Offering a new(s) view of the Arab world: A study of the news production of Al Jazeera

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Abstract

This thesis examines the production of the Al Jazeera broadcast news programme based in Qatar and pays particular attention to the Al Jazeera news form for programme production and journalists’ practice. Acknowledging the significant differences between the programme form adopted by Al Jazeera and other news programming in the Arab news ecology, it explores these as collective knowledge shared by journalists within the production domain and underpinned by a visualisation of the programme’s audiences. The study draws on observations of news practice, in-depth interviews with news workers, and analyses of news content to demonstrate connections between these professional understandings, journalists’ news practices, and the shaping of news discourse. The research shows how the news form and the imagined audience – while representing wider organisational, cultural, and political influences - shape the production process and structure its news output. By tracing the selection and presentation of story themes, actors, language, and images, the thesis concludes that Al Jazeera news programmes mediate significant issues in the Arab world in two ways: first, issues are shaped according to constructed national perspectives; second, others are reconciled according to a view of a particular Arab region fraught with conflict and disagreement.
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Chapter One

Introduction

This thesis investigates Al Jazeera news form. It examines how journalists’ practices and the news they produce are shaped by their collective views about their news form and visualisation of their audience. The thesis adopts Cottle’s (2000, 2003, 2007) proposal for new perspectives in news production research. The latter challenges earlier news production studies and moves from viewing news objectivity, journalists’ daily routine, and news output as standardized forms. The thesis contextualises the wider political and cultural elements in the newsroom, linking the news discourse to the journalists’ practice, an issue that is absent in many studies (Hamas, 2012; Nötzolda and Piesb, 2010; Krzysiek, 2009; Cooper, 2008; Dajani, 2005; Amin, 2002).

1.1 Contextual background of the study

Al Jazeera has managed to establish itself as one of the most effective, popular satellite channels among Arab viewers (Al-Jaber, 2012). During important events in the Islamic and Arab world, such as the second intifada, the second Gulf War, and the war against the Taliban, Al Jazeera became one of the main news sources for audiences in Arab countries (El-Nawawy and Iskandar, 2002).

The importance of Al Jazeera does not stem merely from its objectivity, which has been criticised in many studies (Miles, 2005; Saker, 2007; Anzawa, 2011). Neither does it come from its popularity, which falters in line with many variables, such as nationality and religious ideology (Al-Jaber, 2012). The importance of Al Jazeera emerges in two ways: first, through its role in the region, and second, through its unique news style. Examining the latter, we see that by imitating a western news presentation style, Al Jazeera presented the news in a new form, such as on-site live or recorded reports of events news analyses, and interviews with people regardless of their cultural or ideological backgrounds (Miles, 2005). Barkho (2006) suggests that Al Jazeera’s success is due to its understanding of the Arab cultural context. In his study, Barkho (2006) compared audience reaction to CNN, BBC, and Al Jazeera and found that, in contrast to the latter, the two western channels had failed to gain Arab
viewers’ trust. So, how does *Al Jazeera* manage to capture most Arab viewers’ hearts and minds? How do *Al Jazeera* journalists perceive their audience needs and understand their viewers’ political and cultural contexts? Answering these and other questions will provide an understanding of *Al Jazeera* and its role in the Arab world.

*Al Jazeera* proved itself to be a powerful force in shaping the media scene in the Arab world. It created considerable doubt among others as to its aims and owners. *Al Jazeera* has been accused of being an Israeli agent, a terrorist organization, and anti-Islamic (Miles, 2005). At times, even *Al Jazeera* supporters turned into critics. For example, the United States supported *Al Jazeera* in its early days but changed its policy after the September 11 events and accused *Al Jazeera* of being anti-American and promoting hate against America (Seib, 2005). On the other hand, many believe that *Al Jazeera* is just a western, specifically American, tool designed to divide the Arabs (Anzawa, 2011). While many Palestinians believe that *Al Jazeera* represents the Arab view in their struggle against Israel, others believe that it works against the Palestinian cause (Miles, 2005).

*Al Jazeera* increased media competition in the Arab region. For example, many believe that the *Al-Arabia* news channel was established to counter the influence of *Al Jazeera*. There is heated competition between the two channels, as illustrated by Al-Waleed bin Talal, owner of *Al-Arabia*, who claims that *Al-Arabia* produces a calm, cool news style (Shapiro, 2005). Needless to say, such a competition produced different news messages, motivated new media practices, and gave *Al Jazeera* a new boost (Barkho, 2010).

To understand these divergent views about *Al Jazeera*, first, it is important to move from viewing political and cultural discourses as outside forces which monopolise media performance. There is a need to investigate how these political and cultural discourses are interconnected, how they are debated, and how they are reproduced in the news production process. Secondly, an in-depth understanding of *Al Jazeera* can be presented by examining how these views of the Arab community are linked or presented from the organisational definition of news programs, their aims, and requirements.
1.2 The research problem

This thesis examines two main concepts: the imagined audience and the news form. It investigates these two concepts in relation to journalists’ practice and their view of their audience’s cultures and political backgrounds. The study also examines how journalists’ practices and views are reflected in the news process and content, shaping Al Jazeera news production. It examines these by observing newsroom activities, studying journalists’ views, and analysing three news programmes, namely, Midday, This Evening, and Alhasad. Studying journalists’ visualisation of their audience will help us to understand the cultural and political contexts and to examine these through the production of news. This thesis explores these issues using a framework based on William’s (1979) definition of the news genre that was further developed by Cottle (1993), Helland (1993), and Matthews (2010). The thesis divides the news form into agenda, mode of address, and news style.

The study evaluates the concept of the gatekeeper, which refers to the position of individual journalists and the way they select the news, published or broadcast. This is presented along with research that emphasizes production as defined by the daily routine and labour hierarchy of news organizations (Gans 2003; Tuchman 1987; Fishman 1980) for its dismissal of journalists’ knowledge, practices, and skills in shaping the news (Cottle, 2007; Harrison, 2000). This theoretical orientation is closer to recent news production studies that explore journalists’ knowledge and practices as part of the production of diverse news forms (Matthews, 2010).

The chosen news organisation is part of the growing media ecology in the Arab. It can be viewed as integral to wider cultural changes taking place in Arab societies. News satellite channels have increased the flow of political and religious discourse, and some claim the heterogeneity of Arab societies (Lynch, 2006). Now, television news reflects different views on religious, cultural, and political issues (Khatib in Sakr, 2007). In their reporting, new satellite channels have broken taboos, discussing ideas that were previously taken for granted or banned. Satellite TV news journalists have found themselves dealing with new issues in new ways and with new audiences. Ongoing political disputes and military conflicts testify to the emergence of this trend. In this respect, the thesis analyses the presentation topics and styles of Al Jazeera,
Chapter One: Introduction

linking them with the newsroom activities. Linking the news discourse with journalists’ practices, this thesis disagrees with early views that suggest that it is the routine that shapes the news output.

1.3 The rationale of the research

Despite the impressive body of research on news production programmes, there remains a need to update research on changing news forms and practices. Most studies dealing with Arab media production focus on the printed press, standardizing the view of the news output. Such studies examine the political and cultural influences in local terms, demonstrating how news is affected by political domination (Elmasry, 2012; Krzysiek, 2009; Cooper, 2008; Amin, 2002), how it is a standardized output for routine activities (Al-Hasani, 2003; Althidi, 2003), or how it expresses journalists’ ideologies (El-Nawawy, and Strong, 2012; Pintak and Ginges, 2009). Such studies fail to address the issue of the diversity of news forms and they way they are affected by organizational factors or journalists’ direct involvement in news operations.

Al Jazeera has been the subject of many studies, yet none has focused on its production that links journalists’ practices with news content. Most studies seem to focus on its history, funding, aims, and role in the region (Seib, 2012; Rushing, 2007; Lynch, 2006; Zayani, 2005; Miles, 2005), its coverage of certain topics in comparison with other media organizations (Tahat and Zing 2012; Samuel-Azran, 2010; Richardson and Barkho, 2009; Barkho 2006; Motut, 2006; Altheidi, 2003), or its representation of Arab, minority or ethnic views on political issues in opposition to western views (Lynch 2006; Rinnawi, 2006; Tatham, 2006; Cherkaoui, 2010; AlKhanbobi, 2011). Some studies have also suggested that Al Jazeera is a political tool controlled by the Qatari government (Anzawa, 2011; Barakat, 2011).

The limitation of these studies is that they refer to the wider context; the details of how these views or factors in the wider context are recalled and negotiated or how they interact with other organizational elements in the newsroom are absent. In other words, they present fragmented views about Al Jazeera. In these cases, many details about the news process may have been missed; such details can teach us more about
the news organizations as a cultural field that overlaps with other fields such as politics, religion and other cultural aspects

*Al Jazeera*’s news form and its journalistic practices have yet to be examined; hence the importance of this thesis. This study argues that *Al Jazeera*’s wider political and cultural contexts need to be investigated, using a multifaceted approach that examines the journalists’ practices, their understanding of their professional values, and their recall of contextual political and cultural knowledge (Cottle, 2002). Hence, this study sheds light on how the current political changes and different Arab viewpoints are being presented in *Al Jazeera* news, at a time when expectations are high concerning democratic projects, Arab cultures, and the reshaping of the Arab identity.

### 1.4 The research questions

The following questions inform the present study:

- How do *Al Jazeera* journalists view their audience and their news form?
- How are journalists’ political and cultural contexts reflected in the news form?
- How do journalists make sense of the relationship between their news form and audience, and how does this understanding shape their practice?
- How does journalists’ collective understanding of news form and audience shape the news agenda and their stances on the stories?

### 1.5 Research design

A combination of methods is used to generate data: field observations in the newsroom to assess the process of editing the news, semi-structured interviews with journalists to assess their views, and quantitative and qualitative content analysis to examine cultural and political patterns in the news coverage. The three methods are used in an integrative approach. This approach has been selected to investigate the theoretical framework and offer the possibility of studying the news form and journalists’ visualisation of their audience in relation to the journalists’ practice.
1.6 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is organized into nine chapters. The Introduction presents the research problem, rationale, and research questions. Chapter Two presents a review of the literature and the different approaches applied in Arab media studies. This is followed by a review of the theoretical framework of this study.

Chapter Three presents the research design and use of observation, the semi-structured interview, and quantitative and qualitative content analysis. The Chapter explains how each method was applied, the type of data gathered, and the challenges and advantages in using these different methods.

Chapter Four provides a background on Al Jazeera newsroom structures and journalists’ daily activities. It describes the process of the news production, hierarchy of the tasks undertaken by each desk, and how these reflect journalists’ understanding of their audiences’ political and cultural contexts. It also investigates journalists’ identification of their news sources and conceptualization of objectivity as a professional value. These inform a discussion of journalists’ activities and use of knowledge and skills.

Chapter Five explains in detail journalists’ presumptions about their audience. The findings highlight how these views influence the structure of the newsroom and journalists’ contact with their audience. It outlines journalists’ tactics in communicating with the audience. The Chapter also examines the journalists’ view of their news programme form and they way it is related to their imagined audience.

Chapter Six examines Al Jazeera’s news agenda. It discusses the findings in Chapter Five by examining the shaping of journalists’ views of their audience and understanding of the three news programme observed for this study. The Chapter provides a multiple analysis that addresses the Al Jazeera news agenda. It uses the findings from the observations, interviews, and quantitative and qualitative content analysis to explore the journalists’ selection and construction of news topics, views of their audience’s needs, and news form.
Chapter Seven investigates how journalists’ views of their audience and understanding of their programmes’ form shape their decisions. It investigates the journalists’ selection of the language and visual elements in addressing their audience. Data from the editorial meetings, interviews, and content analysis are used to understand the complexity of the news presentations. Detailed elements of the different modes of address offered by the three programmes *Midday*, *This Evening*, and *Hasad Alyoum* are illustrated by examples from the news stories and are explained using the findings from the interviews and observation notes.

Chapter Eight examines the news presentations by *Al Jazeera* journalists. It investigates the integration of organizational, political, and cultural elements in news production and presentation style. The Chapter examines the journalists’ practices, such as editorial discussions of news presentations and writing of news stories. It includes an analysis of the journalists’ interviews and a qualitative discourse analysis of news story examples to provide a detailed understanding of the process, motivations, and shapes of the news presentation style.

The Conclusion presents the findings. It provides a discussion of the key concepts of the study, such as the journalists’ practice, objectivity, news form, and imagined audience. The main findings of the research are discussed to identify the possibility offered by the framework of shaping our understanding of the news production process. The Chapter underlines the limitations, contributions, and recommendations of the research.
Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In order to conduct an in-depth investigation of the Al Jazeera news programme, it is necessary to review the most pertinent theories relating to journalism and news production studies. There are three primary approaches to studying news production, namely, political, economic, organisational, and cultural (Schudson, 2003). The challenge facing media researchers is bridging the gap between these approaches in order to present a fuller picture of news production (Cottle, 2003; 2007). In this thesis, through an examination of news production in relation to journalists’ visualisation of their audience and the news form, a wider view will be provided of Al Jazeera to explain the different political and cultural factors that shape its news. Al Jazeera news form is shaped by organisational discourses, that in turn reflect its relationship to political and economic factors. The latter understanding provides a challenge to political economic studies that argue that production studies ignore the wider political and economic pressures at play. When studied at the level of production, these ideas of news forms shape the news environment that surrounds journalists’ work. This challenges production studies that argue that organisational routines and roles shape homogeneous news.

This Chapter discusses Arab media production studies. Particular emphasis will be given to the studies that have already investigated Al Jazeera. These studies will be evaluated and their relevance to this thesis, followed by an examination of the literature of the key concepts used to define the objective and the rationale for using them. Arab journalism studies can be divided into three categories: (i) those that focus on political and economic factors, (ii) those that attempt to explain Arab news production within its wider cultural content and, finally, (iii) those that favour the social organization approach. These will now be reviewed.
2.2 Political and economic approach

The study of political economy is important in the context of Arab journalism because until recently most media organisations were owned and controlled by the state. The root of political economy in the study of mass communication dates back to Karl Marx’s discussion of ideology (Williams, 2003). The political and economic approach focuses on the wider picture, studying the effect that politics and economy have on media production. This approach is usually associated with economic change and political movements and “looks specifically at how ownership, support mechanisms (e.g. advertising and government policies) influence media behaviour and content” (McChesney, 2000, p.110). This perspective perceives media producers as gatekeepers who choose to publish the news that meets the interests of their owners.

Political and economic studies argue that the ruling class in society exerts its dominance by using media. Bagdikian (2004) believes that American media is dominated by a few large companies that decide the kind of information that people should receive. Schudson (1978) argues that American media is owned by parties focused on profit generation. This theory holds that news professionals depend on official government sources to collect their news that lends authenticity to stories and results in news that is treated as more newsworthy than that from other sources. In this way, news is based on the information source and therefore reflects their interests. Murdock and Golding (2005) claim that recent political economic approaches have moved to a more critical view of the industrial and political forces that shape news as a cultural good. It focuses, they argue, on “the interplay between the symbolic and economic dimensions of public communications” (p. 60).

The political and economic approach has been adopted by many Arab media scholars. Many of their studies focus on the influence the dominant political class exerts on the news, such as through the relationship between the state and the media. Ayish (2002) introduces three patterns of political communication in Arab television: first, traditional government-controlled, where news reflects government policy and is presented without interviews or outside reports; second, reformist government-controlled, that has emerged from government policy toward journalism practice and attracts professional journalists through the use of new commercial strategies, such as
advertisement and sponsorship; and third, liberal commercial, adopted by Al Jazeera. The latter approach, Ayish argues, is based on professional standards more than political considerations and is distinguished by its western style presentations. Ayish (2002) points out that government controlled media uses traditional presentations style while the other two patterns follow a western news format in the use of filed reports, live interviews, rich visuals and graphic presentations, sensationalism, and fast rhythm news. Informed by the analysis of a five-day sample of newscasts presented in the three communication patterns, he suggests that even when journalists are free from political control, they are still prone to sensationalism and national discourse will dominate the news coverage. The focus Ayish places on political patterns of news organization and agenda results in insufficient explanation of news formats. He offers no account of the latter as expressive of cultural symbols, insight into style, presentation of information, language used, or agenda in different types of programmes. He focuses only on the impact of the dominant political ideology on the news format. Other studies show that output can be shaped by other factors, such as technology, organizational structures, and professional ideology (Altheide, 1987).

Pan-Arab media, such as ADSC, Al Jazeera, LBC, and MBC shares the same features and style of western approach (Ayish, 2001). Ayish attributes this to the fact that many of the staff of these corporations were trained in the West. He suggests that pan-Arab media has adopted a conversational nature presentation; however, he fails to explain its meaning or how it relates to the programmes he analysed. The new western style of reporting by mixing moving and still images with dramatized Arabic language audiovisual effects is increasingly being applied to enforce a more Arab-centric agenda (Rinnawi, 2012). While the western format and style of programming have been imitated by Arab media Rugh (2007) claims that this is limited to the emergence of political discussion programmes in Al Jazeera and other entertainment shows, such as reality television. These programmes still fit the political and social norm (Rugh, 2007; Kraidy, 2002; 2006). Matar (2007) suggests that it is this new western format adopted by Al Jazeera and other Arab channels that enable them to attract the audience and then present a meaningful discourse that challenges political and cultural issues. Boyd-Barrett and Xie (2008) argue that Al Jazeera has adopted the BBC presentation format, while its content is not purely free from national and international pressures.
Rugh (2007) believes that the media is excessively influenced by national political systems. He suggests that print media can be divided into three typologies: mobilization, loyalist, and diverse. He suggests that political change has resulted in Arab media mobilization to evolve from three phases, colonial, factional, and non-partisan mobilization to include a fourth: transitional. The similarity between media production in different Arab countries may be attributed to the similarity in their political systems. For example, although competition between Arabic satellite channels has resulted in more open media production, channels like Al Jazeera, Al Arabia and Abu Dhabi are still subject to a measure of governmental control. This may be so because many media bodies still rely on owners who are close to the government (Sakr, 2007). Al Jazeera, for example, depends greatly on the ruling family in Qatar, making it difficult to levy criticism against that government.

Other studies have examined the way political factors are routinized in the newsroom (Murdock and Golding, 2005). Tarabay (1994) studied four Arab newspapers, *Ash-Sharq Al-Awsat* and *Al-Hyatt* in London, *As-Safir* and *An-Nahar* in Lebanon, in order to examine the external and internal factors that affect Arab press. The study shows that there are three patterns of ownership in Arab press: editor-owner, semi-organization, and government-owner. Tarabay notes the impact of religious groups on the press and cites the examples of two families that instil religious beliefs in the production of their news products: *An-Nahar*, owned by the Tweinis, a Greek Orthodox family in Lebanon, and *As-Safir*, owned by the Salmans, a Shiite family.

A new Islamic ideology is spreading among news audiences, demonstrating that different religious groups have managed to infiltrate media institutions. Studies have primarily addressed the political conflicts in the Arab world, while other cultural aspects and how they are debated and contextualised in news organisations have not been given enough attention. Religious controversy in the Arab world is an important part of the political conflict, such as the Arab-Israeli conflict, war in Iraq, and Iran and its relationship with political events in the region. In essence, religion is a variable that shapes Arab society and the views of Arab journalists; however, the studies reviewed for this thesis show that they have failed to explain how journalists see their role or interact with their sources. Investigations have focused on routine, ideological
aspects, and departmental relations rather than on journalistic practice or editorial discussions.

Other political economy studies have conducted discourse analysis, suggesting that Arab news organisations are controlled by governments, despite evolving media regulations and media variety (Hamas, 2012; Krzysiek, 2009). Local media in the Arab region fails to fill the gap or contribute to the democratization of their communities. The localisation of media topics in broadcasting media often means addressing economic and social themes. According to Nötzolda and Piesb (2010), it is used to counter the occasional influence of the pan-Arab media’s potentially negative effect on the stability of the region. Some studies have suggested that even in diverse media environments like Lebanon this variation is often used by political parties (Dajani, 2006; Nötzolda and Piesb, 2010). Media discourse reflects the foreign policy and political agenda of the hosting country, as can be seen in the comparison between Al Arabia and Al Jazeera in covering the issue of state influence in Arab uprisings (Barakat, 2011). Al Jazeera serves Qatar’s political agenda and acts as a political tool that serves Qatar’s alliance with the West (Anzawa, 2011). Al Jazeera’s adoption of a discourse that criticises America and Israel is appealing for Arabs. That helps Qatar to divert attention from its heavy reliance on American forces and strong ties with Israel.

Recent research shows that strict government control is being challenged by the new media and the rise of citizen journalism (Hamdy, 2009; Khamis, 2011). The increasing number of civic society activities and citizens’ greater access to expression through different media outlets are important factors in this change (Ayish, 2010). For instance, television in Lebanon is now following different political ideologies and a diverse agenda (Khatib, 2007). Hafez (2011) suggests that Arab media organisations can be listed under Hallin and Mancini’s model of State Interventionism, Political Parallelism, Media Industries, and Markets and Professionalization, suggesting that Arab media productions are no longer homogenised but driven by politics and market forces.

media by criticising the lack of democracy in the Arab world. He believes that Al Jazeera and other new-trend news channels changed the relationship between politicians/governments and media organizations in the Arab region. Politicians have become keener to respond to questioning and explaining their policies in recognition of the power of the media (Lynch, 2006). If true, this is a break in the old taboo in Arab journalism of challenging the dominant political discourse (El-Nawawy and Iskandar, 2002). Perhaps this explains why Al Jazeera is a more respected channel than Al Arabia that is controlled by the Saudi government (Hammond, 2007). While covering the Egyptian uprising, Al Jazeera showed more empathy towards the demonstrators. The channel also gave its audience a more active role through phone calls or over the net (Rinnawi, 2012). Al Jazeera enjoys greater credibility among its viewers by allowing the airing of the Arab perspective on issues thus counter-balancing western views (Lynch, 2006; El-Nawawy and Iskandar, 2002).

These studies provide important insights into the complicated relationship between political groups and the media in the Arab world. Media production cannot be studied without considering political and economic factors, but this approach ignores cultural activities in society and journalists’ norms and beliefs (McChesney, 2000). Political economy studies in the Arab context focus primarily on the relationship between media and state, with only a few studies attempting to understand the complex relationship between the political ideologies and religious, ethical, or class issues. The application of the institutionalised critical political economy approach proposed by Murdock and Golding (2005) restricts the discussion to political influence views, despite the importance of other factors. The political economy approach cannot offer effective explanations to cultural aspects; it even distinguishes itself precisely from the cultural approach suggesting that the two have different interests (Murdock and Golding, 2005). These studies investigate news discourse but do not provide a clear examination of the styles of different news programmes or how they are constructed in the newsroom. The processes between production and ideology are missing (Schudson, 2005). Institutionalised political economy studies are led by the market, hence they tend to dismiss journalists’ practice and the different stages of news production.
2.3 Cultural approach

Tribal identity and religion are very important in the Arab world, hence discussions of Arab media must take into consideration cultural issues as well. The cultural approach studies the macro level influence on media production and looks at the way in which media content and professional routine in media organisations are shaped by the broad cultural symbol system (Robinson, 2008). Hall’s (1980) encoding and decoding model is an important contribution to this approach. It offers insight into the various cultural factors that inform journalistic practices when encoding preferred readings into news texts. When discussing this process in terms of news photography, Hall argues that deep cultural structures inform the sense that journalists have of newsworthiness, offering an understanding that moves beyond studying the moment of taking the news photograph.

