“The Voice of the Voiceless”
News production and journalistic practice at Al Jazeera English

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Abstract
This thesis explores how the cultural and social media environments surrounding the journalism of Al Jazeera English are shaped by and shape the channel’s news practices. Al Jazeera English has been described as a contra-flow news organization in the global media landscape and this thesis discusses the different reasons why the channel is described in this way by looking at its origins, aims, characteristics and ideals. Based on interviews with Al Jazeera English journalists, news observations and two field observations in London, I argue that Al Jazeera English brings cultural and social sensitivity to its news reports by engaging with multiple in-depth perspectives, using local reporters and integrating citizen generated material. The channel’s early adoption of online technologies and citizen journalism also contributes to a more democratic news direction and gives the channel a wider spectrum of opinions and perspectives to choose between. By applying a comparative analysis built on similar studies within anthropology of news journalism differences and similarities within the journalistic practices can be detected, comparing Al Jazeera English’s journalism with journalism at other places and news organizations. These comparisons and discussions enables new understandings for how news is produced and negotiated within the global media landscape, and this gives the global citizen an improved comprehension of why the news, which shapes our appreciation of the world, looks like it does. In conclusion, this awareness opens up for a discussion towards a societal transformation that gives space for a more multifaceted journalism distancing itself from one-sided perspectives and institutional censoring.

Key Words
Al Jazeera English, journalism, news, media, new technologies, citizen journalism
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1. Introduction

[Richard Gizbert, presenter:] The 24-hour format has its flaws: it’s too much opinion, not enough journalism, more talk than newsgathering. Still there are more news channels than ever as governments from Beijing to Moscow, to Paris, all realize that those channels can provide them with a soft power push. [...] Despite shortcomings and competition on the web, the 24-hour TV news business remains a growth industry. Over the past decade there’ve been a slew of new state sponsored global channels: there’s this one founded by Qatar, there is France 24 which launched when Jacques Chirac was president; Russia’s Kremlin- backed RT; China’s CCTV; and the BBC who launched satellite channels in Arabic and Farsi – with funding from the British Foreign Office. […]

[Paul Jay, Director, The Real News:] Why would any country spend so much money on a network if it wasn’t an extension of their national interest. Al Jazeera is in its heart an extension of Qatari foreign policy that is the same for Russia, and the same for TeleSUR in Venezuela, CNN Spanish: if you want to have influence you got to be on TV. […]

[Marcela Pizarrro, presenter:] Because despite the flaws inherent to the format, the falling ratings and all that fast-pace competition online, people still turn to 24-hour TV news and they watch, even stories like this one (Al Jazeera 2014b). ¹

Al Jazeera English’s the Listening Post is: “A weekly programme that examines and dissects the world’s media”, and during some episodes it even dissects its own role in the media landscape looking at the controversies surrounding the network and bringing in voices that not only praise the channel but also critically scrutinize it. Another episode from the program that also struck me as remarkably unconventional concerns the resignation of Al Jazeera’s Director General and his replacement by a member of the Qatari royal family, a non-journalist, and it starts with the phrase: “Doing a news program that focuses on the media and then covering a story on your own news organization comes with possible career implications, but there is no avoiding this one” (Al Jazeera 2011). This self-scrutinizing and novel approach directly caught my interest for the channel, especially when considering that is owned and financially sustained by the government of Qatar; an oil-rich absolute monarchy in the Persian Gulf.

Al Jazeera English is one of several 24-hour television news channels that have entered the global news landscape, posing competition to the earlier domination of North American and West European news channels such as the BBC and CNN. Although the Royal Emir of Qatar

¹ The Listening Post “24-hour TV News: An Endangered Species?” aljazeera.com April 5 2014, 14:47.
owns Al Jazeera English, its news reporting and shows are far from sharing Qatari ideals. In many ways the channel is breaking the censorship on topics that are considered taboo or illegal in Qatar as well as in the Middle East. Male homosexuality is for example something that is illegal in Qatar and is condemned by many Gulf countries, whereas in Al Jazeera English’s broadcasting a quite strong ‘pro-gay rights’ bias can be detected. Even issues concerning immigration and the treatment of guest workers in Qatar are discussed without noticeable restrictions or censoring (see Al Jazeera 2013d).

These loose constraints from the Qatari government differentiates the channel from other state-owned news channels’ journalism, such as Russia’s RT, China’s CCTV or Iran’s Press TV that can be seen more obviously to stand in correspondence with the nations’ ideals and legislation. What is interesting to analyze is how Al Jazeera English can look so different from other 24-hour news channels as well as if it actually is different.

Media studies of Al Jazeera English’s journalism have discussed the channel from different points of view. In looking at its role in the global media landscape, Kasmani (2010) argues that Al Jazeera English represents “the contra-flow category in the global news media” (ibid.:1719) and he underlines that the channel is known, in similarity to the BBC, for its “‘objective’ reporting, which challenges elite voices and gives opposition groups the opportunity to participate in their news-making process through the multiple perspectives of dialogue and debate” (ibid.).

Other media studies have looked at the role of the channel’s reporting in relation to its influence on its audiences, and in a study made by Powers and el-Nawawy (2010) it is argued that Al Jazeera English is giving media recognition to under-represented groups in its news reporting, which has led audiences to see Al Jazeera English as a conciliatory media outlet (ibid.:62). According to a comparable study made by Gilboa (2012), a contrasting result was discovered rising from a case study of the coverage of the conflict on the Gaza strip 2008-2009. The study shows how biased and unbalanced Al Jazeera English’s coverage was and that its journalists, in their aim to represent the Palestinian cause, neglected their professional code of ethics, and
unquestionably “failed to meet the criteria of peace journalism and reconciliatory media” (ibid.:156).

There have been plenty of studies made of Al Jazeera English’s journalism by media and communication researchers, but few have been done within anthropology. There are ethnographic studies on journalism at other news organizations, but from my understanding there is nothing extensively written about Al Jazeera English’s journalism and journalists from an anthropological approach. I therefore believe that this thesis can contribute to a deepened understanding of the social relations and shared patterns of meaning within media production in the specific context of Al Jazeera English’s media network and how these practices speaks of wider processes within the contemporary world of news journalism, of how the profession is changing.

**Aim**

With this thesis I aim to position the journalism of Al Jazeera English in its transnational context by first looking at its origin and position within the global media landscape compared to surrounding actors and events. Thereafter I will discuss the journalistic professional practices within the channel in relation to professional ethics and ideals, as well as in relation to the channel’s aim. In conclusion, I will analyze Al Jazeera English’s journalism within the changing world of journalism with the increased adoption of new media technologies and interactivity between audiences, news production and professional journalism. I am thus posing the following questions:

- *How do the cultural and social media environments shape Al Jazeera English’s position and journalism, and in reverse, how is the channel’s journalism changing the global news flow?*

- *What do Al Jazeera English’s journalistic practices and ethics look like, do they differ from conventional journalistic ideals, and if they do, how are they different?*

- *What has Al Jazeera English’s adoption of online technologies meant for the channel, its journalists and news practices?*
I believe that a study of Al Jazeera English’s role and journalistic practices is important for understanding where people’s conceptions about the world come from because to a large extent it is from the work of journalists that people get their ideas and awareness of human life. The study also contributes to the discussion of what is the future of journalism, of how it is changing and why.

**Theoretical approach and earlier research**

In 1993 Spitulnik commented that there “is as yet no ‘anthropology of mass media’” (1993:293) but since then the body of anthropological studies concerning mass communication and media consumption has grown with work such as Askew and Wilk (2002), Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod, and Larkin (2002), Peterson (2003), Coman and Rothenbuhler (2005). “[M]ass media anthropology is the field within anthropology that studies the way in which culture shapes society through the mass media” writes Osorio (2005:36), yet in this body of literature of mass media there has been little written on news and journalism, argues Bird (2010:2). The focus has instead been on entertainment media, and has tended to marginalize “the role of news in constructing reality and the constitution of public culture” (ibid.).

Nevertheless, there exist several important ethnographies of journalism such as Pedelty’s (1995) study of war correspondents in El Salvador, Hannerz’ (2004a) study of foreign correspondents, Boyer’s (2000, 2005) study on newsroom practices, Bird’s research on tabloids (1990, 1992), as well as Hasty’s (2005) study of the press in Ghana, and Ståhlberg’s (2002) study of journalists in India. Yet it is communication studies and sociology that have primarily contributed to the amount of research on news and journalism where sociological ethnographies appeared in the late 1970s with Fishman’s *Manufacturing the News* (1980) and Tuchman’s (1978) *Making News* (see Boyer 2010:241).

Since my study focuses of journalistic practices and news production as well as the role of citizen journalism and social media (see e.g. Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti 2013, Postill 2012, Gillespie 2013) I have mainly used ethnographies within these fields, and my main theoretical approach follows discussions within anthropology of news journalism and studies done within media research concerning journalism, news media and new digital media technologies. I argue
that to understand Al Jazeera English journalistic practices and news reporting it is crucial to look at surrounding ideas concerning journalistic practices and ideals as well as to look more closely at the geopolitical setting from which Al Jazeera English originates and has expanded. I also argue that in order to explain the cultural and social meaning within news production at Al Jazeera English, it is essential to analyze the channel’s aim as well as the significance of new digital technologies and social media since Al Jazeera English was one of the first larger news organizations to put their weight behind new technologies and new media platforms in their news production.

The anthropologist Dominic Boyer (2010a, 2010b) has studied the ‘slotwork’ and intuitive practices at German news organizations and has turned to social phenomenology as a way to analyze professional practices within journalism. As a way to help us better understand contemporary news journalism he looks at two conditions specifically: “the social phenomenology of fast-time practice” and the “harmonized attentions of the contemporary news industry” (2010a:248). Boyer underlines that “phenomenology argues that knowledge emerges and is refined through attentional practices” and he emphasizes that phenomenology is a useful analytical perspective as “the term attentional practices captures much of the essence of news journalism, today and always.”(ibid.).

The phenomena of fast-time practices and harmonized attention show how journalists in the contemporary media landscape have to change their way of producing news, and how they also change their way of thinking around newsworthiness, where they have to be more intuitive and pay more attention to the surrounding “agreement” of newsworthiness, where this action stands above the practices of generating “new” news. Journalism becomes a practice of following bigger organizations’ broadcasts and narratives, since with the increased competition in the media market there is no chance for smaller news organizations to be first with breaking news (ibid.:251-252). I will use Boyer’s analysis to position Al Jazeera English’s journalistic practices, to see if they in a similar way to the German news organizations can also be categorized as fast-time practices.
I also use Ulf Hannerz’ (2004a) discussion concerning different types of foreign correspondents and the idea that the correspondents make up a certain “community” with a shared “consciousness of kind” (ibid.:155). Hannerz observes a trend among the correspondents to write and report in a similar way in his study of foreign correspondents mostly working for American and European newspapers, and he believes that this trend comes from their feeling of unity with each other, where they perform similar work even if they come from different newspapers and are placed at different locations. This idea he underlines “may create an overall network of relationships” (2004a:155), where practices of these journalists can be seen creating a certain kind of media climate where the expectations are to get certain themed news depending on the area they are reporting on.

I aim to compare this idea of foreign correspondents making up a certain community with the practices of Al Jazeera English’s correspondents to see if they also share similar ideas about newsworthiness and themed news as correspondents working for other news organizations.

I will also examine Hannerz’ discussions concerning time and different types of correspondents, where he explains how the correspondents have a strong personal influence on their reporting where he believes that bias in the reporting is strongly connected to the knowledge and ideas of the journalists. He notices for example a big difference in writing depending on the time spent at the place, thus depending if you are a “parachutist”, “spiralist” or a “long-timer” (2004a:82-83). Hannerz explains how “long-timers” generally are more critical of the government in the country, which is often due to the fact that the long-timers usually have their origin in the area, if they have not the fact that they have been at the place longer still gives them more in-depth local knowledge and where usually have knowledge in the local language (2004a:89&140). The “parachutist” on the other hand arrives at a place at the same speed as he or she leaves the place again, seldom spending longer time at one single location (ibid:40). I find this discussion useful in analyzing how Al Jazeera English’s emphasized use of local reporters as correspondents can be said to shape their news practices and content.

To analyze the impacts and changes in the media environment coming from new digital technologies, I will use Postill’s (2012) discussion of the participatory potential of new digital
communities and users, that can be used as a means for social activism and democratization (ibid.:168). I will also make use of the theoretical discussions from the media and communication researchers Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti (2013) describing the participation from citizen journalism as stimulating a more diversified and nuanced news production as it encourages more voices and perspectives to be heard and chosen from (ibid.:971), and how collaboration between professional journalists and citizen journalists lead to a sort of ‘networked journalism’ (ibid.:961). They argue that professional journalistic values and norms, such as impartiality, verification and journalistic authority, are being challenged and have to be reassessed with the entrance of “ordinary” people contributing with eyewitness footage and reports in news production (ibid.:964).

Through these theoretical discussions, as well as a number of other concerning news practices, I aim to gain a deeper understanding for how to position Al Jazeera English news journalism in the contemporary global society and to explain how it shapes as well as is shaped by surrounding values and structures. I argue following Bird’s (2005) comment that: “News and journalism play a significant role in the construction and maintenance of culture at the local and global levels, and anthropologists have a place in interpreting that role” (ibid.:18).

Outline of Chapters

The thesis is divided into six parts. In this first chapter my aim has been to introduce the reader to the topic of the thesis and why I choose to do this study. I have in this chapter briefly discussed how non-anthropological researchers have described Al Jazeera English’s journalism as well as how I aim to bring an anthropological perspective to my thesis. I have also outlined some of the theoretical approaches I will use in my analysis, which come primarily from anthropological studies of news journalism and news practices.

The second chapter refers to a methodological discussion of the field and how I collected my ethnographic data. Here I present the choices that lead to this specific study and the difficulties and challenges that the process of data collection posed. Furthermore I discuss the anthropological methods of interviewing and of studying a profession that is hard to gain access to, as well as my role as a researcher and the impact I have had on the field.
The third chapter discusses the contemporary media landscape and its actors, and I will give an historical overview over Al Jazeera English’s origin and growth. In this chapter I also analyze the role and the surrounding discourse that the channel has contributed to shaping as well as being shaped by. Thereafter I look more closely at the aim of the channel and its efforts in bringing in local reporters rather than foreign ones to report from places under-represented by the mainstream media.

The fourth chapter deals with the practices at one of Al Jazeera English’s production meetings and I examine in greater detail the discussions regarding news selection and delegation of work. The different journalistic roles at the channel are also analyzed in connection to the narrow deadlines and time frames imposed on them. In conclusion, the journalistic ideals and ethics are paralleled to earlier work on journalists, and the renegotiations of specific ideals are presented and discussed.

The fifth chapter analyses the changes in the media landscape coming from new media technologies. It discusses the impact and meaning of citizen integration in news production and the new hierarchies that the journalists are subjected to. The new roles are looked at from an analysis of borders and boundaries, along with a discussion concerning the future of ‘professional’ journalism, knowledge production in society and the consumption of news.

The sixth and final chapter summarizes the main topics discussed in the thesis and discusses possible further research that could be done on the topic.
2. Field and Method

Al Jazeera English

Al Jazeera is one of the larger international news organizations and can be compared with international news organizations such as CNN and the BBC. Al Jazeera English is the sister channel of Arabic-language Al Jazeera and they are both part of the Al Jazeera Network, a network and a corporation that besides Al Jazeera and Al Jazeera English also consists of Al Jazeera Balkans, Al Jazeera America, Al Jazeera Sport, Al Jazeera Mubasher, Al Jazeera Documentary, the Al Jazeera Media Training and Development Center and the Al Jazeera Center for Studies.

Al Jazeera was launched by the previous Emir of Qatar, Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, who in 2013 handed over his state power to his son. Following the corporate power and power elites of Al Jazeera English, we arrive at Qatari foreign policy and the politics of the Emir of Qatar (see Zayani\(^2\) 2005:2&10). Al Jazeera and Al Jazeera English can be seen as important components in the Emir’s desire to exercise greater political influence (see Seib\(^3\) 2012:2), even if this is denied by the organization itself, which emphasizes its independence from political influences. Nonetheless, Al Jazeera English is not answerable to Qatar’s domestic audience as it is an international English-language news channel, which gives it freedom not to operate with a domestic agenda in mind. Al Jazeera English was launched in 2006 and gained its international breakthrough in relation to its coverage of the Arab spring in 2008. Al Jazeera English alternates its news management between the headquarters in Qatar and the broadcasting center in London, and besides this they have over 70 bureaus placed around six different continents (see Al Jazeera 2013b).

The Field

My original intention was to conduct participant observation and interviews at one of Al Jazeera America’s bureaus in the U.S. To perform participant observations at one of their news bureaus

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was I believed a suitable method for observing constraints in the journalists’ work while making it possible to explore where they came from, as well as to understand the professional ethics within journalism at a more in-depth level.

The news channel Al Jazeera America launched in August 2013 and it seemed to me that their recent entry into the American news landscape and market would provide an interesting opportunity for my study, as the strategies required for fitting into the American news market would surely change its coverage in certain ways, making the discussions concerning its format and framing more obvious, in comparison to the newsrooms of Al Jazeera English and the Arabic language Al Jazeera.

Nevertheless, it was a rather difficult task to get hold of people from Al Jazeera America. After trying different email addresses and contacting some of the staff-members on LinkedIn, I got one response that however made the bad timing of the request obvious, telling me that they unfortunately could not accommodate my request at that time: “As you can imagine, it is still a bit hectic as we are still growing and developing the new channel”. The negative response to my request forced me to rethink my original plan and instead I decided to get in touch with Al Jazeera English and their bureaus.

It was not an easy task to find contact persons and email addresses to the headquarters in Doha and the broadcasting center in London, but in the end I received one positive answer. I decided to follow it no matter what, which led me to Al Jazeera English’s London office. The response from Al Jazeera English’s London office did not grant me the access I was looking for, which was to spend the entire field-work period at the news bureau, observing the editorial work as well as the decision-making processes, but it did grant me access to join one morning meeting with the executive producer. I was hoping that this meeting would open up some doors and give me further access to the journalists there.

In the end, the visit at the office did not give me further access to observe other meetings or the work at the office. Neither did I get presented to anyone among the rest of the staff, even though I stated this request. When I asked the executive producer whom I could contact I received the
answer that it probably would be hard as people were “very busy”. Nevertheless, I still believe that in an indirect way the meeting opened up some of the closed doors I had encounter in my previous search for journalists within Al Jazeera English. The fact that I could subsequently mention that I had been to one of Al Jazeera English’s morning meetings and met with the executive producer probably made the people I contacted more confident that I was serious, as well as seen as an “accepted” (by the producers) researcher to talk to. However, I do not know for sure if people confirmed this with the London office and actually had to ask for permission to talk to me. I know that concerning at least one of the journalist this was not the case.

Method

As I was not able to conduct more than one participant observation at Al Jazeera English’s newsroom and one participant observation at a protest for the release of two detained journalists in Egypt, I had to rethink my methods in gathering empirical data. The circumstances therefore led my fieldwork to become a study based on interviews, besides the two field observations, and the observations of Al Jazeera English’s news broadcasts. As most journalists I was able to interview were positioned in other places than in London I mostly conducted the interviews through Skype. Conducting fieldwork at a distance is something that Rabinow et al (2008) claim is becoming more common, since ethnographic work today is not in the same way connected to one field. Therefore, can the study be conducted at a distance, even in another country if that should be the case. My study became an examination of testimonies of foreign news reporting rather than newsroom practices.

The outcome however did not surprise me as my choice of field can be seen as an obvious example of studying people with power, of ‘studying up’ (Nader 2011). Hannerz (2006) explains that ‘studying up’ or ‘studying sideways’ often imply a kind of ‘anthropology of appointment’ where “access to people, to informants, is in fact often limited, regulated and timed” (ibid.:34). Journalism exemplifies this group of professionals that are hard to get access to, as they are under constant time pressure and constantly have to change their schedules according to the global flow of news stories.

