Jazeera is perceived as a stabilizing factor for Qatar in the region. It is both an indicator of democratization and a sign of its uniqueness in the Gulf. Moreover, the Al Jazeera effect is a sort of screen which hides the strategic alliance of the Emirate with the [U.S.].”\textsuperscript{75}


\textsuperscript{73} Da Lage, “The Politics of Al Jazeera or the Diplomacy of Doha,” 54; Miles, \textit{Al-Jazeera}, 29, 55, 63, 67; Zayani, “Al Jazeera and the Vicissitudes of the New Arab Mediascape,” 15.

\textsuperscript{74} Miles, \textit{Al-Jazeera}, 60.

\textsuperscript{75} Olfa Lamloum as cited in Da Lage, “The Politics of Al Jazeera or the Diplomacy of Doha,” 64.
Clearly, whereas a free press is generally understood as an integral part of any democratic state, it must be stressed that the founding of Al Jazeera “was an act of liberalism, not one of democracy,” for the station could be shut down at the Emir’s will.\textsuperscript{76} Nevertheless, to date Al Thani has kept his word and instead of intervening to cool the anger of international leaders offended by the station’s nonconformist coverage, he has simply reminded them of Article 48 of the Qatari constitution, explaining that “Al-Jazeera [is] an autonomous company responsible for its own editorial decisions.”\textsuperscript{77}

Much like Nasser over four decades earlier, Al Thani recognised very early on the potential new broadcasting technology held in assisting in the achievement of his political objectives. However, unlike Nasser, Al Thani is not a product of an Arab world enveloped in the struggle against imperialism and as such has felt no need to worry himself with the leadership of any territory other than Qatar. Instead, Al Thani is concerned with the development and promotion of his state on a greater global stage. In addition, the Emir also recognized that the introduction of an “open medium” was a precondition to the public being able to clearly make their voices heard in his proposed forthcoming parliamentary elections.\textsuperscript{78} Thus, once put into historical context, it is not only the content broadcast on Al Jazeera that makes it innovative and controversial, but also the rationale behind Al Thani’s eagerness in establishing what he considers to be a free and democratic Arab television news channel so quickly after coming to power.\textsuperscript{79}

Regardless, it is probable that those outside the Gulf would not have been aware, concerned or impressed with the Emir’s liberal style of governance had they have not been inundated with video footage from a small satellite news channel that purported to speak on

\textsuperscript{76} Miles, \textit{Al-Jazeera}, 22.
\textsuperscript{77} Da Lage, “The Politics of Al Jazeera or the Diplomacy of Doha,” 49; Miles, \textit{Al-Jazeera}, 29, 55.
\textsuperscript{78} Zayani, “Al Jazeera and the Vicissitudes of the New Arab Mediascape,” 12.
\textsuperscript{79} Rugh, \textit{Arab Mass Media}, 215.
behalf of the Arab world. As has been demonstrated, both the state of Qatar and its now famed ‘independent’ news channel have and will continue to serve each other’s objectives. While Al Thani has taken enormous steps toward liberalising Qatari society and mass media, Al Jazeera, more than any of the Emir’s other reforms, catapulted the tiny peninsula of Qatar onto the world stage. In the end, unlike Nasser’s failed plans for Egypt and Sawt al-Arab to become the unifiers of the greater Arab nation, Al Thani’s objectives seem to have been achieved, for Al Jazeera has undoubtedly served as the ultimate tool in the development and promotion of the liberal Qatari state.

This examination of the changing Arab media landscape over the past six decades has provided a crucial look into the different political, economic and social motives pushing authoritarian Arab rulers like Nasser and Al Thani to establish and expand their nations’ broadcasting facilities and programs. Although a broader historical examination of this nature provides an urgently needed and nuanced understanding of the rise in prominence of new Arab media, to this point our investigation has given us very little detail regarding the messages embedded within both Sawt al-Arab and Al Jazeera’s content and how these same messages have been understood and responded to by their audiences. Thus, chapters 2 and 3 will be dedicated to the analysis of the dominant or preferred messages encoded in Sawt al-Arab and Al Jazeera’s content and how these messages have been actively decoded by audience members in diverse ways.
Chapter 2: The Dominant Encoding of the *Sawt al-Arab* and Al Jazeera Broadcasting Idioms

Thus far, our investigation has highlighted the historical context required to appreciate the emergence of the new Arab media phenomenon. By understanding the historical transformation of the Arab media landscape, we are better able to address the ideological and propagandist legacy that has overshadowed and stalled efforts at producing more independent and socially conscious broadcasting content in the Arab world. Nevertheless, this form of analysis raises other crucial and interrelated questions about the nature of the content disseminated by both *Sawt al-Arab* and Al Jazeera. Far from being a benign process, the production and distribution of media content favours the embedding of dominant or preferred readings. Accordingly, to undertake a thorough historical comparative study of *Sawt al-Arab* and Al Jazeera, we must scrutinize the dominant and preferred meanings or values that have been encoded within each media outlet's programming content. We need to ask the following: How involved have Nasser and Al Thani really been in the actual decision-making process that has determined the manner and tone of the content aired? How, if at all, have both leaders' interests been embedded within the content approved and released for broadcast? In other words, who and what has shaped

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1 Stuart Hall, “Encoding/Decoding,” in M.G. Durham and D.M. Kellner, eds. *Media and Cultural Studies: KeyWorks* (Malden, 2001), 172. In defining dominant or preferred readings, Hall states, “we are not talking about a one-sided process which governs how all events will be signified. It consists of the 'work' required to enforce, win plausibility for and command as legitimate a decoding of the event within the limit of dominant definitions in which it has been connotatively signified.” Emphasis appears in the original. In other words, broadcasting content has embedded within itself a message form or meaning that its producers hope will be taken in and decoded by the receiver in its non-negotiated form. Dominant or preferred readings are thus imprinted with the institutional, political and ideological order of their producers. It should also be noted that although in this piece Hall refers predominantly to television content, it is believed that the same process of embedding dominant or preferred readings is also present within the production and distribution of radio broadcast content.
the broadcasting idioms of *Sawt al-Arab* and Al Jazeera, what values have been encoded within their messages and, as a result, what form has their famous programming content taken?

In an effort to address these questions, this chapter analyses the markedly different idioms present within the broadcast content of *Sawt al-Arab* and Al Jazeera. Whereas *Sawt al-Arab*’s idiom ran parallel to four interrelated values that shaped the Egyptian elites’ political manoeuvring during the Nasser era — anti-imperialism, Arabism, leadership and prestige — Al Jazeera’s idiom has instead been shaped by its editorial and journalistic staff and has thus been moulded by values characteristic of an idealized Western journalistic ethos — independence, objectivity, truth and free debate. Additionally, by investigating the dominant or preferred meanings and values encoded within the discourse disseminated by each broadcasting outlet, this chapter also dispels misguided comparisons which seem to imply that Al Thani has envisioned Al Jazeera to be a pan-Arab broadcasting conduit of the same nature and calibre as *Sawt al-Arab*. As will be demonstrated, unlike the intentional and progressively escalating Arabist tone of *Sawt al-Arab*, there has been no deliberate production and distribution of a specifically pan-Arab message of a Nasserite connotation on the part of Al Jazeera. Rather, with Al Thani agreeing to allow Al Jazeera almost complete editorial independence, the station’s predominantly Western educated and trained staff has attempted to live up to the near impossible qualifications of a prototypical democratic Western press, while at the same time attempting to meet the Arab world’s need to finally be heard and understood. What results is a broadcasting mentality in stark opposition to that of the government led propagandist rhetoric of *Sawt al-Arab*.

The amalgamation of Nasser’s gradual transformation from a dedicated Egyptian nationalist to a revered yet reluctant Arab nationalist hero with his evident understanding of
the advantages presented by the new transistor revolution, laid the groundwork for the young leader’s aggressive utilization of radio as the primary means by which to further his ideological aims, particularly with regard to Egypt’s foreign policy initiatives. Hence, with Ahmed Said at the microphone and Nasser at the helm, Sawt al-Arab’s programming content and commentary gradually became more reflective of the state’s foreign policy objectives, particularly between 1954 and 1961. In his 1976 study of the elements of Egyptian foreign policy during Nasser’s reign, Adeed Dawisha discusses how the following four “declaratory values” affected the Egyptian elites’ policies and actions: 1) anti-imperialism; 2) Arabism; 3) leadership; and 4) prestige.\(^2\) Not surprisingly, these four interconnected and overlying values run directly parallel to the Sawt al-Arab idiom. Thus, they will provide the framework for the remainder of this chapter’s focus on the dominant or preferred principles encoded within the content broadcast by the Egyptian government’s chief tool of propaganda.

With regard to modern Middle Eastern history, one of the most notorious events associated with the anti-imperialist movement was Nasser’s attack on confirmed or prospective signatories of the U.S.-led Baghdad Pact. Nasser strongly opposed this alliance which, fostered by Cold War exigencies, ultimately brought together Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Pakistan and Britain in an effort to create a belt of containment in the Middle East running along the Soviet Union’s southern frontier. After decades of occupation and domination by the British, the new Egyptian government and its populace were extremely adverse to any form of foreign intervention that served imperialist or colonialist ends. Nasser viewed the Baghdad Pact as little more than an imperialist plot to maintain control of the Arab world by destroying any vestige of Arab unity or cooperation, and thus was determined that no Arab

\(^2\) Dawisha, *Egypt in the Arab World*, 125.
country would sign the Pact. One of the primary means by which the president sought to achieve this goal was through the transmissions of *Sawt al-Arab*.

Utilizing standard propaganda techniques, particularly transference, *Sawt al-Arab* launched an unprecedented and vicious propaganda campaign on pro-Western Arab leaders who had either signed the Baghdad Pact or who were considering doing so — signatory Nuri al-Said, the prime minister of Iraq, was the primary target from 1955 to 1958. In an attempt to damage the reputations and legitimacy of other Arab leaders, *Sawt al-Arab* found its greatest success in associating them with Western imperialism and support of Israel. In other words, by transferring the burden of responsibility for imperialist activities in the Arab world onto these heads of state, Nasser was able not only to sway public opinion in countries where *Sawt al-Arab*’s transmission signal reached, but his anti-imperialist rhetoric served as a major motivation and justification for Egyptian policy and provided opportune scapegoats for its failure.3

With the U.S. offering countries such as Iraq funding and arms in return for their participation in the Baghdad Pact, *Sawt al-Arab* criticized Western objectives in luring Arab nations into this alliance:

> Every Arab now realises the glaring fact that the West wants to settle in our land forever [sic]. The West wants to remain the master of the world so that it may colonise, enslave and exploit it. The West will give Iraq military equipment, but what for? Is it to strengthen proud Iraq so that she may liquidate the step-daughter of imperialism and the principle enemy of the Arabs, Israel? No, it is to lead her to death in the front lines of the next world war in order to immortalise the Western colonization of Iraq.4

Astonishingly venomous in its brash and unrepentant rhetoric, at its height the station’s propaganda campaign went from accusing Nasser’s opponents of being “lackeys of

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3 Dawisha, *Egypt in the Arab World*, 125-29; Dawisha, *From Triumph to Despair*, 150.
colonialism” to outwardly calling for their overthrow and assassination: “The hearts of the people in Iraq are full of vindictive feelings against the rule of Nuri [al-Said] and British colonialism. The extermination of the agents of imperialism is the first step towards the extermination of imperialism itself.” Nasser’s vicious propaganda campaign against al-Said found a receptive audience and has even been credited with assisting the Iraqis in rising up against the monarchy in the Iraqi revolution of 1958.6

Nasser also successfully used Sawt al-Arab in pressuring other Arab nations to comply with Egyptian policy objectives; for instance, targeted radio assaults were successful in coercing Jordan, Lebanon and Syria not to sign the Baghdad Pact. Shortly thereafter, Nasser would enter into a series of coalitions with Syria, Saudi Arabia and Yemen — agreements that were to mark the beginnings of a proposed integration of the greater Arab world, while at the same time demonstrating that the Arabs did not need to rely on the West for their safety and well being.7 So began Nasser’s gradual transformation from Egyptian president to undisputed symbol of pan-Arab unity.

As early as 1954, Sawt al-Arab began claiming that “Cairo must always remain in the service of the Arabs and of Arabism and Islam... The Voice of the Arabs speaks for the Arabs, struggles for them and expresses their unity; it has no object but Arabism and no hope in anyone but the Arabs. It struggles for nothing but the glory and independence of the Arabs...”8 Thus, Sawt al-Arab progressively became increasingly Arabist in character, resulting in a culmination of cries for Arab unity mixed with its earlier anti-imperialist

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5 BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, no. 539 2 May, 1958 as cited by Boyd, Broadcasting in the Arab World, 328; Anthony Nutting, Nasser (London, 1972), 88; Dawisha, Egypt in the Arab World, 166. 6 Boyd, Broadcasting in the Arab World, 328. 7 Dawisha, Egypt in the Arab World, 12; Jankowski, Nasser’s Egypt, 58. 8 BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, no. 430, 12 January, 1954 as cited in Seale, The Struggle For Syria, 196.
rhetoric. Beginning midway through 1954, the program began to tenaciously promote Arab solidarity as the true means by which to overcome foreign domination:

The “Voice of the Arabs” calls on the Arabs to stand in one rank in the face of imperialism, to expel the British, to cleanse the land of Arabdom from this plague, to obtain with their own money and to make for themselves arms which will repulse aggression, and to maintain peace and justice.