Tarabay (1994) acknowledges that the cultural context influences news production and journalistic practices; therefore, the same news organisations may have different practices when based in different cultural realms. Al-Hasani (2003) compared Omani Arabic and English language newspapers and found that journalists from different nationalities respect Islamic principles and Arab traditions. Despite this, there seems to be confusion over what can be considered as a cultural reflection as opposed to journalistic roles and/or editors’ strictures. His study fails to take into consideration the richness of the Omani society and instead focuses on societal homogeneity.

Other researchers have looked at specific cultural aspects, such as feminist studies. Matar (2007) investigated discussion programmes that targeted women and found that as the topics were suggested by viewers the presentations reflected the roles and concerns of women. She also argues that the views that the production teams have of their audience and their understanding of feminist subjects influence the overall content and presentation of programmes. While Matar’s (2007) study took the institution perspective into account, it did not provide a clear sense of how journalists visualised their programme characters, audiences, and how these visualisations informed the selection, writing, and presentation processes. Al-Mahadin (2011) suggests that feminine representation is shaped by the ideological, cultural, and politically conflicted context between the East and the West. A content analysis study
by Al-Malki, Kaufer, and Ishizaki (2012) concludes that Arab women are construed as active, liberal sources. Skalli (2011) suggests that portraying women in the media as active politicians is not enough to suggest gender equality in society. He argues that media acts as a gatekeeper that is holding back change in women’s position.

Mellor (2008) examined the views that Arab journalists have towards their profession and on how they build their own norms and protect their professional identity. The study shows how journalists manage “to negotiate their autonomy albeit partially from the political regimes by redefining their role in society… as eyewitness and historian” (p. 318). These insights assume that journalists are restrained by political pressure and censorship, and that their space for free expression is in the books they published, narrating stories and testimonies from their working lives. Mellor (2012) suggests that these accounts challenge the prevailing political discourse and play a cultural role in protecting the collective Arab memory. Her argument is based on publications outside the newsroom as she analysed a different material than the news reports and did not provide a discussion of how these beliefs affected the news production process.

Despite the relative dearth of in-depth cultural studies, the cultural approach provides some insights into the ways in which cultural factors shape media production in the Arab world. They do not provide a clear explanation of how these factors actually interact in the complex relationships that take place in the process of news production.

### 2.4 Organizational approach

The organizational approach provides an intensive study of media institutions and news producers, examines the conditions under which news is produced and decisions are made, and studies the effect of technology on journalists’ daily work (Cottle, 2003; Altemppen, 2008).

Interest in journalistic organizations, processes, and producers as subjects of study did not start until the late 1930s when journalism studies moved from examining the presentation of historical descriptions of newspapers to the interaction between news organizations and societal activities (Weaver and Loffelholz, 2008). White’s study of
gatekeepers in 1950 can be considered as one of the most significant of these early studies. White questioned what had for a long time been taken for granted: how and why journalists produce the news the way they do. He applied the gatekeeper concept to study editors’ decisions behind publishing or rejecting news articles, pointing out that news could be selected or refused for different reasons, but usually because of editor’s political ideology. His research was followed in 1955 by Breed’s study, “Social Control in the Newsroom”, that highlighted the influence of organizational factors, such as the daily routine on shaping the news.

The idea of news organisations as institutions and journalists as collective members came later with studies into the daily routine of journalists. Examinations were also conducted into the structure of news organisations, the hierarchy of the labour in the newsroom and how external events were routinized according to the organisations’ policy and bureaucratic function (Tunstall, 1971; Epstein, 1973). Some investigated the interaction between journalists and their political activities (Schlesinger, 1978; Schudson, 1978), while others studied innovation in news production (Ryfe, 2009; Lowrey, 2011). Research was also done on journalists’ role in checking news sent by the audience against the news organisations’ core values (Harrison, 2010). Some recent studies explored journalists’ activities in news websites (Domingo et al., 2008; Holloway, 2011) and the role of technologies in news productions (Robinson, 2011; Itai and McCreery, 2012).

Schudson (2005) suggests that news organisational studies can be used to inform the discussion of the ways in which the wider political and cultural contexts can influence journalists’ activities. These early studies were criticised for addressing news production as homogenised products that are mostly constructed in the same way as official sources. Cottle (2003) argues that organisations studies should investigate the creative practice of journalists and variation in news production forms. In studies on Arab media, the trend is to move away from grouping Arab media as a homogenous production monopolised by political control and focus on the diversity of media organisations. Such studies tend to focus on the margin of freedom given to each organisation and fail to explain the variation in production or the way in which journalists integrate with the wider Arab cultures. Often Arab news organisation studies focus on the analysis of journalistic ideologies and structures of news
organisations rather than journalists’ activities and their engagement in the production of the news.

Mellor (2008) believes that Arab news studies tend to favour the gatekeeper theory. She presents a critical reading of several studies that follow the social organisational approach. The four studies that Mellor discusses used quantitative survey to collect data and provide a demographic profile of journalists. The data shows that many journalists are affected by the political ideology of their governments and often act as gatekeepers who control publication of the news (Mellor, 2008).

Valeriani (2010) discusses the work environment and strategies that journalists employ in dealing with competition. He compares journalists in the pan-Arab media and local news organisations. He notes that the way in which they evaluate each other and their national identity presents itself in their daily work. His study did not assess how these views are reflected in the news agenda and presentation. El-Nawawy and Strong (2012) found that Al Arabia journalists correlated with their feeling of editorial freedom they enjoy.

To study Arab journalists’ characteristics and how they see themselves in comparison with western journalists, Pintak and Ginges (2009) conducted a survey of journalists in both television and press in many Arab countries. Their study shows that Arab journalists are very critical of their work and have a much more positive view of Arab media organizations than their American counterparts. Although Arab journalists have a high respect for western professionalism, they see themselves as more objective in covering certain subjects, such as 9/11. The study showed that many Arab journalists claim that western journalists are moving backward in a professional sense, having nothing to teach Arab journalists who are looking forward. Pintak and Ginges (2009) highlight the major challenges that Arab journalists face: freedom, ethics, and business pressures. The study did not show how these beliefs affect news production or Arab journalistic practice.

The attitude of Arab journalists has changed. They see themselves as representatives of a Muslim pan-Arab culture rather than their own national state. They are interested in addressing issues like poverty, human rights, and education in the Arab world.
(Pintak and Ginges, 2009). This shows how journalists are proud of their Arab identity, and that the latter is the motivating force behind their covering of certain issues in specific ways.

While these studies investigated journalists and their ideology, others looked at journalists as a collective group (Al-Hasani, 2003; Tarabay, 1994). Al-Theidi (2003) investigated the role of Al Jazeera in Arab society. He looked at its objectivity and the way it changed the flow of information. The study described the hierarchy of Al Jazeera’s staff, the process of making newsworthy decisions, and the news production machines. It did not explain what shapes the production of news, what affects decisions, or the background to these decisions. Zayani and Sahraoui (2007) analysed Al Jazeera’s institution function as a business model and concluded that it is an institution with process structure that allows open access to resources and flexible relationships between its workers unlike other media organisations.

The majority of the studies above have failed to explain the connection between journalists’ norms and the way in which their collective practices interact with the wider contexts. While some studies have referred to the national and cultural perspectives of journalists’ activities (Al-Hasani, 2003; Zayani and Sahraoui, 2007), their instigations did not analyse or link these factors with the writing of the news itself. Although Arab studies use the gatekeeping theory that is widely used in western research into the link between politics and journalism (Signer, 2008), this theory needs to be reworked to deal with the global era of news, specifically with how journalism is responding increasingly to a variety of news sources. The findings of these studies have failed to explain the connection between the news and the social and political contexts. To address this lack, Cottle (2002) and Schudson (2005) call for a focus on practice rather than routine and bureaucratic requirements. The present research aims to fill gap by focusing on news form for programme production and journalists’ practice.

2.5 Analysis of news production and journalistic practice: A new approach

While some of the above studies view the social background of journalists and the political monopolization of news production as important factors, they often seem to
fail to study the cultural motivation behind the behaviour of journalists or the production of news material. There is a missing link between producers, news production, and other influences. The study of the relationship between media and religious ideologies in society seems to be neglected (Mellor, 2008). Nowadays, audiences are much more likely to be an active part of the news production process rather than just be receivers. The boundaries between sources, journalists, and audiences in modern journalism have become blurred (Signer, 2008). The study of news formats needs greater attention. Studies that have addressed the issue of format have either been quantitative (Ayish, 2001; 2002), neglecting language or visual elements or qualitative, neglecting the newsroom process and journalist practices.

In the global context of journalism research, there are few studies that link news output with production context (Loffelholz and Weaver, 2008). Cottle (2003) points out that organization studies rarely investigate the link between journalists’ practice and different types of news forms. Harrison (2000) believes that each organization has a different structure that affects the practice and results of their journalists in different forms of output. While journalists share a common culture to some extent, Harrison claims that they differ in their skills, ideologies, and ultimately practice, an area overlooked by certain studies.

The diversity of news form has been investigated in discourse analysis studies, with Corner (1995) proposing that despite sharing similar features with other kinds of television production, such as drama, news programmes have their own character, textual features, and visual features. Vliegenthart and Van Zoonen (2011) have called for sociology to be used in framing analysis studies, arguing that early organisation studies that investigated news production process and journalists’ activities focused on framing rather than on pure textual and visual framing analysis.

Cottle (2003) believes that instead of textual analysis a more in-depth understanding of journalism and its heterogeneity may be achieved through the analysis of journalistic practice. He argues that such an approach will result in a more productive analysis of practice and bridge the gap between the three theoretical approaches of news production. Cottle (2003) suggests that researching the form will demonstrate how political and cultural context is integrated into the daily practice of journalists,
supporting the work of studies that emphasize the role of journalists as actors shaping a variety of news forms for a number of different reasons (c.f. by Bell, 1991; Matthews, 2003). Matthews (2010) develops this line of thought and states that studying the different news forms as visualised by news workers provides a clear insight into their news practices. Journalists, he argues, share the same idea about their imagined audiences and news form. For Cottle (2007),

*Journalists do what they do for the most part knowingly and purposefully, that is not to say they are on an ‘ideological mission’ or, in idealist terms, that they somehow escape the structures in which they work. But it is to say that they are more consciously, knowingly and purposefully productive of news texts and output than they have been theoretically given credit for in the past*”. (p. 10)

The current research attempts to fill a gap in Arab news studies. It adopts the news form as one of the key conceptual frameworks. It also addresses the imagined audience as a second component in the analysis framework and investigates how these key concepts are shaped and inform journalists practice. Matthews (2010) constructed a framework based on these two key concepts, suggesting that the understanding that journalists have of their audience shapes the news agenda and its presentation. His framework was used in studying specialised news programmes that targeted a specific audience. The following sections will explain the framework and the rationale in using these two key concepts.

### 2.6 Key concepts of the research

This research seeks to critically investigate the production of Al Jazeera news. A more comprehensive view of Al Jazeera can be achieved through the examination of news activities and output and the way they are shaped by journalists’ visualisations of their audience and their collective understanding of the news programme they produce. This approach will allow us to examine journalists’ employment of cultural and political elements in the wider context.

This section examines the concept of news form and determines its applicability to the study. It focuses on the understanding journalists have of their news form and of Al Jazeera’s imagined audience. These two concepts were originally forwarded by Cottle (2002) and constructed as a theoretical framework by Matthews (2010). The resultant
conceptual structure will be employed to investigate Al Jazeera production and how this is shaped by the visualisations that journalists have of their targeted audience. First, a defence will be provided for the idea of form, tracking the use of this concept in the literature. Second, it will examine each element in the news form (agenda, mode of address, style), defining them and presenting a literature review. Finally, an examination will be provided of the imagined audience, as a second key concept in this study.

2.6.1 Journalistic practice

In reviewing the idea of encoding and decoding in the communication process, Hall (1980) explains that the symbolic meaning of the event takes a certain form in the moment of production. This form is then articulated through the process and practice of the institutional context, meaning professional skills and ideologies, social organisational relation of the labour, and technical applications. These processes occur with the broadcasters’ idea and assumption about their organisations, audience, the wider socio-cultural and political context, sources, and the programme they produce. Hall (1980) writes, “the institution – societal relations of production must pass under the discursive rules of language for its product to be realized” (p.109). He focuses on the relation between the assumptions that journalists make about their audience and the programmes they produce. Hall presents an early view of the integration between the institutions, culture, and politics factors - macro and micro - in the moment of the production. This integration is the core of journalistic performance and has been largely absent in the reviewed studies. The arguments put forward by Hall (1980) adhere to the linear view of the production communication processes. He believes that professional practices are standardised and rely on dominant political sources that lead to a more homogenised production.

In contrast, Cottle (2002) criticizes the tendency towards standardised news output in early media production studies. He argues that this focus on the routine has resulted in standardized views about the media output as being reliant on official sources. He believes that viewing objectivity as standardized shared values neglects the role of journalists as actors who are creatively involved in the production process. Cottle refers to Foucault’s views of power and practice to argue that power is not related to
the state or imposed from outside the institutions. For him, institutional practices are sets of administrative and discursive actions, processes, and relations that enable organisations to form the “truth”. This way, journalists are seen as human actors who are involved in the production rather than being controlled by outside forces.

We can identify different elements employed in the professional practice, knowledge, experience, and expectations of journalists, such as their organisational policy and culture, audience, and the news they produce (Cottle, 2002). Cottle suggests that professional practices differ as media organisations vary in their aims and culture, and these changes ultimately lead journalists to produce different forms of output. This variety in terms of news form occurs across cultures. He suggests that the output of the news organisations and the context of the production are linked. According to Harrison (2000), we can add these suggested elements of practice to journalists’ creative skills, something that is often dismissed in media studies.

The framework proposed by this research is informed by the ideas put forward by Hall (1980), who describes the way that institutional and wider political and cultural contexts are composed in the moment of news production. The latter refers to journalists’ employment of their professional skills and experience, understanding of their news culture, views of their targeted audience, and the news programmes they produce. As this practice is defined by institutional, communicative, and cultural factors, they are also a social phenomenon in the wider context; therefore, they are operated with particular political norms and cultural values. To the linguistic tools provided by each language (Hall, 1980), cultural values include the more in-depth influence of other cultural aspects, such as religion and literature.

2.6.2 News forms

In contrast with some Arab news studies that show news as standardised, homogenised productions whether because they follow the same routine structure or because they are influenced by dominated political forces (Hamas, 2012; Krzysiek, 2009). This research assumes that journalism is characterised by diversity and that different news organisations produce different news forms (Mellor, 2007; Matar, 2007). It argues that diversity in news programmes is a natural consequence of the
differentiation in the needs of audiences and different newsroom cultures (Cottle and Matthews, 2011).

The term ‘form’ has been used to describe the examination of the style of news production and the aesthetic element in news structure. In this context, the form of the news may have the most significant impact on how it is received (Schudson, 1995; Barnhurst and Steele, 1997). Baym (2004) argues that the form of the news may shape the way in that journalists interact with the world and changes in form, suggesting more complex changes in the wider context of news production. Other studies have agreed that examining form might be a way to explain important elements in journalistic practice and the role of media in society (Barnhurst and Nerone, 2001). These researchers argue that there are several complex levels in the news form: the material, represented, and aesthetic. In the case of television, it is the combination of these forms, as the “assemblage of representational techniques and narrative conventions make the television news story recognizable” (Baym, 2004, p.4).

The term ‘form’ is often referred to as ‘genre’ in the literature. Although Helland (1993) used the term ‘genre’ instead of ‘form’, he studied selected news stories and different modes of news presentation. Helland (1993) used this approach to understand the differences and similarities in the news production of two news organisations. In the context of ‘genre’ in news production studies, Harrison (2000) distinguishes between ‘main’ and ‘sub’ news genres. Her model distinguishes between the ‘pure’ news programmes that comprise the main genre and others that are sub-genres, noting that they share some common features. These programmes have their own character, textual features, and visual features. Their precise form changes according to the schedule position of the programme in the channel production and the type of expected audience (Corner, 1995). Cottle (2007) refers to form in terms of different types of news programmes production.

Matthews (2010) offers a more comprehensive definition. Borrowing categories for the news elements (stance, mode of formal composition and appropriate subject matter) from Williams (1979), Matthews divides the news form into three aspects: first, news agenda (subject matter) that explains the news’ selected themes; second, news stance that refers to the way that the addressers (news presenters) speak to the
audience (stance); and third, the news style (mode of formal composition) that includes the news’ presentational appearance. This definition is suitable for understanding news production forms because it takes into consideration and links the news process and its manufacturing stages. It introduces news as a product that has aesthetic and content levels, while the tendency in news production has been to fragment these elements.

From referring to news as it discussed above, the examination of form is therefore a legitimate approach to understanding the complexity and influences upon Arab media, AlJazeera in particular. As studies into the news production, discussed earlier in this chapter, did not address these elements of form as connected initiates processed through journalists’ activities in the newsroom. Secondly from the discussion above we can see how the idea of form can elevate the news organisation culture, and shows journalists understanding of the organisation’s requirements (Cottle, 2002) on one hand and indicate the influence of wider political and cultural context on another hand. The understanding the form here means journalists knowledge of the programmes requirement, the organisational requirements, and how the news outputs is linked to other political and cultural elements. Additionally it includes stylistic assembling and on a deeper levels the news agenda and its massages as the following discussion shows.

The concept of form in this study consists of the: news mode of address, news style, and subject matter, including the news topics or themes (Helland, 1993), and the news agenda (Matthews, 2010). As previous studies have looked at this issue through the examination of external and organisation factors, (or as a matter of framing which made its suggestion on the reading of content analysis (Matthews and Cottle, 2011), this study will approach the news form through the journalists’ selection of their news stories and the structure of its main themes. AIn addition, an attempt will be made to link these practices and the understanding that journalists have of their audiences’ characters and needs (see chapters 6, 7 and 8)

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factors, this study will approach the news form through journalists’ selection of their news stories and themes. An attempt will be made to link these practices and the understanding that journalists have of their audiences’ characters and needs.

In the next two sections, each element of the news form will be examined and reviewed in detail.

2.6.2.1 News agenda

This section will explain the construction of the concept of ‘agenda’, look at classical forms, and the degree to which these are appropriate in terms of the study of Arab media. In their seminal study Galtung and Ruge (1965) introduced relevance, timeliness, simplification, predictability, unexpectedness, continuity, composition, elite people, elite nations, negativity, frequency, amplitude, clarity, meaningfulness, predictability, continuum, and composition. These values have been widely reviewed (e.g. Brighton and Foy, 2007; Hartley, 1982). In the American context, Gans (2004) suggests that news values are supported by ethnocentrism, altruistic democracy, responsible capitalism, individualism, modernism, culture, audience, ideology, journalistic practice, and organisational requirements. He underlines the following news criteria: source consideration, importance, interest, medium consideration (picture, formats), novelty, story quality, balance, and competition. McGregor (2002) suggests that other values should also be considered, such as virulence, emotion, conflict, and ‘celebrification’ of the journalist. Other news values include: celebrity, bad news, good news, power elite, entertainment, surprise, magnitude, relevance, follow-up, and newspaper agenda (Harcup and O’Neill, 2001).

Althedi (2003) suggests that Al Jazeera journalists select news according to proximity, impact, and exclusivity. He adds that journalists prioritise political and economic issues and have little interest in human, scientific, and cultural news stories. Ayish (2001) suggests that political news must be given top priority in recognition of the interests of the Arab audience. His findings were based on quantitative discourse analysis and did not assess how journalists explain their selections. Al-Nawawi and Iskander (2004) argue that news discourse is framed to appeal to the social and political values of its target audience. They define contextual objectivity as the
political and cultural spheres that shape the way news stories are framed. They do not explain story selection or the way journalists’ decisions are reflected in their production. These studies looked at the news agenda as detached from news presentation.

Brighton and Foy (2007) believe that news values should be assessed in relation to change in media genres and news format. Matthews (2010) argues that the newsworthiness of topics changes over time. He believes that news values cannot be studied simply by identifying selected news topics because these criteria do not provide information about the construction of the story. Heltry (1983) and Clayman and Reisner (1998) suggest that news values are just one part of the overall news selection and construction process, so it is important to investigate the approach and structure chosen for news stories.

The next section will discuss news presentation.

### 2.6.2.2 News presentation

The second element in the news form is the ‘stance’ or mode of address. Studies suggest that texts possess a relationship between the text sender and the text receiver (Ekstrom, 2000; Kress and Leeuwen, 2006). Mode of address has been described as the relationship between the producers of the message and their audience (Helland, 1993; Chandler, 2002).

In television news, the presenter “is the mediator between the domestic world of the viewers and the public world of the events” (Bignell, 2002, p. 121). Through the construction of the language and other aesthetic elements in the news discourses, the mode of address invites viewers to recognise the news subject in a deliberated and specific view (Tolson, 1996). Kress and Leeuwen (2006) believe that there are shared culture codes between the news producer and the wider viewers. It is not just the presentation of the language and the visual elements the schedule also plays a significant role in fulfilling the requirements of the audience. News schedulers and journalists seem to perceive evening to be the time for family gatherings and consequently more appropriate for softer local news and magazine programmes (Ellis,
Bignell (2002) suggests that television codes are a combination of different genres that have been arranged and constructed to appeal to viewers. He adds that news headline forms can show different modes of address in different programmes.

In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the form of news programmes, the literature of news content studies are discussed here. This is essential in the context of this study, as studies of news content generalise their analysis and do not seem to refer to the relation between the mode of address and the audience image and how it differ in the varied news form. Effectively, the mode of address changes its character according to the programme’s form (Chandler, 2002; Tolson, 1996). Many of these studies achieve their results through application of discourse analysis, which dismisses the actual construction of the mode of address in the newsrooms or the explanations of journalists in these constructions. Therefore, this section will conduct a critical review of discourse studies, in order to create a cohesive conceptual understanding of news programmes that can then be used to inform discussions of the production domain, alongside the examination of the role of journalists in media production.

Media discourse has a unique communication structure that has been widely successful in addressing the mass audience as individuals. The believability of news being conveyed by the same presenters, using a direct camera look, and a real time relationship leads to the creation of an everyday routine that establishes a connection between individuals and news presenters (Scannell, 2000). This positioning of the addressee can take a subjective or an objective approach (Kress and Leeuwen, 2006). Essentially, this means that modes of address change according to the context.