My fieldwork was therefore a kind of ‘anthropology of appointment’ where I experienced how “[p]eople in positions of power are less accessible to the traditional ethnographic approach of
simply going to a location and hanging out” (Aull Davis 2007:37). To conduct this kind of study you have to develop new methods that meet these new ‘settings’ (ibid.). Therefore, I had to rely on scheduled interview-appointments with the informants following their time schedule and availability, as well as their local time zones as they were positioned in other time zones in relation to London. I also followed Al Jazeera English news through live streaming and their webpage, and these observations form part of my ethnographic material, as well.

I conducted six of the eight interviews with Al Jazeera English journalists through video call. We had set a date and time for the interview, having shared Skype names in advance, and most of the time we did follow these appointments. To perform the interviews via phone or video have certain disadvantages: it limits the observation of facial expressions and gestures, and it is hard to see how the person interacts in and is made aware of their surroundings.

Hence this way of performing fieldwork does not look like the traditional way of doing ethnography, where the “key operational phrase” (Nader 2011:213) within Anglo-American anthropology has been to conduct participant observations rather than interviews by appointment. The anthropological tradition is also often characterized by being untimely, to do longer field work and not just write about one single matter in a very timely context (Rabinow et al 2008:55). My differentiated methods can therefore be seen clearly shaped by me ‘studying up’ rather than the more traditional engagement within anthropology in ‘studying down’ (see Hannerz 2001:1).

Löfving claims that the anthropologists as well as the journalists are strangers and outsiders towards the people they aim to represent but where the anthropologist often stands closer to being an insider as he or she often has more time for establishing contact (2004b: 130). However, the limited time in the field, as well as conducting fieldwork at a distance decreased my prospects, as an anthropologist, of ever becoming an insider.

Despite the difficulties of gaining access to the field and informants, the interviews I conducted with the journalists were appreciably rich in ethnography. As professional journalists they were accustomed to expressing themselves vibrantly and eloquently, and they gave me a wide material for my study. I did not find any specific difficulties with the semi-structural model of
interviewing and I do not agree with Aull Davis (1999) argument that, “the goal of free-flowing discussion is not readily attainable when one party to the discussion is clearly holding back, not expressing any opinions, or even interacting except in the most minimalist form” (ibid.:96). The journalists I interviewed did not have a problem with me listening rather than contributing to the discussion, and had no problem in upholding a free-flowing discussion “with themselves”.

Besides this, I was also well aware that “in conducting interviews, techniques are promoted (such as standardized wording of questions and controlling interviewer responses) so as to limit the effect of the interviewer on this particular social encounter” (ibid:16). Yet in my interviews I did not have to proceed in controlling the responses as most of the interviews I had were recorded and it was therefore easy for me to go back and listen to the exact words of the informants. Neither did I use a standardized wording of questions in my interviews but I attempted to keep to open-ended questions and avoided using questions or ordering of questions that could be leading the answer of the informants. Leading questions might however not always be something negative for the research, as long as the ethnographer is aware of its effects, as that kind of model of interviewing may provide an insight to the power relations that occur in the interview situation (see Kvale 1997).

One negative aspect with excessively relying on interviews is that it might be harder to preserve anonymity of the informants; Aull Davis (1999) mentions that “the use of extensive direct quotations makes informants recognizable, at least to themselves, and often to others who know them well” (ibid.:51). I make use of pseudonyms in this thesis but I am aware of the possibility that the informants might be recognizable to other Al Jazeera English journalists. As journalists, they are nonetheless well accustomed to the fact that, “[a]nonymity is not always possible” (ibid.) as they work with the same ethical issues in their own work. Nevertheless was non of them requesting to be anonymous and neither did I ask them, however in the emails I sent them I made clear that no real names would be used in the thesis.

The interviews were hard to predict, as I never knew who would answer the many emails I sent. In the end, it depended on the timing of the email as well as the interest of the receiver. On the other hand, it meant that the journalists who agreed to an interview were interested in the topic
and in sharing their opinions, which resulted in the richness and discursive nature of the interviews. Thus, the selection of journalists came about by chance. I found most of the Al Jazeera English journalists through Twitter and through the Al Jazeera web page. The people with whom I formed the best rapport were four persons, one of whom also had a master in social anthropology, which encouraged him to become more engaged in my study. I also felt more comfortable in asking him more “sensitive” questions, concerning Al Jazeera English’s bias and his personal opinions regarding e.g. Al Jazeera airing the tapes of Osama bin Laden.

All of the eight interviewees had different backgrounds, and only two of them had the same nationality. On average ages ranged from early 30s to early 50s, with three females and five males. Some of them went to journalism schools but many did not. I talked to three journalists positioned in the headquarters in Doha, two at the broadcasting center in London, one in central Europe, one in South Asia and one in Southern Africa. To get a deeper understanding of the diversity and different education the journalists came from I will introduce two of them in more detail, where I believe these two in a informative way exemplifies this diversity.

One of the informants worked as a news anchor at Al Jazeera English, in Doha, and was of West African descent but had lived and studied both in the U.S. and France, and had a university degree in journalism from the U.S. She emphasized that she had always wanted to be a news presenter and when she later in her career was asked to work at Al Jazeera English, she accepted immediately. Another journalist was a reporter from South Asia, who originally had a degree in engineering, subsequently switched to anthropology and from there started to work as a journalist. He had also lived and studied in various countries and he saw his background, of having a broad knowledge from different fields of studies, rather than just a degree in journalism, as much more useful in his work at Al Jazeera English.

I noticed that my ethnographic methods and research actually resembled at many levels those of journalists, and I could understand how an anthropological degree could be useful in the journalistic profession and vice versa. Several anthropological studies underline this relation between journalism and anthropology (see Bird 2010b, Boyer 2010, Hannerz 2004a, Hasty 2010, Ståhlberg 2006, Rabinow et al 2008). Something journalists, especially foreign correspondents,
and anthropologists have in common, is to report at distance, both geographical and cultural (see Hannerz 2004a:6), and they are both professions of representation.

In my study I was constantly prepared to scribble down notes and record what I found interesting in order to be able to later restate what had been said and done without the risk of misrepresenting the person or the situation. This is something that Grindal and Rhodes (1987) claim is typical for both journalists and anthropologists: “Both use time-tested methods of data collection – notebooks, tape recorders and cameras. Both realize that one’s “neutral” observations cannot be accepted at face value and that it is always necessary to cross-check and verify information” (ibid.:4). I was also constantly on the move, taking trains and busses and always having an eye open for potential quiet cafés or pubs that I could use as interview places. These places were then later used for my interviews with non-Al Jazeera English journalists who were stationed in London. The interviews and field observations with and of non-Al Jazeera English journalists and meetings are however not included in this thesis as the journalists worked for very diverse news organizations and the observations were made in non-work hour settings at journalist-club events.

In this thesis it is necessary to be aware of how the selection of this particular news organization has shaped the results. The choice of studying a global and successful news channel such as Al Jazeera English instead of a smaller local news organization is, for example, something that shapes the depiction of the contemporary media landscape and journalistic practices. If instead the study had been made at a more local level, at a non-elite news organization, the results would probably have been different. Karin Wahl-Jorgensen (2010:27) argues that within ethnographic studies it is often the elite news organizations that are being studied by anthropologists, especially British news organization, and in particular the BBC (ibid.:28).

This is of course important to take into consideration when I discuss the effects new technologies have on the journalistic profession. Smaller local news organizations that operate on a smaller scale might function very differently, and may not apply citizen material or social media to the same extent as the larger global actors. According to Ginsburg (2005), earlier research in media studies have been narrowly located in “First World settings, which have provided an ethnocentric
frame for much academic discussion of media” (ibid.:6). This is however something that ethnographers try to change by engaging themselves in non-Western media settings.

I am therefore aware, when relating my findings to other ethnographic work on journalism, that these studies are often concerned with organizations from a ‘First World’ setting (see Boyer 2010, 2011, Hannerz 2004a) and often around larger news networks. The patterns and parallels might be more difficult to draw when considering smaller scale and local news organizations’ perspective. However, Ståhlberg’s (2006) study of journalistic practices in Lucknow, India, is an example of a more local news organization’s professional practices and Ståhlberg’s standpoint is that the practices and ideals to a large extent look very similar to those of other news organizations at other locations, even if he can distinguish certain local and cultural differences (ibid.:64).
3. Al Jazeera English and the Global Media Landscape

In one of the unrecorded interviews one of the journalists argued that they in Al Jazeera English’s weekly show the *Listening Post* can do things no one else can do, where the BBC and CNN both have restrictions in terms of corporate constraints where they do not want to interfere with their business connections, especially when broadcasting in America. Al Jazeera does not answer to anyone, he emphasized in the interview, as Al Jazeera it is an *Island*, as the name ‘peninsula’ indicate, compared to other channels. He continued by commenting that when Al Jazeera English was launching they already had the “street name” because of Al Jazeera Arabic and people were seeing Al Jazeera as “revolutionary” as it was showing issues the Arab world never had seen before. Al Jazeera English was in this sense already known for its difference, even before launching. The reason for its success he claimed had to do with that many English-speaking people around the world wanted to get an insight of what was happening in the world from a perspective that was not always the same; they want a perspective from somewhere else that shows things in a different light than their local news. He further stressed that the difference with Al Jazeera English is that it has never been seen with suspicion, as Qatar, a small country in the Middle East with 1.2 million, has never tried to conquer or anything. He made this statement in a comparison to Russia, that he argued would like to conquer, or China having their huge power. Qatar in difference, he claimed, ‘never wanted to conquer the world’.

In this chapter I will discuss how Al Jazeera English is different from other global news organizations, and the reasons for them being different. To be differentiated, if following the ethnographic observations done by Boyer (2010:252), should be something attractive, something that lures more people to specifically watch Al Jazeera English. In this chapter I aim to show how Al Jazeera English’s differentiated position has become problematic for the channel and its journalists, both in its competition with global western news organizations as well as in its position in the region. The channel’s distinguished news coverage has for instance led to limited access in certain news markets, governmental sanctions, detention of journalists and even killings. I also argue that Al Jazeera English’s use of local reporters, its financial support as well as its aim, made them portray people in a more cosmopolitan way, while moving away from stereotypification.
Al Jazeera “The Island”

Al Jazeera English is an island, not only because of its name but also metaphorically speaking, since in a wider context it stands out from a sea dominated by Western-based news outlets and wires such as the BBC, CNN, France 24, Reuters, Associated Press (AP) and Agence France-Presse (AFP). Due to Al Jazeera English’s origins in the Middle East and attention to news coming from the Global South rather than the Global North, “areas that often remain outside mainstream news coverage” (Seib 2012:3), it has gained a differentiated image of being a counter hegemonic and contra-flow news organization in the international media landscape. The Al Jazeera English executive producer in London, Mark Payne, underlined that Al Jazeera English reports from places other organizations do not, such as Africa, South Asia, the Middle East, and elsewhere in the developing world. They also cover these places during extensive periods of time, rather than short occasions for specific events, staying afterwards for longer periods to follow what happens.

Al Jazeera English’s aim is to revert the traditional North-South news flow to rather run from the South to the North (see also Amin 2012:37), and in a study made by Brown and Youmans (2012) “content analyses demonstrate that Al Jazeera English covers parts of the world under-reported by other news channels, such as CNN and the BBC” (ibid.:174, see also el-Nawawy 2012:170). Al Jazeera English’s media expert Derek emphasized that just after watching a short item on Al Jazeera English about Yemen he had learned more about the country than he would have done from years of watching mainstream global news from other channels.

Al Jazeera English is counted as one of the dominating channels on the contemporary news market, and the Al Jazeera English news anchor Loffo, who earlier worked for France 24, emphasized: “Al Jazeera is a well-known media network, it is one of the big three, you got the BBC, you got CNN and you got Al Jazeera”. When looking at the coverage of the news channel, it is estimated that Al Jazeera English with its 24-hour news flow broadcasts to more than 260 million households (Al Jazeera 2012a). This is comparable to CNN International’s broadcasting

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to more than 271 million households (CNN Press Room 2011), and BBC World News TV broadcasting to more than 295 million homes (BBC 2011). These numbers show the resemblance in the international reach of the three channels.

Al Jazeera English has over 70 bureaus placed around six different continents (Al Jazeera 2013b), and taken from its website published in 2012, it claimed itself to be “the most watched news channel on YouTube, receiving 2.5 million views per month” (Al Jazeera 2012a). The channel is directing its news towards an international English-speaking audience, but it is part of a bigger media network that comprises several news channels, which is similar to the networks of CNN and the BBC. In scope and influence, Al Jazeera English looks similar to these two global media organizations, but when comparing its mission and origin, Al Jazeera English differs. El-Nawawy7 (2012) writes that:

> Among this hardening media environment, one news organization stands out: Al Jazeera English (AJE), which is considered by many an anomaly when it comes to its journalistic mission and identity. It stands out from its competitors in that it presents a challenge to the existing paradigms guiding international news broadcasters. It is neither dominated by geopolitical nor commercial interests, and is the first of its kind to have the resources, mandate and journalistic capacity to reach out to typically isolated and ignored audiences throughout the world (ibid.:163).

Powers8 (2012) also argues, “AJE’s ability to generate support, both from its host government and from its journalists and audiences around the world, allows the channel to never be beholden to any single constituent, like the BBC is to the British Parliament and CNN is to its stockholders” (ibid.:25). My informants at Al Jazeera English emphasized a similar approach towards the network, where they also saw Al Jazeera English as a differentiated news organization compared to the mainstream “Western”9 ones. The Doha-based news anchor, Loffo, stressed that Al Jazeera English is,

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8 Associate director at the Center for International Media Education and an assistant professor of communication in the U.S.
9 The concepts of “Western”, “Global South” and “Global North” is used in the thesis because these are the concepts the journalists used in the interviews when discussing their journalism and Al Jazeera English’s role.
telling [the news] from a different perspective, we bring the viewpoint of the South, so like the big networks like BBC, [and] CNN have a Western perspective, the perspective of Washington, or London, or Paris, here [at Al Jazeera English] you have the perspective of the Arab world, what’s happening around the world in their viewpoint. And it’s not necessarily that bold either, people also often hear about our motto here, “the voice of the voiceless”, of the voices from the people on the street in the Arab world and elsewhere. So it is completely different from any [other news organization], but that’s what primarily distinguishes us [Al Jazeera English] from other networks.

This emphasis on being different can be found in most studies and opinions concerning the news network, underlining its efforts in bringing in voices from the Global South, those who have been under-represented in the global news flow and those who, can be regarded as the “voiceless”. However, to understand how Al Jazeera English positions itself and why it can be seen as differentiated in comparison to contemporary international news channels in the global media landscape, it is important to understand its origin.

Before the launch of the original channel, Arabic-language Al Jazeera, many people in the Arab world had to rely on the big Western news channels, such as the BBC and CNN, to access uncensored news of what was happening in their region (see Seib 2012:188). It was in reaction to this that the Emir of Qatar, Sheik Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, decided to establish the news channel Al Jazeera in 1996. He wanted to create an Arab generated news channel that would not be state controlled, as the rest of the media was in the Middle East, and it was his aim to take a stand in the movement towards democratization of the region where Al Jazeera would exemplify a free and non-censored news media (see Powers 2012). The channel was aimed to freely scrutinize the internal affairs of the political elites and the world leaders without governmental interference. It would also open up a new platform for discussing earlier topics that had been taboo in Middle Eastern news media, such as women’s rights (ibid.:8). Nevertheless, there were obviously also geopolitical reasons for the launch of the channel: the Emir had been questioned by media outlets of neighboring countries concerning his legitimacy as ruler of Qatar and felt the need to challenge their governments by creating his own news organization (ibid.:10).

Al Jazeera become successful fast, as the people in the Middle East were tired of relying on American and other Western media’s perspectives of their lives argues Seib (2012:188), and the channel became one of the most watched news channels in the region, both due to its mission and
financial support. According to Gillespie\textsuperscript{10} (2013), Al Jazeera has now gained hegemony in the Arab world, and BBC Arabic is competing with the channel, as well as with the Saudi Arabian channel Al-Arabiya in the region, where she argues that BBC Arabic struggles for gaining trust among the inherently skeptic Arabic audience, seeing BBC Arabic “as an instrument of British foreign policy” (ibid.:98).

As the quote from the Al Jazeera English journalists in the beginning of the chapter shows, people were seeing Arabic-language Al Jazeera as revolutionary when it launched because it was presenting issues that had been taboo in the Arab media. The mission of not being governmentally regulated and of broadcasting “the opinion, and the other opinion” (Seib 2005:601), made it stand out from the rest of the Arab media landscape, and the financial support made it possible for the channel to hire professional journalist veterans with extensive knowledge in regional issues (ibid.) The possibility to attract so many well-trained journalists was also due to the failure of BBC Arabic’s collaboration with Saudi financial funding just one month before the launch of Al Jazeera, which left a large number of BBC Arabic reporters looking for employment (Powers 2012:9). The success and spread of the channel also had to do with Al Jazeera’s access to international communications infrastructure (ibid.:8).

Al Jazeera did not at first have much international recognition, but it was seen as a serious competition to other Arab media outlets, as well as to the established power bases in the region, some countries even tried to ban Al Jazeera journalists in their countries and to close their bureaus (Seib 2012:189). El Oifi (2005) claims that besides the channels inclination to critique Arab rulers and discuss taboo issues, it is “the channel’s notable tendency to align itself with public opinion” that has led to Al Jazeera’s success (ibid.:74). Here, the channel has contributed to a more ‘open’ space for Arab citizens to engage and take part in public discourse surrounding issues of public interest and politics where in the past these possibilities had been limited.

Powers (2012) writes, taken from Mark Lynch (2006), that “the network can be credited for the creation of an “Arab public sphere… or spheres”, where open, deliberative discourse on matters of public interest became more and more notable and sophisticated” (Powers 2012:10), and it is

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through adopting transparency as an ideology that this has been made possible argues El Oifi\(^{11}\) (2005:77).

In one of Al Jazeera English’s programs, the former Director General, Wadah Khanfar, argues that “Al Jazeera’s audience will not keep tuning in if the network changes its journalistic approach” (Al Jazeera 2011) emphasizing that the audience is not merely a passive receiver but also an active actor in sustaining the quality of unbiased and uncensored news. El Oifi (2005) however claims that:

> In order to “disguise” its contribution to American hegemony in the Gulf region, Qatar has played a crucial role in promoting freedom of expression in the Arab world. By presenting itself as the champion of media and political pluralism, Qatar tries to rebuff the accusations of being agent to the US but also to Israel in the Gulf (ibid.:77).

The channel’s valorization and incorporation of public opinion can of course have political purposes. Looking at the historical relations between the Gulf States and the relationship between Qatar and the U.S., it becomes obvious that the Al Jazeera Network serves many purposes. The Arabic-language Al Jazeera fosters not only an Arab nationalism but also a diplomatic success for Qatar in acquiring influence, creating both allies and rivals, regionally as well as internationally, from the ground and at the top. It is these diverse tactics that make the channel’s position and purpose rather confusing. Two of the factors that have to be considered in the contemporary landscape, when looking at Al Jazeera’s role and purpose, are the transnational influences and practices, and the consequences of new technologies to the practices of the channel, that provide a “relative freedom from domestic regulation and the decentralization of the flow of information” (Wojcieszak\(^{12}\) 2007:116).

It was after the 9/11 attacks that the demand for the channel’s perspective and journalistic expertise in the Middle East grew from being restricted to an audience in the Middle East and an Arab diaspora to also include people from the rest of the world, not having Arabic as their native language. Due to the failure of the international Western media outlets, such as the BBC and

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CNN in establishing reporting in the area, and since Al Jazeera had already been stationed in Afghanistan and Iraq for some time, Al Jazeera became a channel of international interest. People in North America and Europe started to request Al Jazeera’s broadcasts (Powers 2012:11) and this led to Al Jazeera becoming one of the leading actors on the international news market (Seib 2005:603).

Al Jazeera English was then launched in 2006 in an attempt to reach an even larger audience, not only restricted to Arabic speakers. They started out by dubbing and translating Arabic news reports, but soon noticed that it was not only the language that put up barriers for acceptance but that an international audience, especially the North American audience, also required another way of reporting, with more accurate and comprehensive material and sources, as the expectations and cultural values of the Arabic audience were different from that in the West (Powers 2012:12). The Doha-based reporter Khalid explained that:

I think they realized that if they want the channel to work they were competing with a totally different audience, the Arabic goes to people in the Arab world and Middle East and North Africa, it tell stories that are almost always very localized to that region. Whereas the English [version] realized they have to be much broader in scope, and because of it being broader in covering things all around the world, it needs to be appealing to those groups.