No-one would refuse honest aid from abroad; but the Arabs can do without any pennies and bullets which bring enslavement and put back the clock of Arab progress. Aid of this kind is not based on respect for mutual interests and for the rights of people to freedom and independence. This, O Arabs is the policy of Egypt.9

As was discussed in chapter 1, Nasser’s acceptance of pan-Arabism as one of Egypt’s core values carries its greatest significance in the fact that the Free Officers put minimal importance on this ideology when they first came to power. Up until this point, Egypt — which had been arguably struggling for its independence since the time of the Ottoman Empire and the governorship of Muhammad ‘Ali — was enveloped in an internally uniting, but regionally isolating dedication to Egyptian nationalism. As Nasser began to respond to regional events, his dedication to pan-Arabism grew noticeably. This political and ideological modification was unmistakably reflected in the government’s radio broadcasts.

Correspondingly, R. Hrair Dekmejian’s 1971 content analysis of Egyptian radio broadcasts between January 1, 1952 and December 31, 1959, which consisted of 15,515 news stories, demonstrates that Egypt’s Arabist ideology first occurred as early as 1952, but that it did not result in a complete orientation to Arabism until February of 1955.10 As Dekmejian explains, earlier themes of Egyptian nationalism made frequent reference to the

10 R. Hrair Dekmejian, Egypt Under Nasir: A Study of Political Dynamics (Albany, 1971), 93. While Dekmejian’s study does not state which radio programs were examined in his content analysis, the author assumes that Sawt al-Arab was included given its popularity. Regardless, Dekmejian’s analysis still demonstrates the Egyptian government’s use of radio broadcasting facilities as a tool to disseminate their newly focused pan-Arab policies and beliefs.
"unity of the Nile valley," the "sons of the Nile valley," the "Egyptian people [and] territory" and the "glory and the pride of Egypt." However, in late 1952 to early 1953 (the year Sawt al-Arab went to air) Egyptian radio's broadcast themes gradually began to focus on "the Arab nation from the Atlantic Ocean to the Arab Gulf," "Arab solidarity" and the "Arab people of Egypt," with a large frequency spike by 1955 (the year of the Baghdad Pact) that almost completely dominated any mention of Egyptian nationalism. Yet, despite the fact that the Baghdad Pact can be credited as the foremost catalyst of this ideological and propagandist shift, a number of historic regional events between 1955 and 1958 ensured that both the president and Sawt al-Arab held the ears and hearts of the Arab world, thus securing the era as the age of Nasser.

Although initially adopting a posture of positive neutralism in the Cold War, Nasser's decision to purchase arms in 1955 from Czechoslovakia not only led to the complete irrelevance of the Baghdad Pact, but also eventually resulted in the nationalization of the Suez Canal. Agitated at the Egyptian leader for his decision to deal with the Soviet Union, in July of 1956 the U.S. reneged on a commitment in cooperation with the World Bank to provide Nasser with funding for the construction of the Aswan Dam — a project which was to bring both political and economic gains for Egypt. In the wake of this reprimand Nasser pledged on Sawt al-Arab that the "high dam [would] be built" and invited the Western powers to "go choke on [their] fury." Most Arabs avidly supported Nasser, but at the same time were curious as to what he would do next. Anxiously waiting, many of Nasser's followers purchased radio receivers with their savings in order to stay informed.

11 Dekmejian, Egypt Under Nasir, 93-96. Not unexpectedly, Egyptian broadcasts registered another substantial increase in its Arabist ideology in 1958 with the commencement of the ill-fated union of Egypt and Syria into the United Arab Republic (UAR).
13 Aburish, Nasser: The Last Arab, 106.
did not disappoint. On July 26, 1956 he nationalized the Suez Canal Company stating that all funds from the operation would be channeled back into the domestic development projects for which he had been seeking external assistance in the first place. These unprecedented actions most certainly garnered Nasser the title of leader of the Arab world — a “new Saladin” as some would later credit him.\textsuperscript{14} Not unexpectedly, it was bold actions like this that led Egypt’s mass media, both print and electronic, to later praise Nasser as “an answer to Arab aspirations,” “the leader of a struggle for destiny in historical circumstances” and “an Arab symbol which transcends local boundaries.”\textsuperscript{15}

Nasser’s, as well as Egypt’s, role in the pan-Arab movement were also closely linked to their correspondingly heightened prestige. As Dawisha contends, each of the aforementioned declaratory values — anti-imperialism, Arabism and leadership — were dependent upon the final value of prestige and dignity (\textit{karameh}).\textsuperscript{16} While Nasser’s stand against Western imperialism and his resulting leadership of the pan-Arab movement would bring the Egyptian populace to hold him in great esteem, the failure of the UAR in 1961 and the Arabs’ humiliating defeat at the hands of Israel in the Six Day War of 1967, would denote the downfall of the ‘Arab giant’ and the dreams of dignity and freedom that he symbolized to the Arab people. Thus it is imperative to understand how \textit{Sawt al-Arab} helped reinforce and communicate the significance of reclaiming Arab dignity in the face of foreign domination and intervention and how the overzealous and increasingly fabricated transmissions of Ahmed Said became the forerunner to not only Said and \textit{Sawt al-Arab}’s ultimate loss of prestige and credibility, but also Nasser’s.

\textsuperscript{14} Tawfig Y. Hasou, \textit{The Struggle For The Arab World: Egypt’s Nasser and the Arab League} (London, 1985), 57.
\textsuperscript{15} Mohamed Hassanein Heikal, former editor of \textit{AlAhram}, as cited in Dawisha, \textit{Egypt in the Arab World}, 135.
\textsuperscript{16} Dawisha, \textit{Egypt in the Arab World}, 137-38; Dawisha, \textit{From Triumph to Despair}, 149.
As is evident from the brief broadcast transcriptions provided earlier in this chapter, the theme of Arab dignity was always a mainstay of the *Sawt al-Arab* idiom — an attentiveness that formed in opposition to Egypt’s long struggle against British occupation and the rest of the region’s fight against colonialism. Yet simultaneously, as was mentioned earlier, *Sawt al-Arab*’s content had become progressively more seditious and critical of other Arab leaders (a move in itself detrimental to the notion of Arab unity) and was frequently punctuated by juvenile bouts of name-calling and much graver calls for government overthrows and assassinations.\(^\text{17}\) However, up until this point *Sawt al-Arab*’s rhetoric had done little more than build upon popular sentiments within the Arab nation. These assumptions can be seen to carry some weight given that the Arabs’ support of Nasser and Egypt seem to provide evidence that they viewed both the man and his nation as the saviors of Arab dignity and freedom. Yet, when *Sawt al-Arab* made the catastrophic decision to move away from the simple exploitation of pre-existing sentiments to the promotion of blatant lies and false information, Nasser and Egypt then transformed into symbols of the Arabs’ ultimate despair and humiliation.

Although the events leading up to the Six Day War of June 1967 are beyond the scope of this chapter, *Sawt al-Arab*’s misleading, if not highly deceptive, ‘coverage’ of the event is of paramount concern, for rather than admitting that the Israeli army had completely decimated the Egyptian, Syrian and Jordanian air forces on the ground in less than twenty-four hours, Said and *Sawt al-Arab* left the Arab people in the dark for nearly four days.\(^\text{18}\) What *Sawt al-Arab*’s audience heard instead were completely fabricated reports of the Egyptian military’s ensuing victory. Consequently, at the same time that Israel was taking both the Sinai and Gaza Strip from Egypt, the West Bank from Jordan and the Golan

\(^{17}\) Hale, *Radio Power*, 74.

Heights from Syria, Sawt al-Arab was astonishingly reporting one Arab triumph after another. For instance, on June 6 Sawt al-Arab alleged that “[o]ur triumphant armies are now moving along the road of victory, to Tel Aviv, Haifa, Afa, towards our stolen land. The triumphant Arab armies are now moving in this direction to recover our land and achieve victory for us.” But it was not long before the truth and gravity of the Arabs’ defeat shattered premature victory celebrations. With some Arabs having to tune into Israeli Radio’s Arabic service to hear the truth of what was happening, the psychological shock that it was Nasser’s Egypt that had lost the war to Israel was too much to endure. Although it was Nasser, not Said himself, who is said to have made the policy decisions for Sawt al-Arab, it was ultimately Said who was “seen not just as [a deceiver], but as the [agent] of Egyptian humiliation” and as such he was imprisoned and then later assigned to house arrest for a number of years. On June 8, 1967, speaking via radio and television, Nasser admitted his defeat to the Arab world and bore sole responsibility for the war’s outcome.

It would be credulous to assume that the broadcasting content of a single national radio program could be the sole element responsible for “[changing] the entire configuration of forces in the [Arab world]…giving rise to new power alignments and constellations” or knowingly luring the whole of the Arab nation to a before unimagined state of hopelessness. Yet it must be acknowledged that by encoding Sawt al-Arab’s inflammatory and revolutionary programming with the values of anti-imperialism, Arabism, leadership and prestige, Nasser single-handedly created the most effective tool in the Egyptian government’s propaganda apparatus. Nasser’s appreciation and recognition of the production and distribution of value laden radio content as a political weapon was blatantly

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19 BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, no. 2483, 6 June, 1967.
21 Boyd, Broadcasting in the Arab World, 326; Dawisha, Egypt in the Arab World, 11.
demonstrated when, in a 1958 meeting with United Nations Secretary General Hammarskjold, he was asked about the possibility of discontinuing the antagonistic broadcasting of Saut al-Arab, Nasser is said to have responded: “Can we disarm the radio?... How can I reach my power base? My power lies with the Arab masses... The only way I can reach my people is by radio. If you ask me for radio disarmament, it means that you are asking me for complete disarmament.”

In glaring contrast, Al Thani has found it unnecessary to qualify his power or protect his national interests by way of a direct personal relationship with the Arab masses. Instead the Emir has envisioned Al Jazeera as a global promotional vehicle for the Qatari state and the flagship for his other liberal political and economic reforms. As we have seen, his markedly different media stance is a product of the shift in imperatives that resulted from the transformation of both the Arab political climate and media landscape following Nasser’s death in 1970. Furthermore, being Western educated, Al Thani represents a new brand of Arab leader, one unconcerned with the downfall of Western imperialism, the leadership and realization of a unified Arab nation and the reclaiming of Arab dignity and prestige. Instead, Al Thani has openly established political and economic ties with both the U.S. and Israel, attempted to move Qatar out of the shadow of the other Gulf states with which it has integrated political and economic agreements and launched his kingdom on a regionally uncharted path of political, economic and social liberalization. Consequently, aside from being the founder and sole benefactor of Al Jazeera, Al Thani has sought no direct control over the channel’s production and distribution of content — a decision that

has cleared the way for Al Jazeera’s journalistic and editorial staff to shape the channel’s maverick image which is simultaneously praised and condemned today.

As a result of Al Thani’s hands-off attitude Al Jazeera’s broadcasts are typified by an idealized Western-inspired journalistic ethos that its staff claims offers viewers objective truths rather than nationalist or ideological rhetoric. While such a socially responsible media model has been allowed to flourish due in part to Al Thani’s open-mindedness to Western principles, it has thrived owing to the fact that a number of Al Jazeera’s staff — all of whom are of Arab heritage or nationality — were hired after the failure of a Saudi Arabian and BBC cooperative effort at launching a European based Arabic version of BBC’s World Service in April 1996. Left jobless, a number of these BBC-trained Arab journalists, producers and administrators made the jump to the upstart Al Jazeera in hopes of creating a uniquely Arab news service courageous enough to break free from the stale traditional protocol news that has been so typical of Arab state run media since the moral devastation of the 1967 war and the lessons of Sawa’t al-Arab’s disgrace.24

Whereas Nasser’s direct involvement in the creation and manipulation of Sawa’t al-Arab’s propagandist rhetoric is evident from even the briefest analysis of the radio program’s broadcasting transcripts, Al Thani’s contribution to the production and distribution of Al Jazeera’s content is not immediately apparent and is thus much harder to substantiate. Since the Emir has left the responsibility of editorial decision-making in the hands of the network’s staff, we must approach the analysis of values encoded within Al Jazeera’s content from a novel perspective by dissecting the media philosophy to which the station’s staff subscribes.