Studies that describe studio and language presentation mood tend to link presentational themes to the character of the formal news presentation, or examine the change in the mode of address in terms of how it serves the objectivity of the news presented, or how it is influenced by the commercialisation of the news (Chandler, 2002; Tolson, 1996). Even though these two insights are important, it is only appropriate to point out that social, organisational, and cultural aspects are absent from such analyses.
Studies employing content-based analysis suggest that the direct, formal mode of address is notable in news presentation as most news presenters wear formal clothes and speak in formal language (Helland, 1993). The serious presentation style constitutes an authoritative mode of address (Bignell, 2002) that attracts the audience and increases their involvement (Tolson, 1996). The direct mode of address in magazines, for example, encourages readers to identify themselves as individuals and as having a specific image. Bignell (2002) believes, “despite the problems for real people in society, the mythic gender identities signified in magazines provide imaginary satisfaction for men and women” (p. 70). This body of research suggests that generally news programmes address their audience in an educational, authoritative tone (Helland, 1993). The latter can also be signified in the particular design of title sequences, the use of loud, dramatic music (Corner, 1995) and even the brand image of created programmes (Helland, 1993; Bignell, 2000).

Fisk (1987) suggests that an intimate relation will more commonly be established with viewers when they share the same views as the presenters. This is an illusion, as the news presenter enjoys more power in this context than the audience (ibid). Bainbridge and Bestwick (2010) argue that such an intimate relation is achieved through marketed and celebrity newsreaders or familiar presenters who the viewer feels they have a close relationship with.

Other studies have described the subjectivity in the personalised mode of address used by most news programmes. Analysis has shown that close-up shots lead to a more personal relationship (Corner, 1995). In a context where media discourse is monopolised by government control, Sim (2006) found that the personalised presentation of hard news topics is routinely constructed in order to de-politicize the news issues and place emphasis on the government’s claim, even when citizens are allowed to contribute to the news production. Smith and Higgins (2012) argue that the personalised mode of address is a professional response to the demands of the audience and as such attracts them, increases empathy, and gives viewers a sense of immediacy. Rentschler (2004) writes, “to commemorate usually means ‘to feel’ in common with others for the purpose of remembering a past event, but it can also be the means through which political actions are mobilized under the cover of ‘remembering’” (p. 299).
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Tait (2011) examined the issue of monopolising and influencing the personalised approach. Other studies have reviewed the personalised mode of address with less criticism, highlighting the possibility of using this approach to ensure greater public engagement and understanding of news content. A personalised mode of address has been shown to engage the audience as active citizens rather than merely as media consumers. Örnebring (2008) argues that giving access to ordinary people can serve the organisation’s political agenda. This direct mode of address and the invitation of the audience to participate could still open a potential way to democracy.

These studies standardized the mode of address as shared between all news programme forms. In contrast, the current study argues that news forms vary in their mode of address. Ekstrem (2000) suggests that there are three types of communication modes: first, the mode where journalists presume that the interest of their audience lies in specific information, and so they are addressed as information seekers and the story telling is exciting; second, the dramatic mode, where the audience are listeners and are encouraged to become emotionally involved; third, the attraction mode, which covers extraordinary and shocking stories where the audience are perceived as spectators. He suggests that these deliberated modes influence the shape of the news content, its aesthetic elements, programme format, and the making of the news stories. Ekstrom’s argument, however, is not supported with sufficient evidence.

None of studies above looked at the influence of journalists’ understanding of their news form or the way in which their perception of their audience might affect the selection of the news modes of address. In his study of BBC children’s news Matthews (2010) offers a possible explanation for this link. This research applies the same framework to study Al Jazeera’s mode of address. In doing so, it seeks to illustrate how such links can be present or absent in the construction of news that is aimed at a wider audience. It is also evident, in light of the literature review, that this study fills a notable gap in news production studies. With a few exceptions (e.g. Darwish, 2009), studies have failed to address Al Jazeera’s mode of address and the understanding journalists have of their audience. Barakho (2010) shows that an understanding of the wider culture shapes Al Jazeera’s presentation style and that it differs from CNN’s and BBC’s coverage of the same Arabic topics. His study focused
on discourse analysis and was informed by interviews with higher management thereby ignoring journalists’ actual practice.

The next section will discuss news style.

2.6.2.3 News style

The final element in the news form to be discussed is the mode of formal compression, otherwise known as ‘codes’ in semiotic studies. This will be examined in relation to the aesthetic elements in the news presentation (Helland, 1993; Matthews, 2010). Through a critical examination of this element within the context of discourse studies, this section provides an informed, meaningful context for a later examination of programme construction.

Corner (1995) demonstrates that the television news form consists of ‘outside’ and ‘in studio presentation’ modes. Under these general types, there are three categories: narrative, visualisation, and interviews. He suggests that news styles have the flexibility to change and adapt to different shapes. In the current study, the news presentation styles include language, visuals, sound, and talk (Corner, 1995). The majority of media genre studies, whether pertaining to news production or other media genres, highlight the relationship between media form and audience perspective (Clausen, 2004; Bruun, 2010). Some of these studies explain the variety of news forms among different platforms and their relationship to the practice of journalism (Erdal, 2009; Barnhurst, 2002; 2010).

Recent news production studies have focused on the association between news style and audience expectations. The linguistic perspective suggests that news can be divided into ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ topics. There might also be ‘special topic news’ that has similar features to both press and broadcast news (Bell, 1991). The news consists of different layers, of written and spoken language, because “journalists report talk not actions: announcements, opinion, reaction...” (p. 53). Bell believes that there are different layers of audiences as well, and that journalists choose the style of language that they think is appropriate in addressing their expected audience.
Dupret and Ferrié (2007) have compared Al Jazeera, Al Manar and Al Hurra by analysing selected spots self-presentations. They state that each channel has a different culture and aim that are reflected in the presentation of these spots. They suggest that it is not only the identity of the news organisations but also the identity of the targeted audience that shape the presentations. They found first, that Al Jazeera emphasises the diversity in the unity of its audience cultures and cultural symbols, such as homeland and Arabic literature; second, Al Hurra’s liberalism and individualism characterise the presentation of the channel and its audience; and third, Al Manar presents Muslim communities’ resistance to Israel. These findings show the presentations diversity and the way they are shaped by the audience, images, and the news organisations’ culture.

These studies do not seem to clearly link the way in which the targeting of audience perspective is negotiated or operated in the newsroom. They use an overly simplified system of categorization, such as ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ that are debateable concepts. These studies suggest that news production is a homogenised product (Matthews and Cottle, 2012; Batabyal, 2010; Cottle and Rai, 2006). In the current research, style is the employment of journalists’ skills, expectations, understanding of their programme, and their recall of the cultural and political context in constructing the language, images, and interviews in the news stories.

A wide range of discourse studies above have been reviewed, in order to build ideas that can be traced back to the production domain and inform the subsequent investigation of journalistic practices in Arab media. This chapter has shown that news form was studied detached from the news daily operation in the newsroom. Additionally the findings of discourse studies above are relying heavily on researchers reading and interfering of the news text. The above discussion shows that agenda, style, and presentation are affected by institutional culture and journalistic perceptions of audience preferences. Researching the news form through the examination of journalists’ activities and their actual decision on news selection and presentation shed light on their motivations and understanding of organisational, political, and cultural aspects of the news stories they produce. The next section will discuss the second theoretical key concept, that is, journalists’ understanding of and relationship with their audience.
2.6.3 News audience

Dwight-Pallmeyer (1997) argues that news production scholars generally talk about two types of audiences, first, the real ‘demographic’ audience, and second, the ‘imagined’ audience. While early studies attempted to compare journalists’ knowledge and real demographic information, modern researchers have increasingly focused on the imaginary image of the audience as an influencing factor. Early studies suggest that journalists do not know their audience and are not even interested in knowing them. Schlesinger (1978) claims that the understanding that journalists have of their audience is limited. He argues that instead of representing the real audience there is a ‘missing link’ between journalists and their audience. He remarks,

*Broadcast news is the outcome of standardized production routines; that these routines work themselves out within an organizational structure which has no adequate point of contact with the audience for broadcast news; and that there is, therefore, no sense in which one can talk of a communication taking place which is truly alive to the needs of the audience.* (p. 106)

According to Schlesinger (1978), journalists assume that they know their audience’s needs even when they do not receive or read audiences’ feedback. He argues that they rely heavily on their professionalism and construct their news according to a vague categorisation of their audience. This leads to the production of programmes that do not understand or cater to the needs of audiences. His argument leads to an understanding of news as a standard production. Schlesinger (1978) places a lot of emphasis on the daily routine, where repeated journalistic action detracts from the nature of journalism as an actor at the border of the social and cultural context. He emphasizes the role of the news workers as social actors, working within the routinized milieu in strong connection with the wider context. This leads to the conclusion that journalists are disconnected from their audience and work in a partly isolated world that has its own culture.

Gans (1980) believes that journalists will be interested in and fully aware of their audience for commercial reasons and news organisation’s viewer ratings. His study shows that journalists do not pay sufficient attention to the comments of their audience. Comparing journalists’ anticipation of their target audience’s characters with the real audience demographic, he suggests that journalists must not know their audience because their understanding of them is unrealistic. The problem with this
perspective is that Gans compared the demographic audience and the journalists’ understanding of their audience with the initial assumption that they should be identical. This raises a very important point, namely that what really influences the product is not necessarily the information about the real audience as this is not usually available to journalists or producers. Instead, the influential factor is likely to be the imagined image of this audience. Gans (2004) also argues that journalists see themselves as representatives of their audience; however, he fails to provide a detailed analysis of the audience’s image characters. He believes that the best description of the audience image is their news receptivity. Both Gans and Schlesinger (1978) fail to explain how the image of an audience influences news production because they focus their arguments on the fact that this image is vague and does not match the real audience. Tuchman (1978) refutes the idea of the audience as a factor that impinges on news production. She suggests that audiences are interested in whatever media provides them.

Recent studies reveal that media production style and content are profoundly affected by audience testing and their interests, meaning that journalists who are concerned with their audience and news organisations seem to be very interested in knowing their audience. Ang (1991) and Ettema and Whitney (1994) argue that the audience is a socioeconomic element that shapes journalistic practice and media production. The latter, they suggest, make media organisations and news workers become more interested in knowing their viewers. McKenzie et al. (2011) have shown that journalists pay great attention to audience feedback, although this interest usually focuses on marketing data. Tebbutt (2006) writes,

New techniques for ‘measuring’ audiences and the languages that accompanied them were forms of imaginative demographics. They allowed media and advertisers to imagine groups that could be abstracted from a ‘general audience’ of potential buyers and packaged into specific commodity audiences. (p. 856)

Franklin (1997) and Langer (1998) argue that media organisations respond to audience demand and deliver lighter media productions. Min (2000) and Tarabay (1994) believe that journalists communicate with their audience in different ways in order to learn about their opinions and needs, such as reading their letters and seeking audience feedback through emails and telephone. Harrison (2000) suggests that news organisations sell their news to consumers because they are interested in knowing
their rating. News organisations increasingly conduct specialised audience researches in an attempt to learn about the opinions and needs of their audience. Harrison argues that the concern of news organisations about their audience shapes the news standards and presentation format. Audience feedback influences the news presentation of online journalism; they enjoy a powerful influence that changes the role of journalists from ‘watchdog’ to ‘guide dog’ (Deuze and Paulussen, 2002). In the Arab media context, some see the new media (network media) as a new force in changing the news production (Hamdy, 2009; Ayish, 2008) although it has been argued that network journalism has failed to establish effective citizen engagement (Duffy, 2012).

Litt (2012) and Matthews (2010) argue that the image that journalists build about their audience can also be significant. Some studies show that journalists’ ideas about their audience remain disputed and unclear (Litty, 2001). Others suggest that they do not match identically with the audience’s real needs (Hinnant, Len-Rios and Oh, 2012; Tai and Chang 2002). Other studies have shown that audience expectations affect news language (Bell, 1991), its values and selection (Musleh-Motut, 2006; Neblock and Machin, 2007; Sumpter, 2000; Min, 2004; Neblock and Machin, 2007), and construction of stories (Nötzolda and Piesb, 2010). Audience expectations also shape the format of news stories in the art section (Hellman and Jaakkola, 2012) and the selection of topics among Twitter users (Marwick, 2011; Brake, 2012). Martin (2008) traced the change in news presentation format and showed that marketing influences drive newspapers to shift their interest from targeting an upscale audience to a middle class one.

Dwight-Pallmeyer (1997) explains that news workers build their audience image through several learning strategies while managers pay more attention to the results of audience research. He argues that lower level news workers, such as producers, learn about their audience through other ways, such as personal contacts. He notes that the influence of this image on the news process and the final news product differ. For example, while news directors are more concerned with stylistic changes to the news, other news workers may shape their sections and the construction of the news stories according to their understanding of their audience and their role in the construction process. Dwight-Pallmeyer does not provide examples from the news content to explain audience perceptions.
The visualisation that journalists have of their audience shapes journalistic practice and informs both the agenda and style of news production forms (Geiß, Jackob, and Quiring, 2012; Matthews, 2010). These studies investigated perceptions of audiences in specialized news types by targeting specific groups or providing examples of the way that audience image has been reflected in certain news stories (e.g. Ewart, 2000; Hodgetts et al., 2008).

The next section will discuss imagined audience and imagined nation.

2.6.4 Imagined audience and imagined nation

Audiences have been studied as imagined communities or imagined nations, referring to audiences as those who share the same nation. This section will look at this issue in order to understand the way national character or its perception may affect the formation of news programmes in Arab countries.

Cooley (1902) writes, “The imagined audience is the mental conceptualization of the people with whom we are communicating, our audience. It is one of the most fundamental attributes of being human” (cited in Litt, 2012, p. 331). Audience image is not necessarily unrealistic, but it is probably not identical (Gans, 2004). Schlesinger (1978) suggests that these views are completely imaginative and reflect the lack of communication between news producers and their audiences. In the same vein, Fisk (1989) believes that broadcast audiences are fiction. The current study adopts a more flexible view that suggests that audience image is constructed through self-experience and audience feedback (Dwight-Pallmeyer, 1997). In addressing the characters of the audience image and how this can be used in the editorial discussions, this study employs the commonly used term ‘visualise’ (Matthews, 2010). This concept differs from the idea of imagined communities (Anderson, 2006), as explained below.

Several studies have explored journalists’ identities and communities’ understanding. Pintak (2009) argues that Arab journalists stand on the borderlines of Arab identity, shaping an emerging imagined nation that, in some ways, transcends the traditional lines ‘in the sand’ that define the nation-state. Matar and Dakhllallah (2006) shows how Al Manar constructs an imagined resilience community. Other sources suggest
that media organisations are influenced by the political system of the owners’ country, even if it is based on different cultural spheres (Tarabay, 1994; Cayla and Eckhardt, 2008; Gavrilos, 2002; Zandberg and Neiger, 2005). Rugh (2004; 2007) argues that even though western media prepare different content for Arab audiences from media controlled by Arabs they are still controlled by the political reality by Arab countries.

Other studies have explained the Arabism mode of Al Jazeera (Cherkaoui, 2010, Uysal, 2010). Wessler and Adolphsen (2008) suggest that Al Jazeera was able to influence western media to recognise the Arab perspective on the war on Iraq, for example. These studies based their findings on the assumption of the existence of a united Arab view on the issues presented. Other studies have shown that Al Jazeera addresses the regional perspectives of each ethnic group or country in the Arab region (e.g. AlKhanbobi, 2011). In covering international sport events, such as the Olympics, Al Jazeera’s discourse adopts a policy of super-nationalism that presents the performance of participants as relating to all Arabs as a united nation, while still encouraging regional nationality in the Arab arena (Phillips, 2012). These studies do not take into account the complex ideologies, ethics, and religious beliefs in the Arab world. The generalisation of the Arabism discourse needs to be examined in the way regional issues are covered when disagreements exist between diverse Arab audiences.

In contrast, the current study argues that the social values that journalists share with their communities are crucial in their understanding of their audiences. Their professional views are also shaped by other factors, which means that this understanding is dynamic and cannot logically mirror the social features of the entire audience base. This is especially needed in heterogeneous communities, such as the Arab region. This understanding contributes to the shaping of production and influences the macro political, cultural, and social contexts. These influences are rendered in the moment of production and editorial meetings when discussing the selection and shaping of the stories and in the subsequent writing and editing of the story presentation elements. In order to capture and subsequently analyse this complex process, a triangulation method will be applied, using data gathered from observations, interviews, and content analysis.
2.7 Conclusion

The above review shows that most Arab news studies are interested in political and economic rather than cultural and organisational aspects of news production. Such views resulted in a body of research which standardised the news professional practice and the news outputs. There seems to be a gap in the three main approaches that study news production. There is a need to address the link between news output and daily work in the newsroom and audience identity and how it understood by journalists and employed in the news production.

This discussion examined two main types of news form studies. The first type argues that news production is influenced by changes in audiences or media practice. These focus on the political and economic pressures on media presentation style and agendas. They generally conclude that news production comprises of hard or soft (popular) news and ‘other’ news. This categorisation does not actually fully justify the claim that there is an element of diversification in news production. These studies do not provide sufficient explanation about how different news organisations have different cultures or how this ethos influences the presentation of the news. The second category of news form studies argues that the philosophies of the audience and different news organisations shape journalistic practice. These forms take various approaches, agenda, and presentation styles. They claim that news production takes different forms and which are shaped by journalists’ understanding of their news programme and the characters of their imagined audience.

This research has moved on from the arguments put forward by Cottle (1993, 2002) and Matthews (2010) who propose that news takes different forms and is shaped by the understanding that journalists have of their news programme form and their thoughts about their audience. This thesis has borrowed the framework formulated by Matthews (2010) that concentrates on two concepts: first, the news form, and second on the way news form is shaped by journalists’ visualisation of their imagined audience.

The next chapter will discuss the methodologies used to collect the data.
Chapter Three

Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This study provides a detailed investigation of the way in which Arabic media operates, through an in-depth analysis of Al Jazeera. A mixed methods model has been adopted for this investigation, as this approach is generally held to be suitable for comprehensive analyses of processes and exploration of the link between workers and their output. This methodological approach has been successfully used with investigations into production at the BBC (Matthews, 2010).

This research seeks to address the effect that journalistic perception of a target audience has on the way in which television programmes are produced. It will examine the way Al Jazeera journalists describe their target audience, their understanding of their needs, and the factors in the construction of these images. This thesis discusses the way in which these views about the audience are related to the understanding that journalists have of their news programmes, how they are embodied in the news process, and how they are manifested in the selection and presentation of news stories. Analysis will be provided of the newsroom observations and interviews with journalists supported by quantitative and qualitative content analysis of the news stories.

To this end, the main research questions are as follows:

- How do Al Jazeera journalists view their audience and their news form?
- How do journalists’ political and cultural contexts are reflected in the news form?
- How do journalists make sense of the relationship between their news form and news audience and how does this understanding shapes their practice?
- How does journalists’ collective understanding of their form and audience shape their news agenda, news stories, and reports?
This chapter provides an outline of the methodological approaches chosen to address these research questions and the rationale behind them. Analysis will be conducted into the news form, an area that has been largely neglected in Arab journalism research, and the relationship that this has on journalists’ professional attitude in the wider political and cultural context of news production. This study also investigates how journalists select their news, how news stories are written, how its agenda is constructed, and how news representation (style, agenda) is linked with the visualization that journalists have of their audience and the news form.

In order to explore these topics, this thesis will first look at the news production as connected initiatives. An investigation will also be carried out into actual journalistic practice rather than simply analysing the daily routine of the newsroom. This will involve an examination of the selection, negotiation, discussion, writing, editing of news stories, and the overall integration of institutional, political, and cultural elements.

The research will adopt both quantitative and qualitative methods to study the news production process and its output, utilizing observation, semi-structured interviews, content analysis, and discourse analysis. Using this mixed method will provide rich data. This will particularly be important for first, capturing the integration of the organisational, political, and cultural approaches in the shaping of the news, and second, understanding the structure of the news process from selection to production, and how this is linked to the understanding that journalists have about their programmes and their audience.

The thesis examines three news programmes: Midday, This Evening, and Hasad Alyoum. A number of journalists from each programme was observed and interviewed to understand and evaluate journalists’ practices and views. Content analysis was used to examine the topics and outcomes to discern the news agenda. The qualitative discourse looked at the characters in the Al Jazeera news programmes and provided an analysis of the way themes are constructed in the news stories and main actors. Discourse analysis was used to examine how journalists apply their interpretation of political and cultural aspects in their understanding of the needs and characters of their audience and how this is manifested in their writing.
3.2 The methodology design

This research adopts a mixed methods (or triangulation) approach to address the main themes raised in the research questions. These themes are the selection and presentation of news topics and how they are shaped by the understanding that journalists have of their audience and their collective knowledge about Al Jazeera’s news forms. In order to ensure coherence and consistency, the findings from the interviews were supplemented with quantitative content analysis and qualitative discourse analysis of the news stories. Several examples from the news productions are integrated with the findings from the observations and the interviews to present a comprehensive picture. The same news topics are followed through the different stages of news gathering, editing, and presenting by using a mixed methods approach.

Mixed methods have been used by many news organisations studies. The use of triangulation methods in these studies did not grasp the interconnection between the news production process and the news output. They also looked at the news text without tracking it back to the newsroom process (Tarabay, 1994; AlHassani, 2003). This means that many media studies have basically used mixed methods as a complementary approach to validate their findings. This study used mixed methods to investigate the relationship between each interconnected aspect of media production: the views of journalists, their practice, and the news they produce.

Triangulation can occur through the use of more than one theory, method, or coder (Wimmer and Dominic, 2011). Ellis (2006) suggests, “Mixed-methods studies can include ‘standard’ positivistic quantitative and interpretive-qualitative components or a mix of different qualitative data (positivistic, interpretive, phenomenological, and visual)” (p. 46).

Having made this decision, it should be borne in mind that the use of mixed methods does not guarantee that a study is methodologically sound or that more valid results will be obtained (Fielding and Schreier, 2001). It is generally held that when multiple methods approaches are used well, they enhance the credibility and reliability of the research (Jensen, 2012; Wimmer and Dominick, 2011). In all cases, this approach provides a fuller picture and a more in-depth understanding of the topic of
investigation, helping to ensure that the different aspects of the research questions are covered (Sale et al., 2002, cited in Ellis et al., 2006).

The first step in the methodological approach of this study took place through observations of actual journalistic practice between December 1 and 31, 2010. Another observation session took place between April 20 and 25, 2011. Interviews with 30 journalists selected from the observation stage were conducted between December 21 and 24, 2010. Additional interviews were conducted during the second visit in April 2011.