With the launch of Al Jazeera English, the mission of Arabic Al Jazeera, to provide a different perspective than the Western news media, was retained, explained the London-based presenter Derek. With Al Jazeera English, there was also an aim to create a dialogue between East and West (Seib 2012:35), something that is also mentioned concerning BBC Arabic, where the channel should facilitate a dialogue between the audiences that transcends cultural borders (see Gillespie 2007).

When watching Al Jazeera English, I argue that culture and geography become unbounded, and it gives the viewer a cultural experience of taking part in stories of places from completely different continents directed in such a way that it will be of interest to an international audience. For example, they broadcast news stories from Sweden that most other national news organization
would not care to focus on. In addition, they cover these stories from a very local perspective. Mark Deuze (2005) argues that multiculturalism and new technologies are two of the main factors for how news channels become more international in their outlooks, as well as more complex in covering more diverse situations anchored in their social and cultural context.

Through watching Al Jazeera English’s broadcasts it can be detected that the coverage and approach assist to create a global, cosmopolitan ethos. It promotes a drive towards acknowledging diversity but aims for everyone to participate and to gain the sense of being part of the “global community” or “global village”. Al Jazeera English has a global reach through its digital platforms, and the channel’s news are broadcasted 24-hours a day for everyone to be able to watch, which I believe facilitates the shaping of a collective international identity. Al Jazeera English’s shows and broadcasts give voice and space for multiple actors and life stories, emphasizing cosmopolitan values and aspirations which shape the audiences’ global imaginary, molding new frames of possibilities, limitations and meaning. Hannerz (2004a) argues that: “The cosmopolitan impulse tends to favor more inclusive arrangements of compassion, human rights, solidarity and peacefulness” (ibid.:21).

Following the interviews with the journalists and observations of the channel’s news coverage, I reason that Al Jazeera English wants to be an “island” in the global media landscape, to bring in something different and new, and not only follow the hegemonic Western media’s content that have had near monopoly in global news media before Al Jazeera English’s entrance on the market. The construction of the imagined exotic could play its role in marketing the channel to “foreign” consumers, by emphasizing a certain kind of identity creation that the channel will bring to the consumer. Studies made by Figenschou (2012:44) have shown that Al Jazeera English has a larger presence on the Global South compared to the North and that major mainstream Western news organizations are rather reducing their global networks of correspondents, something which gives Al Jazeera English a competitive advantage when it comes to coverage of places distant from the Western news outlets’ headquarters (ibid.).

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Al Jazeera English has however remained controversial within the Middle East as well as elsewhere, something that I will discuss in the following subchapters, and this has affected its economic health, its journalists’ freedom, reliability and its spread. At the same time as the channel identifies itself as working against a hegemonic media landscape and a history of Western dominated mass media in the global news market, it is part of larger hegemonic processes of modernity and globalization. Al Jazeera English’s images and messages are spread transnationally and are in this way competing with local news organizations, and rival 24-hour news such as RT and CCTV. The Al Jazeera Network has broadened its position as a media empire through launching worldwide “local” sister channels, where Al Jazeera America and Al Jazeera Balkans already being launched, and with plans to open Al Jazeera Turk and Al Jazeera Egypt.

Al Jazeera and the Al-Qaeda tapes

The differentiated position has not always been a success for the channel, it has actually been quite problematic for Al Jazeera English. The perspectives and people Al Jazeera has given voice to have not always stood in line with those perspectives given by American or European news, which to a certain extent can be said to follow the line of U.S. and European geopolitics. The airing of the post 9/11 al-Qaeda tapes was one of those choices that brought controversy to the network. Al Jazeera was including “the other opinion” that was denied access to mainstream news and a discussion concerning the network’s and Qatar’s relation to Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda began.

During my fieldwork I visited the Al Jazeera English London office three times, the office was located in the Hyde Park area surrounded by embassies and expensive hotels. Al Jazeera English was sharing the office building with large Arab banks, so the security in and around the building was very tight. At first I thought the security had to do with Al Jazeera English's policies of not allowing unauthorized persons from entering the office, but the Al Jazeera English presenter and media expert Derek Jones informed me that it had nothing to do with them but with the Arab banks in the building. He also explained that Al Jazeera English actually had had difficulties in finding a venue in London for their office, as people actually feared involvement with Al Jazeera as it was ‘Arabic’, and seen by some as a “terrorist channel” (see also Amin 2012:34). These
controversies and accusations surrounding Al Jazeera can both be said to come from its differentiated position and have contributed to it: the fact that Al Jazeera English originates from the Middle East, as well what distinguishes it from dominating international channels.

Derek pointed out that the terrorist accusations perhaps explains why the Arab banks as well as other Arab companies were the only ones sharing the office with Al Jazeera English, as they know who Al Jazeera is and do not see it as the arm of terrorist groups, or at least they are not afraid of the channel. “Nevertheless, there is a kind of irony in this fear”, of sharing office location, argued Derek, as no terrorist of course would bomb Al Jazeera, if they were associated with these terrorists. In this sense he remarked, half laughing, it might even be safer for other companies to share the office with their “enemy” as the terrorist would not bomb “his own”.

A Doha-stationed correspondent, Khalid, expressed his disagreement over the terrorist connection of which Al Jazeera has been accused, and told me that,

we [Al Jazeera] broadcasted this [Osama bin Laden] tape back in the days but we are not the arm of a terrorist organization. I mean most people have heard of us, it’s not like they haven’t heard of us. But some people will be under the impression that this is a dangerous news channel somehow.

According to Derek, the accusations of being the ‘propaganda arm of Osama bin Laden’ have to do with other news channels’ representation of Al Jazeera. He emphasized how Fox News in the period after the 9/11 attacks, was quick in responding to what other channels were showing and doing at that time, especially Al Jazeera, and every time other channels showed the video, they had a four minute discussion about it, concerning the reasons why the other channels broadcasted the videos. In these discussions they were portraying Al Jazeera as collaborating with al-Qaeda, and in discussing the videos repeatedly and extensively, Fox News aimed to create fear among the American population, Derek argued.

The reasons behind this were of course also business- and ideology- related, claimed Derek, and Fox News’ purpose was to start discussing Sadam Hussein’s supposed weapons of mass destruction. Derek suggested that this was a way to scare people into consent with the decision to go to war with Iraq, or what Herman and Chomsky (1988) would have argued is part of the
propaganda model used within American news media to shape public opinion towards the goals of U.S. foreign policies and business. According to Derek, the interesting question was not if Al Jazeera was the first to air the videos, or why they were the ones receiving them, but who it was that actually started the ‘wolf song’ about it. Derek continued, “what should be looked at is who claimed Al Jazeera for being a terrorist network and ally”. A professor in journalism and mass communication argues that:

There have been a number of analysts who have commented that AJE’s lack of availability on the largest and most popular cable providers reflects hostility to the network following its sister network’s broadcast of Osama bin Laden’s post-September 11 videos condemning the United States as well as a fear of alienating advertisers and angering the former Bush administration and influential U.S. political leaders. Bush administration officials promoted the view that Al Jazeera was supporting Islamic terrorist groups and was anti-American (Amin 2012:34).

Derek argued that one of the reasons for these accusations have to do with Al Jazeera being “Arab”, and because of that have the network been seen as “the other”. According to the theorist Edward Said (2003) there would not be any Iraqi war “[w]ithout a well-organized sense that these people over there were not like ‘us’ and didn’t appreciate ‘our’ values” (ibid.:xvi), and:

In the demonization of an unknown enemy, for whom the label “terrorist” serves the general purpose of keeping people stirred up and angry, media images command too much attention and can be exploited at times of crisis and insecurity of the kind that the post-9/11 period has produced (ibid.:xxi).

To accuse Al Jazeera of being a terrorist channel based on their airing of the Osama bin Laden videos, which the rest of the news media also aired, can be seen as a continuation of generalizing people or organizations from the Arab world as one and the same thing, to being “the other”, “the foreign devil” as Said puts it. This can be seen as a tactical way to turn Al Jazeera English into an underdog in the political power struggle, where especially in the media, the “Islamic other” has been represented in a homogenous way to show national supremacy towards “the other” and to gain the public’s consent in times of state intervention in the Arab world. Accusations of Al Jazeera English support for Islamic terrorist groups could then be seen as part of U.S. foreign policy (see eg. Chomsky & Herman 1988). This way of reasoning is the “very core of traditional
Orientalist dogma” argues Said (2003:xvi), and he argues that especially the American media is continuously bolstering these fictions about the “Arab other”.

According to the Al Jazeera English reporter Khalid, the accusations of Al Jazeera English being a terrorist channel have also spread to other parts of the world. When asking Khalid if he thought that the voiceless, who Al Jazeera English tries to portray, also watch the channel, he began to talk about the topic of the reputation of the channel.

Khalid: Al Jazeera doesn’t broadcast in Pakistan, across the border only with certain cable companies, so there is not that much awareness of it, still, I mean, you know this idea of Al Jazeera is al-Qaeda, and “you guys are the Osama bin Laden guys”, it is not something that is limited to the West. I have encountered it myself when I go out in the field in rural Pakistan and I tell people I work for Al Jazeera. People, not in a hostile way but they will react in saying “oh oh that’s the al-Qaeda channel” and then you have to explain to them that “no no, that is not what it is.” So this perception is not solely American or UK or European perception it’s something that travels across the borders.

This conception of the channel being “the al-Qaeda channel” was something that was discussed when launching both Al Jazeera English in 2006 and Al Jazeera America in 2013, explained the London presenter Derek. At both times management considered changing the name, as Al Jazeera had too many bad connotations that might dissuade people from watching the channel. Yet, in the end the name was kept.

The reason for showing the Osama bin Laden tapes also says something about Al Jazeera’s aim and approach towards impartiality and objectivity.

Khalid: I think that when you get information like that, when you get an announcement like that, I think it is newsworthy and I think it should be covered based on its newsworthiness. It shouldn’t be like “oh we got a tape from him [bin Laden] we should just play it”, but it should be “we got a tape from him, he says these and these things that all are actually significant, so we should play those bits”. It shouldn’t be like by default, like this guy released a tape and he’s ratting on about what ever and it has no impact. It should be based on its newsworthiness and if it is, then it should go on the air.
**Emma:** But I guess sometimes you have to consider certain kinds of risks, with all kinds of news, I guess, if you feel that you are being used by someone, as a means for propaganda?  

**K:** But yeah everything is propaganda, so if that would be the case we would have to stop U.S. statements as well. We would have to stop government statements from anybody. Barak Obama wouldn’t get on the air either right?

Khalid underlined that all news should be valued for its newsworthiness as it is always a question of definition and point of view. The same thing can be said considering the choice of words or descriptions in news reporting. Hannerz (2004a) explains how editors can easily modify the cautious wording made by correspondents into provocative or unacceptable wording due to their lack of knowledge concerning a territory or phenomenon, as in the example of how a territory’s “freedom fighter” got altered and become the editor’s, and then also the readers’, “terrorists” (ibid.:151). Impartiality and objectivity is therefore connected to a relativistic idea where it is always a question from whose perspective and from what context the critic is judging.

Concerning the broadcasting of the al-Qaeda videos, one Al Jazeera English correspondent stationed in Africa argued that:

**Jade:** if you were in that part of the world [Middle East], and the American and the British are coming and killing civilians, and whoever they felt like, and if you would have a video, of whatever it was, would you give it to the American or British journalist or would you give it to the Arabic journalist…?

**Emma:** yeah...give it to the Arabic…

**J:** [laughing], it doesn’t make sense [that you would give it to Western media], you give it to the person that you know, the person who speaks the same language as you. Then what that person does to it, it’s up to them, isn’t it? It is so much fury in the Middle East against Western intervention, that’s how it was broadcasted, and I don’t know if I agree with it, but it made people quite aware of how angry people were and where that anger came from, and it forced people to listen, didn’t it?

Arabic Al Jazeera has enjoyed the trust of the people in the Arab world, something that has led to mistrust from the people in the non-Arab world. It has then both gained and lost from the fact that

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16 The documentary *Control Room* (2003) exemplifies a similar debate, portraying the differentiated coverage of the 2003 invasion of Iraq, comparing American media and Al Jazeera, directed by Jehane Noujaim.
it originates in the Middle East. With Al Jazeera English the balance of trust has alternated, where it has become ‘less Arab’ in its use of international reporters concentrating on news from the whole world, and seen with less suspicion by the non-Arab audience. It is straddling a middle space in between having trust from both the audiences of its region of origin and the international audience.

Zayani (2005) however argues that Al Jazeera, despite the suspicion of importance for certain political groups, has contributed with insight to “a part of the world that is all too often alien to the West” (ibid.:4), and it is this that makes Al Jazeera and Al Jazeera English stand apart from mainstream coverage coming from North American and West European news organizations. The network’s emphasis on being different and bringing in a perspective of news that is not the same as the Western news organizations’ increases the chances of it being “first” among the news outlets with that specific news story, something that is particularly strived for within news production according to Boyer (2010:252). By having trust from those who mistrust Western news, they increase their possibility of being the only one, or the first one, in receiving information from these groups. As Jade and Khalid emphasized, the al-Qaeda tapes were newsworthy.

The Arab origin, and being a ‘contra-flow’ news outlet can therefore be seen as an advantage from certain perspectives and as a contradictive reason for Al Jazeera English’s international success. To further the discussion of the difficulties of its position, I will discuss in the following subchapter how the criticism of the channel and network not only originated from the West but also from within the Arab region.

**Coverage of the Arab Spring**

The inference of Al Jazeera being an arm or supporter of terrorists does not only relate to al-Qaeda but also more recently to the coverage of the Egyptian revolution, in connection to the wider North African and the Middle Eastern protest movements of the ‘Arab Spring’. During the coverage of these events, Al Jazeera and Al Jazeera English have been accused by the current Egyptian government and surrounding Arab states of being biased towards the Muslim Brotherhood in their perspective and choice of sources, as well as biased towards Hamas in their coverage of the conflict in the Gaza strip 2008-2009 (see eg. Gilboa 2012, Merriman 2012), I will
not however discuss the coverage of the conflict in Gaza in the thesis. Both these groups have been declared as terrorist organizations by multiple countries, Egypt being one of the countries classifying both groups as terrorists (see Seib 2012:2).

The differentiated position of the network has therefore not only been evoked due to Al Jazeera and Al Jazeera English’s Arab origin and that the “network on occasion stakes out controversial and inflammatory positions on issues of interest to the United States” (in Amin 2012:37), a discourse mainly invoked by the West. Complains and criticism have been circulating within the region as well, where almost every Arab government has filed formal complaints, questioning the network or Al Jazeera’s owner, the Qatari government (Figenschou 2013:99).

Allegations of the network being biased towards the Muslim Brotherhood are believed to have led to the detention of three Al Jazeera English journalists and one Al Jazeera Arabic journalist in Egypt during the summer and autumn of 2013. As of May 2014, the journalists were still being kept imprisoned in Cairo’s Tora prison by the Egyptian military, the first three months without the right to a lawyer or a trial. The reporter from Arabic language Al Jazeera, Abdullah Elshamy, had of May 2014 been on hunger strike for over 100 days17.

During my stay in London I attended a protest November 12 2013, outside the Egyptian embassy in London, not far from Al Jazeera English’s office, that was organized in solidarity with the journalists who had been detained, injured or killed in Egypt. The protest was organized by The National Union of Journalists (NUJ UK and Ireland), the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and the Aljazeera Media Network, demanding the release of the then two Al Jazeera English journalists who were being detained in Egypt; the two other journalists were then detained in December 2013.

The protest was not long-lasting or large, but consisted of a quiet gathering of around 30 journalists and activists holding posters with images of the reporters who had been detained or killed in Egypt. The protest lasted about one hour and during that time the protesters lined up

outside the embassy demanding to speak with the Egyptian ambassador or people at the embassy. It was quite a raw and chilly day and most of the journalists arrived at the place in small minibuses loaded with placards. I recognized two of the journalists and later tried to contact them via email for an interview: both answered the first emails, but not the following ones.

At the protest there were plenty of people taking pictures and some were also interviewing the protesters, recording them and filming them. A majority of the people were Egyptians and I spoke to a group of young women who were living in London and who followed the actions of the Egyptian government but were not working as journalists. Some of them lined up with the Al Jazeera journalists and the NUJ members, others, like me, stood slightly to the side watching the
line-up and discussing the actions of the Egyptian government. I was told by one of the women that one of the men holding a placard was Sami al-Hajj, an Al Jazeera cameraman who was detained by the U.S. after 9/11 and held at the detainee camp at Guantánamo Bay for six years, questioned for his and the network’s association with al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden.¹⁸

There were six policemen present at the protest making sure that the protest did not become violent or that the protesters were not blocking the road when cars passed. There was an agreement that one person would be allowed into the embassy, but in the end this did not occur, and a car with dark windows coming from the garage of the embassy drove away half hour after the protest had begun. An hour after the protest had started the protesters started to leave the protest site and people started to talk more freely with each other, mixing Arabic and English. The young Egyptian women that I had met actually did not know each other and some of us decided to exchange numbers discussing whether we would all attend a meeting the following day also organized by the NUJ.

The protest for the detained journalists has been followed by a worldwide campaign organized by journalists all around the world to show support and to raise awareness for the four Al Jazeera journalists in Egypt’s Tora prison. The journalists are being detainted due to the accusation of spreading false news and of having links to the ‘terrorist organization’, the Muslim Brotherhood, something that is fully denied by Al Jazeera and Al Jazeera English. The campaign expresses how their detention is a crime against democracy and the journalistic profession. On Twitter they have used the hashtags #FreeAJStaff and #JournalismIsNotTerrorism together with their personal photos and black-taped mouths.

This campaign shows that there is support coming from journalists around the world when it comes to common issues of journalistic safety and freedom of expression. Al Jazeera English is then not seen as a differentiated news organization but as a news organization like any other that tries to portray the “reality” without partiality. The Egyptian case in which journalists have been detained and killed, in addition to Al Jazeera journalists, exemplifies a larger debate that makes

¹⁸ Al Hajj’s case and detention at Guantánamo Bay was portrayed in a documentary film titled Prisoner 345 (2006) directed by Abdallah El Binni.
support from fellow news organizations come naturally. In this example, Hannerz’ (2004a:155) discussion of journalists having a network of relationships and sharing a feeling of community becomes more pertinent, even in the case of Al Jazeera English.

Al Jazeera English broadcasted an episode of the program the Listening Post, “Egypt’s Media War” (Al Jazeera 2014a) concerning the detained journalists’ situation in Egypt, in which they explain how the media in Egypt are in favor of the prosecution of the Al Jazeera journalists, as they are seen as spies, due to a fabricated video that was leaked to a pro-army station in Egypt that portrayed a plot and the framing of the Egyptian people. One of the interviewees in the program, a female columnist, suggested that there was a domestic purpose for the detentions. In showing how the government was taking care of the international agents who were destabilizing Egypt, it would send a message to other media professionals to follow current Egyptian rules and regulations.
In the show they emphasized how three of the Al Jazeera channels were very popular amongst the Tahrir Square revolutionaries during the Egyptian revolution in 2011, after which the network had been criticized for having a pro-Muslim Brotherhood bias, since the Brotherhood acquired power after President Mubarak was deposited in 2012 (Al Jazeera 2014a). The interviewed columnist continued by saying that the dispute was not really about journalism, but that it came down to geopolitics.

I think this is an outcome of actual governmental tension between the Qatar government and the Egyptian government and in that respect Al Jazeera is not perceived as being an independent professional acting on its own news organization, but rather a political arm of the state of Qatar, and when you have regional clashes and a regional antagonism, journalism becomes the place where these proxy wars, political wars, are fought (ibid).