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24 Faisal Al Kasim, “The Opposite Direction: A Program which Changed the face of Arab Television,” in M. Zayani ed. The Al Jazeera Phenomenon: Critical Perspective on the New Arab Media (Boulder, 2005), 104; Noha Mellor, The Making of Arab News (Lanham, 2005), 71, 75-76. Al Kasim, host of Al Jazeera’s most controversial program The Opposite Direction, calls this traditional and highly censored news “receive and see-off journalism.” Both this term and “protocol news” refer to news broadcasts that simply cover the daily happenings and diplomatic meetings of the ruling monarch.
Far from working to promote the ideological agenda of its home country’s ruling monarchy, Al Jazeera routinely proclaims that it endows its Arab audiences with much needed freedom of thought, independence and scope for debate.25 As such, the idiom of Al Jazeera seems to have manifested itself around four values at the core of Western journalistic news practices: 1) independence; 2) objectivity; 3) truth; and 4) open debate. As was done with Saut al-Arab, these four values will provide the framework for the rest of this chapter’s investigation into the dominant or preferred values encoded during the production and distribution of Al Jazeera’s content.

Determined to present all sides of every story no matter the consequences, Al Jazeera has elevated its claims of independence from government censorship and external political and economic pressure to the forefront of its journalistic ethos. As News Editor Ibrahim Hilal asserts, “[t]he literal translation of Al Jazeera is an island and we are…an island, we don’t want our audience to consider us a mouthpiece of anybody in any crisis…It doesn’t matter who doesn’t like Al Jazeera or who likes Al Jazeera, what matters is our independence, our freedom of information.”26 Surprisingly, Al Jazeera’s assertion that it is has been liberated from the shackles of government domination may carry more weight than its critics care to admit.27

Regardless of accusations that Al Jazeera practices ‘soft’ reporting on the domestic indiscretions of the Qatari Emirate or criticisms of its continued funding by Al Thani, the Emir has given Al Jazeera considerable editorial freedom. This is most evident in Al Thani’s repeated refusals to intervene in the station’s editorial decisions even when its inflammatory

27 Al Jazeera, “About Al Jazeera.”
programming has enraged the leaders of numerous Western and Arab countries. Al Jazeera’s determination to not only maintain, but also extend its independence from the monarchy, gained some momentum when the channel’s unmistakeable logo — an Arabic calligraphic rendering of its name — secured the station a place as the fifth most influential brand name in the world in 2005. The announcement of their global success was quickly followed by news that the station had been in talks for approximately fifteen months to determine how and when they might be able to privatize.²⁸ As Al Jazeera’s former Manager of Media Relations, Jihad Ballout, stressed “[w]e’ve been subsidised by the Qatari government since 1996 and we believe that this is the next stage... [t]he most important factor is that [Al Jazeera] maintains its independence.”²⁹ But as Naomi Sakr notes, the line between objectivity and subjectivity is grey:

Unofficially, Al Jazeera’s output indicates that it has been given considerable scope. Its staff prioritises stories according to their newsworthiness, not their acceptability to the local regimes, and much of Al Jazeera’s material is broadcast live. Newsworthiness criteria, however, are subjective, and Al Jazeera’s criteria may well reflect the Qatari leadership’s agenda. The paradox of Al Jazeera’s situation is that if it were wholly in the private sector its relatively independent approach might be curtailed.”³⁰

To date there have been no further announcements of Al Jazeera’s progress in this intended privatization process and so Al Jazeera currently remains owned and funded by the Qatari Emirate. Yet, Sakr is likely correct, for it appears that remaining under Al Thani’s protective wing has allowed Al Jazeera the chance to make a legitimate effort at introducing socially

²⁸ Al Jazeera, “Aljazeera Voted Fifth Best Global Brand.” Available: http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/643DC574-6D6A-4CE2-B21F-375482A5847C.htm; Al Jazeera, “The Fifth Most Advertised Brand Globally,” The Middle East No. 352, January 2005, 4; The Middle East, “Al Jazeera: A Brand Recognized the World Over,” 48. In a recent article, one U.S. journalist states that Al Jazeera ranking in the top ten of world product branding, “has been a long time in coming... I am not sure whether it is yet another manifestation of its professional swashbuckling bravado, or simply a way to enhance its image globally by way of controversy.” Not surprisingly, Al Jazeera took the opportunity to boast of their branding success in a run of English-language print ads.

²⁹ Al Jazeera, “Aljazeera Voted Fifth Best Global Brand.”

responsible broadcasting to the Arab world.

Even though Al Thani’s continued ownership and funding may allow Al Jazeera to legitimately claim semi-independence from the Qatari Emirate, the channel still routinely encounters accusations that it serves as a treacherous and unrestrained pulpit for radical political and religious elements within the Middle East. For example, following the airing of Al Jazeera reporter Taysir Alluni’s exclusive post-911 interview with Osama bin Laden and the subsequent tapes of the Al Qaeda leader that found their way into the hands of the station’s editorial staff, many in the West accused Al Jazeera of irresponsible journalism. Shortly thereafter, Al Jazeera Managing Director, Mohammed Jasim al-Ali, denied accusations of serving as the mouthpiece for bin Laden and Al Qaeda and again supported the station’s independence, neutrality and professionalism:

We worry about how we treat the news. We don’t just take any tape that comes to our offices or to the station and put it on air. Before that we have a meeting to discuss how we should treat the news, and not be subject to the propaganda from a party or organization or group, Osama bin Laden or others…To air the statements without any comment, without any opposing statements or viewpoints or analysis, that’s when it’s propaganda.31

Whether Al Jazeera will retain its level of independence under Al Thani or possible future private ownership or even continue to resist pressures from radical elements in the region remains to be seen. For the time being however, Al Jazeera has pledged to “[a]dhere to the journalistic values of honesty, courage, fairness, balance, independence, credibility and diversity, giving no priority to commercial or political considerations over professional ones.”32 Thus, in the same way that prestige functioned as the base element providing the

groundwork for the values of Sawt al-Arab’s idiom, in the case of Al Jazeera, the station’s remarkable, although not complete, independence from its host country’s authoritarian ruler serves as the underpinning value that strengthens its commitment to objectivity, truth and open debate.

In light of Al Jazeera’s constant need to prove its independence from direct and indirect political pressures, it has also had to persistently defend its corresponding claims to journalistic objectivity. Although Al Jazeera states that it continues to provide coverage of all viewpoints with objectivity, integrity and balance, the station’s commitment to impartiality is highly questionable. In fact, its claims to objectivity are just as dubious as those made by the Western media which it purports to have modelled itself and its Code of Ethics after. Regardless of political or cultural orientation, the impartiality of media outlets is compromised as they operate within the hegemonic confines of contemporary newsgathering practices that fall prey to a “regime of objectivity.” In other words, far from always operating transparently, the job-related norms and practices that news-workers use on a daily basis can function as a knowledge-producing discursive system that compromises media’s claims to be working in the public interest. As a result, we must not only discuss the external political pressures that Al Jazeera must contend with, but we must also

33 Al-Jazeera, “Code of Ethics.”
35 Hackett and Zhao, Sustaining Democracy?, 7; Hall, “Encoding/Decoding,” 174. Hackett and Zhao’s “regime of objectivity” is closely related to Hall’s “Encoding/Decoding” model. According to Hall, professional journalists and newsworkers produce a “professional code” when encoding content with a message already denoted in a hegemonic way. Thus while the professional code may work somewhat independently of the dominant code it still “operates within the ‘hegemony’ of the dominant code.” It does this by “bracketing... the... hegemonic quality [of dominant definitions] and operating instead with displaced professional codings which foreground such apparently neutral-technical questions as visual quality, news and presentational values, televisual quality, ‘professionalism’ and so on.” Hall also suggests that the professional code can be said to serve these dominant definitions “by not overtly biasing their operations in a dominant direction: ideological reproduction therefore takes place here inadvertently, unconsciously, ‘behind men’s backs.’”
acknowledge the internal pressures it must struggle with to maintain its objectivity.

While a comprehensive account of the pitfalls of institutionalized journalistic news practices is well beyond the scope of this chapter, one of the main difficulties facing Al Jazeera is the competitive drive to seize the greatest share of the available viewing audience, especially domestic and expatriate Arab viewers. Although it is clear that neither Al Thani nor the staff of Al Jazeera subscribe to an ideological pan-Arabism of a Nasserite colouring, the station does profess to present an Arab view of the world. Al-Ali explains that although Al Jazeera was built and launched by a predominantly Western trained staff they “[are all] Arabs...their background as Arabs means we can adapt this...[Western]...experience and apply it to the Arab world. We know the mentality of the Arabs.”

Thus, the question remains, can Al Jazeera maintain an objective stance when covering pressing current affairs that are decidedly relevant to their, as well as their audiences’, lives and futures? Even the briefest discussion of Al Jazeera’s highly controversial coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict demonstrates that the station’s commitment to presenting an Arab view of world events can directly compromise its journalistic objectivity.

Although Al Jazeera has repeatedly boasted that it has broken Middle Eastern taboos by not only inviting Israeli officials to be guests, but also by allowing them to speak live to Arab audiences, to many its use of value laden terms such as *shabeed* (“martyr”) hardly

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36 As cited in El-Nawawy and Iskandar, The Story of the Network, 53-54. In the original, this passage appears in italics.

37 Within the context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the term *shabeed* refers either to a suicide bomber or to a Palestinian killed by Israeli forces.
demonstrates journalistic balance and integrity. The West Bank Bureau Chief for Al Jazeera, Walid al-Omary, justifies the station’s choice of terminology by asking: “What [term] are we suppose to use? Those people lost their lives because they are fighting for their freedom and many of the Palestinian people [who] were killed...were civilians. They are not armed...What are we suppose to call these people?”

Given that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is one of the strongest issues unifying Arab public opinion, it is no wonder that Al Jazeera feels the need to gear its reports to the sensibilities and cultural traditions of their dominant viewing audience.

Yet if approached on an individual basis, outside the collective network discourse of objectivity that is habitually recited to their international viewing audience and critics alike, members of Al Jazeera’s staff are quick to openly acknowledge the struggle and unremitting negotiation that their dedication to professional journalism and their identification as Arabs entails. For instance, al-Omary acknowledges that “[t]o be objective in this area is not easy because we live [in the West Bank]. We are part of the people here. And this situation belongs to us also, and we have our opinions.”

The issue of American involvement in Iraq raises similar feelings for Moafar Tawfiq, Al Jazeera’s main live translator and an Iraqi with family in Baghdad: “I cannot afford to get involved emotionally...but of course...when I

38 Da Lage, “The Politics of Al Jazeera or the Diplomacy of Doha,” 58; El-Nawawy and Iskandar, The Story of the Network, 52-53; Miles, Al Jazeera, 92-93, 356-58. Criticizing Al Jazeera’s use of shabed is not meant to discredit its seemingly admirable attempt to act as a communication platform between the Arab world and Israel, as it is likely that before Al Jazeera many Arabs had never heard an Israeli speak. Rather, this form of analysis is meant to demonstrate that Al Jazeera’s positioning of news content within a dominant cultural frame is just as problematic as Western media outlets whose own particular cultural frame would label the same Palestinian suicide bomber, for example, a terrorist. Neither term is neutral, as their culturally specific uses are both products of the regime of objectivity discussed earlier.

39 As cited in Miles, Al Jazeera, 357; El-Nawawy and Iskandar, The Story of the Network, 52-53. Miles asserts that the use of the term shabed is not a practice unique to Al Jazeera alone, but is rather endemic to all Arab media. El-Nawawy and Iskandar echo the same sentiment. All three authors note that, although shabed is certainly not a neutral term, its use is intrinsic to Arab culture (as is demonstrated by Al-Omary’s reasoning) and thus not to assign this designation to someone killed ‘fighting for Palestine’ is more than simply strange, but disrespectful.

40 El-Nawawy and Iskandar, The Story of the Network, 53.
start playing it all back again in my mind, and I think my God [they are] going to invade...I
start worrying about my family, but while I'm working I try my best not to let it interfere..."41 In a similar vein, one of Al Jazeera's cameramen, a former Iraqi army
photographer in the 1991 Gulf War, goes so far as to admit that "[if the U.S.] will destroy
everything in Baghdad I think I will fight, I will forget the camera and I'll fight...because it's
my country."42

Al Jazeera is certainly not the first international media outlet to fall short of the
unobtainable ideal of journalistic objectivity and it certainly will not be the last. However, Al
Jazeera is unique in its promise that, "[t]ruth will be the focus that will drive us to raise
thorny issues, to seize every opportunity for exclusive reporting, to take hold of
unforgettable moments in history and to rekindle the willpower within every human being
who strives for truth."43 By targeting Arab audiences who have lived a shared history for
generations, Al Jazeera has used its ability to beam exclusive audio-visual footage from its
strategic regional location to illuminate the realities of war and conflict in the Middle East.
Not surprisingly, although not always objective in the traditional journalistic sense, this form
of activist journalism has garnered Al Jazeera some of its greatest praise and certainly its
most severe condemnation.

Being the first Arab media outlet given the opportunity to produce and distribute
news content not routinely censored by its host country's authoritarian leader, Al Jazeera
seized the occasion to remake the face of international news by broadcasting the realities of
current affairs in the Middle East from a uniquely Arab perspective. Unlike the limited

41 As cited in Anthony, *Wide Angle*.
42 As cited in Anthony, *Wide Angle*.
audio capabilities of Sawt al-Arab, Al Jazeera also has the benefit of being a visual medium—an advantage that the station has used to document the cost and devastation of corruption, occupation, war and terrorism. Far from simply having the ability to 'scoop' exclusives away from other international media outlets who work with much more limited access in the region, Al Jazeera has exceeded its regional imitators and Western counterparts by broadcasting footage that is extremely upsetting and often gruesome in an effort to cover issues of relevance to the Arab world with truth and integrity.