The observations and interviews were used to observe journalists’ daily work and assess their understanding of their audience and their news programmes. This enabled the assessment of the journalists’ discussions and the application of the institutional, political, and cultural factors in the daily process. The data collected includes how editorial meetings were used to decide the selection of the news topics, discussions of the political and cultural aspects of their decisions with respect to the audience, and their understanding of their programmes and audience.

The next stage involved the supplementation of the observation notes with interviews to assess the way they shape audience image and journalists’ understanding of the form of their programmes. Quantitative content analysis and qualitative discourse analysis were used to assess how the understanding that journalists have of their audiences’ image is reflected in their selection of the news topics and news presentation. This stage was supported with evidence from the observations, editorial meetings, and interviews. While this approach is rarely used, it is considered a promising model and provides a comprehensive understanding of the subject being studied (Kelle, 2005; Moran-Ellis et al., 2006).

Research methods are usually driven by the research questions. They are also defined by the stance of the epistemology and the theoretical claims. Having both theoretical and methodological claims, this study of media organisations provides a more in-depth understanding of media production through the insights of the complex daily production process (Cottle, 2003; 2007). A better understanding of media production can also be achieved through process, attitude, ideology, and production (Cottle,
1990; Quandt, 2008). This can be achieved by applying interchangeable and different methods in order to understand these unities and the links between them. For this reason, three methods were used interactively to answer the same questions.

The study first collected data on the newsroom layout, its division, and the daily activities in the news operation. Data was generated on the understanding of the news form and the target audience. Using these findings, links were made between the journalists’ understanding of their audience and their news form. These were investigated through the study of the news values (subject matter), mode of address, and news style. Each of these main research sections was buttressed by examples from the editorial meetings, interviews, quantitative, and qualitative content analyses. The key concepts in the framework were used as guide points.

### 3.3 Observations

This research adopts what Quandt (2008) calls ‘input throughput, output analysis’ to study the production of Al Jazeera news, and it uses observations to do this. Input, throughput, output analysis follows the news material through the news production stages (selecting, gathering, writing, editing, and presenting) and investigates the changes that occur to the news product as part of these news operations.

Keeping a safe distance was important to examine the situation objectively. Three main files were utilised for analysing the newsroom setting, editorial meetings, and journalists’ daily work in the newsroom. The latter included journalists’ selection of the news stories, discussions with reporters, writing, and editing of the news stories. The journalists varied in age. Some were around 30 and others were in their 50s. They came mainly from Egypt, Morocco, Algeria, Kuwait, Tunisia, Jordan, Lebanon, Sudan, Eritrea, and Yemen.

When analysing the data, the chosen theoretical framework provided the guidelines. The analysis must take account of the observed actor’s point of view. That does not mean taking everything people say for granted, but being in the field gives the researcher the ability to examine journalists’ activities and relate them to the findings later through content and discourse analyses. The researcher can only observe what
he/she can see. Reading and interpreting the data means taking into account and respecting what was said in the field. Linking the findings with other methods used in this study and going beyond what was found to analyse it with its context of wider political and cultural context may is restricted by the limitations of the methods and the theories that are examined in the study.

The observations in this study were used to gather information on the daily work of the journalists. This included the receipt of news from agencies, field reporters, press releases, discussions in the editorial meeting, selection of topics, writing, and editing. This provided rich data on the actual news process. General information about the news setting, departmental divisions, and the daily work routine was also gathered during the early stages of the observation. The data informed the general background to the study.

The main purpose of the observation was to assess how religion, culture, and politics influence the news production and how these factors shape journalists’ understanding of their audience. This data was obtained to provide an understanding of how audience image and needs not only shape the practice of media organisations but also influence the newsroom formation. Attending editorial meetings and having conversations with the journalists helped the researcher to assess how the images of the audience and their needs are embedded in the daily news process.

The study focuses on the production of representative news stories related to the research problem, such as world news, Afghanistan, Palestine, and other news from and about the Arab world. These broad categories were selected for the following reasons:
1) The cases of Afghanistan and Palestine are broadly deemed to be core issues in the Arab world and are therefore covered more or less continuously

2) Comparisons of these issues are likely to inform the way in which Arab journalists produce news that is related to the Arab nation

3) These examples denote key Islamic issues that might provide an understanding of how journalists evaluate religion, nationalism, and different political ideologies

4) Through observation and analysis of how Arab news is produced and presented it may be possible to learn how and why Al Jazeera presents Arab news in the way it does

5) The channel was accused of being biased and anti-Arab by a big proportion of Arab audiences and even their governments

6) This might explain how Al Jazeera’s journalists view the fragmentation of the audience

7) Observing and analysing world news will be useful in understanding how it differs from other news in style, language, and form.

Following these story types through different news stages the study examines how journalists select stories, how news is planned and divided into different news programmes, and how the news form changes during these news programmes. Data was also collected during news meetings held in the newsroom and from discussions with journalists during their work.

Observation is a respected tool in empirical news production studies (Quandt, 2008), with proponents citing the importance of a natural setting in confirming important data about actual and behaviour and setting (Mason, cited in Deacon et al., 1999). Social scientists study news production using what are called ethnographic studies, looking at issues like news gathering and selection (White, 1950), objectivity or daily routine and its role in shaping the news (Tuchman, 1972). The focus on the bureaucratic organization and the journalists’ professional ideologies and attitudes emerged in the 1980s. More recently, researchers became interested in the production of different types of news forms (Cottle, 2007) and “input-throughput-output analysis” (Quandt, 2008). News production has been examined by following news
topics from the moment of the selection until the final presentation (Bell, 1991; Matthews, 2010).

The following section provides a description of the observation fieldwork and highlights the main obstacles, challenges, and limitations of the method. It also provides an evaluation of the types of data that have been gathered from the observations.

### 3.3.1 Conducting the observations

Cottle (2003) defines the observation stage as gaining access, gathering data, interpreting, analysing data and writing up results. This study included a preliminary step in which a practical plan for systematic observation was designed. This plan was designed to ensure that sufficient data was gathered from the literature about the news organisations and the newsroom (Altheidi, 2003). This stage was helpful to capture any significant changes that might occur in the newsroom. For this study, sufficient knowledge about the news content was required; therefore, the gathered information and the research questions worked as a guiding framework for the items that needed to be observed.

The next step involved gaining access to the media organisation. The researcher contacted Al Jazeera to request access. Permission was granted four months later. It was necessary to explain the purpose of the study and to negotiate exposure to the internal operations of the company over a period of three months. Initially, a period of three weeks was offered; however, upon arriving at the company, an extension was granted. This underlined the importance of making contact with the right people, gatekeepers, who provide introductions to the newsroom staff and enable access to the help required to complete a data collection process.

The observations in this study occurred in two distinct phases: the first visit took place from December 1 to 30, 2010, and the second from April 20 to 25, 2011. The focus was on the interview desk. In the first visit, three programmes were observed: *Midday*, *This Evening*, and *Hasad Alyoum*. As these programmes have different timings, the observation was intended to cover most of the workday. The observation
usually began at 8:00am and finished at 6.30pm. On a few days, it started at 11.30am and finished at 9.30pm and sometimes at 11:00pm. The last week was devoted to interviewing the journalists who were observed. The first two days were used to generate information about the newsroom settings and the daily work processes. After that, a schedule was made and reviewed daily as the observation period was short and intensive.

In order to generate useful data, two editorial meetings were recorded each day. During the first few days, the content of these meetings was recorded using traditional note taking. After this time, permission was granted to record them using an electronic recording device. The first meeting took place at 9:00am and the second at 4:00pm. Opportunity was given to enter the computer system and study both the newsroom archives and the daily updates of the news reports.

The researcher was allowed to attend the daily editorial meeting at midday; however, no permission was given to record data. The information could not be used, despite its direct relevance. A request was made for permission to attend the weekly meetings attended by the main channel departments and chaired by the General Director. My request was rejected. Access was also denied to certain documents from the planning department, such as minutes of previous meetings and particular planning proposals.

Certain strategies enabled the effect of this restriction to be mitigated. For example, it was occasionally possible to discuss issues with the participants in the meetings about particular issues that had arisen. On many occasions, these individuals were very cooperative, giving explanations, offering their opinion, or allowing their comments to be recorded. With time, some people became less careful and more open.

The organisation itself offered alternative data sources. Permission was granted for the researcher to attend the planning meetings. That was very useful, but not as much as access to documents would have been. While the general meeting was out of bounds to non-employees, the Director of the News Department was willing to be interviewed and furnish information about certain issues that were raised during the meetings.
It was difficult to collect accurate information during the first few days, as many of the news workers seemed to be suspicious. These are elite, intelligent people who have great loyalty to their organisation. Most of them tended to be very protective of their work. Very little criticism of the organisation was heard from people inside the newsroom. Once something sensitive or important had been said, conversation stopped. Journalists created interesting ways to communicate to ensure their privacy, such as obscuring the content of their discussions through linguistic techniques. Some journalists switched from Arabic to French, while others did not finish their sentences or just used some codes known only to members of the group.

In the beginning, the information from the journalists was relatively limited. Consequently, much of the early data was collected manually because the journalists almost always asked the researcher to turn off the recorder. This led to some useful data from these early days to be lost. With time, the participants demonstrated greater trust in the research and became less guarded about their conversations. During this acclimatisation process, it was necessary to participate in some cultural discussions in order to make the participants relax. The passive observer role was resumed when discussions turned to issues of the news. Effort was made to ensure that the researcher was distanced from work, thus enabling the clear observation of actions while exerting minimal influence. Even when invited to participate in the discussions, the researcher offered no opinion.

It should be noted that some people at Al Jazeera were welcoming from the very beginning, and they displayed a readiness to help. These individuals were instrumental in facilitating the research process. Having had time to acclimatise, the second week was easier. It enabled the researcher to become more visible without interfering in the collection of data. As the observation period passed, the actual observation process became smoother. Permission was granted for electronic recording of the meetings. The journalists became more open and keen to share information. Due to the nature of the study, conversations with journalists doing their work played an important part in gaining insight into the process of editing and writing the story. Few journalists were keen to share their writing strategies or to show the researcher different drafts of their stories.
The discussion between the producers and journalists on how the story should be presented was the most difficult part to learn about, as these conversations remained out of bounds. A wealth of important data was gathered from conversations with journalists during the observation, such as the differences between programmes. I was able to ask for example questions like: how is Hasad Alyoum different from the other news programmes? Tell me more about This Evening? Can you explain how you wrote this report? What was the main idea here? These questions revealed important data and added new angles to the interview questions as they explained journalists’ practice.

The second visit lasted four days and took place from the April 20 to 25, 2011. This time was allocated to observation and interviews with journalists at the interview desk. An interview was conducted with the Head of the Quality Department to gather information about the feedback system and how it was used, especially in light of the developments after the Arab Spring. While access to this audience feedback reports was forbidden, the interviews provided useful information.

3.3.2 Analysing the observation notes

The second stage in the observation process included the collection, consolidation, and analysis of the data. Glaser and Strauss (1967, cited in Wimmer and Dominick, 2012) suggest the use of the four stage constant comparative technique: comparative assignment of incidents to categories, elaboration and refinement of categories, searching for relationships and themes among categories, and simplifying and integrating data into a coherent theoretical structure.

The first stage in this process was to look through the observation notes. The notes were then divided into sections, such as editorial meetings, conversations, explanations, opinions, and instructions for workers. This classification into general sections helped the researcher to visually organise the notes in a systematic way. To do this, each group was highlighted in a different colour, and titles were given to the notes according to their relevance to the category. After this, the general questions topics were used to form the headlines of the main categories: description of the newsroom layout, news selection (values) and news presentation, encompassing
language, voices and images. Once this was completed, general themes relating to the main research questions were identified in each section. For example, the news selection was examined to determine whether there was any reference to the audience needs or character or news about different countries. Themes that emerged were given a different colour and highlighted with different colours.

This was a complex process, demonstrating that it was not sufficient to use the observations to assess how the journalists imagined their audience. During editorial meetings, journalists met their audience only if it was required, that is when they needed to justify or convince others of the importance of the selection of certain topics in certain ways. These arguments are less likely to happen in a short time of observation. Therefore, in answering the questions on audience image, the interview findings were used to inform assessment of the observation notes and to see whether or not they supported or refuted these notes.

3.3.3 Weaknesses and strengths of observation

One major drawback of the observation approach is its limitation in covering all the aspects of a research problem. This method cannot consider external political and market pressure (Curran, 1990). For this reason, observation in media studies is usually accompanied by other methods, such as interviews and content analysis, which are used to track the influence of external elements.

In this current study, there were a few occasions where certain topics were excluded. A few participants explained that the main reason for this exclusion was political pressure. It has been argued that access to higher management level meetings is often prohibited, a fact which prevents the investigation of the influence of these higher managers in decision-making (Cottle, 2007). It was difficult to conduct face-to-face interviews with the higher management. There were two opportunities to attend editorial meetings chaired by the General Director, but the researcher was asked not to use the information gathered in these meetings.

Besides providing important data about journalists’ motivation and the complexity of the culture of production processes, this approach explored the link between culture,
production, the wider context, and the ways in which news organisations adjust to changes in their social and political contexts (Cottle, 2007). It is one of the most reflexive methods that provide insights into actual practice. Cottle (2007) adds, “Participant observation, perhaps more than most other methods is destined to be reflexive, open to the contingencies of the field experience and therefore less than strictly linear in its execution or predictable in its findings” (p. 5).

Observation has also been criticised for its reliability, as it has been suggested that people who are observed may change their behaviour in the presence of the observer. However, observation is usually conducted for a certain period of time so that the observer can blend with the setting (Henson, 1998). Cottle (2007) argues that observation could be valid and generate valuable data if it is used systematically.

In the current study, the observation stage was intended to answer specific questions that defined the purpose of the research subject. The observations were divided into sections each day. A map was then drawn of the newsroom and a plan of what to assess was designed. Each day, the researcher reviewed the notes and set next day’s agenda. This helped to ensure that the observations focused on the three programmes, different desks, and the chosen activities, such as meetings, writing, and editing. The notes were organized under main topics, such as images of the audience, selection criteria, and writing style. The information was recorded systematically according to the date of the observation, using both note taking and recording.

### 3.4 Semi-structured interviews

The researcher used semi-structured interviews to complement the data gathered from the observations. The interview was chosen to provide rich qualitative data on the attitudes and beliefs of the participating journalists and their explanations of news operations. While informal conversations enable a large amount of information to flow, structured interviews are generally held to be a more effective way to gather specific information (Deacon et al., 1999).

Interviews can serve as an effective complementary method to observations rather than as the primary data collection tool (Berger, 2011). While in observation
researchers gather information by watching present actions in a specific context, interviews generate information about past and present attitudes and motivations. This method was chosen as the most suitable way to reflect on the findings from the observations, as they allow the researcher to extract additional information from selected participants. Interviews were conducted with journalists working in *Midday*, *This Evening*, and *Hasad Alyoum*. The researcher interviewed 33 journalists and members from the management. The interviews were used to understand the motivations in selecting the news and the criteria informing these decisions and to gain a better insight into the culture of the station and their perceptions of their target audience.

These data provide an in-depth understanding of the categorisation of the news. The observation notes show that there was an interest in the humanisation of some topics. It was also observed that there was an interest in the intensive or contextual mode of coverage of certain topics, so the interviews were able to investigate this further by addressing questions to journalists about this particular behaviour or their contribution in the editorial meetings.

The observation period was used as an indicator to shape the interview questions. The initial plan did not cover the issue of citizen journalism and how it affects news production; however, two breaking news videos sent to Al Jazeera by ordinary people made the researcher amend the research tools to discuss this new issue. The notes taken during the observation stage informed the majority of questions asked during the interviews. Notes taken during the editorial meetings also supported the preparation of additional questions about the process of the news, the news agenda, and the news presentation style. This helped in the gathering of information that might not otherwise have been addressed. Additionally, witnessing cases in the observation time gave the researcher the opportunity to obtain further explanations about certain examples.

The first few interviews were used as a pilot study. These interviews helped to rewrite certain key questions in addition to the general notes from the content viewing. Asking questions immediately after the observations enabled journalists to discuss issues by using examples from their work, such as the presidential election in Egypt.
This approach provided ideas for some sub-questions and enabled the researcher to reflect on the editorial meetings.

The researcher tried to select participants who reflected all the categories in the newsroom: management, producers, and journalists of different ethnicities and nationalities. Social background was not a core factor in this study, but an effort was made to include a range of nationalities in recognition of the possible differences that varied backgrounds might have on audience perception. Journalists from a range of different ages and experiences were chosen to investigate whether any differences existed in their understanding of Al Jazeera’s news form and the ways in which they pictured their audience. The interview lengths were restricted by the time allocated by the company. The interviews were conducted during working hours, so most participants agreed that interviews should not take more than 40 minutes. This meant that the interview questions had to be tailored to ensure that all of the key points could be covered within this time. Another difficulty was completing the research questions of the interview schedule in one visit, as the second visit had not been planned. Due to the expense and time involved in interviewing participants in another country, the initial visit was expected to be limited to only 4 days.

By the second visit, the Arab Spring was at its peak and journalists were extremely busy. The broadcasting format temporarily changed to an open, live format without a clear division of the news programmes, as was observed during the first visit. The second observation was planned to focus on the interview desk, but it was apparent that this would not provide the required information in isolation. It was necessary to work intensively on the notes from the first observation visit to deal with the general themes about Al Jazeera’s style, as these were mostly related to the news content. Being familiar with Al Jazeera’s content, the researcher linked this general knowledge with the notes on journalists’ practices and formulated questions about Al Jazeera’s presentation mode.

3.4.1 Conducting the interviews

The interviews were conducted in two phases. The first phase took place in an office next to the newsroom. Participants were selected from the journalists who had been
working during the observation period. The interviews were held in the last two weeks of the observation period, between December 21 and 27, 2010. In the second phase, which took place in April 2011, interviews were held with two journalists from the interview desk and the Head of the Quality Department. Interviews were also conducted with the News Director and the heads of the Planning Section, the Assignment Desk, and the Human Rights desk.

Nineteen journalists and senior journalists and ten producers participated in interviews (see Interview Schedule in the Appendices). It was not possible to interview the Deputy Editor who had more experience in the newsroom than the News Director who had been in his position for only six months. The General Director was also unavailable. To overcome this limited access, the researcher used a book published by Al Jazeera that includes testimonies from its General Director, a few news presenters, and some researchers. Mellor (2009) suggests that published articles and books from journalists can provide important data for these kinds of studies. These articles were used as complementary materials to the interviews. Although the book was published in 2006, it is still relevant to this study because these people were still employed in Al Jazeera in the same roles. Their testimonies covered anecdotes of their experiences, what Al Jazeera means to them, the development of Al Jazeera, and even information about the channel’s target audience. These articles were published to celebrate ten years of Al Jazeera. While many of the sections contain some propaganda, it still comprises a legitimate document. Excerpts were chosen of journalists describing the first broadcasting day, the selection process of Al Jazeera mottos, and their experiences.

The questions were designed to discuss key aspects of the journalists’ practice. As these had already been observed in the newsroom, it was important to support the observation notes with explanations provided by the journalists. The next set of questions was designed to provide information about the channel’s target audience. These points were sometimes followed with sub-questions, such as “do all Arabs find themselves in Al Jazeera, or can you be more specific about what you mean by all Arab viewers?” Questions were asked to investigate the way in which journalists understand Al Jazeera’s culture and how they distinguish it from other news
institutions. The questions were designed to seek explanations about the agenda and the presentation style used at Al Jazeera. These were:

- What are the stages of the news production?
- To what extent does the news item change during these stages and why?
- What are the main criteria for selecting the news subject, whether international or Arab?
- What type of audience does Al Jazeera target?
- Do you think that all Arabs find themselves in Al Jazeera?
- How does Al Jazeera deal with the political and religious variations in the Arab region?
- What are the main sources of Al Jazeera news?
- Why does the news form change from one programme to another during the day?
- Do you think that Al Jazeera represents all Arabs?
- What is the influence of the multicultural team on the news production?
- How do you see your role as a journalist in the region?
- What are the sources of Al Jazeera’s financial support? Does that affect its policies?
- What is the hierarchy of the newsroom and how is it processed?

Other questions were included for specific people only. For example, the representative of the Human Rights Desk was asked extra questions like: What is the role of this desk? When was it launched? Does your experience in Guantanamo prison have any influence on your work?

Before each interview, the participants were assured that they were allowed to withdraw or change any of the information that they had provided, if they wished to do so, without providing reasons for it. The researcher’s contact numbers and email address were given to each participant through one of the Al Jazeera staff who had initially helped me to gain access to Al Jazeera.

The use of semi-structured interviews helped to reflect on the answers and ask for more information where required, allowing the conversation to flow more naturally
and the opportunity to repeat certain questions for further clarity. This information was used as additional explanations for the main findings. This strategy helped to provide a richer body of data and to assess the findings more reliably, seeing whether statements were echoed by multiple journalists or whether unexpected responses had simply been exceptional opinions.

3.4.2 Transcription, translation and analysis of the interviews

The transcription process began after the field trip and took approximately two months to complete. This stage was extremely useful in familiarising the researcher with the data. Re-hearing and transcribing the interviews made the analysis easier. The interviews were conducted in Arabic, so it was important to translate them. This translation was carried out after the analysis, as it was more efficient to understand the precise meaning of the quotations in their own language. Even though care was taken to translate the data as precisely as possible, some meanings may not be as clear as they were before the translation.

After finishing the transcription and checking it carefully, the quotations were divided into categories. The first part of this process required returning to the main research questions and highlighting the sub quotations under each one. Next, the interviews were examined, using the question topics as general categories. All of the answers were categorised manually and repeatedly studied. The main themes were identified from each category by exploring the main idea of each quote, tracking the frequency of these ideas, and drawing a line between the quotations and these themes. This led to the division of the themes into main categories, which comprised the main findings and sub-themes, which comprised additional information from the interviews. A link was then drawn between the main findings and the outcomes of the observation notes and the interviews. The explanations and justifications in the interviews did not contradict the notes from the observations. After this stage, the quotations were translated. The finished translations were compared to the original text to ensure that they were completely correct and reflected the original interviews.
3.4.3 Weaknesses and limitations of semi-structured interviews

As with most qualitative research methods, semi-structured interviews are criticized for the difficulty in assessing their credibility and reliability. This criticism is primarily related to the influence of human factors: people do not always tell the truth, people do not always have useful information, people sometimes tell the interviewer what he/she wants to hear, and people use language in different ways (Berger, 2011).

The influence of the interviewer and the interviewee truthfulness is another challenge in face-to-face interviews. Truthfulness can be tested by asking the same questions to different participants, as was done in this study. The journalists’ testimonies were also evaluated according to their actual practice in the newsroom, using triangulation methods and exploring the research questions through quantitative and qualitative means in order to address these weaknesses.