In the show they also state that world leaders want to mobilize the media to fall into line with their agendas and their aspirations. Qatar has however refused to agree on a policy with the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) that assure a non-interference in the other states internal affairs, and as a consequence have three of the countries recalled their ambassadors from Doha (Svenska Dagbladet 2014). Besides Egypt, there are other Arab countries in the region which also disapproved of the Emir’s refusal of banning the Muslim Brotherhood (ibid.), and that is something that colors the geopolitics surrounding Al Jazeera, with the Emir at Al Jazeera’s top (see Zayani 2005:2&10).

This fact might be evidence of biased news coverage, even if Al Jazeera in this sense is no different from other media outlets that for example are dependent on their proprietors or commercial sponsors (see Seib 2012:3). It is also of interest to read on the Al Jazeera English website that “Qatar […] played a pivotal role in the Arab Spring, supporting the overthrow of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, and now backing the opposition in Syria” (Al Jazeera 2013e). If the network is accused of taking the exact same stand as Qatar, the function of Al Jazeera as a soft power tool might be then evident. Karl Steinick (2004) argues that there are always multiple ways to portray an issue and that you can never get away from the question of framing within journalism as well as anthropology. He also mentions that there may not be one “correct” frame
but many incorrect ones, insisting that the best reporting is a combination of several frames, which allows for the viewer to observe from different angles (ibid.:208).

Not one of the journalists I interviewed expressed any agreement with the accusations that the network has been subjected to, but in the Swedish newspaper Dagens Nyheter (Shachar 2014) it is suggested that several Al Jazeera reporters actually have resigned in protest against the channel’s sympathy with Islamic groups and to the increased control coming from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Doha. The article also points out that in 2013 two former employees claimed that Al Jazeera had smuggled equipment to the Syrian rebels (ibid.).

Global South and local reporters

Al Jazeera English is not only differentiated because of its aim in giving voice to people that are refused airtime in other news media, but also in its practices of accomplishing this.

**Khalid:** The Al Jazeera English newsroom is actually incredibly diverse, which is not to say that the Arabic one isn’t - the Arabic one is diverse from within the region, you have people from every Arab country and every MENA [Middle East and North Africa] country - but you don’t have that many international people there from outside the region. And the same way for Al Jazeera English as we cover the whole world we have people from all over the world. So when you do that, you end up having very different feel of news channel, just by who’s working there and how they are working.

What Khalid mentioned, and what I think mostly characterizes Al Jazeera English in comparison to the Arabic-language Al Jazeera as well as other international channels, is the diverse origins of its staff, and its choice and practice of having local reporters rather the foreigners reporting from around the world, which is especially true in terms of the Global South. Al Jazeera English is neither only focusing on its region of origin – the Middle East where it has its headquarters, but also demonstrates expertise from a wide selection of places. This is mainly due to Al Jazeera English’s spread of local knowledge among its staff, as well as its over 70 bureaus, most of them located in the Global South.

In its aim to make the news palatable to audiences around the world Al Jazeera English has decided to hire more ethnically varied staff that has diverse local knowledge of the multicultural
Fatima emphasized that diversity is something that Al Jazeera English struggles for, and this will make everyone feel included in the news they cover, of being part of the international news flow, not only as witnesses or citizens but also as creators and gatekeepers of the news. This goals of having the perspective of an insider is crucial and it connects to the ideal of being one of the people, to breakdown the hierarchical image of news producers as above the people they cover, of giving a more emic perspective rather than an etic, a discussion that is current within anthropology as well (see Hannerz 2004b:25, Grindal & Rhodes 1987:4).

The emic perspective is discussed as “the natives’ point of view”, where the anthropologist explains things from the perspective of how the studied group’s members look at it. Hannerz (2004b:25) argues that this sometimes can be one of the aims among foreign correspondents, but that it might be difficult to live up to since it might be a better strategy to portray oneself from the perspective of the audience, of seeing the excitement of the foreign exotic to maintain interest. As Al Jazeera English has an audience all around the world, a different prioritizing is done, as the people that are being portrayed will also be watching the channel. On the other hand all the journalist that I talked to have lived and worked or studied outside their native countries which has also given them an etic perspective on their own culture, and which allows them to analyze and see structures even if they are from the area in question.

There is an ideal within Al Jazeera English that it is better to have local reporters than to use foreigners and that this brings another perspective to the issues compared to other international channels, which might have a less diverse staff, consisting of people from Britain working for the
BBC or Americans working for CNN. Earlier theories concerning the use of local or foreign reporters have taken a stand that local reporters would be too biased in their reporting. Hannerz (2004a) writes in his study of foreign correspondents that there is an overall belief that a foreign correspondent should never be stationed more than three years in the same place. This is because after three or more years the reporter would be too much involved in the country, and the local customs, and this would affect their reporting which would not be ‘objective’ enough, while they would be unable to see stories with fresh eyes (ibid.:84).

The point that Al Jazeera English has many reporters who originate from the place they are reporting from or about is something that can also be seen in Al Jazeera English’s news broadcast and weekly shows. I observed that they have a vast amount of reporters with diverse nationalities, especially as correspondents. The London office was somewhat less diverse one informant told me, meaning that there were a lot of British people working there. The journalist I tried to contact for my interviews, as well as those I did have contact with, had a large spread of nationalities and almost all the journalists I was able to interview had their native country as their field of expertise. All of the journalists had lived, studied and worked in many different countries, but most of them did have their native country as their area of specialty even if they were not permanently based in the area. The journalists emphasized the reason for them being “stuck” with their native country as being due to their expertise and knowledge of the local political situation and the local language.

The deliberate use of ‘local’ reporters can be compared with how the news is shaped and angled within Al Jazeera English. Earlier studies on foreign correspondents emphasize the effect of “parachute” journalism, as well as the effect of foreigners covering stories they are not very familiar with. Hannerz (2004a) explains that parachutists are those journalists that move around a lot and do not stay and report at one place for a longer period of time, it is the journalists who arrive with fresh eyes, who take nothing for granted (ibid.:85).

One of the journalists I interviewed explained:

I do more stories of Pakistan, of stories I know, I don’t like the parachutist thing. I don’t feel I know enough of other places and I don’t have the built-in cultural vocabulary, and ethical and political vocabulary. But I
can do that [report] for Pakistan or South Asia and I speak the language and I know it, I’m from there, and I would feel stupid otherwise. You should cover places that you know, that you are from and speak the languages.

Hannerz claims that long-timers often are more critical of the government of the country as through their accumulation of local knowledge they become “less receptive to government interpretations of events” (ibid.:140). Khalid underlined this fact as well, that foreign reporters might cover things in a very simplistic way: they already know what they should write even before visiting the place. However, he also mentioned that one of the pieces he struggled the most with and which he felt was one of his best stories, concerning local allegiances and kinship network in Pakistani vote, was one of the stories that got the least readers. So the best journalism might not always be the most popular and read piece. He also mentioned that: “My editors hate me because I write really, really long stories, like 3,000 words long, and we can’t print that, they will cut and cut away all the history that I feel might be essential.”

Khalid’s connection to the local society that he covers makes him write in a different way, valuing in-depth stories and emphasizing the importance of having an understanding of the background and history of the issue. Steinick (2004) believes that this is a good perspective to have and he claims that a broad and in-depth knowledge among foreign journalists contribute to a diversity in perspectives which makes it easier for journalists to bring informed and independent evaluations concerning framing and newsworthiness (ibid.:186). In practice, Al Jazeera English is aiming for this approach by choosing local rather than foreign reporters, but due to the media landscape and market it is difficult for stories of this nature and framing to actually get audience response as news is too commonly framed in a direct and concise way in order to keep the interest of the audiences and where the articles or reports can not be too long or too complex.

One of the Al Jazeera English reporters, Jade, pointed out that she saw flaws in having too close a relationship with the country and culture journalists report on:

If you are a foreigner you can bring a fresh perspective and see things in a different way than people that have been somewhere for a while or are from the place. It’s not that they are ignoring it but maybe it’s just that they don’t see it.
Nossek (2004), a senior researcher in media studies writes that “journalists and editors have two distinct ‘frames’ regarding foreign news coverage – a national ‘frame’ and a professional ‘frame’” (ibid.:350), and he argues that there is a domestic bias among journalists and editors, and it is therefore believed that the less involved a reporter is with a situation or event, the better he or she will be in applying professional news values to the reporting (ibid.). This underlines that the reporters who are local are more involved with the issues than a reporter who has grown up in a different cultural context. Jade’s claim can be understood from the fact that she was not from the country she was based in at the time.

Khalid, being a reporter that valued the use of local reports in journalism, nevertheless could understand if for example a journalist from a small state in the U.S. wanted to cover something else and he could understand the argument of foreigners being more objective,

"foreigners can cover other things but at the same time, you have to work so much more, study all the history, and everything is harder for a foreigner rather than a local. But you can say that you have a more objective view, because you are not part of it, but they have less knowledge."

The use of local reporters may bring a more refined cultural sensitivity to the issues. In the international media landscape this sense of refinement can be seen missing in much of the news originating in the West as the refined knowledge is connected to North America or Western Europe where they have the most journalists. Mark, the executive producer at Al Jazeera English’s London office, told me that you can see the non-Western perspective of Al Jazeera English by looking at how it not only covers stereotypical perspectives of poor Africans and the issue of corruption, but it also tries to cover other stories from the Global South focusing on stories about technology or other more positive pieces of news. In the end it shows that Al Jazeera English values expert cultural and in-depth knowledge rather than the professional standards of ‘objective’ news reporting.

The stereotypical news reporting that Mark witnessed amongst Western news organizations is something that is also mentioned by Hannerz (2004a) in his study of foreign correspondents coming from West European and North American newspapers. He could see a trend among these reporters to write and report in a similar way, with expectations to get certain themed news
depending on area. The news about Africa mostly concerned tribal conflicts, news about Japan mostly discussed their traditional culture and where news depicting Israel in general concerned the conflicts between Israel and Palestine (ibid.:144-145). Amin (2012) writes, following an audience study by el-Nawawy and Powers, that the researchers argue, “AJE’s model of journalism provides an alternative to the current style of news journalism that is premised on stereotypical attitudes towards cultural “others”” (in Amin 2012:37).

In being part of “the other” where Al Jazeera English has local reporters stationed in many places in the Global South they can access news from a different perspective compared to news organizations of the Global North. By having news generated by journalists on the ground, they have a better opportunity and more time to actually observe events and people’s lives with their own eyes, rather than follow commonly held notions and stereotypes. Loffo stressed that Al Jazeera English has of course the same breaking news stories as everyone else: if there is a train crash in New York they will be there at once and cover it but:

Where there will be a difference for instance is when we cover a country like Egypt, where we go in-depth and we have people on the ground on all air-ports, that you won’t necessarily see on CNN as it might not be what their viewers are interested in.

Hannerz (2004a) explains how the similarity in the reporting of Western news outlets might be the result of the correspondents influencing each other as they in their work meet at commonly stationed locations and tend to see themselves as a ‘community’, and that this “consciousness of kind […] may create an overall network of relationships” (ibid.:155). Taken from an argument made by Wolfgang Donsbach, the author Kasmani\(^\text{19}\) (2012) points out that:

A shared reality may cause an agreement in news decisions and news treatments due to similar “frames of reference of coverage built up before the events” and “by the journalists’ need to validate their professional decisions about what is newsworthy” (ibid.:1720).

In the case of Al Jazeera English journalists they would then rather have influences both from this global network of reporters working for international news organizations and from local reporters. The Al Jazeera English journalists are both stationed at places typical for foreign

\(^{19}\) Ph.D. in Arab, Islam and the Middle East in Australia.
correspondents and at places in the Global South less common for foreign correspondents, and
the channel’s use of reporters who originate from the area and know the cultural norms and
language of the citizens facilitate the establishment of local contacts. This gives them a broader
network and better access to news stories and in-depth attitudes, something that Hannerz
(2004a:85) also argues looking at journalists that staid longer at one place. The anchor Loffo
points out that,

when you rely on agency video or agency footage you are not there to meet the people who tell the stories
from your viewpoint, which is then what distinguishes Al Jazeera from other networks, we often go out and
tell the stories ourselves.

The anthropologist Christina Schwenkel (2010) describes in her ethnographic work on
photojournalists reporting from the war in Vietnam, how she could distinguish a considerable
difference in the representation of the war, grouping Western news representations against local
communist journalists’ coverage. She points out how the Western news coverage gave a very
dehumanizing and victimizing portrayal of the war and the people, with its detached struggle for
“objective journalism”, whereas the Vietnamese journalism, however not as state propaganda,
emphasized a deeper more multifaceted picture, together with an emphasis on individual
strengths and portraying “people as active determined agents involved in production, training,
preparation, and defense” (Schwenkel 2010:92).

The more local approach and focus of Al Jazeera English differentiate it in comparison to the
approach of CNN International or BBC World (Figenschou 2012). Al Jazeera English is an
international news organization but in its use of local reporters positioned in the often less
covered Global South it is giving audiences another perspective of the situation, just like the
people in Vietnam received a more empowered portrayal from the local Vietnamese reporters in
comparison with the “outsiders”, the foreign reporters (see Schwenkel 2010).

**Summary of chapter**
Here I have argued that Al Jazeera English differs from other news outlets, not only the
mainstream Western news organizations such as BBC, CNN, AP, Reuters, AFP, France 24 but
also from RT, CCTV, Press TV and TeleSUR. Al Jazeera grew out of the conventional news
market with censored domestic news media organizations in the Arab world and with the global Western hegemony over international news. With its launch and growth the channel changed the global news market, where the Western news media no longer had hegemony over news frames and perspectives, and the Arab world no longer could use their geopolitical strategies to keep the people and certain sensitive issues out of the media. However, this differentiated position has caused problems for the channel’s journalism where it has been seen as the Arab “other” and been subjected to accusations of being a terrorist channel and used in American argumentation in support of foreign political interventions in the Middle East. Its journalism has also been dismissed in the Arab world, where in its siding with the voiceless and in its close coverage of the people “on the ground”, it has been accused of being biased towards certain Islamic “opposition” groups and the channel’s journalists have been detained as a consequence of these perceptions.

I also argue that despite its problematized position, its differentiated practice of using local reporters has contributed to a less stereotypical portrayal of people and issues, by bringing in refined in-depth stories allowing Al Jazeera English journalists to distance themselves from a conventional and narrow ideal of ‘objectivity’ to instead provide diversity and cultural sensitivity leading to a less victimized picture of people. Giving agency to people by their more “localized” news analysis is something that Schwenkel (2010) saw as well, comparing foreign and local reporters in Vietnam. This also explains the journalists’, at Al Jazeera English, approach of siding with the people rather than with the established elite or the government, where Hannerz (2004a) saw “long-timers” being more critical of the testimonies from the government.

The differentiated news coverage by Al Jazeera English’s journalists compared to other news organizations can also be explained from their position as both acting as local and foreign reporters, where they then do not fit into Hannerz’ (2004a) description of foreign reporters acting as a community in the global media landscape, developing similar ideas around newsworthiness. Al Jazeera English’s journalists would then be part of two communities – both with local reporters and foreign correspondents. This also gives Al Jazeera English journalists an advantage in the news flow because their diverse perspectives and practices allow them to be the first and only news organization covering certain news, which can be seen as most desired task for news
organizations (Boyer 2010), since they cover places other global news organizations give less priority to.

In this way Al Jazeera English is shaping the global media flows, where they take over and set the frames of what is newsworthy and important. Other channels have fewer resources to be first and will therefore follow larger more established news outlets. If Al Jazeera English was once a contra-flow organization showing images of the Arab world no Western outlet had done, it is now becoming part of the mainstream due to its global reach and domination on the international news scene.
4. Practices and perceptions at Al Jazeera English

Every day we do our daily news log in the bureau, and everyone takes terms, and it’s their job first thing in the morning to go through the papers online, watch the news, and then write a list of stories going around in the region, and sometimes there are three sometimes there are four stories that Al Jazeera would be interested in covering. So we send that as an email form to Doha every morning, and every bureau does that and so then Doha has a decision, they can see what is happening in your day, in your patch basically. Sometimes there is something on the list that they are like “we really, really want”, then you go and do that, but sometimes there is nothing there, you just keep on working with our features and pre-thumb story ideas. So you are constantly busy really. It is a job between ‘on the day news’ and making sure there are ‘features on the shot’ open for Doha. We are heading into a quiet time of the year [Christmas], so they like to have timeless feature stories ready to ‘go on the shot’ because you know the whole Western world kind of shuts down [laughs]. [Interview with Al Jazeera English correspondent Jade stationed in Africa].

In this chapter I will explore how the email forms, which the journalists compile every morning and send to Doha or London, are discussed at a daily morning meeting between the producers in Doha, London and Sarajevo. The purpose of the meeting is to get an overview of what the day’s news will be about, and which features will be shown and which frames on the top news stories will be acquired. I will, in the following sections, also discuss the daily routines among the different roles of journalists, looking at the profession from Boyer’s (2010a) analysis of journalism as a fast-time practice. In the final section, I aim to discuss the changing in priority of certain journalistic ideals of reporting, where the ‘objectivity’ ideal is replaced with a social responsibility ideal, and in which Al Jazeera English journalism can be discussed as a kind of ‘moral’ or ‘alternative’ journalism.

Al Jazeera English morning meetings

Having been allowed to sit in on one of Al Jazeera English’s daily ‘production’ meetings at the London office, where the news and program producers of London, Doha and Sarajevo got together over a video call, I was able to observe some of the interaction and discussions between the news offices. It gave me an appreciation of how work was delegated, not only between the offices but also concerning the role of the correspondents in relation to the producers. This meeting was however smaller than the big weekly meeting in which each bureau’s ideas for the week’s news and features are discussed in more detail.
However, at the daily meeting I was able to follow some of the discussions concerning the choice of what to broadcast or not, as well as how they planned to frame the news narratives. The core of the morning meetings was to present and discuss the day’s news packages and features based on each office’s region of responsibility.

When arriving at Al Jazeera English’s London office I was directed to sit down at their visitor’s reception. The reception room was equipped with TV screens on both sides of the room, both showing the Arabic language channel and Al Jazeera English. I had pictured the office to be located in a more up-market environment as I had seen the city of London in the background of Al Jazeera English’s news anchors when they were presenting news bulletins. I could however see that they obviously made use of a blue screen in their studio, as the office was located on the bottom ground floor.

There were six producers in total in the meeting room, with two women and the rest being men, aged between 30 and 45. They sat in a glassed walled room in the middle of the London office, on one side of which there were desks and TV screens, and on the other side additional conference rooms. I did not see many people moving around the meeting room, but this was probably due to the fact that it was a Friday. The producers sat around a long table with a big screen at the other end of the room that was turned on when the meeting started. On the screen, two camera views were displayed showing the headquarters in Doha and the Sarajevo bureau.

The meeting room at Doha was definitely busier in comparison to both London and Sarajevo, with about 12 people, both standing and sitting, some even half lying on the floor. Around a third of the people present were women. While the meeting proceeded, they spent their time reading leaflets and checking laptops and notepads. Most of the people were dressed very casually, and in judging from their appearance the majority of people were of Middle Eastern origin. A male producer at the Doha office took charge, and from the London office it was Mark Payne who led the meeting.
It was a daily meeting for the producers of the three offices to discuss the news reports and features that were up for the day, some of which had already been filmed and some that were discussed further and were to be aired later during the day. The meeting gave every office an idea of what would be broadcasted that day and suggestions of what to do, as well as inputs on whether their news ideas were acceptable or not. Each office presented what they were planning for the day and at what time. Some of the news seen from other news channels was also discussed, which is a common practice within newsroom decision-making (see Boyer 2010a).

The meeting did not have much of a general structure and the discussions were both directed towards the other offices and to the rest of the staff within each respective office.

The meeting started off with a discussion of the typhoon in the Philippines. The person leading the meeting in Doha said they were not going to repeat every line or quote from the news that people already had, but they were deciding on a 27-minute deeper story, about the aid people were getting in the Philippines. They were also running a piece on a forgotten island, and one on a hospital in Ormoc, which one of the journalists had found and considered a good infrastructure story, rather than a hospital story. They continued discussing how this story was about the chaotic situation there and the visual quality of having a female journalist standing in front of this broken down hospital.