As the Palestinian-Israeli conflict continues to act as a unifying factor in the Arab world, the media play an ever-increasing and intrinsic role in the formation of Arab public opinion. Mohamed Zayani asserts that while the first Intifada (1987-1992) exemplified a political event the Al Aqsa Intifada (2000-present) represents a media event, for no other international broadcasting outlet has presented Arab and non-Arab audiences with as frank and immediate footage as Al Jazeera. In effect, because of Al Jazeera’s commitment to disclose the realities of war and occupation, the world is witnessing the brutality and violence of this conflict as never before.

Take for instance the video footage of Mohamed al Durra’s death. On the second day of the Al Aqsa Intifada, al Durra, a twelve year old Palestinian boy, and his father Jamal were hit by Israeli gunfire while walking home in the Gaza Strip. Disturbing images of al Durra slumped in his father’s lap and his wounded father attempting to protect him were shown repeatedly by Al Jazeera and later used in the network’s promotional material, quickly becoming the insignia of the network’s coverage of the current Intifada. Needless to say,

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45 Zayani, “Witnessing the Intifada,” 173-74. As would be expected, al Durra was immediately granted the title of shahid.
the constant repetition of al Durra’s killing by Al Jazeera provided the world with a much different perspective of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict than is traditionally broadcast in the West and at the same time inflamed anti-Israeli rhetoric and strengthened bonds between the Palestinian people and their Arab sympathizers. From Al Jazeera’s standpoint their “on-the-ground” reporting of the Al Aqsa Intifada has demystified the ‘common sense’ Western framing of Palestinians as “terrorists” and “Islamic militants” and has instead demonstrated the civilian face and loss inherent in any such conflicts.

Another example of Al Jazeera’s attempts to portray the truth and reality of military warfare was the airing of footage containing images of American and British military casualties and prisoners of war. The unobscured footage, which showed the scattered and bloodied bodies of Western soldiers and the crude interrogation of POWs, sent shockwaves throughout the world. When criticized again of irresponsible journalism and of apparently contravening the tenets of the Geneva Convention, Hilal insisted that Al Jazeera was simply showing what was happening inside Iraq and thus was leaving both Arab and non-Arab audiences to judge the situation for themselves:

What we are doing is just showing the reality. We didn’t invent the bodies...we didn’t make them in the graphics unit. These are the shots coming from the field...this is a war...we have to show them. There are people killed in this war. We have to leave it to the viewer to judge whether the war [is] the most suitable way to solve problems or not. So if I hide shots of British or American people being killed it’s misleading for the American and British audience. It’s [also] misleading for the Arab audience...they would have imagined that the only victims of this war are the children and women of Iraq — they have to know that there are more victims...there are victims from both sides.46

Al Jazeera’s intention to air the ‘facts-on-the-ground’ so its audience can arrive at their own opinions regarding conflict in the Arab world, speaks volumes of the station’s

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46 Noujaim, Control Room.
audience-focused programming. Far from telling its viewers what to think or lying about the realities of current affairs like Nasser and Said had done through *Saut al-Arab*, Al Jazeera has attempted to not only present their viewers with fact based reporting, but also allow them a channel through which to speak back. It has done so by presenting their audience with as many interpretations of an event or crisis as possible, as well as by opening their forums for audience participation — something that was previously taboo, if not unconceivable, in the Arab world particularly during the time of Nasser. Thus, Al Jazeera’s top management and staff have persistently continued to test new boundaries with their passion driven journalism. Station slogans such as, “the opinion and the other opinion” and “a different point of view” have been the hallmarks on which they have build the network’s image.47 No component of Al Jazeera’s programming typifies this stance more than its flagship program *The Opposite Direction (Al-Ittijah al Muaakis)* hosted by the controversial Dr. Faisal Al Kasim.48

Admittedly modelled after Western programs such as CNN’s now defunct *Crossfire*, *The Opposite Direction*’s format pits guests with extremely opposing views against each other to debate controversial subjects while taking audience phone calls — novel and daring programming for any Arab media outlet, but even more so given that *The Opposite Direction* is broadcast live with no backup time delay. Al Kasim, said to play the role of neural referee by some and a practitioner of brinkmanship by others, pilots his guests into heated discussions that tackle topics which were previously considered unmentionable in the public sphere. Consider, for instance, that episodes of *The Opposite Direction* have broached such sensitive religious subjects as polygamy and women’s rights, the relationship between Islam and secularism, even the existence of God and has asked difficult political and social

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48 *Al Jazeera* has a number of other public affairs shows, for instance *Without Borders, Open Dialogue, More Than One Opinion, and Beyond the Event*, but *The Opposite Direction* is the most popular and best exemplifies *Al Jazeera*’s commitment to live, political debate programs that are accompanied by continuous viewer participation.
questions such as: Should organizations like Hamas and Hezbollah be considered freedom fighters or terrorists? Is the House of Saud corrupt? Is Kuwait actually part of Iraq? Should American forces be stationed in Arab lands? Do the people of Iraq have the right to demand an apology from the Arabs who supported Saddam Hussein while he was in power? What is the effect of the Intifada on Palestinians?49

Not surprisingly, Al Kasim, who states that his “mission is...liberating the Arab world...from dictators and despots and horrible traditions, political, social, cultural,” sees his program as the heir to the pan-Arab broadcasting legacy of *Sawt al-Arab.*50 For him the comparison is two-fold: until the launch of Al Jazeera no other program was able to recapture the hearts and minds of the Arab world in the same way as *Sawt al-Arab* had at its height and none produced such popular transnational media figures.51 Regardless of his apparent respect for *Sawt al-Arab’s* contribution to Arab broadcasting history, Al Kasim feels that Al Jazeera and programs like *The Opposite Direction* have succeeded where Nasser failed for they are “watched avidly by millions of Arabs and are contributing a great deal to the formation of pan-Arab public opinion over many issues. Arab viewers can now share each other’s problems, issues and concerns. They have discovered that they suffer from a similar malaise.”52 Thus for Al Kasim, political dialogue-based programs like *The Opposite Direction* have superseded *Sawt al-Arab’s* relevance and impact by globalizing, rather than simply regionalizing, Arab affairs.

50 As quoted in Amy Goodman, “Democracy Now! in Doha...The Opposite Direction: Why This Al Jazeera Talk Show Draws Fire From Arab & Western Governments.” Available: http://www.democracynow.org/article.pl?sid=06/02/02/147208.
51 For instance, Kasim notes that *Sawt al-Arab* launched Ahmed Said and Mohammad Hasanein Haikal’s popularity, creating the first pan-Arab broadcaster and journalist.
52 Al Kasim, “The Opposite Direction,” 103.
This chapter has demonstrated that while Nasser played a very direct and personal role in the production and distribution of Sawt al-Arab's broadcasting content, Al Thani has taken a much more lax approach to Al Jazeera by leaving the editorial decision-making in the hands of the network's staff. It has also analyzed the values encoded within each media outlet's idiom, thus opening a window to the inner workings of Sawt al-Arab and Al Jazeera — processes that are both far from dispassionate. However, the encoding of broadcasting content with dominant or preferred meanings is only one half of the communication cycle. Thus it is imperative that we turn our attention to how these embedded idioms have also been decoded by Sawt al-Arab and Al Jazeera's audiences. Far from working as one homogenous mass, those who have consumed the content of Sawt al-Arab and Al Jazeera are not simply passive recipients, but rather active participants.
Chapter 3: The Polysemous Decoding of and Response to the *Sawt al-Arab* and Al Jazeera Broadcasting Idioms

Although seemingly simplistic, it must be remembered that communication is a two-way process — the encoding of dominant or preferred readings into media content is only one side of the communication cycle. In other words, communication cannot and will not take place unless these encoded messages are received and decoded by their intended audiences. However, it is crucial that the audiences' decoding of and subsequent response to these embedded values not be viewed as static and homogenous. Rather the active decoding of media content is generally understood to fall into one of three hypothetical positions — dominant-hegemonic, negotiated or oppositional — and is therefore more appropriately understood as polysemous. Accordingly, while both Nasser and the staff of Al Jazeera (and only indirectly Al Thani) may have embedded within their broadcasting idioms the values they would prefer their audiences to take away and act upon, this acceptance is not guaranteed. But concrete evidence of audience responses to *Sawt al-

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1 Greg Philo and David Miller, “Cultural Compliance: Media/Cultural Studies and Social science,” in G. Philo and D. Miller, eds., *Market Killing: What the Free Market Does and What Social Scientists Can Do About It* (London, 2001), 49-55; Hall, “Encoding/Decoding,” 174-76. Hall defines these positions as follows: 1) the dominant-hegemonic position is produced by those “operating inside the dominant code” who take the connoted meaning of the encoded message outright. This position is understood as “the ideal-typical case of ‘perfectly transparent communication’” or its closest variant. It is also hegemonic because it represents the meanings of events that are “in dominance” or seen to be “natural,” “inevitable” or “taken for granted,” hence lending them an air of legitimacy; 2) the negotiated position is produced by those who effectively understand and privilege the connoted meaning, but who also “[reserve] the right to make a more negotiated application to ‘local conditions’, to [their] own more *corporate* positions.” This is done by applying “situational logics”; and 3) the oppositional position is produced by those who clearly recognize both the literal and connotative meanings of the message, but who reject the message in its preferred code and instead decode it in a contradictory fashion by means of an alternative framework of reference. Emphasis appears in original. Philo and Miller, however, criticize later variations of Hall’s “Encoding/Decoding” model for putting too much emphasis on the audiences' active decoding of media messages rather than on their varied responses to them. In their research Philo and Miller found that audiences had no problem understanding and reproducing intended messages, but differed in the degree to which they believed them. Thus, in a historical study of this nature it is important not to simply focus on whether audiences grasp the embedded messages, but how they have responded to them based on their own particular circumstances and experiences.
Arab and Al Jazeera are undoubtedly hard, if not impossible at times, to locate — a problem exacerbated by the serious lack of survey data that still characterises the region today. Still, historical and communication studies are filled with corresponding accounts and claims made by audience members and outside observers which certainly suggest each media outlet has had an enormous affect on the audiences and regional governments exposed to their broadcasts, even if they have decoded Sawt al-Arab and Al Jazeera's broadcasting idioms in diverse ways.

This chapter seeks to understand how the audiences and opponents of Sawt al-Arab and Al Jazeera may have decoded and subsequently responded to the values embedded within each media outlet's broadcasting idiom. For instance, during the 1950s and 1960s a majority of Arabs were not only fervently anti-imperialist and drawn to the notion of Arab unity, but they also viewed Nasser's leadership as the means by which to reclaim Arab dignity and prestige — all pre-existing or emerging sentiments that Sawt al-Arab capitalized upon. Accordingly, evidence suggests that the Arabs' identification with and support for the policies of the Nasserite regime equated to primarily dominant-hegemonic decoding responses to Sawt al-Arab's broadcasting idiom, thus contributing to the program's popularity until its downfall in 1967. The audiences of Al Jazeera, however, seem to have had a predominantly negotiated decoding response to its broadcasting idiom. For example, while viewers acknowledge that Al Jazeera provides the best coverage of events relevant to Arab audiences and, more importantly, also functions as an agent in the formation of a “new Arab public,” many nonetheless challenge the station’s assertions of independence, objectivity and truth based on their own situational experiences and knowledge. Furthermore, the fact that both media outlets have garnered extreme oppositional decoding

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2 Lynch, Voices of the New Arab Public, 2-3.
responses from Arab and Western governments and critics alike speaks volumes of the threat each has been perceived to pose to other nations — accusations that add validity to claims of their impact on their respective political landscapes. Although these media outlets may have garnered an array of decoding responses, Sawt al-Arab and Al Jazeera have both been able to transform the interactions of domestic, international and expatriate Arabs through new technological advancements, thus producing progressively modernist variants of Benedict Anderson’s imagined communities. It is here that the most legitimate basis for comparisons between the Arab world’s two most notorious media outlets can be found.

As we have seen, Nasser used Sawt al-Arab as a means by which to combat Western imperialism and strengthen his leadership of the pan-Arab movement, thus directly moulding the program’s broadcasting idiom to serve his political ends. But the man and his ideals were also responsible for the positive reception the program received from the Arab masses, as well as the oppositional responses it garnered from governments. Accordingly, four factors account for Sawt al-Arab’s overwhelming popularity and menacing power: 1) very early on Nasser recognized that radio could mobilize the masses, including the chiefly illiterate rural populations, behind the Egyptian regime’s political policies or conversely against the rule of other Arab states; 2) by being the first Arab leader to target the whole of the Arab world with his nation’s radio broadcasts, Nasser had established an expansive broadcasting system and erected powerful shortwave and mediumwave transmitters long before other Arab nations, thus leaving other Arab heads of state little ability to stop Egyptian propaganda from reaching their respective populations; 3) Egypt itself held a position of cultural supremacy, particularly with regard to music and patriotic songs, which resulted in Arab audiences being continuously drawn to Egypt’s sophisticated broadcasts; and 4) Nasser’s personal charisma, oratory genius and ability to “use the past in order to
subvert the present" were extremely effective tools in rallying the masses and shaping public opinion. As we will see, these four factors played a critical role in ensuring the audiences’ predominantly dominant-hegemonic decoding reaction to the embedded values of anti-imperialism, Arabism, leadership and prestige and subsequently posed a significant danger to the leadership, security and legitimacy of other Arab nations. Simply put, the values embedded within the propaganda of *Sawt al-Arab* fit perfectly with the popular sentiment and political landscape of the time.