Face-to-face interviews allow the researcher to reflect more adequately and to follow the participants’ responses. In the current study, sub-questions emerged from the journalists’ answers. The researcher also had the chance to ask the interviewees for further explanations or examples. Wimmer and Dominick (2011) suggest that interviews are useful in generating more in-depth information compared to surveys for example. Interviews are also better at providing answers to sensitive issues. They allow the researcher to reflect and use information from previous observations, potentially providing in-depth explanations of particular cases or arguments.

In this study, the researcher addressed some sensitive questions, such as how Al Jazeera responds to the differences in Arabs’ religious and political beliefs or the influence of the political relations between Qatar and Saudi Arabia on the production of Al Jazeera programmes. Addressing these kinds of sensitive issues allowed the researcher to assess journalists’ words and thoughts.
3.5 Content analysis

Having obtained information from observations and detailed qualitative data from the participants in the interviews, the decision was made to include data collection from content analysis.

The study aims to analyse the relationship between journalists and the messages they produce. News topics were selected to act as examples in the analysis of news content. Once the data from the observations and interviews had been gathered and analysed in terms of the general themes, it was important to assess these findings and complete them with quantitative and qualitative content analysis. The observations and interviews indicated the characters of the imagined audience as was perceived by the journalists, as well as their understanding of their programmes and the culture of their organisation. Textual analysis in this research was used to reflect on such views.

Early journalism studies tend to separate between the news organisation routine, journalists activities, their daily work, and the output of the news operations. Analysis of the news texts revealed important cultural, political, and economic influences, which helped to assess the journalists’ daily activities, their ideology, and shared culture (Klomer, 2008). It is essential to understand the news process and journalists’ engagement in the news manufacturing to study the final product.

Three programmes were observed and analysed: the Midday, This Evening, and Hasad Alyoum news programmes. These are the main news programmes broadcast by Al Jazeera. They were selected due to the assumed differences in the targeted audience, as well as the fact that they cover the peak broadcast times in the Arab countries. The Midday is aired from 2 to 4pm, This Evening from 7 to 8pm, and Hasad Alyoum (Today’s Harvest), from 11 to 12pm. The plan was to include the three programmes in the quantitative analysis, or at least Midday and This Evening, as the latter is in a completely different style and targets a specific audience. However, time constraints and the availability of materials complicated this initial plan.

The qualitative analysis included all three programmes, as each has a specific audience group. For example, This Evening targets the family. It was started in 2006
to present the lighter side of Al Jazeera. It made it suitable for investigating whether the channel’s agenda had changed. There are differences in the presentation of the programmes. For example, *Hasad Alyoum* has a more analytical approach to meet the requirements of its specialised audience. The findings gathered from the observations and interviews are also supported by the quantitative content analysis.

This analysis was linked to journalism practices, attitudes during the observation, and the findings from the interviews. To cover the subject matter produced by Al Jazeera, quantitative content analysis was applied to only one programme: *Midday*. This programme is the longest news programme in Al Jazeera’s production. Each episode is two hours long and targets a wide audience. It was therefore deemed useful in examining Al Jazeera’s agenda.

In the current study, materials were recorded over the observation period in order to enable the news topics to be examined through the stages of the news operations. The material covered the first three weeks, from December 1 to 20, 2010. The bulletins were used as the unit of analysis, and the economics and sports slots were excluded. In order to study the frequency of topics in the news content, the data was analysed using the SPSS computer programme.

### 3.5.1 Conducting content analysis

The initial plan was to analyse the three programmes quantitatively. Due to the material limitations and the unity in Al Jazeera general agenda as was gathered from the observations and interviews, content analysis was applied only to *Midday*. The latter was selected because as the longest running programme it would have covered a wide variety of news topics.

A total of 299 stories and a range of different topics, except economics and sports slots, were included in the analysis. First, the date, headlines, names of the main interviewees, and their positions were manually transcribed. Second, a description of each news story was noted. Third, this description was later used to identify the main themes.
The Glasgow University Media Group - More Bad News (1980) model was used as a guideline. The main news categories were divided into the following sub topics (Contents Analysis Code):

- Politics: this is divided into Political Statement, Political Negotiations, Election, Political Change, Human Rights, Meetings/Summits, Minority Situations, Internal Political Conflicts, and International Relations Conflicts.
- Military: this is divided into Military Peace Negotiations and Settlements, Arms Deals, Military Training, Other Military issues, Demolition of Homes, Bombing, Military Statements, and the Iranian Nuclear Programme.
- Economic: this is divided into Economics, Industrial Projects, Factories, Agricultural Matters, Projects, Crops, Harvests, Economic Legislation, Prices, Cost of Living, Labour Strikes, the Environment, Natural Disasters, Pollution, and Climate Change.
- Human interest: this is divided into Scientific Discovery, Art, Culture, Sports, Disasters and Accidents, Christmas Celebration, WikiLeaks and the Middle East/Sudan Referendum Procedures, Referendum People, and Other.

The model needed to be adjusted to ensure that all of the categories were covered and to respond to new, topical news. For example, news about WikiLeaks was added separately because it would not fit easily into any other category. These news stories were used to explain some activities in the newsroom, and so it was important to look at the number of personal news stories about Assange and compare them with, for example, the WikiLeaks political news related to the Arab region. In their coverage of Egypt’s elections, stories that show disagreements and conflict between the government and other groups were categorised under the heading of ‘internal political conflict’.

SPSS was used to study the regions that were covered by the news. The limited period available for the content sample makes it difficult to generalise the findings. However, these findings were used to reflect on the data obtained from the observations and the interviews, providing additional evidence to demonstrate that the audience image, as it is applied in practice, is reflected in different approaches in the news production.
3.5.2 Weaknesses and strengths of content analysis

Content analysis is used to measure the apparent elements in the text. This research technique enables the “objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication” (Berelson, 1952, in Hansen and Newbold, 1998, p. 94). However, the general model for topics and actors typified in similar research should be adjusted to the content of the particular study. This can be seen in this research, when additional topics were added in response to developing news.

The main limitations of content analysis are that it is time consuming and is limited to measuring the categories denoted by the research. This method does not provide an in-depth description of the features of the text and cannot explain the broader context. In the current study, content analysis was first combined with qualitative discourse analysis, which provides an in-depth understanding of the production. It was also used to examine the communicative context of the news production process, explaining how this was constructed and the factors shaping the news. While content analysis is typically used as a primary method in order to precisely measure large amounts of data, it can also be used to assess specific content when it is used as a supported method (Helland, 1993). In this study the amount of content was defined by the observation period.

3.6 Discourse analysis

Studies looking at Arab news production in general, and Al Jazeera in particular, have typically failed to link the news produced to the news process. Tracking the news text back to the moment of production was therefore intended to understand the motivations and explanations of the news output (Cottle, 2007). The news discourse here is not seen as a representative of controlling ideology or power, rather it seen as a result of the interaction between complex institutional, political, and cultural relations. The idea of journalists’ presumptions about their news form implies their ideological understanding of the political and cultural aims of the institution. Journalists’ understanding driven by certain expectations of their news form acknowledges the complex relations of political and cultural discourses in the Arab world. News
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discourse is not a result of one clear, stable ideological discourse; it is a varied discourse with different layers.

The linguistic analysis used the following frames: textual and semiotic analysis, grammar, vocabularies, structure and organization, lead sentences, themes, and actors. These questions guided the study: What is the aim of the text? What mood or message does it create? What are the main subjects and sub themes? Who are the main actors? How are they described and referred to? Contextual analysis included production motivations, journalists’ explanation of their writing techniques, and analysis of the political and cultural context of the Arab world.

In studying Al Jazeera’s presentation and mode of address, this study presents a view of three different news programmes. First, this process included the analysis of the studio modes and presentation of these programmes, highlighting some features, especially in the language of the programmes’ headlines. Second, the analysis moved to examining the main elements in Al Jazeera’s presentation characteristics and its mottos as important elements in shaping its news form. Finally, the analysis was directed into a more detailed examination of specific examples of news stories to look at the visual and textual modes of address.

Qualitative examples were offered to show Al Jazeera’s language and visual styles. In each of these examples, a systematic approach was applied to the analysis, studying the language and the camera movements in an attempt to examine each of the themes and the presentations of the main actors. The examples that have been selected from these three programmes enable the assessment of the views that the journalists seem to have of their audience. Analysis of the language was intended to explain journalists’ integration of the wider cultural and political context of their targeted audience. During the observations, examples were gathered in that the participating journalists were explaining their writing tactics. The discourse analysis was then used to provide a deeper examination of the news presentations and the ways in which it may be related to the audience images and journalists’ understanding of their news form.
Discourse analysis offers an in-depth understanding of the media text. Critical discourse analysis is defined as “a shared perspective on doing linguistic, semiotic or discourse analysis” (Van Dijk 1993b cited in Wodak, 2012, p. 131). It is a qualitative approach that attempts to explain the use of language (lexical, structure, syntactic) in the media and its relationship to the wider social context (ideology, value, power). In addition to the text language, discourse analysis examines how the news is framed, including images, sound, speech, and layout (Darwish, 2009; Barakho, 2010).

Researchers in media studies have examined different aspects of media content. One example is the work of Van Dijk (2005), who examined the “critical linguistics” approach. His news analysis framework takes into consideration the relationship between the processes of news production, output, and the wider context. This approach is based on the belief that ideologies are represented indirectly in the media text, and that discourse analysis can assess them (ibid). Hartley’s (1982) semiotic analysis links discourse analysis with the wider production process. In the same vein, Bell (1991) suggests that news language usually reflects the news processes of gathering and editing. He also proposes that news presentation styles might change according to the “audience design”.

While some of the linguistic and visual analysis tools used by these studies are useful to use in analysing the text, video, and still image in the news stories, the current study has chosen to include any relevant aspects in previous discourse analysis studies. Most critical discourse analyses on media discourse depart from the assumption of the influence of powerful class and ideologies. As this view is standardized in media discourse, research into Al Jazeera and other media outlets challenge these assumptions (Wojcieszak, 2007).

Other studies have looked at the cultural aspects of media output (e.g. Hartley, 1982). Some of these studies looked at the macro and micro levels in the media text and explained the link between the media linguistic and visual feature and the wider social context. However, they relied heavily on media output and actual communicative context, while producers’ accounts were almost absent. Fairclough (1995) suggests that the institutional practice can be an important dimension in the understanding of media texts. He refers to a chain of routine, process, and relations that shape the final
product. He suggests “intertextual” analysing that traces the discourse of practice in the media text. In this case, practice will be “predicted” in the interfering of the researcher reading of the text. The current research is actually taking the opposite approach by tracing the output features in practice.

Discourse analysis will be used in this study to address the political and cultural factors and how language, mode, and tone of the news might vary across different news topics and in different news forms. Discourse analysis also is helpful in estimating the relationship between the image of the perceived audience and the language of the news, as the variety of genres within the news programmes could involve different journalists’ activities and therefore different relationships with the audience (Fairclough, 1995). This analysis reflects journalists’ explanations of their selection of the mode of address and links to their actual practice in the newsroom.

Following the same categories that were used in the observation and content analysis (world news, Afghanistan, Palestine, and other Arab news), selected news items from different news programmes were analysed. Examples were selected for detailed qualitative analysis using the interviews, news editorial meetings, and journalists’ practice as guideline indicators. The examples were analysed in detail to examine the agenda, mode of address, and the presentation style.

In addressing the news agenda, the use of in-depth qualitative analysis was employed to illustrate the framing of news stories. The analysis of representative examples of news stories enabled the investigation of the main themes in the news stories, the main actors, and how they are presented in the report. This helped in a number of goals, such as examining the empathetic treatment of the Palestine-Israel conflict and linking that to the journalists’ testimonies of their audience’s interest in this issue. It also shows the double treatment that is offered to news stories related to Iran, which are shadowed by journalists’ expectations of their audiences’ different views about Iran. In covering the news agenda, a qualitative discourse analysis of human interest news stories was used to explain journalistic practice and the views that journalists have of the social and political values of their audiences.
3.6.1 Conducting discourse analysis

The analysis was organised into two forms: simple, which will analyse the headlines, video wall, and lead paragraph; and detailed, which will add the whole news stories, including news reports. The detailed analysis was conducted to investigate the construction of the language and visual elements in more detail. This includes the examination of text structure, action, and meaning. The analysis provided further evidence for the observations and interview findings to create a fuller picture and enable the understanding of the issues in this research.

The analysis focused on the sub themes of the news items, the main actors, and how they were presented. These choices were informed by the data obtained from the interviews and the observations. These will be used to explain the link between the journalists’ views/practices and the news they produce. The analysis will examine the visual elements, camera movements, the meaning of the chosen vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure, and language tools, such as metaphors, irony, and similes. Discourse analysis will enable investigation of the news agenda and the way journalists’ understanding of their audiences’ political perspectives and social values.

Initially, the analysis focused on the programmes’ studio modes and their presentation, highlighting some linguistic features of the headlines. This turned into a discussion of the main elements in Al Jazeera’s presentation character and motto as important elements in shaping its news features. The analysis of the language, the selection of the vocabulary, and the creation of different types of images in presenting the news subjects also illustrated the presentation styles of Al Jazeera’s main news programmes. Themes from the analysis were divided into sub-headlines, as with the main general types of Al Jazeera’s styles. The selection of these examples was informed by the findings of the interview and the observation notes.

One of the main challenges of this study was to link the findings of the four methods without one of them becoming dominant and thus mislead the findings of the other methods or create subjectivity in how they were carried out. To avoid subjectivity in the selection of the news excerpts, the analysis of the news discourse was conducted separately. A connection was subsequently made between these findings, those from
the editorial meetings and the interviews. It must be clear that the early findings of the observations and interviews were applied as a general framework. In each case, different examples were provided from the discourse analysis to all three programmes.

3.6.2 Weaknesses and strengths of discourse analysis

A key criticism of discourse analysis pertains to its subjectivity and the doubts that can arise about its validity because of the need for researchers to encode meaning according to their reading. Polysemy is also another aspect of such criticism, although this method can also enrich findings. There are inherent limitations with the method with regards to the difficulty of linking findings to the social and cultural context at a macro level. Recent studies have applied the method with some connections to the macro level (e.g. Bell, 1991; Barkho, 2010)

Given its complexity, discourse analysis is also often time consuming and problematic in its defence of the categorisations it uses for the analysis subjects (Bertrand and Hughes, 2005). In the current research, the examples for discourse analysis were guided by the data gathered from the analysis of previous methods. This was time consuming, as there were three programmes to observe, transcribe, and translate. Despite these issues, discourse analysis can provide a rich, detailed view of the characteristics of content.

3.7 Conclusion

This research utilises a mixed methods approach, including observation, interviews, and qualitative and quantitative content analysis in order to investigate the understanding that Al Jazeera journalists have of their audience and their views on the programmes they produce. The thesis explains how these understandings influence the news process, work context, and news stories. It tracks the production of Al Jazeera inside the newsroom to explore the different institutional, political, and cultural elements embedded in journalists’ views about their audience.
The next chapter will provide an analysis of the Al Jazeera newsroom and the daily journalists’ practice.
Chapter Four

Al Jazeera: Background

4.1 Introduction

This Chapter provides an overview of the newsroom structure and the hierarchy of the news workers. The findings of this Chapter are based on the observations and the interviews.

Observations are presented of journalists’ daily activities to explain the news process, the identification of news sources, and the understanding that journalists have of professional values, such as objectivity. Exploring Al Jazeera newsroom and journalists’ daily activities show the common features between Al Jazeera and other news organisations but at the same time demonstrate the distinguishable features of Al Jazeera newsroom. These practices and newsroom features will explain the link with journalists’ visualisation of their audience and their news form.

Unlike earlier social organisations news studies that looked at the newsroom division and the work routine as industrial standardised structures (Tuchman, 1978; Fishman, 1980; Tunstall, 1971; Epstein, 1973), this Chapter explores the newsroom from a cultural perspective arguing that news organisations construct distinguishable cultures, that lead to differentiate journalists’ practice and the news form (Hall, 1980; Cottle, 2000). This approach suggests that journalistic norms such as objectivity cannot be standardised (Cottle, 2000) but can be identified in different approaches according to each organisation’s views (Clausen, 2004). Sources are not standardized official figures. They may be used in different ways, and deployment of different sources differ from story to another in a conscious approach which recalls journalists’ understanding of their news form and their visualisation of their audience. Newsroom structure is not a fixed system. It responds to a certain understanding of the wider social context and expectation of the audience needs.

The Chapter starts by providing background information about Al Jazeera. An examination is then provided of the newsroom and the work structures. The Chapter
concludes with an investigation of the daily practice, highlighting journalists’ understanding of news crafting, news sources, and news objectivity.

4.2 What is Al Jazeera?

Al Jazeera presents a unique case because despite political obstacles and marketing issues, it continues to grow and increase in popularity. We cannot understand its popularity from just political economic perspective (Barkho, 2006). In 1994, an agreement was signed between a Saudi businessman and the BBC for the purposes of starting an Arabic channel, Al Jazeera. This initial agreement was soon halted due to cultural differences, with the Saudi government insisting on taking control over the new channel and the BBC resisting interference with their work. After the channel broadcast an interview with Al-Mas’ari, Head of an Islamic organization in conflict with the Saudi government, relations between the BBC Arabic service and the Saudi government became increasingly fragile. The agreement finally ended in 1996, after a documentary programme that was critical of Saudi Arabia (Miles, 2005).

While the Saudi attitude ended the collaboration project, a player with a new political strategy in the Gulf region was planning to establish a media organization. The Qatari ruler, Sheikh Hamad AlThani, agreed to fund Al Jazeera, giving it freedom from government control at least with regards to broadcasting news about other countries. In 1997, Al Jazeera started to broadcast for twelve hours daily. By the end of the same year, it was competing with other household media organizations, reaching an increasingly wide audience and broadcasting high quality news for seventeen hours each day (Miles, 2005). Yet as Barkho (2006) notes,

_The Arabic television went unnoticed until the US-led wars against Afghanistan and Iraq in the aftermath of September 11, 2001. The two wars have propelled Al Jazeera to international fame through its groundbreaking coverage and scoops that have made it the envy of international broadcasters like the BBC and CNN. (p. 13)_

Al Jazeera is now a household name, broadcasting programmes around the world. It has extended its services to include the provision of twenty-four hour news, a documentary channel, a sports channel, a children’s channel, and an English language news channel. Although intended to be politically and financially independent from the Qatari government, Al Jazeera has failed to fund itself and is still heavily reliant
on financial subsidies from Qatar. This is largely attributable to its failure to attract big company advertisements, despite its popularity, that was exacerbated by an advertisement ban placed on the Channel by the Saudi government. This ban prohibits Saudi business outlets or those who have economic relations with Saudi Arabia from advertising on Al Jazeera (Miles, 2005). This constitutes “a unique case where advertising companies put political considerations before business opportunities” (Barkho, 2006, p. 13).

Saudi Arabia is not the only Arab country to have problems with Al Jazeera. Many Arab countries have complained about its attitude and the way it presents Arab news. Al Jazeera has been banned in some Arab countries several times, such as Iraq, Kuwait, and Morocco. This relationship between Al Jazeera and Arab governments led the Gulf countries at the 1999 GCC summit to unify their reaction towards media criticisms (El-Nawawy and Iskandar, 2002). Al Jazeera is seen as the main dynamic force in empowering citizens’ movements knows as The Arab Spring (Rinnawi, 2012).

The next section will discuss Al Jazeera newsroom layout and journalists’ daily activities.

4.3 Al Jazeera from the inside

This section describes the division of the newsroom sections and the main duties of the different desks. The hierarchy of the newsroom workers will also be presented. Studying the newsroom structure will help us understand Al Jazeera’s unique structure.

Over the past ten years, Al Jazeera has extended from an Arabic news channel to become a global broadcasting network that has different channels (Miles, 2005). Data from the observations show that the main entrance to Al Jazeera leads to a yard surrounded by a number of different buildings. From the entrance, the administration building can be seen, that is close to the Arabic channel building. Opposite this is the English news channel building. In the past, the administration was part of the Arabic channel but was later moved to a more central position and located between the two
channels. Attached to the administration section is a high memorial wall that is called the wall of freedom. The latter was erected to honour journalists and technicians killed on duty around the world. This wall is about 17 metres high and is currently inscribed with 630 names. The architect who designed the memorial wall explains: “this wall is built from noble material to show the noble idea which enables it to rise so high” (Al Jazeera Museum).

The entrance to the Arabic channel building leads directly to the old newsroom that is now used for different jobs, mainly by Al Jazeera Mubasher employees. The old studio and the old newsroom are reminders of the significant growth of Al Jazeera in only a few years. The corridor to the present newsroom branches into several sections, including promotion, graphics, and make-up. It also leads to administration offices like finance and public relations. The passage walls to the newsroom are decorated with pictures representing different aspects of Al Jazeera. There is a large wall with the photos of journalists. Another illustrates what Al Jazeera means to its audience, showing in a creative way the meaning of Al Jazeera mottos, such as ‘the voice for the voiceless’ or ‘the different opinion’. Some walls have pictures of Al Jazeera journalists who were killed while on duty. They include Tariq Ayyoub, who was killed in Iraq when the bureau was bombed by the US in 2003, and Atwar Bahjat, an Iraqi female journalist who was killed in Iraq in 2006. The biographies of these journalists under are written under each picture.

The back entrance to the newsroom leads first to a small museum with memories from the early days. For example, a press article explains its logo, and pictures show the process in which the logo was designed. There is also some interesting material on display, such as the costume of Tayseer Alwony, a journalist who worked in Afghanistan. After his successful work in covering the Taliban, he was arrested and jailed. He was accused of having connections and working with terrorist groups in Afghanistan. There are also the clothes of Tariq Ayyoub and an emotional article written by his colleague Ahmad Mansur describing his funeral. On display are also Sami Alhaj’s clothes. Sami was once arrested in Guatemala and now works in the human rights section in Al Jazeera. These materials create stimulating modes and demonstrate the challenging style that Al Jazeera follows.
This section will describe the structure of the newsroom.

### 4.4 Division of labour

Although Al Jazeera newsroom shares some common features with other news organisations, the division of the workers reflects Al Jazeera’s understanding of the viewers’ culture. For example, it has the human rights section that is not a common feature in other newsrooms. Al Jazeera divided its main desks according to geographical and the cultural understanding of its viewers. Sections like Language Committee show the importance Al Jazeera gives to language.

In 2006, Al Jazeera started to broadcast from its new newsroom. The newsroom is a large, oval shaped room surrounded on the one side by the news planning office, the news director’s office, and editor-in-chief’s office. On the other side there are several digital editing rooms. At the end of this side is the library. The newsroom itself is divided into three sections. At one end of the first part there is a big news studio, at the other end are the assignment desk, the gathering desk, the producers, and senior producers. In this part there is also the interview section and the editorial board. Each of these desks has a different role.