The discussion at the meeting showed that the producers also relied on the journalists for news ideas: there was a certain autonomy for journalists to generate their own stories. This shows the agency among journalists in contributing to the news content and frames, not only in their way of reporting and framing but also in the choice of stories where the organizations, to a large extent, rely on their expertise. Hannerz (2004a) discusses that to find bias in news reporting, it is important to not only look at the news organization or the common professional ethics among journalists, but to also look at the personal traits and interests of the journalists, especially in their creation of features (ibid.:139).

Studies of newsroom practices from other ethnographic works show that, due to limited time, resources, or a restrained economy and hard competition in the media, the news agencies might have limited possibilities to go out and produce their own news stories. Boyer (2010a) writes that
in his studies of German news organizations, he observed that there was a pronounced reliance on agency wires for news stories (ibid.:248 & 252), and he points out that one of the producers in his study also admitted that there was little space for the journalists to generate their own news stories and that their practices were more about paying attention to certain features that they knew the editors already had “decided will constitute the news agenda for that day” (ibid.:248). At Al Jazeera English it was nonetheless common for journalists to generate their own stories.

In the continued discussion at the meeting they described a report about Sri Lanka, “as a not very sexy piece but worthy”. Describing news stories as ‘sexy’ was something I heard from one of my informants as well and from written interviews with journalists in discussing the pursuing of news ideas. ‘Sexy’ then stood for an attractive and catchy news story, whereas a ‘worthy’ story was a story that had a worthy cause of being about something that should be considered as important. The balance between worthy and sexy brings in the qualities sought in a narrative. Where “media narratives have the potential for shaping our engagement with distant events and sufferers” (Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti 2013:963), and a worthy news story is then morally legitimized rather than a sexy story, as it might lead to the potential of action among audiences.

A similar discussion exemplifies in the news producers’ evaluation in showing live news from Cairo during the national curfew there. The national curfew that the people in Cairo were subjected to was soon to come to an end, but it was underlined by the producers that they were not wishing to have that on the agenda for ‘today’s news’, and therefore they hoped for the situation to remain quiet. The news from Cairo was “not today’s interest” so even though things might have happened there, it would have reduced the “sensationality” of the live news the following day, in addition to which it was seen to be repetitive. In this case, the interest of the audience has to be thought of, since having the “same” news would have reduced the curiosity and attention of the audience.

Another framing discussion, brought up at the London office, was the choice of broadcasting a story about Roma people in France. It was a story about a French community that was being very open for the immigration of Roma people, yet the producers at the meeting recognized that this kind of perspective on the issue might be very angled, and that it underscored a portrayal as “if
everything is marvelous there”, something they all agreed on was not the case. They agreed that Roma people had pretty bad living conditions and rights in France, based on their knowledge about the issue. They then decided that it would be wrong to only bring up the positive aspects of this one case where France was actually receiving Roma people in an open manner. Their evaluation of the news story shows how they perceived broadcasting this story as misleading the audience, as the bigger picture revealed something else. Balance of news and of giving a fair picture are traditional traits within journalism to avoid accusations of bias and partiality (see Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti 2013:962). However, the effort to give a fair assessment, that is balanced, was in this case surpassing the ‘attraction’ of “breaking” news. I will come back to these journalistic ideals and norms later in this chapter.

A working day at Al Jazeera English

The practices and work of journalists depend significantly on the position of the journalists. They have different roles in the production of news and they are expected to do different things where their position is related to their task. To look at a normal day’s work is difficult within journalism, “as you know, in journalism, in news, as well as in the field, every day is very different, [it is] depending on the news”, emphasized the Al Jazeera English producer Fatima. The diverse and unpredictable field of journalism makes it hard for the journalist to plan their work in advance, and the only daily routine is the production meeting for the producers, and the compilation of the news log for the correspondents, that will be sent to the broadcasting centers for confirmation. One of the journalists, a producer, acknowledged the constant awareness and hasty world of journalism, and pointed out: “For example while I’m talking to you, you know if something happens, I have to update our newsroom and decide how best to cover it”.

To get a broader understanding of the diverse roles that exist within Al Jazeera English I will discuss different aspects and tasks of the daily work, discussing separately the role of the producer in comparison to the role of the correspondents and the anchors. To attend and take part in the big weekly production meeting and the morning meeting (that I attended at the London office) is the task of the producers at the broadcasting centers. However, for producers working elsewhere, the daily routines look different.
The foremost responsibility and task for the producers at the ‘local’ bureaus comes down to coordinating the production of news features and news stories. A female producer stationed at one of Al Jazeera English’s South Asian bureaus pointed out that her job to a large extent consisted of coordinating everything and everyone, and making sure that the end product would be delivered to Doha in time for the scheduled broadcast. Fatima explained that she has a more overall responsibility for the whole crew, where she is responsible for their safety, administration and financing.

**Fatima:** As a producer you are responsible for the team in terms of logistics and so on, and make sure they get what they need. So the correspondent is going to do something, he needs the information fast, and that’s something I would help him with, or her. A cameraman needs to get his picture, and a good cameraman obviously direct himself in terms on how to shoot this but because usually with time and stuff I might have a vision of a story and you know what helps with that. So those are the things you do, the producer is always on the backend, he is not in the forefront. […]

She also emphasized that the contact the bureaus have in the morning with the newsroom at the broadcasting center, “it is the only thing that is constant every morning that I do”. On the day of the interview Fatima was covering the issue of the agreement between the Pakistani Talibans for peace talks with the Pakistani government. This was a significant news event that Al Jazeera English was covering live from Pakistan. Fatima underlined that there had been a considerable national debate within the country around the issue, questioning if the government should talk to the Talibans or not. Fatima further explained that,

my job is to constantly look around for different story ideas that are different, unique and good to cover. The most important thing for television that you can obviously imagine is picture […]. [If] an attack happened in XYZ place obviously I am not there, but can I get a picture from there fast enough I put it on our airways.

The importance of images has not only to do with the medium of television but also with the aim of establishing authority and the journalistic aim of “truth telling”. Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti (2013) underline that “journalistic claims to truth-telling are based on an asserted fidelity to the ‘real’ world enabled by particular news practices – among which the journalistic presence (‘being there’) together with the use of news images is key” (ibid.:963). The importance of the image also explains why citizen journalism and the use of audience material have become so
prominent, as the possibility to get a picture from the exact time and place of an event has become so much more probable with people all over the world participating and contributing and acting as eyewitnesses. When I asked Fatima how she got the news updates more specifically she also stressed the importance of the new technologies and citizen journalists,

well it varies, there are different ways, obviously I have a bunch of contacts that let me know from different parts of the country, because I can’t physically be everywhere at the same time, so I’m in Islamabad and at the same time something might happen in Karachi and someone might update me from there. You [also] get it from television, or what is of interest for you - you might be checking Twitter, which is something that is very much updating stuff, whether it is citizen journalists or you know an official thing, of what’s going on. […] And we have stringers in different parts of the country and we work with journalists, police officials…[…].

The practices of the producers are to a certain extent more centered around browsing the web, making phone calls and watching television, rather than being out in the field when looking for news stories and story ideas. Social media such as Twitter and the use of stringers or citizen journalists make it possible for the producer to coordinate news inputs from a distance to a wider extent than just relying on the work of correspondents. I will, however, look into this question of the impact of social media and citizen material at greater depth in the forthcoming chapter.

At the same time as the amount of information is increasing, the fast-paced attention of the producer becomes even more critical. Attention and alertness have become the primary skills, as well as keeping to time frames, highlighted Fatima,

there is a deadline set for when the story has to go out and we agreed on that and they really want it for this news hour, and if it doesn’t make, that is a lot of pressure for the producer because actually you can’t take complete responsibility for it or complete control of it because the correspondent has to write the script and the cameraman has to edit. And then I have to give them pressure to say “you need to hurry up” or “you have this much time”, so that is very important and I have learned to manage that more. You say to the newsroom, “no that’s an unrealistic timeframe”, or “we will try our best” but you know it might make it, so just warn the program editors that make the show, that “this might not make the show but we will try our best”. And in the same way you will figure out the personalities of your team members and know this is going to take a long time or not and then you have to pressure them, so it’s kind of coordinating all of that.
The production of news is very much a group work, a collaboration between the different areas of responsibility and different roles. The production is also steered by time frames that might be hard to get around. For the producer, teamwork becomes obvious as it is the producer that in the end is responsible for “making sure it’s all pretty and sweet, and good for air” (Fatima). The work of the correspondent, despite the fact that they are also part of the production, is much more independent. There is an individual responsibility of the correspondent in preparing questions and seeking out people to talk to. The correspondent’s role is more connected to having human contact rather than coordinating different distant sources, Jade and Khalid told me.

The correspondent Khalid explained what it looks like when he goes out in the field:

I would have an idea roughly of what I want to cover, how I want to cover it, and of what might be said, what my thesis would be, but generally I don’t like writers that know what to write before speaking to people. I will have a general idea in my mind of for example; I want to do a story about a separatist struggle in Pakistan, so when I went there the idea was very open, I just wanted to see what was the state of the struggle right now, where are we in terms of what is the public sentiment and is it not support of it, etcetera. You have to take the opportunity of a story when you are there. When I do a story of the disappeared, I know that it will be about interviewing the victims and the other side, so that is the formula, but an open formula because you haven’t decided that in my story they are going to say this.

In contrast, another correspondent, Max, described how there is an “ideal” practice of journalism and the “real” practice, where he stressed that he was not able to do the kind of journalism he wanted to.

**Max:** I have to know what to say before I even meet anybody. Because we have a certain amount of time and money and we are going to go out and have two minutes of TV in three hours. “Let’s talk to this guy”, but then the question is what is he going to say? We want to know what he is going to say first before saying anything, because I don’t want to have anything off the map, it should either be a pro or a con, or, contextualize it. It is an opinion or value judgment before you go out.

Here Max described the bias that the journalist brings to reporting that is due to constraints concerning time and money, an issue that Bartholdson (2004b:163) also recognizes steers the work of journalists, making the decisions of frames and sources less thought through. According

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to Deuze (2005) the defining principle of news is exactly its immediacy, and that journalists need to be able to make fast decisions in “accelerated real-time” (ibid.:449). Max’s also connected the restrained situation of the profession to technology, where he explained how technology has made reporting a luxury, as it makes live news more common and with live news there is not much time to actually go and talk to people since it takes too long to just set up the satellite phone dish. Max also described the function of live news: “they [Al Jazeera English] just want someone there in front of the camera to show that ‘we could be there’”. From Max’s comment it can be understood that the channel’s aim to have live news comes down to the values of eyewitnessing and prestige.

Having eyewitnesses make news reports more reliable and shows that the channel actually was there. Eyewitness for the sake of claiming authority over the news report is something that Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti (2013) declare as one of the established practices and ideals within journalism. Max also stressed that live news was used as a matter of prestige, in “showing off” their resources to actually “check” the facts themselves and not rely on agency wires for news footage and material.

However, in covering the protests in Kiev, Ukraine, Max underlined the negative aspects of having live news:

It might be possible to do an interview, but it’s all done so quickly, so you don’t have time thinking it through, you have to rely on the news agencies and what other people are saying. The facts are not really that contestable it’s just; “hundred thousand people on the square, the government didn’t sign the European deal, the president hasn’t yet spoken or just spoken”, that stuff in a two-minute-long news story. [That is] probably all you really need.

Time restrictions and the orders from the organization are what shape journalistic practice, argued Max. Other journalists at Al Jazeera English however emphasized another relation between the journalist and the producer, arguing that they have quite big autonomy in their work. Nevertheless, the editorial line is often directing the agency of the journalists. Jade explained that the journalists at Al Jazeera English are quite independent in relation to the editors and producers.
in deciding what to cover but are overall guided by Al Jazeera English’s agenda and editorial line.

Emma: So if [...] something happens that is really big you would know that this is something that Doha would like? How do you know what kind of news Doha prefers?

Jade: Usually it is pretty obvious if it is breaking news, that everybody knows, whatever you are doing or wherever you might be, and then you just get on with it. But some of them are borderline and I kind of think usual experience, largely with Al Jazeera and knowing what kind of story Al Jazeera tends to go for, what we know that they might be interested in, instinct but also just experience with working for a channel for very long.

Later in our interview she came back to the topic and said,

J: So I can have a conversation with Mark Payne [the executive producer at the London office] and he can be like, not finishing the sentence, but you can understand what is going to make it a good story, or how to tell that story, and some of those things, they certainly don’t teach you in school, it’s just experience...just trying things and sometimes they work and sometimes they don’t work.

The fact that experience and intuition, or instinct as Jade called it, is emphasized as the prevailing aspect for deciding on what news narratives Al Jazeera English’s journalists choose shows how the specific organization’s ethics and aims partly shape the journalists’ professional practices. Boyer (2010a) claims that contemporary journalism is a fast-time profession where news has to be generated and compiled quickly, and that’s why intuition and experience is used in deciding on the newsworthiness of an item. To strategically consider the choices is not possible when things have to be decided so quickly (ibid.:244). Knowing what kind of news will be accepted and seen as valid and acceptable is then crucial in working as a journalist in the contemporary news landscape with the increased competition and multiple sources and flows of information.

Jade also mentioned,

sometimes if someone in Doha sees something they think is interesting, they will send it to us and ask our opinion on it, because I think that you have to send it to someone that lives there locally to be able to get a fair assessment on whether that story is worth us pursuing or whether it is just something that is quite ‘sexy’ that is being picked up and kind of spread around the world type thing, so you sort of act as an editorial
stopping point for stories in the region as well, but most of them, we do think about and generate ourselves from various sources.

So even if the generating of news is based on the aim of the channel the feeling from the journalists is that they have relatively loose frames to work within, where their knowledge of the region and area they work in give them a kind of authority in the production and narrating of news. The time frame is however constantly there, as well as the importance of money and the channel’s resources.

The support from the Emir, an estimated $1 billion grant for the launch of Al Jazeera English and then approximately $100 million annually (see Powers 2012:8) gives Al Jazeera English the resources to let journalists generate their own stories instead of faithfully relying on news coming from third-party agency wires such as Reuters, AP or AFP. Comparing France 24 to Al Jazeera English, the Doha based anchor Loffo highlights,

the resources are different, France 24 had a very small budget compared to Al Jazeera, when you have the money you can do stories from all over the world, I mean, here we are able to send people out, to send correspondents to everywhere there is a big news story, and when you don’t have the resources to do that you rely on agency material, where you often rely on non-journalism, like when you rely on agency video or agency footage you are not there to meet the people who tell the stories from your viewpoint, which is then what distinguishes Al Jazeera from other networks, we often go out and tell the stories ourselves.

Bartholdson (2004b) also argues that limited budget and narrow time frames make it harder for correspondents to question their sources and to find more original points of views in their narration of news (ibid.:163). The time frame is something that is difficult to get around even for Al Jazeera English’s journalists: the work done by the presenter and anchor Loffo is for example closely shaped by the tight time schedule, where the Internet is taking an even more vital role. Loffo outlined her preparations for presenting a news bulletin,

my first bulletin will be in two hours, 9 pm local, so I usually arrive three hours before, and I will sit down with my team to find out what we are going to be doing, who we are going to be talking to. Then I do some research on the guests that I have – I usually have in an hour and a half up to five guests. I do the research for the questions and then I go to makeup, because in television you have to take care of yourself, and that takes less than 45 minutes and then I come back to the team again and see where we are at, to finalize our stuff
basically, who we have so far as guests, talk to the interview producer who basically has spoken to the guests before and see what sort of angle we are going to be covering and we know what perspective the guests take on the subject that’s going to be discussed. And then I go to air at 9 pm.

Derek, the Al Jazeera English presenter stationed in London, also explained how he works in a team that together try to brainstorm about topics for their show and how important the Internet is in helping them with collecting information and background research in the stressful time settings.

**Ideals and ethics of journalists**

The journalistic profession is centered around the act of representing people and events from one place to another, and in Al Jazeera English’s broadcasting, with its global reach, this is a representation often done from one side of the world to the other. In order to do this in a satisfying way or in a legitimate way that will keep giving journalism the authority over news production and circulation, they tend to follow certain professional standards and ethics.

Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti (2013) describe how, drawing from some researchers’ work written about the journalistic profession, they recognize “three dimensions of journalists’ discursive construction of their profession: specified skills (such as storytelling), norms (or ethical standards, such as objectivity and public service), and values (such as autonomy)” (2013:962). In my interviews, I identified a similar grouping among the Al Jazeera English journalists’ perception of their profession, its ethics and purpose as well as what is considered ‘good’ and ‘bad’ reporting. They were repeatedly referring to certain concepts in specifying what they in their profession should aim for and what journalism entailed.

The concepts that were discussed and underlined can be seen to follow the conventional professional ethics or ‘codes of conduct’ within journalism. The journalists were discussing the importance of fairness, balance and correctness in news reporting and saw objectivity, impartiality and authenticity as qualities that should be aimed for. They also discussed, as mentioned earlier, their knowledge and practices in relation to experience, of ‘learning on the job’ and intuition rather than in relation to studying journalism at journalism schools.
Fatima: It’s a certain self satisfaction of having the sort of ability and authority to do this [journalism], and with it comes a lot of responsibility [...] the stress is about being correct and making sure of balance and that pressure is enormous, because you got to put something out there that is not only good but also is factually correct, interesting as well as responsible.

Fatima further pointed out that, “what would come under journalism ethics, or code of conduct, of what’s your responsibility to your network, but most importantly to your audience, is giving them a fair picture”. The ideal of being fair, of showing things how they are in as accurate and ‘real’ way as possible, is in several of the interviews also connected to the moral idea of representing the reality of other peoples’ suffering, or the daily lives and struggles of those in subordinate positions as opposed to those in power. According to Hasty (2010), journalists in general “profess to represent the voiceless” (ibid.:138), but I would argue that in Al Jazeera English’s case this becomes even more evident as, “Al Jazeera’s slogan is to have the voiceless heard” (Fatima). The Al Jazeera English correspondent Jade exemplified this discussion:

Someone at Al Jazeera once said to me during a speech to the newsroom that “if you look on a scale of perspectives in terms of how the news is delivered to the world, for many viewers that perspective is really heavily weighted towards a Western perspective. So in order to re-bounce that why do you need to go right to the middle, and instead further over to the opposite side to where everybody else is.” I think there is a bit of a balancing act sometimes, it is surely, and whenever we do a story we try to get both sides, and representing those other sides fairly, but [...] because of the nature of Al Jazeera, we are more heavily, I think, in favor of, or on the side of people who are being repressed, of children, of women who are not given a fair deal. So it can, I don’t want to say campaigning but we are quite on the victims’ side.

Jade was connecting “fair” to a bigger concept, than just the issue at hand, to the responsibility of the news agency to be different and to contribute with a different perspective in comparison to other news outlets, to be fair in balancing the one-sided representation in mainstream media. She also underlined that in Al Jazeera English’s journalists’ struggle for fair coverage there is also a moral and social responsibility, to take a stand for the ‘victims’ and the ‘repressed’, something she explained had to do mostly with the organization’s stand, rather than conventional journalistic ethics. It is then fair and correct to highlight the causes of the disempowered, as these people do not have the possibility to show their opinions in other ways than to have the news media to do it for them. To be fair is then both connected to morality, helping the disempowered,
and to an ideal of “objectivity”, to show the ‘reality’ of diverse opinions surrounding a specific issue.

The objectivity-neutrality ideal that has been a cornerstone within journalistic ethics in this case becomes secondary, after giving more room and preferably space to those in subordinate societal positions. Hasty (2010) claims that even if journalists argue that they represent the voiceless, they seldom in practice have the freedom to stand in opposition to power, as they often are compelled to constantly interact with business and government elites in the production of news. She argues that the frequent reciprocal engagement between journalists and the powerful instead often leads to a journalistic identification with an elite perspective (ibid.:138). Deuze (2005) also argues that these ideological values of the journalist may function as a way to legitimize their selection of news, to protect the journalist from criticism. Deuze also claims that “supporters of the public journalism movement blame this ideological way of thinking for the news media’s inability to engage citizens” (ibid.:446).