After suffering at the hands of Western imperialism for decades, many Arabs heard in Nasser’s speeches and the rhetoric of *Sawt al-Arab* recognition of their fears and frustrations, as well as fresh hope for the reclamation of their dreams of independence, dignity and unity. Nasser’s legendary hours long speeches and Ahmed Said’s explosive broadcasts passionately roused the populations of the region by building upon popular sentiments — a technique often able to whip audiences into frenzied states of excitement and even moved many to take political action against their respective governments. Consider, for instance, that one of Egyptian propaganda’s primary objectives was to incite and further enflame domestic upheavals and chaos in other Arab nations by utilizing the propaganda techniques of “name-calling” and “bandwagoning.” The effectiveness of these

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4 Beattie, *Egypt During the Nasser Years*, 113.

5 Clearly the propaganda broadcast by *Sawt al-Arab* cannot be viewed as the sole cause of the strikes, demonstrations and riots that broke out in various Arab nations during Nasser’s reign, but it certainly was instrumental in encouraging such activities by building upon pre-existing attitudes commonly shared amongst the Arab masses.

6 Dawisha, *Egypt in the Arab World*, 165, 170-71. The technique of name-calling sought to discredit other governments and their leaders by attaching emotional political and personal labels to them, whereas bandwagoning sought to appeal to people’s desires to be included in the majority, thus either bringing someone holding a minority view over to the thinking of the majority or reinforcing someone’s pre-existing agreement with majority sentiment.
techniques was never more evident than during Nasser’s fervent attack against the imperialist Baghdad Pact.

As King Hussein noted in his 1962 autobiography, at first even he was swept up in the mass excitement that surrounded Nasser after the Czech Arms Deal was announced: “Hundreds of thousands of Jordanians, listening avidly to the propaganda of Cairo Radio, saw in Nasser a mystical sort of savior...the first Arab statesman really to throw off the shackles of the West. I must admit I sympathized with the point of view to a great extent.” At the time Hussein offered Nasser Jordan’s full support and even described him as “the soul of Arabism,” but Hussein’s feelings would change when he became one of the primary targets of Sawt al-Arab’s extremely venomous propaganda campaigns and its rhetoric began to penetrate the consciousness of the Jordanian masses.

The increasingly heated propaganda targeted at the Jordanian population quickly began to see the desired results, as riots broke out simultaneously in both urban and rural areas. Hussein recounts his populations’ reaction to the broadcasts of Sawt al-Arab and how this subsequently affected his political stance toward the Baghdad Pact:

Without warning, the Egyptians launched a heavy barrage of propaganda against Jordan. Within a matter of hours Amman was torn by riots as the people, their senses blurred by propaganda, turned to [Nasser], the new mystique of the Arab world. ‘Hussein is selling out to the British!’ screamed Cairo Radio. ‘Egypt is the only really independent Arab country — thanks to...

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7 H.M. King Hussein of Jordan, Uneasy Lies the Head: An Autobiography (London, 1962), 88. The use of Cairo Radio here, as well as in the forthcoming quote from Hussein, presents an instance where it is believed the program referred to is actually Sawt al-Arab. This has been deduced by cross-referencing other research findings and corresponding reports that list the program responsible for these popular reactions as Sawt al-Arab. Additionally, the nature of the broadcasts discussed is highly characteristic of the Sawt al-Arab style, particularly with regard to Hussein’s second quote.

8 William S. Ellis, “Nasser’s Other Voice,” Harper’s Magazine (June 1961), 57; Boyd, Broadcasting in the Arab World, 170; Dawisha, From Triumph to Despair, 169.

9 Boyd, Broadcasting in the Arab World, 326; Hale, Radio Power, 74; Stephens, Nasser, 175. Hale notes that the threats made against the life of King Hussein by Sawt al-Arab did alienate a proportion of the Jordanian community who were extremely loyal to the monarchy, thus demonstrating the existence of some oppositional readings of the broadcasts by a portion of the country’s population.
Nasser! Propaganda poured out...[it was impossible] for us to get the truth across to everybody, and...[countless stories] were accepted by thousands of people...all hell broke loose. Riots such as we had never seen before...disrupted the whole country...bands of arsonists started burning government offices, private houses, foreign properties. I had no choice but to call out the Legion [Jordanian Army], who with tear gas and determination met force with force. I imposed a ten-day curfew on the country....That was the end of Jordan and the Baghdad Pact.10

Although Nasser managed to coerce Hussein into not participating in the Baghdad Pact, he was unable to deter Nuri al-Said who became the dominant target of Sawt al-Arab’s vicious propaganda from 1955 to 1958. While Iraq did have their own broadcasting capabilities, their transmitters were so weak that they could not fully cover their own territory let alone neighbouring states — conditions that made countering or jamming Egypt’s propaganda an impossibility. The result was that while Egyptians were exposed only to domestically produced radio programs like Sawt al-Arab, the Iraqis were exposed to two; first the Iraqi government’s own regional programming, which asked the people to maintain the status quo and continue to support the historically dependent relationship they had with Western powers, and second Sawt al-Arab’s which called for them to struggle against Western domination so as to become self-sufficient and independent.11

Sawt al-Arab won over the Iraqi population by announcing on their behalf that they “disown [the Baghdad Pact]...the chains imposed by it on the noble people of Iraq tie only Nuri al-Sa’id. The people of Iraq are not bound by this alliance; they have not signed it and will not sign it; they curse it and will destroy this filthy piece of paper.”12 The program’s tirades found an open and receptive audience in the pan-Arab and leftist opposition groups who condemned al-Said for threatening Arab security and sustaining Iraq’s enslavement by

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10 Hussein, Uneasy Lies the Head, 91-93. Emphasis appears in the original.
11 Dawisha, Triumph to Despair, 164-65.
12 BBC Summary of World Broadcasts no.547, 1 March 1955 as cited in Seale, The Struggle For Syria, 222-23.
Western powers, as well as the officer corps who resented the government's ties with Great Britain regardless of the advanced weaponry that both the British and Americans were providing them. Similar sentiments eventually resulted in the 1958 military coup that saw the bodies of al-Said and King Faysal dragged through the streets of Baghdad in a grisly display of anti-Western emotion. Confirming the role Saut al-Arab played in influencing the leaders of the revolution, Ahmed Said later received an envelope containing a piece of bone along with an anonymous note that read: "In appreciation for what you did in helping to make the revolution a success...I send you a piece of the finger of the traitor Nuri as-Said."

If the Baghdad Pact dispute catapulted Egypt onto the international stage and to the forefront of the Arab nationalist movement, then it was Nasser's apparent victory in the Suez Crisis of 1956 and the complete union of Egypt and Syria into the United Arab Republic (UAR) in 1958 that actually galvanized Arab public opinion behind Nasser's policy of pan-Arabism. As we have seen, although Nasser's commitment to Egypt was at the forefront of his political ideology, following the Baghdad Pact and leading up to the nationalisation of the Suez Canal and the resulting Suez Crisis, terms such as "the Arab nation" (al-ummah al-'arabiyya) and "Arab nationalism" (al-qawmiyya al-'arabiyya) had become fixtures in the Nasserist lexicon and, as a result, the broadcasts of Saut al-Arab. Not surprisingly the citizens of the Arab world began to imagine themselves as encompassing the one nation that Nasser spoke of, for the early "tribal magic of radio" was able to revolutionize ties of kinship and belonging amongst various Arab populations otherwise

14 Ellis, "Nasser's Other Voice," 328.
unconscious of each other, but who were tied together by their temporally mutual consumption of the values promoted by Egyptian radio.\textsuperscript{16}

Much like anti-imperialism, Arabism served as a successful mobilization tool. The proposal of Arab unity was simple, direct and carried great emotional appeal — all characteristics that assisted in breaking down complex issues into clear, relatable and palpable information for the masses. Thus historical accounts dealing with the age of Nasser often point to the power Egypt’s broadcasts had in bringing all segments of Arab society together in a shared nationalist and spiritual consciousness. For instance, Adeed Dawisha contends that the post Baghdad Pact era closely resembled Benedict Anderson’s imagined community:

\ldots an Iraqi lawyer, a Jordanian student, a Bahraini poet, a Syrian doctor, and a Moroccan businessman would not have known one another by name or profession, but by adhering to the Arab nationalist creed, they were indeed but one fraternity, sharing in convictions and aspirations. Such individuals would not have known of each other’s existence, and, given the wide regional variations in dialect of the Arabic language, might not have conversed easily had they met, but in these few and fateful years, they belonged to one another spiritually, for indeed, \textit{in the minds of each lived the image of their communion}.\textsuperscript{17}

It was this form of imagining, assisted by the broadcasts of \textit{Sawt al-Arab}, that led Arabs in different nations to show their support for Nasser during the Suez Crisis by launching anti-Western riots and demonstrations; people took to the streets screaming Nasser’s name, many boycotted French and British merchandise and in Iraq, Syria and Saudi Arabia a number of petroleum pumps were destroyed.\textsuperscript{18} Needless to say, when Egyptian radio announced Nasser’s triumphant escape form the surprise attack orchestrated by France,

\textsuperscript{17} Dawisha, \textit{From Triumph To Despair}, 173. Emphasis appears in original.
\textsuperscript{18} Dawisha, \textit{From Triumph To Despair}, 181; Ellis, “Nasser’s Other Voice,” 54-55.
Israel and Britain the masses took their celebrations to the streets once again, for they believed that they — the Arab nation lead by Nasser — were winning their fight against imperialism and had begun to reclaim control of their destiny and dignity. However, when this common notion of Arab unity transformed from a shared consciousness and spirituality to a tangible reality with the formation of the UAR, the Arabs believed, albeit misguidedly, that Nasser had the policies to back up his claims of being the leader of the Arab world.

Nearly every historical account of Nasser’s life makes mention of the magnetism he possessed — a magical aura that drew the masses to him and his uniting ideology. His ability to present himself as a common man — one who felt the same frustrations and shared the same dreams as the average Arab citizen — was contrasted and yet complimented by his leadership of the Arab nationalist movement. It was Nasser, and interchangeably Egypt, who was seen as holding the common fate of the Arabs in his hands. As such it is well documented that Nasser’s efforts against the Baghdad Pact, his signing of the Czech Arms Deal, his apparent victory in the Suez Crisis and his role in the formation of the UAR were met with tremendous praise and excitement by the majority of the Arab masses as they learned of them through Sawt al-Arab. In addition, a brief examination of the extremely popular watanīyyat (patriotic songs) of the period provides additional cultural evidence of the strength of the masses’ support for Nasser’s leadership.

Nasser’s speeches, Said’s tirades and other Sawt al-Arab features were interceded with watanīyyat meant to entice listeners to stay tuned for the more sombre content scheduled adjacent to them.19 Thus as one observer noted, Sawt al-Arab’s block programming allowed for “the birth of a new folklore, the joining of the political diatribe to the traditional

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19 Boyd, Broadcasting in the Arab World, 325; Rosenbaum, “Nasser and Nasserism,” 325.
While Nasser himself commissioned the composition and performance of hundreds of wataniyat praising himself, Egypt and the new regime, the strategic use of music as political propaganda cannot account for the popularity these songs experienced at the time of their release or the position they have since secured in the cultural history of the Arab world.  

As Gabriel M. Rosenbaum argues, Nasser and the period of his reign had such a significant impact on modern Egyptian society that even today allusions to both are made in literature and conversation by quoting stanzas of popular wataniyat, thus effectively acting as cultural proverbs or maxims. In other words, within the collective memory these songs symbolize the spirit, excitement and expectations that characterised the Nasserite era. Although a staggering number of these nationalistic songs were released during Nasser’s reign (one author notes that 300 songs were written just to celebrate the construction of the Aswan Dam and another 220 plus to promote Arab unity) not all wutaniyat gained the same degree of popularity. Rather following the Free Officers’ Revolution, it was the voices of ‘Abd al-Halim Hafiz (“the voice of the president…and…the revolution”), Umm Kulthum (“the voice and face of Egypt”) and Muhammad ‘Abd al-Wahhab (“the Singer to Princes and Kings”) that “expressed the romantic feelings…sentiments…aspirations and dreams of the entire Arab nation.” Although fifty percent of Umm Kulthum’s repertoire from 1952-1960

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20 Hazem Zaki Nuseibeh as cited in Hale, Radio Power, 72.
21 Nasser, “Egyptian Mass Media Under Nasser and Sadat,” 7. Munir K. Nasser notes that the government asked popular Egyptian singers to record songs stressing nationalistic themes such as pan-Arab unity, anti-imperialism, progress and socialism, with the agreement that each singer would contribute a set number of songs every year as “a good-will gesture” toward the regime. As the popularity of these songs grew in enormity, many lesser-known singers sought the opportunity to also record them as a means by which to increase their notoriety.
consisted of national songs, ‘Abd al-Halim Hafiz released 56 patriotic songs during his short career earning him the title of “the historian,” owing to his ability to “translat[e] national dreams and visions into song.”