#### 4.4.1 Assignment desk

The assignment desk is responsible for co-ordinating and observing overseas correspondents. It receives urgent news and proposal topics for future news stories from international reporters. This desk functions as the connection between reporters and the news producers. Assignment desk workers have editorial responsibility. For example, they agree with the reporter on the angles that should be focused on, the kinds of pictures that are required, and the final editing. Occasionally, they even write the news stories. When, for instance, a reporter is busy doing more than one story at the same time, they can send the information and pictures to the journalists on the assignment desk who then write and edit the story.

The assignment desk consists of news producers and journalists, some of who are working as reporters or as a filter to make sure that the report meets the institution’s
ethical and professional codes. The following examples show that news editing is a process that exemplifies journalists’ integration of political and cultural meaning and journalists’ professional understanding of the organisation’s requirements. For example, in the 15/12/2010 edition of *Midday* the reporter in Lebanon sent a report about a speech by Hasan Nasrallah, leader of Hizballah, on the decision of the international court regarding the assassination of Rafiq AlHariri, Lebanon’s former Prime Minister. The reporter described the speech as reeking of corruption. The producer on the assignment desk asked the correspondent: “Is that what Nasrallah really said… no, no you have to distinguish, if it is your view we need to be careful and name as they are” (Producer, Al Jazeera, December 2010). They spent a long time on the phone discussing this issue, with the report being sent back and forth until a final edition was agreed on. Another example is when a reporter from Egypt sent a report about the election in Egypt. He said, “The relative calm did not happen until two political factions decided to boycott the Egyptian election.” The producer called the reporter and told him, “No, you cannot say that it seems as these political factions are the cause of the problems. That is not true. There is a difference. Besides, they are parties not factions” (Election in Egypt, 2/12/2010). The focus on language shows us that news production is a creative crafting. This will be explained in detail in Chapter Eight.

### 4.4.2 News gathering desk

The news gathering desk is responsible for compiling, booking, receiving and organising material. It provides logistical and technical support to the correspondents.

This desk might face some technical or political difficulties in some countries. For example, it can be difficult to obtain good material from countries like East Asia, Kazakhstan, and other parts of central Asia because there is insufficient technical equipment. Difficulties can also arise in certain Arab countries, especially those that do not have an Al Jazeera office, such as Algeria, Tunisia, and Bahrain. However, there are always ongoing negotiations between the channel and these countries, as evidenced by the improved situation with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates where new bureaus were opened.
4.4.3 Interview desk

The interview desk is one of the most active sections in the Al Jazeera newsroom. Interviews are an essential element of the daily news programmes, with all of the work related to these being performed by this section. Interviews can be Phonons (by phones), or DTL (live), using technology such as SING or Stream Box. In addition to these technical forms, interviews can be divided into news (information) which usually means an interview with the field reporters, or an opinion interview which is usually with a politician, intellectual, or expert. Each news programme requires a certain number and type of interviews. However, more intensive programmes or those with higher audience levels, like Hasad Alyoum, require really hard work.

4.4.4 The language committee

The language committee does proofreading to check spelling and grammatical mistakes and monitors coherence and overall language standards. The committee makes sure that the language included sends a clear message, and that expressions are not ambiguous. They also check that the language of each news story meets the overall organisational policy. For example, they do not use words such as “observers say” because they are obliged in their charter to tell people what was said and its source. Neither do they use ambiguous phrases, such as “a big demonstration. Journalists in their daily work understand how language should be appealing to their audience, as this journalist explains: “When you want to address all people, ordinary people, housewives, government officials, you diversify your language: high, average or simple language. Elite speech is not understood by all” (SJ 2 December 2010).

4.4.5 The specialised desks

This is the largest section, equipped with different computerised desks. This section is for journalists and includes specialised areas, such as the Iraq and Yemen desks. These desks were established to come closer to the bureaus in these countries, and because these countries are considered to be “hot spots”. For example, a Yemini journalist explained that he had been working on Al Jazeera.net but after the latest events in Yemen he was brought in to help cover the news there. The Iraq desk is
another example. The Iraq bureau was bombed in 2003 and 2004. It was reopened in 2006. Morocco also has a specialised desk and its own daily bulletin. These specialised desks are established in response to a certain understanding of the imagined audience. They also indicate that the news form emulates regional political and cultural details. This is how the News Director explained the need to have a specialised news bulletin for Morocco:

> In fact the western part of the Arab region barely existed in the main Arab news production... Al Jazeera was no exception. The presentation of that part in the news was not comparable with its importance in the Arab region. Therefore, Al Jazeera considered producing a news bulletin concerned specifically with the Moroccan region (Libya, Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, and Mauritania), to be broadcast daily as an essential part of the Al Jazeera news production... this news program had to continue until the coverage of Moroccan issues became a part of Al Jazeera culture and Moroccan subjects became embedded in different news programmes, even if the particular programme was cancelled. (ND, December 2010).

As the account shows here, in Al Jazeera there is a recognition of the variation in the need and interest of its audience and the important of some sense of local news that emphasises the regional presence of different Arab countries in the news programmes. In order to remain close to its viewers, Al Jazeera is considering extending its coverage. The head of the planning section explained:

> Viewers like to see themselves in news programmes. When I watch news I want to see topics about my country and my society's problems and, if I could not find them in Al Jazeera, I would search for them on the local news television and slowly lose my connection with Al Jazeera. (HPS, Al Jazeera, 2010)

Besides these sections, there are other specialist areas: economics, sports, translation, behind the news programme, the press news programme, and the human rights section. The latter was established on November 15, 2008, and according to the News Director, is a unique section exclusive to Al Jazeera. The head of this section is Sami Alhaj, one of the Al Jazeera journalists imprisoned in Guatemala. He explained that the section came about as a result of associations between human rights organisations and Al Jazeera. He states that the goal of this section is:

> to record the achievements and violations of human rights and freedom. It is also devoted to establishing relationships between corporations and international and local organizations that work in human rights. The section now mainly gets the news from organizations such as the UN, UNICCO... (HHR, December 2010)

This section also underlines the importance of responding to the needs of Arab societies. Alhaj adds:
When we say to people that you have the right to belong to a place and have an identity that means the Bedoon (without authorized nationality identification) issue is unacceptable. When we say to people that those journalists have freedom of expression, this means that to attack journalists when they do their duty is not acceptable. When we say that people have the right to demand their rights means that enforced disappearance is a very dangerous issue. Many people do not know where their relatives are after they have been arrested in an arbitrary way. Prisons are full of such people. (HHR, December 2010)

He explained that the human rights desk is primarily designed according to the organisation’s assumption about the needs of Arab audiences. It focuses mainly on human rights stories related to the Arab region. The section depends on two sources: reporters from the field who provide them with information but no pictures, and regional and international human rights organisations that send reports and information.

4.5 The hierarchy of labour

The hierarchy of the newsroom shows the relation between these changes and the visualised news form. For example, we can see that the addition of the planning section aimed at emphasising certain stylistic views of the news form, such as focussing on the human side of the news stories and helping to produce more historical elements in the news stories.

The news management is divided into two departments, planning and editorial. Both are under the News Director. The planning department (input) includes: planning, news gathering, and assignment; the editorial department (output) consists of the producers and their assistants, journalists, interviews, economics, sports, and press programme desks.

The planning section was one of the new additions to the newsroom. The main duty of this section is to plan upcoming events and to provide suggestions about subjects that can be covered in the future. To this end, information is gathered from different sources, such as news agencies and press websites. The planning can be for short-term (daily) and long-term (monthly) delivery. A weekly meeting is held with the head of the planning department, and there is also another weekly meeting with other sections of the newsroom. In addition, a representative of the section attends the daily editorial
meeting and the two daily conferences at 9am and 4pm. Prior to the establishment of this section, planning was part of the assignment desk.

Interviews with the journalists revealed that the section was still in a relatively early stage of development and thus faced some difficulties in contributing effectively to the news production. Their major contribution is in providing suggestions for big events coverage that involves ready reports, such as the elections in Egypt and the Sudan succession referendum, rather than minor daily news. Journalists claimed that the section has helped to increase the production of features, reports, and human interest news.

In the last six months, before the researcher’s visits, a new division had been implemented in the news departments. When Al Jazeera first emerged, the newsroom was designed as a press media organisation. Journalists illustrated this point by saying: “It was designed similar to a press institution and in such a way that appears eventually to be more like the Al Ahram (an Egyptian daily) newsroom.” There were plans to redesign the newsroom during the data collection phase of this research. A project was under consideration for a company to enhance the newsroom division and for the employees to meet international standards of television newsrooms.

The diagram above illustrates the management division. It should be noted that the editorial responsibility during daily news practice follows another hierarchy. Authority flows from the news editor-in-chief to producers then to journalists. Through this editorial hierarchy, news workers perform their daily tasks, as discussed in detail below.
4.6 News production process

The next section will outline the process by which news is produced. An overview will be provided of each of the main stages, underline journalists’ creativity, diversity of news sources, how journalists evaluate the news, journalists’ understanding of objectivity.

4.6.1 Daily activities

News workers start their day every morning with a quick review of the last bulletin. After that, they start gathering information about news topics. Morning editorial conferences usually start at nine o’clock. The bulletin producer chairs the meeting, which includes journalists, the assignment and interview desks, graphics, and the presenter of the planning section of the English news channel.

The meeting usually starts with a brief from the assignment desk about the ready news reports and proposals from correspondents. Journalists then present their views on the news stories of the day. Choosing and deciding the lead news differs based upon the approach of a given producer; some of them discuss this point during the meeting with the team, while some rely on the opinion of smaller teams. In general, producers have a quick meeting with the interview desk and news observer about the final vision of the programme, interviewees, style, and headlines. The next team meets again at 4 o’clock to prepare for afternoon bulletins and Hasad Alyoum. After the meeting, producers instruct journalists to work on their stories. News changes every second so it should be updated or sent along a new path. Journalists monitor news agencies and emails from reporters. Once confirmed, urgent news is given priority to be broadcast live before the full details are completed and broadcast as news stories later.

As these processes seem similar to other news organisations, journalist activities are not standardized actions. It is their interaction with the material and their visualisation of its crafting technique that will distinguish them. For example, the competition to host the World Cup was presented from the beginning, even before Qatar won the bid, as a political issue more than a sports event. After the results, journalists focused on one political theme: the idea of the Middle East and Obama’s
comments after the result. This kind of political analysis is representative of the general approach.

A journalist from the economics section explained the connection typically made in news programmes and economic bulletins when certain news is discussed, such as during reports on Iran:

*There is no separation between the two. Separation is an illusion. For example, the war in Iraq was clearly caused by the need for oil. We explain politics when we talk about the European Union adopting economic austerity plans or about Arab businessmen. We simply explain the economic side in the political news so the simple Arab citizen understands what is going on and how his life is affected by all these events.* (J5, December 2010)

Journalists demonstrate that they rely on a visualised sense of Al Jazeera news form and journalistic experience to determine newsworthiness. It was obvious that political knowledge is essential in understanding the news. Political questions are asked directly when they discuss news stories during editorial conferences. This is an example from a news meeting dated 13/12/2010:

*PLO statements came from the office of Palestine in a quiet tone: they said the negotiations with Israel must be on ‘basics’ instead of ‘conditions’. Stop settlement activity, including Jerusalem and not ‘in Jerusalem’. We must stop at the content of the statement. Talk about the possibility of going to the Security Council. There is a kind of softness before the arrival of Mitchell, when this appeasement language is used in this time, the Palestinian Authority must be asked about it.*

Here the journalist suggests analysing the statement to check for hidden or implied meaning. This is important in order to construct a story but also to explain its meaning to the audience. Journalists’ analytical skills, political knowledge, and awareness of detailed political and cultural context of their countries enable them to shape the news in accordance with the local goals and culture of the channel.

Now beside the constructing of the topics and the language, the treatment of the pictures and the interacting with the sources are also related to specific culture production as the following section explains

### 4.6.2 The technical craft of the news stories

Journalists explained that pictures are the most important element in developing topics into news stories: “Pictures are the only things that really stay in viewers’ minds” (P5,
December 2010). This is exemplified by an explosion that happened in Qandahar (December 13, 2010, *Midday*). The producers at the assignment desk called the reporters, asking for pictures to illustrate the situation there. Otherwise, they would not be able to produce the story with just a general video. Another example that video footage might give news worthiness was a story of a sinking boat in Australia (December 15, 2010, *Midday*). This did not attract journalists who had planned to include it in a short story at the end of the programme. However, then they received the video that showed the pathetic situation and included information that these immigrants might be Arabs, the news shifted to one of the lead stories in the programme.

The selection of the picture itself might express the style and culture of the news organisation. For example, a journalist states, commenting on the video of the shark attack on tourists in Egypt: “Look at these video clips. They are all close shots. If they were medium shots they would have been unacceptable. Where are we? At CNN?” (December 8, 2010, *Midday*). The reference to CNN is meant to underline the fact that Al Jazeera is different and that it does not report such feature news about unusual events in a particular, attention-grabbing style.

The importance of pictures can create challenges. Sometimes a video is simply not available, so journalists use graphics to illustrate news stories:

*The issue of pictures is a problem for the media in general. That is why news about human rights is absent. Most news organizations neglect this news because there are no pictures. We try in the human rights section to establish a net from low activities to work with them, so they can send news through the net or phone. After we make sure it is real, we can use it... besides there are other techniques that involve using graphics, maps, or other approaches. (HRS, December 2010)*

Alhaj suggests that citizen journalists are working to organise and plan agreements with professional journalists because they are sometimes closer to the particular events in question. Their main contribution is to provide information and video footage. This requires an examination of the change in the main news sources for Arab media from official sources to new categories, including human rights and its influence the role of the media in a democracy. He also suggests that graphics might replace pictures, a strategy to focus attention on important human rights issues that are often ignored, not because they are unimportant but because visual illustration is a
basic element in television news and can be challenging to obtain with regards to these issues. As a consequence, the use of graphics is becoming increasingly important. The news needs visual illustrations when video footage is not available. Therefore, the role of the graphics department is to help viewers understand more:

*Each news program differs in the amount and kind of graphic works it needs. Hasad Alyoum I think needs work more than others... We tried to make information simple for the audience. It is also a way to make information attractive. You have to bear in mind that the audience is intelligent and does not want information fed to them with a spoon. It depends on the topic itself.* (Graphic Technician, Al Jazeera, 2010)

Panoramas or the background of the studio change with each news topic. This is usually selected by news producers. Words, pictures, and sometime sounds are carefully selected to present a particular idea. For example, a news topic about the border between Egypt and Gaza could not be explained by video because of its complexity. Journalists attempt to make graphics simple to illustrate the news clearly, as seen in news about the Iraqi election results (December 20, 2010, *Midday*):

*Journalist A: Is there a possibility to put the names we are sure about in the graphic?*  
*Journalist B: Sure.*  
*Journalist A: Each one beside his ministry.*  
*Journalist B: And with his alliance.*  
*Journalist A: Yes, that will be better.*

The above discussion shows that graphics is an educational tool to convey complex ideas quickly. In this case, although a video was available of the parliament, graphics were chosen because they explained more. Finally, after a story is written, it is reviewed by the producer and edited by a member of the language committee.

### 4.6.3 Field reports

In addition to in-house reports, there are reports from correspondents. Producers normally receive between ten and twenty reports every day. However, some days this number increases. On one of the observation days, twenty-five reports were received. Correspondents work in feature news, suggest proposals, and inform the assignment desk of any urgent news. The construction of these stories generally follows the same stages: gathering information, writing, revision by producers in the assignment desk,
and final editing. This process is very complex, moving back and forth between the newsroom and the field.

### 4.6.4 The interviews

After the selection of interviewees and the main points of the interviews with the producer, the members of the interview desk discuss the issues with the news presenters, giving them a brief about their guests and the aims of the interview. Presenters are free in writing the interview questions. Guests are selected according to the kind of information needed. For example, in discussing the weather conditions the interview desk is likely to choose meteorologists who have the ability to speak to ordinary people. This guest will be told that they need to provide simple information. Additionally, guests might be chosen to raise certain points or take a particular stance, usually closer to an opinion that Al Jazeera wants to represent. Interviews seem to be typically co-ordinated in line with programme requirements. This journalist explains that Hasad Alyoum has a specific audience and particular news style that guide the selection of the interviewees:

*The typical Al Jazeera viewer has much concern in politics and is interested in knowing more than what the news offers... someone who cares about the government position if a supporter and the position of the opposition if he holds the oppositions’ point of view, so I offer him various angles. (SJ2, December 2010)*

So we can see from the above that the analysing feature of the programmes where more in-depth treatment of the news story is designed in this programmes as journalists assumed to be interested in these analytical styles and enjoy knowing more about what is happening (see chapter 8).

### 4.6.5 Evaluation of the daily performance

In addition to the editorial meeting before the news programme, the team meet afterwards to evaluate the programme and to discuss any issues that may have been raised. This could include objections on an item that does not seem to be entirely accurate, or correction of the pronunciation of a name, or evaluating the guests.
Journalists even conducted further detailed reviews of their approach in news presentation and whether they selected the correct angles. This constitutes an evaluation meeting among the programme team for a given date, including the producers, journalists, and the editor in chief, but without the higher management. This meeting is shorter than other meetings and graphic, planning, and English Channel presenters do not usually attend it. It is mainly to appreciate the good work and learn collectively from mistakes.

The quality department presents a daily report at the noon meeting in order to assess the news programmes in terms of the number of pictures and their quality, and the language used for the news stories. The above shows the journalists’ involvement in doing their work (Cottle, 2002, 2003, and 2007), the employment of their skills, and their visualisation of their professional technique in presenting the news.

We move now to examine the main news sources and journalists’ understanding of objectivity.

4.7 News sources

News agencies as a traditional source of information can broadly be divided into trustworthy and less trustworthy sources. However, journalists explain that in general, information gathered from another news agency should be carefully evaluated because they are likely to have their own agenda. Despite the skills and wide-ranging language abilities of its journalists, translating the web pages of these agencies to Arabic is not allowed because translations are sometimes inaccurate. Al Jazeera depends mainly on its field correspondents as the main and most truthful news source. “Al Jazeera is characterized by the ability of its offices, proliferation and distinction of correspondents and their mobility and radio equipment owned. This is what distinguishes Al Jazeera, especially in the Arab world” (J12 December, 2010).

Al Jazeera has eighty-three reporters and thirty offices around the world. They sometimes ask for help from the sports and English channel reporters. Journalists stated that if they are not sure about the news obtained from other news agencies,
especially if a story has not been confirmed by more than one agency, their reference will be the reporter in the field:

*Our sources are different and we arrange them differently. Our correspondents are the primary sources. Once a story reaches the news agencies we automatically contact the reporter to be certain. We study it in depth to make sure of it, then if he has any additional information, this does not mean that we do not rely on agencies... but if the reporter said: There are forty people killed in Pakistan and the new agencies says sixty people, we take the words of the correspondent.* (SP1, December 2010)

Closing Al Jazeera offices affects the quality of its coverage; however, news cannot be hidden in the modern context. Viable sources of information include organisations, activists, and special sources as journalists, politicians, and ordinary people who sometimes call the news organisation to give their story. During editorial conferences it was observed that Al Jazeera relies heavily on press releases and press websites. Many news stories are inspired and captured from press news or press articles. Journalists refer to this as suggesting their ability to construct the story. The main facts and events comprise the raw materials that are used from different sources whether they are field information, press releases, official reports, or others. Journalists from the interview desk commented on researching or raising stories based on other organisations’ reports or press articles and said:

*Al Jazeera is not transcribing the news rather it creates the event. We devise the information and develop it into a news story. We can do this effectively because we have many information sources, an excellent net of reporters, and a good financial cover.* (J11, December 2010)

Internet websites are becoming one of the main sub-news sources. In addition to official organisations and newspapers, websites and social network sites provide news organisations with videos and news topics. Websites, such as YouTube and Facebook, are starting to become increasingly important sources regardless of journalistic suspicion about their validity:

*The Internet is still met with suspicion in traditional media because this eye that monitors the news and the press eye is not one. A journalist has various tools of observation, while an ordinary eyewitness might focus on the side details and neglect the event itself. Thus, the suspicion; however, these are still very important sites. The Internet is the thread where the news can be taken from the ordinary person and used to create a news story. In any case, a news story is not approved until its credibility is checked.* (P2, December 2010)

The above quotation highlights that the first barriers to the use of social network websites in journalism are historical and psychological barriers between tradition and
modern practice. Additionally, distinguishing between the work of ordinary people and professional journalists leads to consideration of network material as raw information that needs extensive additional moulding. Journalists explained that they only use the Internet in strict situations. Usually, they rely on it in areas where journalists are not allowed, as in Iran and Tunisia, or where the event cannot be captured by the journalist’s camera. However, journalists still do not completely trust the Internet, and they have several techniques to ensure the accuracy of the information obtained from this source:

*It is true that in the events of Tunisia without the new technology, and the photos that were captured of the demonstrations by the people who were there, we would not know the truth of what is happening there because the country is almost abandoned by the media. But we do not only rely on this means because when we broadcast news stories or enhanced images that come to us via email, we also refer to the parties concerned according to a policy of ‘The opinion and the other opinion’ for ascertaining the credibility of the source. Then there are in the newsroom people from dozens of nationalities and thus they can verify claims through various means. (J9, December 2010)*

Journalists tend to gather more information to confirm the accuracy of their data through calling their field reporters or by asking other sources. In this way, press treatment can shift the information into a more reliable news story that complies with the style of their news organisation. Adding new angles and other information also extends the story to better cover all parties, in contrast to uploaded material that usually serves the agenda of whoever publishes it.

While the Internet is a mass media technology, it might not reach everywhere. Topics receive different and wider attention after they are presented on main television news programmes. This suggests that journalists feel that Internet materials are not always received as news by all of their viewers and that they refine and process this data. However, in countries that ban freedom of expression or that make access to information difficult electronic social pages have become increasingly relevant primary sources of information. Therefore, despite the reluctance of journalists to use this information, ultimately they cannot ignore the news that comes from these sources.

Audiences are becoming a primary source for the news, providing information and material, such as videos and images. YouTube and other website journalists have also
reported that public members have individually volunteered to call the organisation and report certain news worthy stories.

In covering the war in Libya, journalists explained that that was how they got their information from the field and how they reached their guests. This is because the situation in Libya was different from some other Arab countries as everything was done in secret and Libya’s opponents had not previously been well known. Journalists were therefore reliant upon Libyan citizens to provide information. Getting in touch with some Libyan intellectuals outside Libya enabled journalists to reach others. One of the Libyan guests was even observed to be working with them in the newsroom before his interview. He was using the telephone to call his friend inside Libya, getting information and helping journalists to arrange a guest for the second bulletin. Citizens and the audience have therefore been shown to be involved in the news process as a source of news, providing the station with information, guests for news interviews, and video footage.