Even if the choice of words or phrasing of standing on the “side of the victim” or of the “repressed” might sound like a positioning of the journalists as the saviors of the suppressed and subordinated, Al Jazeera English’s way of reporting is not framed through a victimizing classification and stereotyping, but recognizes agency among the under-represented, ‘less powerful’ groups as well. One of the journalists also underlined this characteristic of Al Jazeera English in comparison to the BBC and CNN:

Khalid: I think what Al Jazeera does is they try to tell the story from the point of view of the people that the stories are happening to. Statistically, regardless of what the conflict is, I think other news organizations do that, but they also in certain situations, particularly in situations where they are covering far away from their base, let’s say the BBC covering something in the Philippines, or CNN covering something in Iraq, those forms of representation will stick more to what their governments’ and countries’ narrative of these places are, and then they will, I mean they also do good journalism, but that is generally where their narrative would come from. Whereas Al Jazeera have always, I mean I might sound bit cheesy, but I think something that they do is, the slogan that they have of being the ‘voice of the voiceless’, is not some subaltern thing because that could be quite problematic, but I look at it more like they look more at the stories from the point of view of the people around who the stories are happening.
Objectivity versus social responsibility

Al Jazeera English journalists can be seen renegotiating the established objectivity ideal within journalism in favor of a model of cultural sensitivity and social responsibility. Khalid argued that,

I think as a journalist you have a responsibility to sort of show things how they are, and this objectivity thing gets quite muddled as well. You know as an anthropologist [that] there is no objectivity right? There is a theoretical objectivity that you can try to adhere to as good as possible as some kind of ideal. So you can try to be as objective as possible without actually totally being objective, and I think you should really try to do that. But I think that journalists and again it is this American model of journalism, doesn’t accept this idea that objectivity is impossible, and I think a better way to do it, for journalists like anthropologists, is to be aware of the fact that their view of the world is subjective, and to allow for it, and to counter it actively, but also to be honest about it.

If you are going to be a journalist and you are going to be subjective about looking at the world maybe the best way to do it is to take a rights base to your approach? Maybe you take a stand to it by upholding certain ideals and upholding certain rights, and I think I do that, and I feel comfortable about that. If someone tells me you’re not objective because you’re standing up to certain rights, I feel comfortable in taking that sort of criticism, I would be okay with it.

The objectivity ideal is somehow negotiable, as it has to be recognized that total objectivity is not possible and as this is the case, as emphasized by several of the journalists, it is more important to follow a moral standpoint in the storytelling. The moral standpoint moreover gets legitimized if it adheres to siding with the disempowered rather than the elite, with the people rather than the government. Pedelty (1995) recognizes as well as Khalid that the struggle for objectivity can be seen as specifically connected to American journalism and their code of ethics (ibid.:169-170). He criticizes this ideal and argues that it does not have as strong a foothold in European journalism where objectivity is instead critically discussed, and seen as a naïve belief.

Pedelty claims that the professional code of objectivity reduces value, emotions and politics, from news to only contain facts, where facts are believed to be found and not created, and being something that speak for themselves (ibid.:170-171). Fatima recognizes for example that it is impossible to be totally unbiased and objective.
**Fatima:** [it] is not my job to tell the viewer what to think, but to put out both sides of the story, [for them] to be able to digest it and to make their own opinion. But in the same time having said that, that’s on the surface you do, because of the element that you choose does have an impact on how the story goes, so it can’t be completely unbiased because if I was to have a story about women’s issues, women’s rights, let’s say in a certain situation, [the] likelihood of me siding with the sort of situation that women [are in] is [bigger] than [siding with] the government’s point of view, but I still have to be fair and let the government defend itself.

Pedelty (1995) argues that in the American journalists’ struggle for fair and objective news reporting there is also an ideal of having ‘balanced’ news. In his case study of the conflict in El Salvador this meant that both sides of the war had to be equally covered in the news reports, both the army’s actions and the guerilla’s, even if the army was responsible for the greater part of the abuses (1995:174). This contrasts to Al Jazeera English that tries to represent the people “on the ground” and focuses on the “less” powerful. Pedelty noticed that there was an emphasis among American journalists to find elite sources, as they were considered having higher value and legitimacy, and it then became obvious that “this concept of fairness allows those in power inordinate influence over the creation of news frames” (ibid.:175).

Khalid also discussed this tendency in American journalism in comparison to Al Jazeera English’s journalism:

There is this American idea of journalism, that in order for a story to be balanced you have to give equal weight to both sides. By and large I agree with that but there are as with any rule exceptions to this rule, how about then who you are talking to, when there is this case where there is a truth, where there is something that has happened, you will not be beholden to give equal amount of space to people who are lying, if you can see that something is happening then you don’t need to give, you shouldn’t ignore them completely, you should have a line, but you don’t need to give them equal amount of space in the story, because that’s not the truth and by doing that you end, the journalist ends up hiding the truth.

Journalists have to constantly evaluate their reporting and practices, as the narrative is not balanced in itself, as things are not black and white. There are usually more than two sides to an issue and they are seldom based on the same premises. The power relations have to be looked into as well as other factors. There is therefore a constant work that has to be performed by the journalist.
Al Jazeera English correspondent Jade exemplified the differentiated focus and approach of Al Jazeera English compared to Pedelty’s study of American journalists, and claimed,

your most important role is actually to hold some kind of government to account and to use that sort of, your journalism and network because it’s actually that bigger picture that is a problem. […] Because one person’s actions affect those millions of people. […] You have to be hard on him because there are millions of people in the country that don’t have that voice.

Hasty (2010) recognizes in difference to Pedelty (1995) that “the ideology of “balance” compels most journalists to cultivate a variety of sources representing a range of social perspectives, particularly those that challenge the interests of the elites.” (2010:138). In a study made by the media and communication researchers el-Nawawy and Powers comparing the BBC, CNN and Al Jazeera English with each other, the authors saw that Al Jazeera English journalists’ and news production employees’ news approach of giving media recognition to under-represented groups and giving more depth to those stories, as well as other characteristics, led audiences to see Al Jazeera English as a conciliatory media outlet (2010:62). They noticed that the longer the audience watched Al Jazeera English, the less dogmatic they became, and they found that Al Jazeera English’s way of reporting brought “culturally and politically diverse audiences together and encourage dialogue, empathy, responsibility and reconciliation.” (ibid.:62). To measure the audience’s dogmatic level they used a scale containing statements such as: “‘There is a single way to do most things’; ‘It is important to be open to different points of view’” (ibid.:80) that the audiences had to answer. Hannerz (2004a:21) would characterize these as similar to cosmopolitan values.

Other studies have also emphasized that Al Jazeera English covers more news from the developing world and the Global South compared to BBC World and CNN International (Figenschou 2012:44-45). According to Al Jazeera English’s code of ethics, Al Jazeera English shall: “Recognize diversity in human societies with all their races, cultures and beliefs and their values and intrinsic individualities so as to present unbiased and faithful reflection of them” (Al Jazeera 2010). Al Jazeera English’s attention to multiculturalism and of giving the perspective of the people “on the ground” – areas which the global media have paid less attention, might show
how the journalists of Al Jazeera English are aware of their own responsibilities in contemporary society, encouraging a model of ‘moral journalism’.

An example of this ‘moral journalism’ can be seen by looking at Al Jazeera English’s weekly programs, several of which try to dissect the power relations around the world and bring in grass-root perspectives, in portraying the situations from how they are experienced by the people “on the ground”. The Listening Post is one of the shows that brings in voices from the audience, as well looking at the media’s role in participating in the shaping of the social environment for people. Another program that also exemplifies Al Jazeera English’s policy and aim of being “the voice of the voiceless” is the weekly show People and Power, which looks at citizens around the world and their means and actions against abuses of power.

Deuze (2005) highlights that multicultural journalism, in seeking out new angles and voices and “engaging actively in public life among diverse peoples” (ibid.:455), changes the way news constitutes itself, forcing media professionals to rethink their ideology where “an active awareness of multicultural sensibility contradicts a cherished independence of special interests. A valued detachment of society, however, may result in disconnections with certain publics and oversimplified representations of social complexity” (ibid.:454). These changes lead the news media from the professor’s role of telling people what they should know to instead take the role of a megaphone voicing “the conversations society has with itself” (ibid.:455). Deuze develops this discussion of multicultural journalism from the notion of public journalism that has entered the field of news production through online technologies, something I will analyze more closely in the next chapter.

**Summary of chapter**

I argue that multicultural sensitivity and recognition, combined with a social obligation of standing on the side of the disempowered, changes the coverage and professional ethics within Al Jazeera English’s journalism. The channel’s journalism is categorized by a local insight rather than an impersonal detached approach. The norms and standards concerning fair representation of re-balancing the Western dominated perspective bring Al Jazeera English’s journalism closer to be categorized as an alternative media, that according to Atton (2003) “privileges a journalism that is closely wedded to notions of social responsibility, replacing an ideology of ‘objectivity’
with overt advocacy and oppositional practices” (ibid.:267). Al Jazeera English can also be described as a multicultural/participatory journalism and following Deuze’s (2003) line of thought this leads to a change of hierarchies, where voice is not only given to diverse perspectives, but people “on the ground” can spread their perspectives by the use of media outlets without going through the journalists’ in the same way.

Furthermore, it is not only the authority that differentiates Al Jazeera English journalism from more traditional practices, but the objectivity ideal is also less prioritized according to several Al Jazeera English journalists’ comments. Pedelty (1995) argues that the objectivity ideal leads to a belief that facts are found rather than created, and I argue that the acknowledgement among the Al Jazeera English journalists that this is not the case makes them more reflexive about their position and aware that what they report might be seen as biased. On the other side, they do legitimize this by emphasizing that they have actively made a moral choice of siding with the less powerful.

I also reason that Al Jazeera English’s news journalism can only partly be described as a fast-time practice dominated by intuitive decisions and a harmonized attention, following Boyer’s ethnographic studies at German broadcasting centers. The factors that distinguish Al Jazeera English from the German broadcasting centers is Al Jazeera English’s resources and aims. With yearly funding from the Emir of Qatar Al Jazeera English can to a larger extent generate its own news: the channel has both the money and the staff to do that. In this way Al Jazeera English does not solely have to rely on news stories coming from larger news organizations or agency wires, where it is common for other news organizations to spend a significant amount of time in reassessing potential news stories by an intuitive understanding of which news stories will be recognized as worth proceeding with.

Al Jazeera English’s journalists can however be said to employ intuitive practices or instinct in deciding on newsworthiness within the contexts following the news channel’s specific aims and agenda. Rather than seeing what the media landscape recognizes as newsworthy, they see what Al Jazeera English specifically would like and believe is worthy to proceed with. This also connects to the second reason why Al Jazeera English’s journalism does not follow Boyer’s
observations, namely that Al Jazeera English’s aim is to bring in a different perspective than that of the mainstream news organizations which still predominantly originates from the West. In this effort, Al Jazeera English needs to generate its own news, as building on others would directly entail that it has the same coverage as the “mainstream channels”.

As Al Jazeera English can be compared with the large news channels like the BBC and CNN it is the only really large global news organization that does not have a “Western perspective”, what Fatima argued is a perspective that give higher priority to news not coming from the West as well as having local reporters from the non-western countries that through their “local” perceptions bring different perspectives than international channels using foreigners to report on places in the ”Global South”. As a result of this is Al Jazeera English not able to rely on other organizations’ news stories, as there are none that would fit their aim and methods as well as opinions about newsworthiness.

However, Al Jazeera English is not only generating its own news with a different and original news content, it also generates the top stories like any other news channel, especially in its “breaking” news, but their longer stories often look slightly different since they apply other angles and in-depth testimonies.
5. Participatory Journalism and Social Media

[Richard Gizbert, presenter]: War reporting used to be pretty straight forward: get yourself into the conflict zone, bear witness, advance on the ground, deal with the propaganda, the inevitable fog of war and then try to tell the story. However, in Syria today, some of the most detailed information is coming from sources who spend their time - not dodging bullets on the battle field but - setting up Skype calls and trolling through myriad videos on the web. These new sources do the bulk of their work online and they often have no previous experience in journalism or conflict analyses, but as budgets shrink and the Syrian war becomes ever more dangerous to cover, many of the leading lights in the news world - on the air and in print - are getting their information from these independent and unconventional sources. […]

[Marwan Kraidy, Professor, University of Pennsylvania]: Unconventional sources on the Syrian story are a challenge to the mainstream media and at the same time they are vital, they do provide information that the mainstream media cannot, but in the same time there will always be a cloud of suspicion. So they cannot live with them but they cannot live without them.

(Al Jazeera 2013a)20.

In this final chapter, I will discuss how Al Jazeera English has been an early adopter of online technologies for distributing its news and shows, and how the channel can be counted as one of the first international broadcasters to establish a formal news channel on YouTube (established in 2006). Al Jazeera English’s implementation of citizen reports and use of citizen journalism portals challenge the conventional journalistic ideals of objectivity, authority and balance to become a kind of ‘networked journalism’, with changes of hierarchies in the news production process. The new technologies and use of social media have also led to a 24/7 job for the news journalists at Al Jazeera English.

**Al Jazeera English’s integration with new media platforms**

Due to new media technologies, the narration and representation of news is no longer reserved for professional journalists, but can be performed by individual citizens anywhere. The possibility for viewers and readers to partake in and direct the production of news has raised diverse views as to what will happen to the role of traditional media outlets and the role of

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20 “Deja vu in Syria: As the media talks of WMDs and calls for intervention, have journalists already forgotten the lessons from Iraq?” aljazeera.com September 8 2013, 10:34.
professional journalists. From having the hegemony and authority over the news flow and of the representation of remote issues and events, journalists in the contemporary media landscape are now urged to reassess their position. There is a dilemma about who has the right to define the reality (see Deuze 2005:451), and through which methods and ethics, and who will take on the role as gatekeeper.

The news media environment has been discussed by researchers “as either doomed or saved by new digital tools” (2010:272), explains the anthropologist Russell. Some researchers argue that the introduction of the Internet has lead to a decline among young people in regards to reading and watching the daily news, and that this is a further threat to democracy as journalism stands for the “the strongest formal check against power that citizens have: the information that empowers our votes” (Mindich 2004:96, see also Meyer 2004). On the other hand, other researchers believe that new technologies such as online media will change journalism for the better, enabling grassroots journalism to challenge the hegemony of big media corporations, as everyone can partake in having control over the news flow, making it more democratic (Gillmor 2004:xv).

In my interviews with Al Jazeera English’s journalists, I could distinguish a divide in the opinions concerning the new digital tools within news media. The journalists were both critical and positive towards the entrance of citizen journalists and news sources such as blogs, Twitter and Wikinews. Participatory journalism and user-generated journalism has challenged some of the professional ethics that have dominated the journalistic profession, how news should or should not be constructed, while the ethics and methods are at some levels maintained and at other levels dismissed. Balance, objectivity, authenticity and verification are issues that Al Jazeera English’s journalists discuss when they reflect on the new media technologies and on the use of citizen-generated news and footage. The anthropologist Vesperi (2010) writes, with the example of Wikinews, that a user-generated news site, can have the same standards of balance and neutrality but that the methods and ethics of gathering information look very different from the ‘traditional’ work of professional journalists (ibid.:262).
Due to some of the accusations circulating that Al Jazeera English is associated with ‘terrorist organizations’ and of having biased news, it has been difficult for the channel to enter and gain access to certain news markets, especially in the United States (see Amin 2012:30). The producer Fatima explained that before the launch of Al Jazeera America in 2013, Al Jazeera English could be seen only in a few states, and the launch of “Al Jazeera America was something that was a big feather in the cap and something they really wanted to do”.

Plenty of satellite and cable providers in the U.S. refused to give Al Jazeera English access and the channel’s strategy to reach out to people therefore consisted of increased efforts in its programming through the Internet (Amin 2012:32). However when the channel first launched its English version of its Arabic website, it was hacked and plastered with U.S. patriotic slogans and as a consequence several webhosts refused to carry the site (ibid.).

Nevertheless, as of 2014, Al Jazeera English can be watched and reached in a number of ways around the world. The channel can be watched through satellite, certain cable providers, live-streaming through Livestation on the Internet, Al Jazeera English’s YouTube channel, their homepage and mobile podcasts. It is also making its presence felt in social media, on Twitter and
Facebook, where you can follow news updates from the organization’s journalists and the channel’s different shows (see also Amin 2012:33). Through these forums audiences are able to participate in the news reporting by giving their opinions. The weekly program the *Listening Post* is for example contacting people through their Twitter and Facebook comments, asking them to be part of the program’s ‘Global Village Voices’ where people record themselves through a web call and share their opinion on a topic, explained Richard, the presenter and creator of the program.

In 2008, Al Jazeera launched a portal for citizen journalism (Sharek, 2014), where you can upload footage and eyewitness news reports. Through translating the website from Arabic to English the webpage encourages people to: “Share your ideas with pictures and video about what is going on around you of news and events updates” (ibid.). During the 2009 conflict in Gaza, the Your Media webpage had a stream of footage uploaded by people on the ground that on several occasions was used on Al Jazeera English’s website and in its broadcasts. Al Jazeera English also synchronized inputs from the people in the area to compile a “War on Gaza” map over the region to show what was happening and where, of deaths, air strikes, protests and more (see Al Jazeera 2012b).

![Screenshot: “War on Gaza” map (Al Jazeera 2012b).](image-url)
The “War on Gaza” map platform signals an effort of integrating audiences and in this way the channel places trust and credibility in the audience. It also changes the authority and conventional hierarchy of professional journalists, as it hands over some of the responsibility to the people to compile information of events on the ground. From the site, it is possible to see how users are able to send text messages and tweets of information on the conflict that then through the use of Ushahidi technology is crowdsourced and compile in different categories following the location given (see Ushahidi 2014). In an attempt to increase its global reach, Al Jazeera English also released on a web platform in 2009 some of their high quality footage for everyone, citizens as well as other news networks, to reuse for free (see Negredo Bruna21 2013:7).

As described in earlier chapters, Al Jazeera English has a mission to represent the voiceless, and it has been seen as a contra-flow news network in comparison to the major Western news networks. Hence, in discussing Al Jazeera English as a channel being one of the first to provide their news and shows on YouTube, and in adapting to new ways of participatory journalism, the channel can in this sense also be seen as proceeding with its mission and reputation, since integration of the Internet can be seen as giving voice to those in the periphery, I will however problematize this view later in the chapter. As the “War on Gaza” map shows, can new media platforms also contribute to giving a different perspective on events compared to the mainstream news.

It was the endeavor to interact with the viewers and citizens that made the channel gain its real breakthrough internationally, through its tireless coverage of the Arab uprisings in the beginning of 2011 (Amin 2012:32). It was the only “English-language media outlet with uninterrupted live video of the demonstrations in the Egyptian capital” (ibid.:35). Al Jazeera English news anchor Loffo told me, “I moved here in 2010, exactly when the Arab Spring was happening and you know that was a very critical moment for Al Jazeera, so I came at the right time to the network”. Al Jazeera English had a large number of staff on the ground as it was happening on home territory, plus they could make use of its citizen journalism portals, where citizens could become the eyes and ears of the channel. Even though many of the Al Jazeera’s journalists were detained and their offices shut down, they continued broadcasting and “[m]ajor U.S. networks were forced

21 Professor of Communication in Spain.
by necessity to replay Al Jazeera coverage of the events in Egypt” (Amin 2012:35) as they themselves feared the situation and left the area (ibid.).

In a study of BBC Arabic the authors point to the conclusion:

> With the Arab Uprisings eagerness for multiple sources of news and information rose. The successive revolts, the uncertainty they brought and the aspirations and opportunities they created made people of the Arab world hungry for news (Abdel-Sattar et al 2012:48).

Abdel-Sattar et al for example saw that an increasing amount of people used BBC Arabic’s website for dialogue during the Arab uprisings (ibid.). The Arab uprisings and the post-election protests in Iran 2009 boosted the public sharing of amateur footage that attained its real breakthrough within global media during these events (see Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti 2013:960).

Negredo Bruna (2013) points out:

> From the very beginning, Al Jazeera English distanced itself from the strategy of such competitors as CNN International or BBC World News with regards to the availability of its live stream and opted for offering it in as many platforms as possible, ranging from its website to external apps and social media. In early 2011, at the moment of the fall of the Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak, 71% of the traffic to the Al Jazeera website was coming from social media (ibid.:6).