Thus when ‘Abd al-Halim sang “Hikayit Shab’” (“The Story of the People”) in celebration of the nationalization of the Suez Canal and the subsequent construction of the Aswan Dam or “Nab’nu Al Shab’” (“We, The People”) in 1958 to commemorate Nasser’s election as president of the UAR, he was said to be singing on behalf of a whole generation:

...We, the people, we the people/Chose you from the heart of the nation/You, who opened the door to freedom/Our leader with the big heart/We, the people/The sweetness the nation enjoys as they call your name/Congratulations to the people for they will enjoy happiness and good luck/And we chose you/And we shall walk behind you/You, who opened the door of freedom/Our leader with a big heart...

Praise for Nasser and his leadership of the pan-Arab movement was not reserved to wataniyyat performed by native Egyptians alone. For instance, Syrian born Farid al-Atrash also had success with songs like “al-Gabar al-Arabz” (“The Arab Giant”): “The Arab giant in the Arab World/His home is everywhere/In Tigris and in Amman/In Egypt and Lebanon/In the Arab Maghrib...He echoes the masses/A nation whose country is so large/Today we build our destiny in our golden age.”

Clearly, these nationalistic songs speak volumes of the prestigious position Nasser held in the hearts and minds of the Arab people, for they encompass the sentiments endemic to the masses and captured the essence of the Nasserite era. But as was discussed in chapter 2, while Sawt al-Arab’s programming contributed to the heightened prestige of

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27 Rosenbaum, “Nasser and Nasserism,”330. Lyrics translated with the assistance of Shawki G. Musleh.
28 Lyrics translated with the assistance of Shawki G. Musleh.
Nasser, the Egyptian nation and even Said, its loss of touch with reality would account for their ultimate defeat. Although Said was responsible for boosting prewar morale, during the Six Day War and reportedly at Nasser’s command, he deliberately lied about the Arab armies’ devastating defeat at the hands of Israel and falsely suggested that British and American aircraft were assisting the Israelis in their attack. While it has been proposed that Sawt al-Arab’s impact was already in decline by the late 1960s, the gravity of the psychological ruin that befell the Arab populace at hearing of the war’s true outcome provides some of the greatest evidence of the faith and trust the masses had put in Nasser and, as an extension, the broadcasts of Sawt al-Arab. Ultimately, had the program not have had the power to mobilize the masses to support the regime’s policies then the disappointment and deception that accompanied the Six Day War would not have been so great or have been the motivation for reconfiguring the Arab media landscape. Not surprisingly, after Nasser’s death the Egyptian government announced that the goal of Sawt al-Arab was “the scientific interpretation of language [and the purification of] that language from repetition, exaggeration, superficiality, and unpreparedness.”

It was Said and Sawt al-Arab that paid the ultimate price for Nasser’s mistakes; Sawt al-Arab’s political voice was severely restrained and Said put under house arrest, effectively eliminating the most contentious remnants of Egypt’s self-deception. Although Nasser’s prestige was bruised, his standing in the eyes of the people was still strong. When he announced his resignation via radio and television following the war, Arabs throughout the region took to the streets in support of the ‘Arab giant’ yet again. Accounts assert that

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29 Hale, Radio Power, 74; Stephens, Nasser, 494-95.
30 Boyd, Broadcasting in the Arab World, 329. Boyd argues that Sawt al-Arab’s initial decline can be attributed to the fact that the audiences of the 1960s were more sophisticated than their 1950s counterparts, television had begun to gain popularity and the Egyptian media managers no longer had their fingers on the pulse of the Arab world.
31 As cited in Boyd, Broadcasting in the Arab World, 332.
immediately following the broadcast of Nasser's resignation, Egyptians flooded the streets of Cairo “by the millions, running aimlessly, weeping or shouting” and later gathered in public spheres, at major government buildings, or by Nasser’s house in an effort to make him reconsider stepping down as their president.\textsuperscript{32} Former \textit{Le Monde} correspondent Eric Rouleau’s personal recollection of that fateful evening parallels the above account:

In the twilight and the semi-blacked-out streets, hundreds of thousands, some of the men still in pyjamas and women in their night gowns, came out of their houses weeping and shouting ‘Nasser, Nasser, don't leave us, we need you.’ The noise was like a rising storm. A whole people seemed to be in mourning. Tens of thousands gathered round the National Assembly shouting ‘Nasser, Nasser’ and threatening to kill any deputies who did not vote for Nasser. Half a million people massed along the five miles from Nasser’s home at Manshet el Bakri to the centre of Cairo to watch over Nasser during the night and make sure he would go to the National Assembly the next day to withdrawal his resignation. Millions more began to pour into Cairo from all over Egypt to make sure that Nasser stayed.\textsuperscript{33}

Arabs in other nations responded similarly and as a result of this outpouring of emotion and support Nasser later retracted his resignation. Yes he had lost this battle, but to the majority of Arabs who continued to believe in him Nasser was still the man who rid Egypt of King Farouk, ended the British occupation, nationalized the Suez Canal, fought the Baghdad Pact, created the UAR and attempted to introduce, albeit not always successfully, Arab socialism. For many Nasser’s resignation equated to being abandoned by “the father of the nation.”\textsuperscript{34}

Clearly, Nasser’s use of \textit{Sawt al-Arab} to bring the Arab masses on side with his policies of anti-imperialism and pan-Arabism were successful and resulted in their faith in his leadership and thereby heightened his prestige.

Finally, the oppositional decoding responses and actions of \textit{Sawt al-Arab}'s opponents surely confirm its effectiveness as a tool of propaganda. For instance, a number of the

\textsuperscript{32} Beattie, \textit{Egypt During the Nasser Years}, 211.
\textsuperscript{33} As paraphrased in Stephens, \textit{Nasser}, 507.
\textsuperscript{34} Stephens, \textit{Nasser}, 508.
program's main targets, particularly Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Britain, attempted to combat Sawt al-Arab's influence and popularity among their respective populaces. The two techniques most commonly utilized were the establishment of counter propaganda campaigns and the jamming of Sawt al-Arab's radio frequency. In the end, their efforts were wasted. Even though these anti-Egyptian broadcasts were more vocally ferocious than those of Sawt al-Arab's — focusing primarily on Egypt's belated arrival to the cause of Arabism, Nasser's supposed running of Egypt as a "police state" and the country's Communist character — they could not match the success of Egypt's extensive propaganda apparatus.35 Furthermore, as stated earlier, efforts at jamming the station were fruitless, as Egypt possessed the strongest transmitters in the region. Even Britain's bombing of Sawt al-Arab's Abu Zabal transmitter during the Suez Crisis and the concurrent emergence of the counterpropaganda station the Voice of Britain (formally Sharq al-Adna) did little to slow the station's broadcasts or popularity.36 As has been demonstrated, it would take nothing less than Sawt al-Arab's loss of touch with reality and the Arabs' loss of faith to finally discredit and ultimately silence Nasser's most powerful political and ideological instrument.

If Nasser's recognition of and responsiveness to the anti-imperialist sentiments and nationalist desires of the Arab masses was one of the primary factors contributing to the success of Sawt al-Arab, then it can also be argued that the lack of responsiveness by contemporary Arab leaders to their citizens' calls for social, cultural and political reform has contributed just as much to the popularity of Al Jazcera. At a time when anti-imperialism

36 Douglas A. Boyd, "Sharq Al-Adna/The Voice of Britain: The UK's 'Secret' Arabic Radio Station and Suez War Propaganda Disaster," Gazette 65 (2003): 450-51; Anthony Eden, The Suez Crisis of 1956 (Boston, 1960), 211; Nutting, Nasser, 174. Nutting asserts that when Nasser was told Egypt may not have an available alternative radio transmitter if the British followed through with threats to bomb Radio Cairo and Sawt al-Arab, Nasser "replied that he would tour Cairo and other cities in an open car and call the populace to resist by loud-speaker" if he had too. But it would not come to this, for as Anthony Eden the former British prime minister attested, soon Sawt al-Arab was again "inciting the population of Port Said to make trouble, thereby increasing the likelihood of demonstrations and rioting."
and Arab unity were principles strongly held by the Arab masses; Nasser stepped into the historic leadership role that he and his public believed needed to be filled. But if Arab nationalists’ desires for complete Arab unity faltered with the disintegration of the UAR and the devastation of the Six Day War, they were finally laid to rest following Nasser’s death. For instance, Anwar Sadat signed the Camp David Accord with Menachem Begin in 1978; Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in 1990 and as a result saw a number of Arab states align against him with the U.S. and its allies; the now famous ‘peace process’ between Palestinians and Israelis began with the Madrid Conference of 1991; Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin stunned the world with the announcement of Oslo I in 1993; and political Islam began to gain strength in the early years of the twenty-first century. In other words, contemporary Arab leaders have abandoned the populist political pan-Arabism that characterised the Nasserite regime, instead focusing on maintaining their own authoritarian rule, venturing only cautiously into cooperative Arab projects that promise to safeguard the sovereignty of their state power.37 This shift of the Arab political landscape has seen the structure of the modern Arab nation taking on the characteristics of a “black-hole state” in which absolute power is concentrated in the executive, thus placing the head of state as leader of all government institutions and ministries. As a result, the marginal freedoms given to citizens of these nations have little if any effect on their leader’s authoritarian rule.38

Whereas Nasser was afforded immense respect and admiration by the Arab masses even during his darkest hour, today’s Arab governments are encountering a “crisis of legitimacy” because of their collective failure in addressing major issues of concern to their

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publics, such as the Palestinian question, pan-Arab cooperation, foreign intervention, human development and popular representation and freedom, as well as a lack of basic life necessities and human rights.  

Frustrated with living in an environment of oppressive instability and faced with a lack of institutional avenues through which to effect change, the Arab public has been starved for an opportunity to finally be heard and understood. In the 2004 Arab Human Development Report (AHDR), respondents in Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Morocco and Algeria expressed their belief that freedom of opinion and expression (95%), freedom of thought (96%), freedom from ignorance (94%) and media independence (83%) were crucial to the realization of their concept of freedom.  

It would seem that these needs are beginning to be met, albeit not completely or faultlessly, through Al Jazeera.

Although it is difficult to determine whether or not the accessibility to a public forum such as the one offered by Al Jazeera can contribute to the realization of social, cultural or political reform, it has taken private political debates off the ‘Arab street’ and out of the coffeehouse into the public domain, thus effectively forcing government leaders and policy makers to answer to their citizens for their actions or lack thereof. But today’s Arab audiences are much more discerning, media savvy and politically conscious than their Nasserite era counterparts who had to be contented with a seemingly one-way flow of broadcast communication.  

Undoubtedly, the audiences of Al Jazeera are grateful to have

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41 Dale F. Eickelman, “New Media in the Arab Middle East and the Emergence of Open Societies,” in R.W. Hefner, ed. Remaking Muslim Politics: Pluralism, Contestation, Democratization (Princeton, 2005), 39. The transformation of the Arab viewer can be attributed to the significant rise in mass education, the spread and increased accessibility of new media technology and mass communication and the escalating ease of travel in the region, which as Eickelman notes, makes “it impossible for state and religious authorities to monopolize the tools of literate culture.”
a venue in which they can finally express and share their frustrations with fellow Arabs, as well as subject regional and international governments to intense global scrutiny, thus creating a reverse information flow. Still, while they seem to recognize and appreciate Al Jazeera's semi-independent status and count on their unique and uncensored coverage of major events, they do so cautiously and critically based on the fact that they perceive Al Jazeera's objectivity as questionable. It would seem that Al Jazeera's audiences have taken its adoration for multiple opinions and open public debate and applied the same logic to their negotiated reading responses to its broadcasting idiom.

While a small number of public opinion polls have been conducted since Al Jazeera began to make international headlines, none provides comprehensive data about the degree of legitimacy the Arab public gives to the channel's claims of independence. The only information found which related directly to Al Jazeera was a 2002 Gallup Poll which showed that a very small percentage of Arab respondents in the following countries believed that Al Jazeera displayed a pro-Western bias: Kuwait (9%), Jordan (7%), Lebanon (4%), Morocco and Saudi Arabia (6%).42 Due to this lack of survey data we are left to speculate based upon other information available to us. For instance, in a region where state run media has been the norm for decades, one is safe in assuming that the launch of a new media outlet operating even at arms length from its authoritarian ruler must have sent a current of shock, excitement and hope through the majority of the region's populace. Regardless of their acceptance or rejection of Al Jazeera, the abolition of the Ministry of Information and the loosening grip on the media by Al Thani must have been viewed as a bold move in an area of the world where change is known to come about slowly. Thus, the following observation

made by journalist Mostefa Souag was likely characteristic of many Arabs' initial reactions to early announcements of the Emir's novel broadcasting philosophy:

When we heard the Emir planned to abolish the Ministry of Information, we said to each other, this has got to be a joke...[t]his could not happen in the Arab world. When we first heard about Al-Jazeera, we thought this is 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 really going on in the world and wanted to apply their ideas in real life rather than be tied down in tradition.43

Whether fans or critics, the Arab public could not but have acknowledged that the degree of freedom given to the station’s staff was unprecedented in the region.