4.8 Objectivity

Ensuring objectivity is perhaps the hardest task in journalism (Gans, 1980; Tuchman, 1972). Al Jazeera journalists distinguish between objectivity and neutrality. They claim that journalists strive to be objective, although “what we want is the highest ceiling of objectivity because the absolute objectivity is a myth” (J2, December 2010).

Al Jazeera presents itself as an independent news organisation. However, despite the wide margin of freedom that enables it to present different news from that shown on other Arab channels, being funded by the Qatari government is an inescapable fact (Miles 2005; Barakat 2011). Journalists did not deny that “occasionally” they might be exposed to external pressure. For instance, on 15/12/2010, journalists worked hard to prepare and broadcast a news story about the girl who had been beaten in Sudan. While this news received extensive media attention, Al Jazeera stopped talking about it. In at least two meetings, journalists raised this issue. In response, producers gave reasons such as it was not trustworthy news, that it was old news, that it had received sufficient coverage, or that Al Jazeera’s agenda differed from others.
The reason for this was not clear during the data collection phase. Even journalists who were in favour of covering the topic in more depth started to justify the attitude of the organisation and to protect the image of its objectivity. However, one of the journalists explained that the topic was not followed because Qatar was starting big economic projects and investments in Sudan.

Several journalists stated that Qatar’s relations with other countries sometimes affected their coverage. For example, relations between the Qatari and Saudi governments changed often. This relationship is often reflected somehow in the way any news about Saudi Arabia is presented. During the time of this study, relations between both countries and ultimately between Al Jazeera and Saudi were stable, and journalists were cautious in presenting Saudi news. For example, (Midday programme, 20/12/2010):

Journalist A: Iylaf website was closed, and their people arrested.
Journalist B: We cannot go deeper into Saudi.
Journalist A: There is talk about fighting among the ruling wings.
Journalist B: We cannot go further about Saudi Arabia.
Journalist A: Ok, just to say that news agencies did talk about it.

In this case, the story was simply ignored. A journalist confided that Al Jazeera was in the process of opening a bureau in Saudi Arabia. This highlights the need to be diplomatic and to keep relations open. A similar case is the way Al Jazeera presented news about protesters in Bahrain and Oman in 2011. In contrast with the intensive coverage of Egypt, Yemen, and Libya, the protest in the Gulf countries received very limited coverage. Some journalists claimed that external demands related to the political relations between Qatar’s government and other Arab governments influenced this policy. Effectively, in this context, “Al Jazeera is the media arm of Qatar’s government” (J1, December 2010).

Al Jazeera works in restricted areas, which makes ultimate fairness hard to achieve and means that journalists need to negotiate with strict rules. For example, a producer explained,
Al Jazeera is not allowed to be everywhere. Recently, it was suspended in Morocco. A few days ago our bureau in Kuwait was closed. It is difficult to be balanced because you are not in the field in Iraq, Morocco, Kuwait, or Saudi Arabia because we were banned by their governments. (P2, December 2010)

Even when they have reporters in a country, these reporters will not necessarily be free to cover news topics freely. For example, journalists say that Egypt is more open than Libya, meaning that reports from the latter state do not receive the same level of importance and fairness as in Egypt. Sometimes journalists face constraints and are threatened with violence or death, as occurred in Yemen.

Individually, journalists might try to push their own ideology. For example, in the December 3, 2010, evening programme, Al Jazeera broadcast Hamas congratulating Qatar on the occasion of its winning of hosting the world cup. One of Al Jazeera’s reporters in Palestine, who is close to Fatah, suggested that they should also broadcast President Abbas’s congratulations. Although the producer was justified, he refused to accept it, saying that Al Jazeera was not distributing protocol news. However, his justification for broadcasting Hamas was: “There is a difference. Hamas is under siege.” Both sides argued about ideologies rather than professional values. However, this rarely happens, as different people review the news.

Despite Al Jazeera’s loyalty to the Qatari government, it is given a margin of freedom not enjoyed by any other news channel. Outside Qatar, Al Jazeera was able to present a number of sensitive issues (Hammond, 2007; Pintak, 2009). Some journalists were viewed as imbalanced because they seek the truth and present news that does not agree with the actions of many Arab governments:

I think that the receiver who has comments gives his comments from a particular angle. There is a big difference, for example, if someone comes from the opposition in Egypt and speaks about the performance of Al Jazeera and one from the ruling power. Opponents will value the role of Al Jazeera, but someone who is in power will often have a different opinion. (SJ2, December 2010)

Al Jazeera journalists seem to believe that they are closer to people than representatives of other news organisations. On the other hand, journalists recognise that not all Arab viewers trust Al Jazeera. They claim that opposition from ordinary people is either because a government has swayed its people against Al Jazeera, or
because they are still accepting fear news and listening to those who do not agree with its not common manners in the Arab culture. This is explained here:

It is very easy to accuse us of bias from both sides. This happened during Israel’s war on Gaza. Israel has accused us of being biased because we broadcast pictures of the victims and aired one view... so we were keen to have Israeli guests from time to time to comment on the events. But this position did not satisfy either side. (J10, December 2010)

The above account shows that journalists believe that they are applying new journalistic practices that would not be expected in the Arab world. This may be because many Arab viewers live under media blackouts and are only used to hearing all sides of a story. Also, Al Jazeera often considers itself in conflict with those Arab governments that see Al Jazeera as an enemy of their propaganda. Additionally, news organisations in general are struggling to be free and objective because while people call for fair and balanced media, much of the audience, organisations, and governments want a media that serves their goals. This makes it easy for them to accuse a media organisation of being biased when a presentation fails to serve their goals or meet their ideologies. This means that being balanced or objective for Al Jazeera means allowing different voices to speak, especially voices belonging to individuals or groups who have been denied the opportunity to speak in the past.

Another important point to raise here is the role of the media in opening and extending dialogue between different parties. One of the main roles of journalism is to tell the truth. However, the problem with casting light on different voices is that it might distract viewers and make them unsure about the judgment that they need to make. However, journalists explained that truth lies in these different voices, and so this is the most balanced approach in conveying and understanding what really happened on a particular occasion. On the other hand, there are journalists who do not agree with this argument. They argue that this approach leads news programmes to produce the opinions of different parties rather than the actual news, which means that the truth is lost. Broadly speaking, Al Jazeera takes the approach of trusting modern viewers to examine different views and to make informed decisions.

Despite this broadly positive stance, it is essential to highlight the construction of the news in a planned form. The selection of interviewees, the amount of time they are given, and the kind of questions they are asked raise questions about the ability of
news workers to lead their audience to certain results (see chapter 8). Additionally, it is unclear about the extent to which news interviews open a dialogue between conflicting opinions or increase the differences among these views.

Early production studies concluded that objectivity is a standardised journalistic norm in that journalists rely on their professional values to ensure balanced reporting (Tuchman, 1972; Gans, 1980). The discussion here shows that modern journalists claim the same professional objectivity; however, it can be argued that these professional values are formed and influenced by both the wider context of the news and by the news culture itself (Cottle, 2002). These insights will be examined further when discussing Al Jazeera’s agenda and its presentation.

4.9 Conclusion

This Chapter shows that Al Jazeera has witnessed considerable growth. However, these developments also seem to have been accompanied by core changes in the news division and the hierarchy of the newsroom. As discussed, the structure of the newsroom has evolved to meet audience needs. Establishing the planning section enabled the assignment desk to focus on planned events that shape the news style. The change in the news structure also responded to the role that Al Jazeera wants to play in Arab societies by sensing and then accommodating their needs. The human rights section is an example of this, enabling estimates to be made about the needs of communities.

The observations showed that journalists start by gathering, deciding, writing, editing and finally presenting, as in other news organisations. While performing their tasks, journalists distinguish clearly between Al Jazeera and other news organisations, in framing their own ideology of objectivity. These insights show that Al Jazeera shares common features of the newsroom structure and the news process with other news organisations, but there are additional details that distinguish Al Jazeera newsroom from others. The routine process combined daily practice with certain production culture.
Chapter Five

Al Jazeera’s Imagined Audience

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the discussion introduced Al Jazeera with a general review of both its aims and funding. The discussion also described the daily activities of its news workers, and the development in the newsroom structure, pointing out that Al Jazeera has its own structure of the news labour that is based on journalists’ understanding of their audience. This Chapter will study the journalists’ visualisation of their audience and their understanding of the news form. It will also analyse the way in which this understanding informs the journalists’ activities and the structure of the newsroom.

The field observations data and the interviews analysed here suggest that journalists share a common understanding of their audience and their programme form. This understanding becomes a major part of the daily news process (Litt, 2012; Geiß et al, 2012; Matthews, 2010). This view is mainly influenced by their connection to the audience and understanding of their organisation’s culture and the wider political and cultural context. Unlike earlier claims of news production studies that argue that the audience image is unclear and does not shape journalists’ activities (Schlesinger, 1978; Tuchman, 1980; Litty, 2001), the findings of this study claim otherwise.

The Chapter is divided into three main sections: the first part examines the imagined audience; the second explains the influence of this audience image on the structure of the newsroom and the journalists’ activities; and the third explains how journalists creatively construct an understanding of their programme forms.

5.2 Imagined audience: The collative images

This section will provide an examination Al Jazeera’s visualised audience characters as understood by its journalists, showing also how these images shape and influence
newsroom formation and practice. The findings here agree with Pallmeyer’s (1997) suggestion that journalists focus more on the news image,

*what were once, perhaps, recognizant understandings of the audience become imbedded in everyday activities of the news organization. Sometimes the audience’s understandings were never consciously employed in the news construction process. Still, they were subconsciously recognised as important and built into the news product. (p. 31)*

Although some journalists, when asked about the target audience, stated that this was a matter of policy directed by higher management, such as the General Manager who defines the audience in relation to the news organisation’s endeavours.

Further investigation revealed that journalists are actually aware of their audience in the process of news making. When asked about their audience, journalists provide a generic description of their viewers, and this becomes a more precise overview in terms of audience needs and interests when discussing certain journalistic practices. For example, most journalists stated that they are targeting an Arab audience: “As an Arabic channel, we speak to people who speak Arabic,” or “We are naturally targeting the Arabs”. These are indicative of a broad answer that avoids explaining the key features of their particular audience. Journalists shared a view of the audience that is usually revealed when they explain their news stories. This is certainly applicable to Al Jazeera journalists.

The following section will provide further explanation to this query.

5.3 The imagined audience: Characteristics

Al Jazeera, as its news workers often say and as documented in its vision statement, targets an audience who speak Arabic and are concerned with Arabic issues: “our viewers are those who are concerned about Arab and Muslim issues” (J1, December 2010). The suggestion is that journalists have a notional view of their Arabic audience, even though this audience is not entirely made up of Arabs. The assumption is that their audience tends to be close to the Arab region and in general exists under Islamic culture.
Journalists also specified diversity and contention as other characteristics. These will be discussed below.

5.3.1 Diversity

Although Al Jazeera describes its target audience according to common Arabic characteristics, it also describes Arab society in terms of a rich, diverse, and multicultural community: “In Iran, Turkey, and parts of Africa, there are people who speak Arabic. There are also other ethnic groups in the Arab world, such as Kurds” (J12, December 2010). This explains that the journalist’s concept of being Arab goes beyond the regional geography of what is known as ‘Arab’ or ‘the Arab world’. Arab countries include people who are ethnically not Arab, such as the Tamazight in North African countries. Waddah Khanfar, Director General of Al Jazeera shares this view of a diverse audience:

We realised in the channel that the Arab World is characterised by diversity and multiplicity, and that its paramount importance is not to be biased toward one culture, ethnicity, or religious identity to the detriment of another. Our newsroom is a living and wonderful example testifying to the diversity of the Arab world. Our screen itself is a strong, potent symbol of diversity. Viewers coming from different horizons can identify themselves with the channel. (Al Jazeera in a Decade, 2006)

The imagined audience is not one belonging to a homogeneous society but involves different ethnic groups, religions, and ideologies. It includes complex relationships between its different groups, where politics and religion can exact influences that make sensitivity essential when dealing with divisive subjects. Such an understanding of a multicultural audience not only informs the news production but also influences the newsroom formation and journalistic activities.

5.3.1.1 Ethnicity, ideological diversity, and the formation of the newsroom

The newsroom is a reflection of the formation of this imagined wider audience. It is constructed purposefully to reflect a range of ethnic groups, religions, cultures, and ideologies, as this quote explains:
We have different journalists from different religious tribes and various political ideologies within Al Jazeera. You can see Muslims, Sunni and Shi’a, Christians, and people who do not believe in any religion. There are also journalists who follow many political ideologies: Islamists, Marxists, and others. Everybody has the freedom to express his opinion and offer his suggestions. (P4, December 2010)

The idea is that the newsroom should consist of a variety of nationalities and religious beliefs or backgrounds. Journalists are selected from different Arab countries or neighbouring countries, such as Chad, that have populations with Arab roots. The composition of this newsroom was purposely arranged to reflect a multicultural diversity. It is clear that such a variety is actively pursued and endorsed: “Yes, the newsroom consists of different nationalities, and this is good. Al Jazeera cares, and the management here is very concerned with building up a multicultural team” (SP5, December 2010).

Some desks are divided into different regions, and having journalists from the same nationalities in each is proof that Al Jazeera is attentive to addressing the complex details involved in the social and political context of the Arab world. Before their closure, local journalists ran the Al Jazeera offices in Iraq, Morocco, and Yemen. These specialised desks helped explain the dynamics of political forces: “Yemen is a country where the social and political situation is very complex. It is not easy for people from outside the Yemeni society to understand the meaning of what is going on there” (J3, December 2010).

It seems clear that Al Jazeera is attentive to the multiple characteristics of Arab culture that, although well known, had not previously come under media focus. Al Jazeera focuses on the details of each Arab region and different ethnic or cultural identities. This opinion countered a long tradition in Arab media that had promoted a homogeneous image of Arabs. Lynch (2006) alludes to this point when suggesting that Al Jazeera managed to reach and get the attention of a very fragmented audience by broadcasting new types of news. He states, “It was not news media alone that created a new public sphere – it was Al Jazeera’s prioritization of politics and its remarkable success in initiating a region-wide public discourse that quickly reached an incredibly widespread and diverse audience” (p. 41).
This multicultural team, as Al Jazeera workers believe, represents their imagined audience. It also helps to overcome possible conflicts and disagreements by adhering to professional standards that predicates a principle of detachment from individual ideologies. For the News Director, this variety also provides the newsroom with the necessary information about different Arab communities:

Variety is richness, when we have different nationalities, ethnicities and religions. They present a small picture of the world that we live in, especially the Arab world because most of our journalists are Arabs. That means we will understand more about the countries, ethnic groups, and religions that these people belong to. (ND, December 2010).

The News Director here is referring to journalists’ skills and practice that is achieved by representing the rich culture of the Arab world in the newsroom activities. He explains how this team is meant to be a microcosm of the wider cultural diversity that helps the organisation to know more about the detailed aspects of individual societies.

5.3.1.2 Ethnic and ideological diversity and journalistic practice

The diverse culture audience image adds to journalists’ skills and performance. Journalists demonstrate that they learn more about their audience by working in this multicultural milieu: “I had some information about Moroccan countries, for example. I had read about it, but it is not the same as having references from these countries here in the newsroom” (SP5, December 2010).

Journalists claim that this multicultural team enables them to utilise each journalist’s individual skills and helps to reveal more about distinct societies. More importantly, such a policy of mirroring cultural diversity within the news team will have the added effect of creating a final news product that better fulfils objective criteria of professional journalism, as this journalist explains:

This helps in the selection of news of interest to liberals and to Christians and helps give the image in all its detail. For example, there are people who have experience in Africa who assist the channel with reference to the names of people, organizations, and regions, and even with their knowledge of other languages. For instance, when we translate the Eritrean president’s speech, when a colleague who speaks the language of Eritrea hears the speech, the translation will be much better than the translation from Reuters... Al Jazeera is a melting pot, where all the ultra-liberal ideas, Marxism, and others, come together... (J5, December 2010)
For the journalist here, having journalists representing different societies gives Al Jazeera the capacity to produce news that is more accurate than other news organisations. These details are unknown to other Arab audiances. For example, Eritrea is considered an Arab country but its Arabic language is hard to understand. Such attention to the diversity of the audience’s specific culture is also demonstrated in the following documented editorial meeting:

**Producer 1:** In Sudan today the president gave a striking statement. He said that in case the South separated he is going to apply Islamic Law as the constitution of the state. He does not see an economic problem because of oil production. In case of secession...

**Journalist 2:** Yes, this speech is dangerous...

**Journalist 1:** How can we deal with it and from what angle?

**Journalist 3:** He is sending a message to the West. He is threatening them saying that he will make an Islamic state if he lost the South.

**Journalist 4:** This speech should be included in the package about Sudan. It needs a special report of its own.

**Journalist 4:** In this speech there are rejections to the other ethnic groups and cultures in the country; this is dangerous...

**Producer 2:** Is it just, let’s say, threats to countries (Western countries) that support the separation or is he serious about it?

**Journalist 1:** We have to be aware of what he said; he said before that to keep the South, he does not mind not adopting Islamic law, but if he loses it he will keep the Islamic constitution. Islam is not a real option for Sudan’s president; if it is real he will keep the Islamic constitution regardless of the separation of the South... He is just using it because religion in our society touches people’s feelings. (Hasad Alyoum meeting, December 2010)

Here we can see that journalists discuss their response to the significance of the President’s statement in relation to their perspective on a multicultural audience.

To better understand how the skills of individual journalists and their understanding of their societies’ culture shape news stories, I spent time shadowing an Iraqi journalist who was preparing a report about the Iraqi Parliament in the editing room. While he was matching pictures with words, his instructions to the editor were not only about political issues outlined in the report but also about religious affiliations based on the costumes they wore. In Arab countries, traditional costumes are a sign of their tribe, region, or religious belief. This knowledge can also be relevant and applicable to political systems and demographic ethnical diversity of the Arab world. With the newsroom consisting of specialised regional desks, it is apparent that Al
Jazeera is interested in details and information that it is assumed are not known by other Arabs.

5.3.1.3 Diversity and objectivity

This multicultural group of journalists managed to work together by respecting the journalistic values and ethical codes of Al Jazeera. As the News Director states, “They are a live example of the possibility of cohabiting with differences.” Evidence for this was observed in editorial conferences, where journalists expressed their opinions and shared ideas about news topics. Journalists from different countries presented their suggestions about what news stories should be selected. It appeared that most of the time journalists’ main concern were issues about their own countries. One of the journalists justified this when he said: “It is natural that each of us has priorities about issues that should be discussed in the newsroom. For example, Egyptians will be more interested in Egypt, Sudan, and the neighbouring countries” (SJ1, December 2010).

This understanding of differences among the viewers and their disagreements on political and religious issues also defines the need to have an objective view, as is explained in the case of political change in Sudan: “Now, to cover the separation in Sudan, we can send reporters from different Arab countries in addition to Sudanese reporters so that we can have different views about the situation there” (SP4, December 2010). This claim is more in theory than practice. Journalists have the possibility and privilege to discuss different views on the news stories, but the debate is usually shaped by Al Jazeera’s political aim. The political line of Al Jazeera regularly defines the cultural understanding of the audience.

Al Jazeera views its targeted audience as a diverse public. The imagined viewers for Al Jazeera belong to multicultural societies, involving a set of complex relationships between a range of ethnic and religious groups. As such, this view of the target audience influences the internal structure of the newsroom. This view of a multicultural audience also shapes the journalists’ practice. Journalists claim that the Al Jazeera newsroom team was established to reflect a certain cultural diversity.
5.3.1.4 Audience age and interest diversity

Some journalists believe that Al Jazeera speaks to everyone; however, when it began news production, Al Jazeera targeted only the educated elite in the Arab world. One of the earlier news producers put it like this:

*In the first five years, the Al Jazeera audience was the educated elite because in the Arab world most media organizations are governmental, producing censored information. For example, people in Rabat, Morocco, who want to listen to the news, have to turn to international radio productions from France and Spain because the local media are only interested in government activities and presidential protocol. Consequently, the relationship between these types of media and intellectual people is negative. (SP1, December 2010)*

Al Jazeera knew that the educated elite did not trust the Arab media because it was censored and perceived as a propaganda outlet. Initially, Al Jazeera introduced its news items to this audience category that was theoretically able and ready to receive the news that countered the present discourse of the local Arab media. Al Jazeera assumed that the elite were used to a western style of news production but would like to also learn more about their countries from an Arabic source.

Besides the elite, Al Jazeera was also interested in political activists and oppositionists. To counter the local Arab media discourse, Al Jazeera gave access to political opposition voices. It targeted the activists who were not known outside the circle of elite politicians. “Al Jazeera broke taboos and gave the opportunity to the political opposition to present its views. Most listeners had heard about these counter views but had never been given the opportunity to really know the people themselves” (SP3, December 2010).

Audiences have a changing nature. At the beginning, Al Jazeera did not plan to attract a young audience. Their main interest was in news that countered governmental opinions. Some journalists pointed out that ‘youth’ was one of the neglected categories in the news productions of Al Jazeera:

*I believe that Al Jazeera did not pay enough attention to the youth. It speaks to people who are fully interested in politics, such as researchers, human rights activists, politicians, university teachers, and journalists but not young people under twenty... I think that this generation, if not already interested in politics, would not watch us. There is discussion going on now to re-examine news programmes and improve them to attract this category. (J10, December 2010)*
The general view was that it would be difficult to appeal to young people who were not interested in Arab political issues:

*It was difficult for Al Jazeera to attract the youth, young people who are passionate about Rap and Rock music. It is difficult to tell them about Hamas, Fatah, and what is happening in Afghanistan. These subjects are for old people. However, what is noticeable now, especially after the Second Intifada in Palestine, is that some young people are really interested in what is happening in the Arab world. They know that there is an Israeli occupation in Palestine, siege on Gaza, hungry children, and people who do not have the chance to get medical care in Afghanistan, etc. The youth did not have such awareness. Media channels like Al Jazeera did not target this category of people. (SP3, December 2010)*

It seems Journalists usually viewed the youth as generally interested in entertainment subjects. This group was considered to be difficult to attract because they had accommodated western culture, thus countering the ideological or political concerns implicit to Al Jazeera. Al Jazeera later recognised that this image of the youth was misplaced. Arab youth were interested in knowing more about political issues. They seemed aware of particular news subjects that came under Al Jazeera’s news agenda. This change of perspective came about because of changes occurring in Arab society. Al Jazeera soon began to pay attention to this social category and to perceive it as a potential viewer category.

### 5.3.1.5 Audience age, interest, and news production

Each news programme has its primary audience, as is explained in the following extract:

*You could say that each programme has its prime audience. For example, This Morning news programme is meant mainly for women, those who do not work, and those who are home at that time. The Midday programme is for employers and workers, who are coming back from work at that time. Finally, the Hasad Alyoum news programme offers an analysis programme for people who are interested in knowing more and are willing to spend their free time in the evening watching news programmes. (SP2, December 2010)*

Here the journalist explains that news programmes are designed and scheduled specifically for different viewers. As described above, early morning news programmes prioritise women because generally most men will be at work. The midday programme is scheduled to be longer to include different topics so as to give viewers, who have just finished work, detailed news of the day. The later news
programme is specifically designed for individuals who enjoy viewing a more detailed news analysis.