It is highlighted in Al Jazeera English’s program episode “Egypt’s Media War” (Al Jazeera 2014a) that the detention of the channel’s journalists is due to Al Jazeera Network’s role in the coverage of the uprisings. The program emphasizes that the Egyptian government sees Al Jazeera’s coverage in 2012 as influential in shaping and spurring the civilian protest that led to a shift of power and to the election of the Muslim Brotherhood’s candidate Mohamed Morsi for the presidential post. This discussion connects to the belief that mobile technologies and social media can lead to social activism, and following the idea maintained by several social scientists that the “Internet serves to advance freedom and democracy” (see Postill 2012:168).

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22 Within this group of users they also noticed a significant imbalance between male and female users, where more than three quarters of the users on the different digital platforms were male (Abdel-Sattar et al 2012:52).
According to Morozov (2011), social media and people’s interaction with the Internet does not only promote democratic debates. He argues that while different actors can use Facebook and Twitter for different purposes, such as for social activism, they can also be used as tools for repressive regimes to track these same activists (2011:xiv). Horst and Miller (2012) write, “there is as much evidence for the way Twitter, Facebook, WikiLeakes and Al Jazeera helped facilitate the Arab Spring as there is for the way oppressive regimes in Iran and Syria use digital technologies for the identification of activists and their subsequent suppression” (ibid.:22). The effects of new technologies and the role of social media and citizen journalism on the conventional news media can therefore be seen as ambivalent.

Al Jazeera presenter Derek, for example, argued that news channels urge their journalists to use Twitter as it gives publicity to the organization even if it is emphasized that it is the journalists’ own opinions that are being expressed: “All views my own”. At the same time, he underlined that you cannot write whatever you want without the risk of being fired for it. The private accounts of the journalists are used on one hand for their own networking and to create a discussion with audiences and other users, but on the other hand their public status also makes it possible for the organization to follow and use what they say and do for the company’s own good and in some cases to the journalists’ inconvenience.

**Citizen journalism**

By looking at citizen journalism it is possible to examine what the effects are with the implementation of new technology in news media and at Al Jazeera English in particular. The audience’s participatory entrance into the news flow is something that affects and challenges the practices of journalism and the journalists’ professional role. The increased contact and cooperation with the public however have had different effects on the work and practices of journalists. The Internet, as well as the spread of smartphones with cameras and video recording, have created new ways for the public to spread news and opinions quickly and cheaply, and the new technologies have also made it easy for people to both shape the news flow, as well as to consume it. This has put pressure on news outlets to keep up with the changes and not to loose their given position in the media landscape, as the new ways for people to consume and narrate news have multiplied.
Citizen journalism can be explained as a type of journalism coming from “amateurs” or “ordinary” citizens participating as journalists in the global news flow, doing recordings, taking photos, and writing about events and issues normally done by news journalists (Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti 2013:964). A way for news agencies to get images and information from certain conflicts zones that are too dangerous for journalists to enter or too difficult, is to rely on the work of citizen journalists and audiences at these locations. There are however both critical and positive views on the increased implementation of user-generated material.

One Doha-based journalist, William, told me:

I think that so called citizen journalism in places like Syria can be very valuable in providing sources whether video, images or audio or personal testimony that you otherwise wouldn’t have, no one would have access to it so I think social media can be very helpful in that regard.

The importance of eyewitnesses is stressed here, as well as the availability of news stories. It shows that what is valued within journalism is to gain access to events and to be able to show the situation of people to the rest of the world, to function as an extra pair of eyes that can find and penetrate otherwise inaccessible sites and realities, and share these with those who would otherwise know nothing. In this way, citizen journalism brings in a useful contribution, and according to Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti (2013) citizen journalism gives a “broader spectrum of voices and perspectives, more material to choose from and thus also possibilities for more nuanced reporting”, which “enhances the chances for accurate reporting” (ibid.:971).

To make use of citizen generated news is not only seen as useful in regards to access, but also as a useful way to integrate the public and activate their participation in what is happening around the world, while making them active in contributing to spreading knowledge. The correspondent Jade told me: “I think it’s got a really important role: the more engaged people are, of what’s happening in their world, the better. And everyone’s got a phone these days that takes a good picture or a video”.

By ensuring that people’s voices are heard by using citizen material, the under-represented that Al Jazeera English claims to focus on, would have a bigger chance to have its issues and
perspectives spread globally through new technologies. Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti (2013) point out that the collaboration between professional journalists and citizen journalists has led to a sort of ‘networked journalism’, and that this has contributed to, “a break with the monopoly of journalistic storytelling in favor of previously marginalized individuals who can now narrate the events themselves and become recognized not only in social media but also in the global and national mainstream media” (ibid.:961). Having a bigger chance to participate might look good in principle but might however be far from the reality when looking at possibilities and who is actually interested in participating through these platforms.

That new technologies would make it easier for people to take part in global and local discourses is something that can be connected to Jürgen Habermas’ (1991) discussion of the ‘public sphere’. “Habermas pictured journalism ideally as an important activity for upholding a rational discourse necessary for a democratic public sphere” argues Larssen (2010:26), and in this sense, following the idea of Habermas, would the Internet open up a place for people of all social groups to actively observe and participate in global conversations and occurrences. This possibility would then break the status quo of who is able to have influence over public discourses, with the new platforms-defying class belonging and social capital. On the other side, the possibility for citizens to partake in news production can give a false sense of ‘public sphere’ since not everyone can be or wishes to be part of the digital network, specially considering those Al Jazeera English would identify as “the voiceless”. Gillespie (2013) remarks:

Our case studies on digital debate forums at the BBCWS [BBC World Service] reveal that, while attempts at promoting a ‘global conversation’ via interactive media may be open in principle, in practice they are neither diverse nor inclusive. Participants are invariably confined to a specific demographic group: highly educated males in the 18–30 age group. And when the debate forums were judged according to Habermassian criteria of democratic communication of independence, equality, plurality and reciprocity, it became clear that the gap between principles and practice was much wider than we expected (ibid.:101).

I have not seen a similar study of the active users of Al Jazeera English digital platforms, but something that also impacts the notion of a public sphere, that allows for the public to partake in societal discourses, is the access to these platforms. This access has to do with the channels’ availability in the country or area, people’s access to the Internet and people’s knowledge of the new digital technologies. According to Gillespie (2013), the Egyptians’ digital literacy, for
example, is very low, which makes TV the principal source for news in the country, and those who can access and use the digital technologies end up being predominantly the younger members of the middle class (ibid.:117). This might say something about who were the most active users during the Arab spring.

Considering the availability of Al Jazeera English, I was told by Fatima that, “Al Jazeera English is not available in the U.S. anymore, [before] they [American people] could see it in one or two states, and online, now that’s gone, they can’t see it online”, they can now only watch Al Jazeera America, which is editorially different from Al Jazeera English. So despite the presence of the channel on the Web, use of online-platforms and online-broadcasting, their reports are still not widely accessible. Khalid moreover mentioned that Al Jazeera English is neither available in Pakistan, nor in certain other countries.

Another issue concerns the unverifiable footage coming from citizen journalists, and the issue of verifiability becomes a reason for tension among professional journalism, as the risk of inaccurate ‘facts’ threatens the professional journalistic norm of having control and authority, something that Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti noticed in their studies on journalism and citizen journalism (2013:962). They saw that it was crucial for journalists that the footage provided by citizen journalists was verified, even if this was actually a rather difficult task, especially for journalists coming from small news organizations, as they did not have the same resources as large global actors. These journalists, working for the smaller organizations, ended up relying on international agency wires for verified amateur imagery instead of getting citizen material sent directly to themselves (ibid.:969).

The importance to verify the sources and the material was mentioned by William as well:

I think if you are citing or quoting these people in the media, you have to really exercise due diligence, to make absolutely sure that what they are claiming is what it reports to be and often that is quite difficult if you are doing it from a distance. I know there are some companies and services that have popped up in recent years that focus on verifying. There is this company called Storyful that, what they do is they take pieces of citizen journalism and try to work on verifying it and making sure whether it’s true or not and then sort of offering that information to news outlets.
Verification is a task that can be performed by non-journalists, but it is very important that it is done, argue Jade, Khalid and Fatima, as the area or relations on the ground are not always known to the journalists and news agencies. Verification often has to do with comparison of other news sources, telling the same story, as well as comparisons of video images of the location in an attempt to verify that it actually was shot at the place that is stated by the source.

With the disappearance of a certain authority within professional journalism due to the increased participation of citizens in news production and circulation, a discussion concerning the ‘fall’ of conventional journalism has arisen. Some journalists are concerned or believe that a change will occur and is occurring, while others believe that there still will be space and a need for the ‘real’ professional journalistic standards.

Jade: I know there is a lot of debate over ‘ground journalism’, or the medium of television being under threat, but I just don’t believe it, [laughter], because I think people will always want some kind of consolidating source of information from people who they know have been doing it for a good enough length.

Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti (2013:966) also noted a persistent belief among journalists that news journalism still needs their expertise in verification, and in employing professional standards. The correspondent Khalid stressed that,

in theory, the idea of citizen journalism is good because it allows news production to flow into the hands of the people, but my experience has been, in that the problem is, because we have seen this happen, that they don’t have to agree to the same idea of ‘truth’. So they will pose things and you have to verify things. It provides us with videos and news we wouldn’t have otherwise, but they need the news organizations to put in the time and effort to verify these bits of information. If you don’t, you will have big news wires around stories that is just not true and that’s a problem.

Khalid also pointed out the fact that there are no real consequences for publishing or contributing false statements or material, as citizen journalists can not be fired. They might therefore not need to follow professional ethics in their reporting. Khalid gave an example of how deceiving video material can be where “people will share videos on social media, which will say something like, ‘this is a video of someone being beheaded in Bagdad’ and then you found out that this is a video from 1999, and that it actually happened somewhere else”. This type of news flow then becomes
very problematic, Khalid emphasized. Max argued that, “it’s not because you have a cellphone that you can do journalism. I hope I don’t say that in a corporatist way, because I don’t think I am, I don’t think it is particularly hard to be a journalist, but journalists are afraid of losing their job if they say something wrong.” Fatima clarified how she handles citizen material and news inputs:

If I were to use Twitter, what I would have to be very, very, very careful about is the source. I would never go entirely on Twitter unless it was from an official source and there on we also must verify it. I mean journalism, it is best to have sources, two credible sources, so obviously if you are at the prime minister’s page saying, an official page saying something it has a lot of credibility, but you know I would then make a phone call to somebody and to just check the facts. With Twitter, it’s a good source for information that is coming quite quickly, but because it is so much out there, verification is very important.

Russell (2010) discusses the changes in online news sites such as Salon.com, where they are challenging the traditional journalistic views of objectivity and which is considered to be a credible source, for example, using “sources that fall outside the realm of what is considered by more traditional news organizations as bureaucratically credible“ (ibid.:278-9). Instead, Salon sees official sources, such as information coming from the government, as unreliable and instead they look for sources with unique voices, which gives everyone a chance to participate in the news flow, believing that opinions should be kept in the piece without it loosing accuracy (ibid.). Hannerz (2004a) comments that traditional major news agencies seldom allow for journalists to include their personal opinions or a reflexive positioning in their stories (ibid.:139).

For Al Jazeera English, citizen journalism is especially important and useful when it is too dangerous for an employed journalist to go to certain areas, such as conflict or war zones. The news organization can then use material from citizens on the ground who report and send footage. These people, however, do not have the same safety net as professional journalists in the event of kidnappings, prosecutions or injuries and so on. Fatima explained how it works when the journalist or producer cannot access certain places:

Usually you call people or journalists, stingers is what we call them, not only when it’s dangerous but also when you just can’t be there yourself, as Pakistan is a huge country and news is about now. So you need stories from other parts of the country and pictures from the other part of the country, then you rely on the
people, and security wise as well, in the tribal area, it’s very difficult for us to travel there easily and we do rely on local stingers for that material and we up-compensate them obviously for it.

Citizen journalists are in this way putting up competition against professional journalists, as they, with the new media technologies, can do the same job without even being paid or paid less than professional journalists. Max mentioned: “The Internet is providing all this free information, and it makes it harder for journalists to get paid to do proper journalism”. This fear is however contested by Jade who explained that she believes that professional journalists are still going to be sought after as they have the trust from the audience and are still seen as more reliable. She also argued that the effort in looking through a huge amount of raw footage will not be very interesting for the audience, and there will still be a demand for news reports that have been crafted and edited by credible journalists; and even if it is crafted, you have to put your trust in professional journalists, not in unidentified people.

**Jade:** You have to hand over that trust to someone that is giving you an accurate interpreted reflection of what happened on a day at one given event. I think we have to relinquish that and trust that in what we are seeing or hearing. By “crafted” I don’t mean manipulated, but someone who has used pictures and sounds to, with as few words as possible, tell a really well told story. It’s about quality story telling – I think there will always be place for that.

Jade underlined the importance of the professional journalist’s skills in attaching meaning and drama to a story. This is something that is also noticed by Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti (2013), where they point out how journalists repeatedly underline their refined skills of narration and of knowing what is newsworthy and valuable for their audience, an area in which amateurs will never compete with the abilities of professional journalists (ibid.:966). They argue however that there is a shift going on among journalists that has led journalists to see “audiences on a more peer level, to appreciate their contributions, and to find normative purpose in transparency and participation” (ibid.:974). Deuze (2003:455) argues that news media is becoming more transparent due to the shared control over the production and narration of news.

In Al Jazeera’s citizen journalism platform *Sharek* (see Sharek 2014) professional journalists make an effort to verify the footage that is sent in and also to give guidelines to those who are interested in improving their material, making it fit to verification and broadcasting. These
guidelines explain how to film and how to take photographs of a larger area and if possible also of newspapers showing where the video is from, as well as the day of the recording. Al Jazeera English does make use of citizen material in combination with journalistic expertise. Journalist ethics do not disappear totally as Al Jazeera also try to teach and educate “amateur” journalists in how good journalism should be done in relation to authenticity and quality. Indeed, most of the Al Jazeera English journalists I spoke to also emphasized that they learned their job and practices “by experience” and not always through practical or theoretical education in professional journalistic standards and ethics, so it is easier to understand that citizens can also learn “on the job” and through experience. “They might not be trained in journalism, but you know with a bit of experience they figure out how to do this and they have been given a camera and they go ‘point and shoot’”, Fatima explained to me.

In this way, it is not only a question of “our” or “their” work, but of a form of ‘networked journalism’ that can be distinguished at Al Jazeera English. Gillespie (2013) stresses that:

Integrating online media with radio and television re-draws hierarchies and roles in news organizations, shifting the boundaries between producers and consumers, and blurring definitions between audiences as users, fans, citizens and publics. Terms change as fast as strategies in international broadcasting. (ibid.:97).

Deuze (2005) argues that a shift from an individualistic “top-down” to a participatory “bottom-up” journalism can be detected with the new multimedia digitalization, where news becomes more of an open societal discussion rather than having the role of “telling the people what they need to know” (ibid.:455).

Similarly, Fatima believed that journalism and the way people are told news narratives in the contemporary media landscape is, and constantly has been, taking on new shapes:

Technology does change the process but the storytelling is still the same, whether it’s one old man sitting around the campfire telling a story or a blogger putting up the video telling you something else, storytelling is ancient, yet the process might take a different form and a different platform but it’s still telling a story and I think that, you know, the ethics will have to remain and adapt to a certain degree, but largely remain the same.
Social media and the future of conventional journalism

Fatima explained that she believes that technology is changing the news media landscape. She found it necessary for news channels to adjust to the new format and technology, as they otherwise would not keep up with the development. As discussed in the previous chapter, Mark Deuze (2005) recognizes new media technologies as one of the central contemporary factors for how journalism has changed and is changing. He writes that digitalization and computerization have entered in all sectors of society and have changed the way journalism should be taught and in which the Internet is becoming more and more important for news organizations to both spread their news and accessing news inputs. In all the journalists’ work the Internet played a central role for finding information as well as for Al Jazeera English to spread its news. Amin (2010) writes that:

AJE’s [Al Jazeera English] strategy should be to focus on niche audiences who watch AJE broadcasts on the Internet. By doing so, the network will be forced to stay ahead of the technological curve and will be, therefore, well-placed for an industry increasingly blurring the boundaries between platforms (ibid.:36).

Derek, the Al Jazeera English presenter and media expert, explained that he does not like to use social media as part of his professional profile, as it can be dangerous considering that what you write is connected to the organization, “I know that with two beers and Twitter then I would write something that could get me fired”. Yet he recognized that it can be good for the news network, and that it can be positive publicity for the organization to have its journalists active on Twitter, as “Twitter is a very powerful tool”. Personally however he felt that Twitter is a bit of an “ego” thing, of showing off and bragging, and as he himself has his own show, he does not really need that.

However, Derek also pointed out that the use of social media such as Twitter and Facebook actually help journalists in their job, as the audience share videos, media links and opinions that Al Jazeera English can then use in their programs as content or in the creation of story ideas or suggestions of subjects, and in that way they do not have to put as much effort in looking for subject matter themselves, so in a sense “they do our job”. For example, 10,000 Facebook users are following his show. “[A] YouTube user is like an alternative stringer, and […] a Twitter
contact can be just as useful as one that the journalist has met in person”, writes Negredo Bruna (2003:11).

When it was difficult for Al Jazeera English to enter the American market they also made use of social media to create public awareness around this issue. They launched a campaign in 2011 in which they encouraged viewers to demand American cable providers offer Al Jazeera on U.S. television. To spread this message they made use of social media, where people were urged to use Twitter, using the hashtag #DemandAlJazeera (see Amin 2012:33). As I mentioned earlier in this thesis, Twitter was also used by Al Jazeera journalists as well as other journalists around the world to give support and awareness to the journalists detained in Egypt, using the hashtag #FreeAJstaff.

The correspondent Max saw the use of Twitter and social media in news coverage as a setback to journalism. He argued that the increased use of technology has shaped the news flow to look the same, where everyone has the same sources and inputs:

**Max:** This is the curse of the Internet. What would be very interesting to me if I were a student is looking at the world of journalists over the past 20 years, at the extent to which technology has really changed things. You are perpetually harassed on your Blackberry or iPhones or emails, telling you what’s happening where you are standing. It is completely wrong. That [the news inputs] comes from people that are your colleagues in London or Doha or the United States. It leads to a uniformity of news, against this supposedly variegated Internet based media landscape that we have. It just means that everyone is forwarding the same stupid article and repeating it and no one is actually going out looking for a different angle, and different fact and different interview, with their own, curiosity and courage and thoughtfulness and what ever they bring.

Max underlined how the incorporation of new technology works to homogenize the news flow. The question if ‘the digital’ leads to homogenization of the global cultural flow or diversification and conditions for change, has been discussed within globalization research (see e.g. Horst & Miller 2012:4), and the global mass media that is part of the globalization process has been discussed within the same premises. Arjun Appadurai (1990) however argues that the global-local transnational flows do not lead to homogeneity but lead to ‘heterogeneous disjunctures’ of culture, and yet others have explained that the global interactions and influences in the media landscape result in a ‘hybridity’ of new genres and conventions (see Thussu 2006:6).
Herman L. (in Boyer 2010) claims that journalists reevaluate the professional role and norms in the digital era, where they have seen a necessity to transform the profession in certain ways to adapt to the increased amount of news and information that is circulating. He argues that journalism no longer is about collecting and generating news and facts but rather to make selections, and knowing what out of all this information on any particular topic is newsworthy and reliable (ibid.:87). At Al Jazeera English this can be seen as well, even if it is a large news organization and has the resources to generate its own news in parallel with the integration and selection of citizen material.

Al Jazeera English’s coverage can therefore be seen as a new form of news media, a hybrid between being mainstream and ‘alternative’, where it has become a mainstream that is marketing itself as being ‘different’ and ‘alternative’ in relation to the American and European mainstream news, emphasizing the representation of distinct voices and perspectives, coming from the people rather than the established elite.

Khalid however mentioned that the new media landscape with its the excessive amount of news sources has resulted in the situation in which audiences just follow their own existing opinions: they choose to read and watch news from outlets that follow their political stand and beliefs. The news is then just adding to and confirming the opinions of citizens rather than challenging them.