For those who may have viewed Al Jazeera’s inception and professed independence with a more critical eye, it is feasible that their concerns mirrored those of the station’s greatest critics, even if lacking in object hostility. Portions of Al Jazeera’s audience have undoubtedly questioned the distance Al Thani has kept from the station’s editorial decision-making process and deemed the broadcasting of political statements couched in religious rhetoric from Islamists such as Osama bin Laden and controversial Muslim clerics undesirable, misrepresentative or simply irresponsible. Relatedly, former Al Jazeera Manager of Media Relations Jihad Ballout notes that, “in the same breath we were being accused of being anti-Israeli by Israelis, Islamists by seculars and Arab nationalists, Arab nationalists by Israelis, Americans and Islamists, funded by the CIA, funded by bin Laden and funded by Saddam Hussein. And then it just became funny.”44 Other rumours suggested that Al Jazeera was established by the U.S. so as to contain hostilities against Western hegemony in the region.45 Not surprisingly such accusations have been given little credence, especially in

43 As quoted in Miles, Al-Jazeera, 29-30.
44 Miles, Al-Jazeera, 56.
light of the regionally specific logic surrounding Al Jazeera’s launch, such as the Emir’s liberal mindset and his desire to promote his nation internationally while also setting it apart from its Gulf neighbours. Similar suspicions of efforts to contain Arab public opinion have also been attributed to regional authoritarian regimes. Critics argue that Al Jazeera acts as a “safety valve” that diffuses and pacifies public opinion, thereby serving and entrenching repressive Arab regimes and effectively maintaining the status quo.\textsuperscript{46} But as we will see shortly, this argument also seems flawed given the outrage and hostility the station’s broadcasts have garnered from numerous Arab leaders.

Nevertheless, the aforementioned Gallup Poll also sheds light on the Arab public’s impressions of Al Jazeera’s objectivity and thus indirectly on perceptions of the station’s independence. Consider for instance, that polls taken in Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Kuwait, Jordan and Lebanon all show Al Jazeera’s reputation for objectivity as being considerably low, thus highlighting it as the station’s weakest area. Al Jazeera’s highest objectivity rating was found in Kuwait (54%) followed by Jordan (51%), Morocco (48%), Lebanon (44%) and finally Saudi Arabia (38%).\textsuperscript{47} However, when Arab viewers’ perceptions of Al Jazeera’s objectivity were measured against other national and regional stations, the media outlet acquired first place in all countries except Saudi Arabia: in both Jordan (51%) and Kuwait (54%) Al Jazeera’s nearest competitor was the Middle East Broadcasting Center (MBC) (21% and 51% respectively); in Lebanon (44%) it edged out the Lebanese Broadcasting Channel (LBC) (41%); in Morocco (48%) Al Jazeera beat out 2M (36%); and in Saudi Arabia it tied evenly with Saudi Channel 1 (38%).\textsuperscript{48} These findings suggest that although Al

\textsuperscript{46} Rami G. Khouri, “Arab Satellite TV – Promoting Democracy or Autocracy?” Available: http://www.jordanembassyus.org/05092001007.htm; Lynch, Voices of the New Arab Public, 4-5; Miles, Al Jazeera, 328-29; Zayani, “Al Jazeera and the Vicissitudes of the New Arab Mediascape,” 9, 33.

\textsuperscript{47} Saad, “Al Jazeera: Arabs Rate Its Objectivity.”

\textsuperscript{48} Saad, “Al Jazeera: Arabs Rate Its Objectivity.”
Jazeera's audience questions its objectivity, they still feel the station has been more successful than its competitors at producing unbiased news content.

Al Jazeera's low objectivity scores should not come as a surprise given that even members of Al Jazeera's staff admit that they struggle between a dedication to their Arab identity and their pledge to uphold the standards of a modern journalistic ethos. As a consequence, critics of Al Jazeera may be right in stating that the station caters to its target audience in the same way that Western media outlets do, thus falling prey to institutionalized journalistic news practices by feeding into the drive to not only appease, but also draw in its desired viewing audience. Marc Lynch explains that although comparisons between Al Jazeera and Fox News do not do justice to Al Jazeera or the Arab public sphere as a whole, the channel's fondness for equally patriotic rhetoric and frequent one-sidedness in event reporting, does highlight some similar and troubling aspects of the station's operation.49

Oddly enough, this distinctly Arab focus may account for Arabs' tendency to take advantage of their easy access to different international media sources. Although Arab audiences may have welcomed a television news channel produced by Arabs for Arabs, this does mean that they rely on it alone. Instead they also turn to other television stations (not to mention other forms of media) to get another perspective, thus demonstrating a new media savvy consciousness that seems to practice what Al Jazeera preaches. The above statistics, as well as an additional 2002 Gallup Poll, support this notion. Even though Al Jazeera was favoured over state-run and international television channels for world news coverage, Arabs polled also tuned into MBC, CNN and domestic channels such as Kuwait

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49 Lynch, Voice of the New Arab Public, 47-49.
Satellite TV, Saudi Channel 1, JRTV Channel 1 and RTM TV. Subsequently, although Arabs turn first to Al Jazeera for coverage of global events, they do not rely on it solely. At best the above combination of available information and statistics acknowledges that Al Jazeera's independence and objectivity are praised by some and questioned by others. But while examining the legitimacy of claims to independence and objectivity may make for interesting and important debate, it has been Al Jazeera's novel and controversial news coverage and public debate programs that made it the most controversial and popular news outlet in the Arab world to date.

The Arab public's tendency to consume multiple forms of media content speaks to their desire for comprehensive coverage and thorough understanding of events, as well as to an awareness that one news outlet cannot provide a full, accurate and unbiased account of every newsworthy event. Consequently, Al Jazeera Managing Director Mohammed Jassim Al Ali notes that Al Jazeera had to work hard to win back the Arab audiences' trust in the Arab news media by treating them as intellectual active participants rather than passive recipients satisfied with whatever they are fed — a statement that supports News Editor Ibrahim Hilal's earlier assertion that Al Jazeera's job is simply to show the realities of corruption, occupation, war and terrorism and then allow the audience to pass their own judgement. With an estimated viewership of thirty-five million people and survey data indicating that it is the station turned to first for global new coverage, Al Jazeera seems to have succeeded in this endeavour.

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51 Al-Ali, “Interview with Abdallah Schleifer and Sarah Sullivan”; Noujaim, *Control Room*.
52 Burkholder, “Arabs Favor Al-Jazeera Over State-run Channels for World News.”
Again, abstract notions such as truth are hard to measure through public opinion, but the data available demonstrates Al Jazeera’s efforts to present its audience with raw, unedited, exclusive coverage, particularly of key conflicts in the Middle East, is recognized and appreciated by their viewers. For instance, although Al Jazeera scored its lowest scores for objectivity in the abovementioned 2002 Gallup Poll, the survey registered significantly higher ratings for the station’s presence at key event sites (69%), daring unedited news (66%), comprehensive news coverage (66%), unique access to information (66%) and good analysis (61%) in Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco and Saudi Arabia. These findings suggest that viewers trust Al Jazeera to have the best unedited coverage, but also question their objectivity, again implying that they are keenly aware of biases accompanying the footage aired.

With that said, however, the graphic nature of Al Jazeera’s coverage seems to have affected some of its audience negatively. While 2001 survey data show that those watching Arab television tended to feel more sympathetic toward Arabs in other countries (Saudi Arabia 46%, United Arab Emirates 87%, Kuwait 75%), for some Al Jazeera’s constant, repetitive, fragmented and graphic airing of on-the-ground footage, particularly from the Al Aqsa Intifada, has had a negative and counterproductive effect:

At the beginning, the viewer is affected by the scenes and responds to them in varying degrees, but as these images keep recurring, the viewer risks becoming numb as a result of experiencing “compassion fatigue” which leaves him or her exhausted by the spectacle of violent events and reports about misery and suffering...[they]...become accustomed to seeing graphic pictures and dreadful events to the point that the event loses its eventfulness in the daily routine screening of violence. More than that, the images that are being fed are for the most part tragic and in that sense tend to sap the energies and hopes of the Arab viewer. The continuous or repeated airing of

53 Saad, “Al-Jazeera: Arabs Rate Its Objectivity.” The numbers in parenthesis were arrived at by averaging the percentages given for all five countries.
54 Lynch, Voice of the New Arab Public, 4.
images of victims and victimization, of expulsion and demolition may incite the Arab masses, but it also tends to affect them negatively.55

This negative consequence could of course been seen as contributing to the pacification of Arab public opinion, but it cannot be denied that Al Jazeera’s ambitious news coverage has contributed to the politicalization and mobilization of the average Arab viewer. In fact, it has been credited with increasing support for the Palestinian cause, as well as inspiring demonstrations against the U.S. and Britain’s ‘liberalization’ of Iraq and protests demanding political reform in Lebanon and Egypt.56 However, unlike during the time of Nasser when Arabs poured into the streets, today they do so “not spontaneously or irrationally, but with a consciousness of playing their role in the political drama playing out on television screens in unprecedented ways.”57 But the average Arab citizen has not had to take to the streets to make his or her voice heard, for they can now express their frustrations and debate issues of relevance with their fellow Arabs — activities that have not only allowed for greater political consciousness and mobilization, but have also undoubtedly transformed prior notions of communal imaginings.

Al Jazeera’s news coverage has helped illuminate the realities facing Arabs today, but it is the station’s political call-in programs that have finally allowed audiences to participate in a pluralistic public sphere. Again, while it may be said that Al Jazeera simply gives its viewers “the illusion of democracy” the station itself cannot be blamed for regional governments’ inability to provide their citizens with tangible avenues for political

57 Lynch, Voices of the New Arab Public, 76.
opposition. Although not flawless, Al Jazeera has played a significant role in transforming both the Arab political and media landscapes by altering interactions between governments and their citizens and amongst regional viewers and their global expatriate counterparts; the former resulting in the creation of a “culture of accountability” and the latter the most contemporary variant of Benedict Anderson’s imagined community.

Al Jazeera’s live audience participatory talk shows have received as much praise as condemnation for putting political and religious leaders under the lens of intense global scrutiny. While a comprehensive review of the taboo subjects tackled by such shows cannot be provided here, suffice it to say that Al Jazeera functions “as a de facto pan-Arab opposition and forum for resistance” where none previously existed. Not surprisingly viewers have taken the unique opportunity afforded them to call on Arab leaders to answer for their actions, the most pressing concerns being the question of Palestine, the current situation in Iraq and the issue of reform. Rather than discussing the state of political affairs in the region inconspicuously and out of earshot of those in power, Arabs now share and debate their concerns in the public sphere, thus collectively transforming their “hidden transcripts” into “public transcripts” for the first time.