Khalid: The way people look at my news production will be based on what they think about me, and my organization, so if somebody, Person A thinks that Al Jazeera is a terrorist news network, then everything that we say, regardless to its relative truth, will be dismissed and at the same time, they then see some blogger who has written something false but that ties in with their narrative and their view of the world, they will hail it as the truth. […] With self-publishing we are getting into a much more fractured world where people will just read things that will agree to their own view of the world regardless of whether those things are true or verifiable or not.

Nicholas Kristof (2009) of The New York Times writes that everyone is becoming their own gatekeeper and editor, when they go online, as anyone else can select what kind of news they want to read and believe in by themselves, as there is such a wide selection of news in the contemporary news market. He argues “there’s pretty good evidence that we generally don’t
truly want good information — but rather information that confirms our prejudices” (ibid.:1). I questioned Khalid if he believed that people would keep having faith in the more established news organizations:

Khalid: I think by and large that might be the case, they will, but there will also, as people will become more nuanced consumers of news, I think they sometimes will pick up more bad habits than good habits where they will pick up this idea of reading news sources that are not verified, but that are speaking to their narrative. But there is also this problem with the idea of conspiracy theory of media being part in a conspiracy in trying to keep the truth away from the people.

According to Larssen (2010), news reporting is going towards fragmentation, with the increased sources and information available. He argues that “the media targets specialized groups or specific interests, rather than providing greater depth of knowledge or a wider view of things taking place both at home and abroad” (ibid.:24).

With internet search tools such as Google, the information that people are subjected to will become increasingly narrow and specialized as the search tool customizes the search to fit the user’s earlier shown interests. The information given will therefore to a larger extent go along the lines of what you are interested in and following the opinions you are already shown to have. With a decreasing amount of single news sources that provide wider views and multiple perspectives, the chances of hearing the “other” side of the issue become less probable (see e.g. Beware Online “Filter Bubbles.”

Al Jazeera English can on one hand be compared to this new trend as they are opening more and more national and regional sister news channels with different editorial standards to fit the cultural and social values and norms of the specific region.

Not all journalists agree about the negative effects of the Internet and new technology. Fatima, for example, saw the increased amount of news sources as an opening for optionality, where the audience has access to a wider spread of news and choices, where they can have more control over their intake and of which sources to follow and believe in, and to be able to compared different news angles and framings.

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Fatima: what we knew before I think is already changing, and the world of 24-hour news channels is very much there, but with the Internet, the opportunities, possibilities, I don’t want to sound clichéd but the possibilities are limitless, there is just so much. As a viewer you don’t just have to watch Al Jazeera or CNN, you don’t have to make those choices: you can watch both and you can select that you want to watch your news from Syria on Al Jazeera and you want to watch your news on New York from CNN. You can choose that, and it’s not just the big networks that are interesting, there are a lot of citizen journalists and smaller journalists who have blogs, and articles, and newspapers, and smaller production companies putting out films. So there is so much in the realm of journalism, it has exploded online alright, and various different channels, and I think the audience or the viewers have a lot more control if they want it, to choose what they are going to digest on a day.

On one of Al Jazeera English’s shows, the *Listening Post*, (Al Jazeera 2014b) they take up the supposed threat that 24-hour news is under due to social media and cellphones that can better satisfy consumers’ instant need of news. What they discuss is that the domination of live news and less time for news gathering might make people go to social media for news inputs instead, but at the same time there is actually an increase in 24-hour TV news channels, such as China’s CCTV, Russia’s RT, France 24, and of course Qatar’s Al Jazeera (Al Jazeera 2014b). A reason for this increase might be due to their partial adaption of integrating social media and citizen journalism in their 24-hour news broadcasts and shows. Fatima reasoned:

I can’t be sure what it [digital technology] is going to do to television channels, but news networks are smart, they are changing, and they have entered the digital sort of information spectrum where they have an online presence, where they have social network presence, where correspondents tweet and blog and you send videos from the field, your packages are posed online, so I think it is important for a network to be able to do that. Of course, it comes down to resources and affordability, but I think networks that want to and newspapers, in fact online you have newspapers that have videos because it is a different climate and I think to survive they need to. […] I think you can’t avoid technology and stay away from it if you want to survive as a news network.

Russell (2010) emphasizes that the dichotomy of talking about “traditional” journalism in contrast to “new-media” journalism should be relinquished as well as the generalizations of a “journalistic culture”, as it does not apply to the contemporary news media environment anymore, where instead “scholars must approach news outlets and newsroom cultures distinctly” (ibid.:282). With Al Jazeera English as an example of a news organization that incorporates
“new-media” within their more “traditional” news reporting it would be hard to categorize Al Jazeera English’s journalism as either “traditional”- or “new-media”- journalism, and should therefore be evaluated not within those categories but for its distinct journalistic culture. Al Jazeera English is neither alone in this role of incorporating social media in its more traditional news production.

In a way the news is becoming fragmented but still it allows the viewer to have control over what to watch because it increases their options; but then again, the viewer might choose to watch just those news sources with the perspective he or she shares. What is interesting to discuss is if the viewer really needs to be told to expose themselves to different opinions than his or her own, and if you do not control this what would then happen to people’s knowledge production and social integration with others if they follow a totally different news flow?

I asked Fatima what she thought the wide range of news sources that new digital technologies have initiated would do to the knowledge production in society:

**Fatima:** It will change, it gives more power to the viewer, to the public and I think it is important too because […] every news channel has an agenda, so does every person, and every blogger has an agenda right, so you subscribe to who you want to, because you have an agenda, a personal agenda or which you been brought up with, so your moral right and wrong to be very basic or how you want to enrich your mind right, and you have that power, and you can also compare three different outlets on the same story, you have the power to do that and then there will be a trust thing, let’s say you read the same story on XYZ outlets or watched them and then you are like ‘oh well, why actually it’s been, actually, wrong, or disinteresting or very biased or you don’t like that, “I will stop reading Y and X, and Z is doing fine and I will starting reading another one S, S is good.”

“They don’t give a damn if you have a personal life”

The blurring of boundaries can not only be seen between the roles of producers, consumers and journalists, but also when it comes to professional and private life. The boarders between leisure and work are getting blurred with digital technology where work follows people even during their spare time (Horst and Miller 2012). Digital technology that has increased the competition, the amount of information available and facilitated the contact and possibility for journalists to
constantly be available and reachable by the organization, or by colleagues or followers, coming from social forums such as Twitter and Facebook.

The stream of news inputs and ease of communication, and the increased industrial concentration have led to a 24/7 job for many journalists, where they have to be constantly prepared to take up stories and answer emails, as well as follow Twitter feeds. The demand is to be fast, not to become stressed out, while being constantly accessible. Deuze (2003) observes the same thing and reasons that the Internet has increased the immediacy of the profession where journalists have to work in a “‘non-stop’ 24/7-digital environment” (ibid.:449), the stress to deliver news as quickly as possible is something journalists however see as both an essential part of their work and as a problematic development, stresses Deuze. Max, stationed in Europe, described the change journalism has gone through:

Before you did one story per week or one every two weeks. You had a driver and it was a slow sending process where you could disappear for three days. No cellphones, you could be at the pool or at the frontlines, nobody knew and nobody care. Now you have a cellphone, people call you at the weekend, they don’t give a damn if you have a personal life, they expect you to answer emails when they are awake even if they are in New York. You never know when you are asked to perform. The journalist’s job is like at anytime someone can distract you and you never know when the news hit you; it’s a job for young people.

With Al Jazeera English being such a global news network some people access news when it is night time for others, but there still exist expectations that even during the night journalists should be answering their emails and so on. There is a constant contact and pressure that the new technologies have contributed to. Hannerz (2004a) gives a similar example to Max argument of how the journalistic profession looked like before the ubiquity of the cellphone and Internet: where one of the foreign correspondents positioned in Hong Kong due to this was given virtually complete freedom, where he could work at his own pace without orders to work faster or in a specific way (ibid.:149).

With the increased use of digital media technologies we can see how the news organizations in one way is taking control over the private lives of journalists. With the lack of spatial and temporal borders, people have to be constantly accessible for answering emails, tweeting, covering live events and jumping on a plane. Negredo Bruna (2013) writes that,
Al Jazeera English journalists that include Twitter in their newsgathering and production routines link their profiles with the organization for which they work in an informal manner, identifying their connection in different ways, but freeing the channel from the responsibilities regarding what they post online (ibid.:8).

By looking at tweets Negredo Bruna (ibid.) argues that it is possible to analyze how much journalists identify themselves with the organization they work for. Some examples of Twitter feeds from Al Jazeera English journalists can look like this:


- What would we know about #RwandaGenocide if it weren’t for journalists? #FreeAJStaff after 100 days #Egypt @PeterGreste @Repent11 @Bahrooz

- Has the ANC done enough for the gay and lesbian community on the continent? [http://www.southafricavotes2014.co.za/a-queer-fear-in-the-anc/ … @ANCKZN #FreebieFriday](http://www.southafricavotes2014.co.za/a-queer-fear-in-the-anc/)

- International union visits #Qatar labour camps to investigate working conditions [http://aje.me/1cuqXE0](http://aje.me/1cuqXE0)

Here are examples of both feeds promoting the journalists’ work at Al Jazeera English and their own personal interests: there are not many personal updates but mainly feeds relating to international or global news stories. In the example of the suggestion of the Swedish article “The truth about the luxury of Qatar Airways” a critical eye on Qatar is underlined, which might show that the journalists are relatively free in recommending and tweeting things that can be considered as negative for Qatar. Hannerz (2004a) sees restrictions in the work of correspondents where improved technology for example has made it easier for editors to have control and be able to communicate with the reporters, and in this way also to be more aware of the work they do and to direct it more easily (ibid.:149). The agency of journalists changes with the new technologies, where journalists before had more room of shaping the content at their own speed and taste without overly strict organizational constraints.

The blurred boundaries between the public and private, as well as professional and amateur realms can be seen as important in several aspects: morally, socially and politically, and at last but not least, as economically. The company or organization’s interventions in the private and
domestic realm can be seen as an intention to improve their productivity so that they can increase profitability. This conclusion can be connected to the discussion by Peter Fleming (2013) in his study “When life goes to work” (ibid.:58) where he explains how the boundaries between work and non-work, private and public is flawing and being manipulated by the ‘new management ideology’ and ‘flexible capitalism’ (ibid.:59) in which the private lives of employees have suddenly become a matter for the corporation.

Fatima told me that she constantly had to be prepared to end the interview we were having in case breaking news reports would come up, and Max emphasized that he was constantly harassed on his phone due to colleagues following Twitter feeds and so on, telling him what was happening at his location. In addition to all this, he was expected by Al Jazeera English to have time to compile several live news reports every day and with citizen journalists “working for free” there is not much space for saying “no” to these demands. To adapt to a fast-time practice of putting aside the original and creative reevaluation of newsworthiness is a way for the journalist to maintain agency in the complex fast-moving landscape of digital information, and to instead rely on agency wires and intuition or instinct when narrating their news reports (see also Boyer 2011).

Studying organizational behavior and boundaries might give a wider understanding of different kinds of organizations’ embeddedness in the wider society and the impacts they have on people’s feeling of belonging and construction of identity both professionally and in the domestic realm. 24-hour television needs constantly to have something to say, even if there is nothing, and there is a demand that when there is breaking news, journalists have to be there and available to cover it (see Aljazeera 2014b). If this is not accomplished, social media might satisfy the needs of the viewer replacing the role of 24-hour news stations.

**Summary of chapter**

The early adoption of online technology by Al Jazeera English to spread their news, as well as to integrate audiences has led to a renegotiation of journalistic ideals in favoring eyewitness reports and diverse perspectives, instead of impartiality and authority. The channel’s adoption has a clear explanation in relation to its aim of giving a voice to the people. Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti (2013) analysis concerning citizen journalism is that it promotes a more democratic news
direction, giving room to a wider range of voices to choose from in the narration of news. It might however change the news, which might become more fragmented and difficult to verify. By having plenty of local journalists and resources, media organizations might however avoid running misrepresentations and “false” news in their broadcasts.

Al Jazeera English’s journalism can however be described as a kind of ‘networked journalism’, where the participation from “amateurs” and citizens in the newsgathering and storytelling changes the authority and top-down feeling of news to a bottom-up journalism, something that Deuze (2003) acknowledges in his research. As a consequence, news reporting can be said to have become more participatory and multicultural. The consequences of the integration of new media technologies in news production have however increased competition, as well as the pace of work and requirements. These requirements do not to have to do with skills of analyzing and investigation but of constantly being accessible for the organization, whatever the need. There is a constant hunting for new stories, as well as the competition to be the first. It may however not be possible to accomplish all these criteria at the same time, and quality and originality may be disregarded in favor of speed and quantity.

Nevertheless, by adopting new technologies and new online platforms as part of its news practices, Al Jazeera English is retaining its place on the news market, especially with the trend among audiences to rely more on web-based news from blogs and social forums rather than on television or newspapers. In the competition with new news sources is ‘networked journalism’ also becoming increasingly important for not losing audiences that now are getting used to take part in the news flow.
6. Conclusions

“After decades of interdisciplinary scholarship on news and journalism, is there anything new that anthropology can bring to the table?” asks Elisabeth Bird in the introduction to the book *The Anthropology of News & Journalism: Global perspectives* (2010). I argue that an anthropological perspective in studying Al Jazeera English’s journalism looks at the larger structures, as well as refined peculiarities that are relevant for understanding and explaining the channel’s journalistic practices and roles. By taking a comparative approach to the data I have collected concerning the opinions and practices of Al Jazeera English’s journalists, I have been able to outline differences and similarities between their reporting and ideals compared to those of other journalists. When these stances become obvious, it also provides an opening for analyzing the reasons behind these differences and similarities.

The purpose of this thesis has been to analyze the cultural and social media environment surrounding Al Jazeera English’s journalism and to discuss how this environment shapes and directs the journalists’ practices and ethics, as well as how Al Jazeera English’s journalism has transformed this environment. At first, it was Al Jazeera English’s unconventional news coverage that caught my interest, especially with the knowledge of the channel’s origin, and I aimed to understand the editorial line and agenda of the channel, as well as its relation to Qatar and the Emir.

I also aimed to answer how the relation to the rest of the global media landscape, the competition and new digital media technologies affect Al Jazeera English’s position and its journalism. To be able to do this, I needed to look deeper into the origin of the channel, as well as its reputation. I also needed to understand how journalistic practices have been portrayed and analyzed by other researchers from other contexts. I aimed to explore the mechanisms underlying the channel’s structure as well as what the journalistic practices and ethics were built on. With the changes in the contemporary media landscape, I also looked more closely into the phenomena of citizen journalism and integration of social media in the news production and practices of the journalists at Al Jazeera English.
I make use of Boyer’s (2010a) theoretical approach to position Al Jazeera English’s journalistic practices within the contemporary media landscape, characterized by multiple news sources and a very timely and fast-changing information flow. I argue that Al Jazeera English can only partly be described through these characteristics, since the channel’s resources and aims look very different from the news organizations Boyer studied. The resources and funding that Al Jazeera English receive enable their journalists to generate most of the news stories themselves and they have to rely less on intuitive practices of newsworthiness and following the news flow of other news outlets. Instead, they employ intuitive practices in terms of following their knowledge of the channel’s aim and preferences of what is considered newsworthy.

In the thesis I argue that there are several reasons for Al Jazeera English to predominantly use local reporters as correspondents rather than foreigners. Firstly, local reporters are able to generate more original news reports due to their differentiated perspective compared to the outsider perspective of foreign reporters. Secondly, they are able to gain a refined understanding of the situation in the place and portray themselves as reporters ‘for everyone’, due to their diverse nationalities, as well as their position of being close to the people “on the ground”. Thirdly, because they speak the same language and “look the same” as the local people. To analyze what this means for their journalistic practices and ideals, I have drawn parallels to Ulf Hannerz’ (2004a) study of foreign correspondents working for mostly Western news organizations, where Hannerz argues that correspondents have a shared perception of themselves as being part of a journalistic community, sharing norms and values of newsworthiness and styles of reporting.

In Al Jazeera English’s case its reporters can be seen acting as much as local reporters as reporters working for an international news organization. This can, besides Al Jazeera English’s different news aim of not presenting stereotypical images of certain regions, be a reason for Al Jazeera English’s journalists’ differentiated idea of newsworthiness, and in not having the same way of reporting, compared to other international news organizations’ journalists. Where the Al Jazeera English journalists do not share the foreign perspective to the same extent but have both a local and a foreign relation to the place and people they cover.
Al Jazeera English’s use of local reporters can be categorized as “long-timers” rather than “parachutists”, a type of journalist that Hannerz saw were more critical to the government of the country. I argue in this thesis that this explains Al Jazeera English’s differentiated journalistic practice of being more ‘for the people’ rather than ‘for the government’. It also gives the channel’s reports a more refined content and emphasis on background, showing things from different sides and giving agency to the people “on the ground”. This is something that is claimed by Schwenkel (2010) as well, looking at Vietnamese reporters, where she notes how local reporters can give the people in the reports a more humanistic portrayal.

I also argue that this approach at Al Jazeera English of having local reporters makes them renegotiate the ‘objectivity’ ideal that has been seen as a cornerstone within professional journalism. By being more involved with local social and cultural structures and values, they have more of an insider or emic perspective, which can be more subjective rather than impartial and objective. However, they combine this with an etic perspective as well since all the journalists I spoke to had lived and studied in various countries and therefore can be said to also have a distance to their own culture and society. The objectivity ideal was also renegotiated in favor of giving more weight to voices coming from under-represented people, and the siding with the ‘voiceless’ legitimised the journalists’ bias in their own opinion.

With this approach, following Postill’s (2012) idea of digital technologies promoting democratization, it becomes natural for Al Jazeera English to implement citizen journalism and social media in their news production. I use Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti (2013) analysis that citizen journalism promotes a more democratic news direction and new perspectives as their contribution gives the channel a wider spectrum of opinions and perspectives to choose between, and I reason that this can be seen at Al Jazeera English and that it makes their news coverage more diverse as well as profound and unconventional. However there is a contradiction in this and that is how the increased use of social media and citizen journalism also leads to a fast-paced working situation that in contrast, according to Max and Khalid, leads to a decrease in novelty and “authenticity”, for the sake of being fast and effective.
In conclusion, I argue that Al Jazeera English’s news approach is different from that of other news channels and its news can be seen to create a dialogue, not only from South to North or East to West, but also from below to top, emphasizing a shared cosmopolitan identity that heightens a cross-cultural sensitivity and acceptance. This is both partly due to the their aim and the media landscape’s need for a differentiated news outlet giving more space to people in the margins as well as to the ‘ordinary’ people, rather than the established elite. I believe that my study has contributed to a broader understanding of the social and cultural dynamics that exist within news production and an insight into a very prominent actor within the new world. The study contributes to the discussion of the future of journalism, and how it is changing and why.

With the threat of news becoming increasingly fragmented as well as ever more adjusted to a certain point of view, underscoring rather than challenging preconceived ideas, I believe that global news outlets with multiple perspectives are to be preferred. The step towards citizen journalism’s presence in news production also promotes transparency and a change of hierarchies. Al Jazeera English’s international outlook may however not last, as it is constantly opening more localized channels that are slightly adjusted editorially to that specific region’s taste and news tradition.

An area for future anthropological research is the study of the editorial processes within Al Jazeera English and studies of Al Jazeera English’s viewers, of how their values are shaped by the channel. A more in-depth study of how the different sister channels differ from each other would also be useful in understanding how the network operates, and how political as well as normative surroundings change and put pressure on news broadcasts. Another aspect would be to look at the implementation of social media and citizen journalism and examine how it changes the coverage on a more concrete level. From there it could be examined how the participation between viewers, producers and journalists changes power structures within news production, and whether it is leading to a more democratic production and circulation of news. This kind of study would then add to the knowledge of how social media and citizen journalism will further impact the construction of knowledge and identity of audiences.
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**Internet-based and other media**


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Cover page photo: Screenshot of presenter of the Listening Post “24-hour TV News: An Endangered Species?”
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