58 Miles, Al Jazeera, 329; Zayani, “Al Jazeera and the Vicissitudes of the New Arab Mediascape,” 33.
60 Zayani, “Al Jazeera and the Vicissitudes of the New Arab Mediascape,” 2.
61 Lynch, Voices of the New Arab Public, 79-80.
62 James C. Scott, Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts (New Haven, 1990), 1-4, 17, 19, 183-84, 199. Scott uses the term “hidden transcript” to refer to the “backstage” discourse between subordinates that takes place outside of direct observation by those who dominate them. Scott argues that so-called “loud form[s] of public resistance” have a “silent partner” in the form of “disguised resistance” or what he calls infrapolitics. These infrapolitics, which are made up of “a wide variety of low-profile forms of resistance that dare not speak in their own name,” constitute safe areas or means by which the political life of subordinates is enacted, albeit in an indirect and somewhat introverted manner.
The political dialogue-based program has also had a profound affect on Arabs' political and religious imagination. Not only has a new public been created and sustained in which Arabs from around the world can interact with one another, but the audience shaping public opinion has expanded greatly. As has been demonstrated, the affordable transistor radio was able to rally all segments of the Arab masses behind Nasser's ideological pan-Arabism. However, while new inexpensive satellite dishes and free-to-air Arab television channels allow for a pan-Arab consciousness based on notions of harmony and association through the shared languages of history and identity, they have also made room for new pan-Islamic and liberal trends as well. While religious debate and the discussion of women's empowerment have been served by Al Jazeera programs such as Shariah and Life (Shari'ah wa Hayat), Islamic Law and Life (Shari'ah wa Hayat), For You (Lakat), Talk of the Fair Sex (Kalam Nowain), and For Women Only (Li Nissa Faqat), these issues have also found a permanent place in the station's daily debate and analysis. Furthermore, eager and now able to stay involved in regional debates, Arab expatriates account for a percentage of Al Jazeera's subscription base outside the region, as well as a number of the audience phone calls showcased on the station's dialogue programs. Not only has the number of people involved this new public sphere grown, but those partaking in such imaginings are also

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63 Eickelman, “New Media in The Arab Middle East,” 49-50.
66 Eickelman, “New Media in the Arab Middle East, “ 50; Kasim, “The Opposite Direction,” 97; Miles, Al Jazeera, 36.
longer mass and anonymous” for satellite technology has facilitated their meeting and direct communion for the first time in the history of the Arab world.67

Armed with the power to make governments accountable and bring its viewers together in a common ‘imagining’ assisted by the first ever open forum for Arab audiences, it is not surprising that Al Jazeera has come under heavy fire from governments worldwide. First, American Secretary of State Colin Powell petitioned Al Thani to restrain the news station’s “anti-American rhetoric” and criticism of the Bush Administration’s actions and policies.68 Yet as one can imagine Powell’s pleas fell on deaf ears. Suspiciously, roughly a month and a half after Powell’s meeting with the Emir, Al Jazeera’s office in Kabul was destroyed by two 500-pound American bombs — the correlation was not lost on Al Jazeera. However, the most devastating blow handed to Al Jazeera’s staff by the U.S. came on April 8, 2003, when one of its reporters, Tariq Ayoub, was killed when another missile hit and destroyed Al Jazeera offices in Baghdad.69 As would be expected, the American military was accused of intentionally targeting Al Jazeera, but it would not be until November 2005 that the staff’s suspicions would be confirmed. The proof came when a government memo, which contained a transcription of an April 2004 conversation between President George W. Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair, was leaked to Britain’s Daily Mirror. It was during this Washington meeting that Blair is said to have talked Bush out of following through with his plans to bomb a number of Al Jazeera’s regional offices.70 While these documents did not directly confirm the U.S. government’s intentional involvement in the

69 Miles, Al Jazeera, 265-71.
bombing of Al Jazeera's Kabul and Baghdad offices, the release of this memo, as the *Daily Mirror* asserted, did “[raise] fresh doubts over US claims that previous attacks against [Al Jazeera] were military errors.”

Similar to *Sawt al-Arab*, Al Jazeera's most vocal opponents have emerged from its own regional base. For instance, by placing extremely controversial topics up for debate *The Opposite Direction* has been said to have been “the source of numerous international disputes and [has] instigated the severance of diplomatic relations with several neighbouring countries.” *The Opposite Direction*, as well as other Al Jazeera programming, has continually come under attack: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain dissuaded local companies from advertising with the channel; Tunisia, Morocco and Libya have pulled their ambassadors out of Qatar because Al Jazeera gave airtime to their nations’ critics; Egyptian state run media launched an anti-Al Jazeera campaign; Yasser Arafat was said to have become enraged because they gave more than ample airtime to Hamas leaders and also portrayed Arafat in an unfavourable light; and Jordan closed Al Jazeera's offices in Amman for a short time after a guest criticized the monarchy — the list could go on. Such controversy was the catalyst for the Arab States Broadcasting Union's seemingly politically motivated move to withhold Al Jazeera, “Memo: Bush Wanted Aljazeera Bombed.”; *Daily Mirror*, “Bush Plot to Bomb His Arab Ally.”

The news channel has also managed to ruffle a vast amount of feathers among members of the right, neo-conservatives and Zionists in both Canada and in the U.S. Pressure has been put on the American based Dish Network to stop broadcasting Al Jazeera and the Canadian Jewish Congress, among others, have fought Al Jazeera's application to the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) for a digital cable license, claiming that Al Jazeera encouraged the vilification of Jews. For more information on this process see: CRTC, “Broadcasting Public Notice 2004-5-1,” 2004.


Jazeera’s entry into their Pact of Arab Honor because the station’s broadcasts were said to blatantly disrespect the code of honor agreed upon by participating Arab states.  

Although audiences’ reactions to both Sawt al-Arab and Al Jazeera cannot be determined with complete certainty, this chapter has used available historical accounts and survey data to highlight what would seem to have been their foremost decoding responses to both outlets’ broadcasting idioms. As we have seen, listeners of Sawt al-Arab seem to have had a primarily dominant-hegemonic decoding response to its broadcasting idiom. The success of the program can be attributed both to Nasser’s understanding of the radio medium, as well as to his identification with and responsiveness to the Arab masses. By moulding Sawt al-Arab’s broadcasting idiom to reflect his ideological needs and popular sentiments of the time, Nasser was able to rally the masses behind his leadership, even following the disappointment of 1967.

Conversely, Al Jazeera’s viewers have had primarily negotiated reading responses to the station’s broadcasting idiom, most especially with regard to its claims of independence, objectivity and truth. Yet by doing so they seem to have recognized and emulated Al Jazeera’s passion for open debate. Thus Al Jazeera’s popularity can be attributed to its ability to bring Arab viewers from around the world together in a new Arab public sphere — the first of its kind in the history of the Arab world.

However, this analysis of Sawt al-Arab and Al Jazeera has also highlighted important similarities. For instance, both have demonstrated an ability to unite and mobilize their Arab audiences, albeit in different ways and with different consequences — an influence that has warranted equally aggressive and violent oppositional decoding responses from Arab and Western leaders alike. By assisting the progressive expansion of the Arab imagined

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community through the utilization of the latest broadcasting technology available to them, *Sawt al-Arab* and *Al Jazeera* surely represent the defining media outlets of their time.
Conclusion

On the evening of September 28, 1970, while lying in bed after suffering his second heart attack earlier that afternoon, Nasser turned on the transistor radio that sat on his bedside table, ignoring his doctor's protests. After listening to the evening's headlines on Radio Cairo, Nasser turned off the receiver and said, "I did not find what I expected" — moments later he passed away leaving us to ponder what it was he had anticipated hearing.¹ It seems almost befitting that the man responsible for demonstrating the power of radio broadcasting to the Arab world would have spent his last moments listening to the radio transmissions that he had so skilfully utilized during his reign as Egyptian president and which left such an indelible mark on the Arab media landscape. As this thesis has demonstrated, Nasser was the first Arab leader to use radio broadcasting as a means by which to mobilize the masses in support of his political goals and social policies. His attempts were successful, for the Arab masses of the 1950s and 1960s heard in the broadcasts of Sawt al-Arab exactly what they desired and often showed their support for Nasser's policies by flooding the streets of Cairo, Amman and Baghdad. Thus regardless of the fact that Nasser and Said chose to encode Sawt al-Arab's broadcasting content with propagandist rhetoric rather than encouraging rational debate, until 1967 the program had the power to bring all segments of Arab society together in support of Nasser's pan-Arab revolution. By "creat[ing] a public opinion where none had existed before, among the illiterate and semiliterate masses of the Arab world from its northern reaches in the Fertile Crescent of Syria and Iraq to the bazaars of Aden and the desolate sands of the Pirates' ¹ Heikel, The Cairo Documents, 1.
Coast,” Sawt al-Arab inaugurated radio broadcasting as the first true instance of mass communication in the Arab world.2

Although many Arab leaders would attempt to either emulate Nasser’s political power or counter it by establishing their own broadcasting systems, all failed. Consequently, no Arab media outlet was able to affect Arab public opinion, ignite the imagination of the Arab masses or bring the region’s populations together in communal imagining to the same extent as Sawt al-Arab until the rise of Al Jazeera. While there is no question that Al Jazeera’s existence hinges on the benevolence of Al Thani, his lack of direct involvement in the daily functioning of the channel has allowed its staff to mould the station’s mandate and character. Even this slight loosening of authoritarian power seems to have brought positive consequences for Al Jazeera’s viewers, as they finally have access to a venue in which to make their voices heard. The result has been the creation of an international Arab public sphere that facilitates a pan-Arab consciousness while also allowing for the expression of pan-Islamic and liberal trends. In stark opposition to Sawt al-Arab, Al Jazeera has demonstrated its power not by showcasing powerful voices from above, but by allowing for the public expression of those from below. Thus, while Nasser and Al Thani may have both utilized their nations’ broadcasting systems to achieve their unique political and developmental goals, there is no evidence that Al Thani, or the staff of Al Jazeera, have set out to encode the channel’s broadcasting content with pan-Arab rhetoric similar to that of Sawt al-Arab. Rather, as noted above, valid comparisons are evident in the decoding responses of their domestic, international and expatriate Arab audience members. Assisted by new technological advancements, both Sawt al-Arab and Al Jazeera have demonstrated

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2 Winston Burdett as cited in Hale, Radio Power, 72.
their ability to produce increasingly modernist variants of Benedict Anderson’s ‘imagined community.’

My intention in undertaking this comparative historical study of Sawt al-Arab and Al Jazeera was not to proclaim one media outlet superior to the other. Rather it was to dispel misconceptions that have led to inaccurate comparisons of the two, as well as to demonstrate the importance of understanding new Arab media in light of the Sawt al-Arab legacy. Historians and media scholars interested in the contours of the Arab media landscape cannot dissociate emerging media outlets from their predecessors, thus there exists an urgent need for the injection of historical context into discussions of present and future Arab media ventures. This is unquestionably demonstrated when the so-called ‘Al Jazeera phenomenon’ is critically analyzed from an Arab, rather than Western, perspective.

While Western media has been saturated with debates concerning the supposed threat Al Jazeera poses to Western power and influence in the Arab world, the only truly remarkable thing about Al Jazeera is its ‘Arabness.’ Its significance and exceptionality cannot be credited to innovative and groundbreaking journalistic practices or technological capabilities (for as we have seen, Al Jazeera follows the same journalistic ethos and falls prey to the same pitfalls as any Western media outlet), but rather to the fact that it is a product of the Arab world. Al Jazeera represents an exception to the government censorship and direct control that has enveloped the Arab media landscape since Sawt al-Arab’s 1967 disgrace. Thus the relevance and uniqueness of the channel’s maverick character is best appreciated by understanding it within its specific historical context, the regional traditions that it is seemingly working to collapse and the impact and consequences this has for the populations of the Arab world.
Although Al Jazeera has undoubtedly challenged the historically oppressive media environment of the Arab world, Augustus Richard Norton is warranted in contending that "it is wishful thinking to presume that new media are in themselves an antidote to authoritarianism. The discursive voices of the new media are fascinating, but their political importance has yet to be demonstrated." By adopting a three-tiered methodology that addressed the production and distribution of media content by authoritarian Arab leaders, the value-laden messages encoded into the media content their outlets broadcast and how these same messages are decoded and reacted to by their audiences, this thesis has demonstrated that Al Jazeera is not free or independent of Al Thani’s authoritarian rule. Such a statement is not meant to negate the clearly positive, albeit limited, affects the rise of such a channel has had on the international Arab community. Al Jazeera has been able to tackle controversial issues openly, allow for diverse international audience participation, force authoritarian leaders of the Arab world and beyond to take responsibility for their actions and the consequences they entail and bring Arabs from around the world together to share their concerns and frustrations, shaping personal and community identity in the process. It is true that Al Jazeera cannot be held up as a definitive catalyst for political transformation in the Arab world, but it must be acknowledged that it does represent a milestone on the long and arduous path toward global media pluralism and democratization. Given that this channel originates in the Middle East, where change is known to come about at a snail's pace, the opening of public debate to the Arab masses is a significant beginning.

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It is an unfortunate reality that scholars outside the field of communication studies have not taken seriously the impact of mass communication on the formation and

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transformation of modern society. While communication media are certainly not the only factor in the development of modernity, they surely stand as one of the most politically, socially and culturally consequential. It is essential to recognize that communication networks are interconnected with the exercise of economic, political and military power and that they are routinely utilized by individuals and groups to achieve their ambitions. Moreover, the audiences that consume media products are not passive, homogeneous and isolated, rather:

[w]e must see...that the use of communication media involves the creation of new forms of action and interaction in the social world, new kinds of social relationship and new ways of relating to others and to oneself. When individuals use communication media, they enter into forms of interaction which differ in certain respects from the type of face-to-face interaction which characterizes most encounters of daily life. They are able to act for others who are physically absent, or act in response to others who are situated in distant locales. In a fundamental way, the use of communication media transforms the spatial and temporal organization of social life, creating new forms of action and interaction, and new modes of exercising power, which are no longer linked to the sharing of a common locale.

In other words, communication media have the ability to shape the way in which audiences see, understand and react to their world and transform audience interactions with one another, as well as with those who rule them. With the increased sophistication of contemporary technology, these interactional relationships are taking place over increasingly greater distances and attracting a broader range of participants, thus reshaping forms of identity and power, while also changing the very nature of the public sphere.

It was not the responsibility of this historical study to speculate about the fate of the Arab media landscape, the transformations that will undoubtedly shape it in the years to come or the consequences such forthcoming developments will have on the Arab world in

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4 Thompson, The Media and Modernity, 4.
5 Thompson, The Media and Modernity, 4.

107
the future. However, it is hoped that this thesis contributes to current historical and communication literature regarding Arab media, particularly *Sawt al-Arab* and *Al Jazeera*, while also inspiring future historians to recognize the role of mass communication as crucial to the understanding of modern societies, particularly those of the Arab world.

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Bibliography