Many journalists have pointed out that Al Jazeera is still behind in satisfying all kinds of interests. Its main focus until now has been political news, although recently there has been an increase in what is called ‘feature stories’:

*Since its establishment, a distorted view about the news on the channel is that if the news is not political it is not news. We often cover the major events, so we did not see this imbalance. Many of our colleagues, whether officials or journalists or others, are not conceding, for example, that Michael Jackson’s death is more important than the death of the great Egyptian writer Najeeb Mahfouz, for example. We forget that the viewer who is interested in politics is also interested in other news.* (J10, December 2010)

Here journalists suggest that the issue in extending news to include other cultural topics is mainly related to Al Jazeera’s culture ethos and the inherent general assumption that their target audience will not be interested in news items that consider topics such as, music, the arts, or celebrity culture. This actually leads to the second characteristic of Al Jazeera’s imagined audience, which will be discussed in the second section. Al Jazeera presumes that, given the cultural values of its targeted audience, there is a reduced interest in news items concerning musicians, singers, and actors. This organizational view of the audience, as evidenced from journalists’ testimonies, has led Al Jazeera to focus on political news.

To summarise, while AlJazeera has developed over time it has extended its view of a target audience. Initially, it was mainly interested in the elite, and educated, political activists. Over time, it has extended its target audience to include other members of society, such as middle-class employers or employees, women at home as well as younger people. Therefore, AlJazeera designs its news programmes to meet the interests of different categories, and to cater for the preferred time of its viewers. AlJazeera for example, has based its beliefs in relation to the political role of a younger audience group according to certain, and so has encouraged the presence of young people in its news stories, and which leads us to the second characteristic of their imagined audience.
5.3.2 Contention

One of the main characteristics of Al Jazeera’s audience is its diversity in terms of ethnicity, religion, and age. The image of the audience changed over time. After explaining the first main feature in the imagined Al Jazeera audience, we now move on to study the second one: contention. This image is divided to regional and international perceptions.

5.3.2.1 Regional contention

This multi-cultural, imagined audience, as explained by journalist and indicated in the news observations, is generally convinced or at least ready to be persuaded, that there is a need for a core change in the Arab world. Arabs face challenges in expressing their opinions to their local communities because most of the time the community lacks freedom of expression. This audience is emotionally attached to its culture and filters the ideas and messages that come from outside because it does not totally trust those who tend to promote a destructive image about Arab societies.

This imagined audience is in search of knowledge, information, and truth because they have failed to gain such knowledge from other Arab media outlets, that are manipulated by governments. They have lost faith in this media and ultimately in Arab governments that have played a core role in silencing the truth. A producer summarises it thus, “Al Jazeera audiences are those viewers who are missing accurate and objective information. Al Jazeera realises that its audience is in search of the truth” (SP5, December, 2010).

Another journalist explains this, saying:

In the Arab media and Arab regimes, governments do not consult their people. Where are the Arab countries that enable their citizens to participate in power and make their voices heard? Al Jazeera works from the premise that the ordinary person is absent from decision-making circles, absent from the traditional and formal media, and focuses on the ordinary person who is reflected in the political and economic decisions that either he benefits from or pays for. (SP2, December 2010)

The audience here viewed as neglected groups are ordinary people who are influenced by government policy but do not have a free space to express their view. The
understanding of this voiceless audience, who need to express their opinions, made Al Jazeera adjust its style and focus its coverage to give the opportunity to this audience to present its voice, as many of the news workers believe.

5.3.2.2 International contention

Al Jazeera has an expectation that a wide category of Arab viewers need to hear different news than that they are used to hearing from Arab and western media.

There was a realisation of the Arab audience’s need for a credible media channel from an Arab country to fill the space that had been monopolised by foreign channels and stations for decades... There was no doubt that those first attracted by Al Jazeera were the Arab public who were longing for a trusted news source outside foreign custody. (Mohamed Krichen, News Presenter, Al Jazeera in a Decade, 2006)

These viewers were not only losing their trust in local Arab media but also in western media, that used to be their destination in difficult times when they needed to know more. They found in Al Jazeera what they had been looking for, as this journalist explains:

Arabs have a deep feeling that they have been wronged for a long time since they lost Andalusia. This feeling became even deeper with the occupation of the Arab world by some Western countries in the recent past. They feel that Al Jazeera represents their voice, presenting, at least politically, what they want. (P1, December 2010).

The journalist’s words suggest that audience nostalgia for their bright history and deep roots made them feel that they were losing the strong position they used to hold a long time ago. Al Jazeera understands this feeling and realises their needs; therefore, it manages to present them whatever satisfies their desire to feel strong, be heard, and understood.

5.3.2.3 Contention image and newsroom formation

Often voiceless people seek to build relationships with the wider and international communities. This was one of the reasons behind the establishment of a human rights desk at Al Jazeera. The News Director puts it thus,

This section is important to introduce and talk about human rights issues. It also educates people in our Arab world when their rights are violated, so they make sure they are not alone in the world that they live in and that there is hope to develop communities and political systems in the Arab world. (December 2010)
The human rights desk was added to the newsroom to educate Arab viewers and spread the culture of human rights among them. This section provides viewers with their need for information about this specific field (human rights). Through presenting news of other people who have been abused in their countries, and by giving them the chance to present their stories, Al Jazeera gives hope for change in Arab communities and improvement in their political systems. One also senses this mood in the spirit of the small museum and in the pictures on the wall in the passage to the newsroom. The promotional pictures hanging on the walls show how Al Jazeera is helping ordinary people by airing their voice and views. The photos of Al Jazeera journalists who were killed in the line of duty are also examples of this resilient spirit.

5.3.2.4 Audience contention image and journalist practice

Journalists’ commitment to contributing to change and development in political systems can be seen in the enthusiastic behaviour of Al Jazeera journalists when they face such a situation. For example, while I was observing the newsroom, the uprising in Sidi Bou Zaid, Tunisia, started. I watched with interest the journalists who were covering the events from their desks. The Tunisian journalists’ enthusiasm is indescribable. They worked without taking any breaks, searching for information all the while. It was more than the usual professional practice. During break time, while watching documentary videos about Tunisia, one of them said that he was happy to do his duty in explaining the situation in Tunisia and playing a part in the anticipated change. The same can be said about the journalists from Sudan. During the coverage of the separation of Sudan and the beating of a Sudanese girl, the Sudanese journalists worked very hard to get as much information as possible. They believed that they were committed to speak for the communities they were part of. Journalists represent categories in the wider communities, and they usually tend to see themselves as part of society, regardless of their claim that they are totally objective. Part of this professional value is the embedded nature of news audiences in journalists.

5.4 Cultural context shaping audience image

If journalists in the newsroom are a small sample of the target audience, then it can be said that these journalists simulate the audience’s character and, occasionally, they
sense the viewers’ feelings, depending usually on their own experiences, as is illustrated here:

Al Jazeera is close to the pulse of the people because when it deals with Arab issues that concern people it sides with them... In covering issues of the occupation of Arab territories, for example, or the issue of dividing Sudan, I feel pain whenever the subject is Sudan... An Arab country will be divided into more than two, and Yemen is going the same way, Lebanon, and Iraq, too. I think most people feel the same and have the same view. (SP4, December 2010)

The image of the audience is embedded in the news process (Gans, 1979); however, it has to be said that this does not mean that journalists do not think about the audience or are not interested in knowing them. It is quite frequent for journalists to discuss their audience’s needs and feelings while they are deciding the subject of the news. But journalists see themselves as presenters to the audience and a part of the communities that they are talking about; they are not outsiders. They share with their viewers many common things, including their views and feelings about certain Arab issues. It seems quite common for these people to express their deeply held feelings of belonging to an Arab culture, or at least an enjoyment in their search for such unity.

Many Al Jazeera journalists have lived and worked in western countries for some time. They have a nostalgia for home, where home becomes an idea of something they need to believe in. The following example of a discussion between two journalists says it all:

**Journalist A:** I am worried and unsure about agreeing to come here.

**Journalist B:** Why, is it because of the work?

**Journalist A:** I was happy in Canada, and this is not the right time to come back. I am thinking of my son’s education. In one year, he will be going to university.

**Journalist B:** Do not regret coming back. Believe me it is much safer for our kids to be raised here in their own society. I lived in Europe for a long time and the conclusion I came to is that we belong here. It is the only place where we can find peace of mind. If you are worried about your son’s education, you can find good options and various solutions here. This is not a reason to leave home. We were tricked for a long time into thinking that western culture has something to offer us. You know that we have everything; we just need to take these things back.

Journalists, in their free time in the newsroom or in the cafeteria during their break, if they not involved in a political discussion they talk about the different aspects of Arab
culture. Even when they have casual conversations about music and cinema, you can feel the pride, nostalgia, and faith in Arab principles and values.

Journalists assume that their personal experience comes within the context of their audience’s experience. For example, Head of the Human Rights section was a prisoner in Guantanamo. When I asked him if his experiences had any relationship with his present position in Al Jazeera, he said,

_The detainees in Guantanamo were people who needed somebody to reflect their issues and adopt the abuses they faced. They needed a platform to express their problems and concerns. I was finally released from Guantanamo because Al Jazeera gave priority to my case, continuously covered the issue of my incarceration at the Camp, and shed light on the humanitarian side of my imprisonment. (HHD, December 2010)_

These views about the audience are also formed by journalists’ access to their audience feedback and connection with them.

### 5.5 Individual connections

Although journalists do not read the official reports of the audience feedback, news workers follow different methods to learn about their audience (Pallmeyer, 1997). Journalists, as the News Director suggests below, speak directly to the audience:

_We have journalists from different countries. They go to their areas and communicate with their friends and relatives, and we receive reactions that make us feel proud. The second way is that we receive many calls about the programmes and reports. (ND, December 2010)_

I observed many journalists searching YouTube and social websites to gauge the audience’s reaction to what had been broadcast. Journalists state that their connection to the audience is mainly direct, and that the audience is an integral part of the news source and the news. The new computer system used to study viewers’ opinions contains a link called ‘participate’, and viewers can send their news and videos to Al Jazeera.

Audience interest is an important factor in the news production. Visualising the audience is an on-going process that goes through different levels of news construction, newsroom management, and actors. It is a practice that might change over time in response to several factors. One of the important criteria of this practice
is that it is affected by the changes that accrue in society and the change in the roles of different social groups.

Al Jazeera targets an audience that speaks Arabic and is interested to know about Arabs and Muslims. It emphasises two main aspects in this imagined audience: diversity and contention, and focuses on the way these influence the newsroom structure and journalists’ activities (Figure 5.1).

![Figure 5.1: Audience image and newsroom formation](image)

5.6 Visualising Al Jazeera’s news form

News production was seen in some studies as standardised and homogenised (Hamas, 2012; Krzysiek, 2009; Cooper, 2008). Some studies state that production might take different forms (Mellor, 2007; Matar, 2007). The term ‘form’ was introduced recently to news production studies. For Matthews (2010) ‘form’ means: “the differentiated approaches that these take when delivering news, as well as understand the particularized production processes that shape them” (p. 22). Based on Williams’s (1977) work, Matthew divides the term into three aspects: agenda, mode, and style. This section borrows the same framework to explain Al Jazeera’s news production. One aspect that will be added is the genre ‘talk’ because in recent broadcast news production this has become an essential, influential element.
Before delving into these issues, it is important to investigate how Al Jazeera news workers understand or visualise its news forms. Journalists are mostly concerned about the product images (Pallmeyer, 1997). This study argues that journalists build conspicuous images of their products based on the knowledge they share about their organisations’ philosophy. Such an understanding is the framework for journalistic understanding of their news form that shapes their practice and the news presentation.

Each of the three observed programmes has their own features. They also have comment features that distinguish Al Jazeera from other news organisations. These characteristics are shaped by journalists’ understanding of their news programme form. For most of its news workers Al Jazeera was a dream; they were sceptical whether its agenda could be put into practice. Mohamed Krichen, one of the main news presenters, explains in his testimony how this dream began to take shape and develop its own character over time:

*On that day, at 4pm to be exact, serious work began to bridge the gap between rhetoric and practice, intentions and execution, ambition and reality. Of course, it was impossible to assess the outcome instantly. The events, news coverage, and programmes that gradually formed the characteristics of Al Jazeera’s editorial policy, and hence its identity, initially closely resembled the BBC Arabic Service – perhaps most of the faces seen on its screens were former BBC employees. However, Al Jazeera soon stopped resembling anything and took up the special position that it has been strengthening day by day.* (Al Jazeera in a Decade, 2006)

As the quote above shows, Al Jazeera, as a new, adventurous idea in the Arab world, took time planning and designing the new model. Initially, it employed journalists who worked at the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) Arabic desk; therefore, it was not surprising that Al Jazeera reflected the BBC’s culture for some time. As the above statement shows, through time it built its unique form.

### 5.6.1 Becoming Al Jazeera

In its vision statement, Al Jazeera presents itself thus:

*Al Jazeera as an Arab media service affiliation is globally oriented with a motto of “opinion and the opinion of others”, a pluralist platform seeking truth and abiding by the principles of professionalism, within an institutional framework. Seeking to raise public awareness of issues of concern to the public, it aspires to be a bridge between peoples and cultures and enhance the human right to knowledge and the values of tolerance and democracy and respect for human rights and freedom.* (Al Jazeera Website)
One of the noticeable features about Al Jazeera is the way it introduces itself to Arab viewers as a presenter of Arab culture. It simulates the western presentation style but has succeeded in reshaping this style to accommodate Arab culture. Researchers have discussed the extent to which Al Jazeera is sensitive to Arab culture, paying special attention to language, the adoption of Mecca timing, in contrast to other Arab channels that either use their local or Greenwich Mean Time (Barkho, 2010). Choosing Mecca and not Greenwich was a very intelligent step. Mecca, with its religious significance, represents the Muslim nation’s unity. In this case, Greenwich and Mecca are symbols of two different cultures. Al Jazeera’s logo that is written in Diwani font is an art that reminds Arabs of their bright history (Darwish, 2009).

The interview data gathered, especially from the older journalists, show that news workers construct a collective understanding of the reorganisation of their news form. Mohamed Krichen explains what distinguishes Al Jazeera from other news organisations,

*Three aspects came to make up the distinctive character of Al Jazeera over days months and years... Refraining from being a propaganda tool for Qatar was an achievement in itself... Furthermore, not one Arab channel had ever covered, for instance, the trial of defendants accused of a failed coup d'état, presenting their testimonies about being subjected to torture, or inviting Amnesty International observers to appear on news bulletins and comment on discrepancies in the court proceedings... For the first time, a television station emerged that took up the role of covering Arab issues in a way at odds with the antiquated style adopted by official stations for decades... For the first time, we earned the right to cover international issues according to criteria other than those that the western media had adopted and imposed on the entire world as the sole and sacred narrative. (Mohamed Krichen, Al Jazeera in a Decade, 2006)*

This statement suggests that Al Jazeera is different from other Arab media organisations in its presentation style, language, and selection of news stories. It produces news with a different agenda than the usual propaganda in the Arab world. The types of news that Al Jazeera produces are not the usual news stories in the Arab media. Although it simulates the western style, it adjusts this style to present Arab views and counter the western presentation style that has a monopoly on both Arab and International issues.
5.6.2 Al Jazeera news form: Cultural view

Journalists’ understanding of their news form is constructed with respect to the wider Arab culture, as the journalist here points out:

*Al Jazeera is clear that its mission came in response to the existing world order which built its pillars of culture and view of western attempts to impose a particular pattern of behaviour, heritage, civilization, and information on the Arab world. Al Jazeera was established to shed light on the truth and to tell the truth to the Arab world. (J4, December, 2010)*

The philosophy of Al Jazeera, as its journalists understand it, is based on the mission it has to protect Arab culture and heritage and resist the global homogenisation of values and principles that is led by western countries and does not respect Arab history and civilisation. It also has the obligation to tell the truth in a way that other western media are not necessarily doing because they produce their news with different agendas.

5.6.3 Al Jazeera news form: Political view

Journalists’ statements show that Al Jazeera’s motto ‘Opinion and the other opinion’ is the essential element in shaping its product. The following extract underlines this view,

*There is another important starting point that defined the course taken by Al Jazeera and made it a prime mover, politically and socially, in an Arab arena that denied the existence of others’ opinion. That is the slang adapted by the channel... that would challenge the familiarities and tradition in official media circles on the Arab stage. (Jameel, Al Jazeera in a Decade, 2006)*

Al Jazeera chose its motto carefully. It is meant to be typically challenging not only within an Arab media context but also within its social and political contexts as well. This slogan made it an “open parliament”. Al Jazeera’s main news programmes are designed primarily not to ‘tell’ the news but to explore it by presenting different views and other opinions. This journalist explains it in this way:

*I have been working here for eleven years. What it does now is what will count in history. It breaks the stereotypes in the Arab media and government-controlled media that put people down and whenever opposing voices rise up they put them in jail. Al Jazeera, with its logo, ‘The opinion and other opinion’, means everyone has the right to speak. (SP1, December 2010)*
Al Jazeera challenges the Arab political and media status quo. Open debates and the opportunity for ‘silent’ people to present their views is adopted by Al Jazeera as the approach that enables it to be different from other Arab media. This approach understands the political and social situations in Arab communities and responds to the desires of viewers who lack such chances.

The logo gives Al Jazeera its unique style and shapes its news conduct. As one of the journalists said, “Is Al Jazeera a news or a political channel? I would say that Al Jazeera is a political organisation. The logo ‘The opinion and other opinion’ has a political meaning and distinguishes Al Jazeera from other channels, such as the BBC” (SJ3, December, 2010). This journalist suggested that while the BBC, for example, focuses on the immediate value in the news stories Al Jazeera is instead interested in discussing and examining different angles of the news. Journalists distinguish between their own news organisation and others. They first see their news as different from other local and international outlets. Additionally, as explained in the above statement, they became more specific when they explain their treatment of the news story.

Journalists define the way they present the news and justify their practice. Al Jazeera, in its search to be unique and present different views, chose to present new voices and started to prefer new views that, as the journalist below said, are not heard in other Arab news organisations:

Al Jazeera was the first channel in the Arab world to recognize you as a human being and a citizen. Previously, the news was about meetings and officials’ travels. We moved from this protocol news about, for example, the Syrian President to news about arrests in Syria. Naturally, the news goes where it should be and that is the human story. This is what Al Jazeera did remarkably well. (J10, December 2010)

Al Jazeera is interested in political subjects. Even when discussing other issues, it usually looks for a political angle or at least tries to highlight its values and principles. As this journalist says, Al Jazeera always produces the hard and serious face of any issue: “Al Jazeera still has the chance to work on entertainment. Even if they report one, they look at it from a political angle” (SP1, December 2010).

This confirms the view that journalist’s political knowledge is the core skill that is employed in the editorial meetings. These views are will be examined in the following
chapter to reflect on Al Jazeera’s serious treatment of news and its professional standards that shape journalists selection and construction of the news stories.

5.7 Conclusion

It seems that journalists construct their knowledge about their audience through their communication with the audience in traditional ways, such as talking directly to their friends and others, and reading commentary on Facebook, YouTube, and other websites. Sometimes they get indications from higher management and are influenced by their own experiences.

The organisation’s news form is constructed according to certain understandings of the audience’s characteristics. This is not just to say that it meets the audience’s demands but to say that they think it represents this audience because it understands it differently than other news organisations. It could be said that journalists visualise their audience in light of their understanding of the news form. This connection becomes clearer through their engagement in their daily work over time and in the action of learning about both their audience and their news form.

Shankleman (2003) highlights this association. He states that news organisations establish an unconscious collective culture which motivates journalists and is deployed as a framework for their activities. This culture usually has common values with the host nation’s values and shapes journalists’ understanding of their audience’s needs. These views are dynamic and change over time. This understanding of audience views influence newsroom division and journalists’ activities as well. These views have an impact on the news production selection and style.

In the next chapter, there will be more detailed illustrations about how these views are reflected in the news topic selection and the construction of the news stories and images.
Chapter Six

Al Jazeera News Agenda

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed Al Jazeera journalists’ concept of their audiences as characterised by diversity and contention. It also showed their understanding of their news form. Based on these findings, this Chapter will explain how journalists’ understanding of news form and audience shapes the selection of their news stories and the structure of the final products.

This Chapter shows how a view of a shared Arab interest or perspective among Al Jazeera’s journalists is integrated in the production process and the diversity of Al Jazeera’s audience and its conflicting opinions. Although the findings show that this view is defined by journalists’ visualisations of their news form, they still adhere to professional understanding of programme features and their aim.

To begin with, an explanation of the news selection framework is provided. Then, an analysis of news agenda categories is presented by providing examples of each category, that is, relevant news, conflict agenda, and the construction of other news. The Chapter provides an analysis of the construction of news agenda into the configurations of news stories and actors.

6.2 Al Jazeera’s news agenda framework

To understand Al Jazeera’s news agenda it is important to examine how the news stories are constructed. Altheidi (2003) points out that the Al Jazeera newsroom follows several criteria or news values, such as proximity, impact, dramatic, exclusive, videos, and footage. He also states that human interest, scientific, and cultural news stories are less important, and the focus is more on political and economic stories. His study does not provide any analysis, examples, or discussion of these criteria.
The following discussion will show that most of these news values are general categories which can be discussed in detail. The findings from the interviews show that Al Jazeera is in a ‘transfer’ stage, rethinking its news values and presentation styles. Setting the news agenda means first, employing journalists’ skills and practice in constructing the news themes and actors, and second, it is a visualisation of their audience needs, characters, and programme form. These two general guidelines are explained below.

As Al Jazeera broadcasts for Arab viewers or those who speak Arabic and have an interest in Arab and Islamic cultures, it is natural, as most of its journalists state, to select news topics that are relevant to this audience or might have an impact on them:

_The most important news is placed at the beginning, based on its relevance to the Arab world. This is the measure Al Jazeera deals with... In the end Al Jazeera broadcasts to the Arab world. It is also possible that global events are included if they have repercussions on the Arab world. I imagine that this is an important measure._ (P2, December 2010)

Journalists have learned through their work that the visualised audience has particular needs and a different personality which distinguishes them from other audiences. The news selected for them will be framed accordingly:

_What dictates the choice of the story is the public. I envisage that it is an Arabic public and what they care about is not necessarily the same as the European or American public interest. This privacy in the relationship determines news treatment._ (SJ3, December 2010)

Journalists demonstrate that Al Jazeera English, for example, has a different agenda, and its news topics are not the same as on the Arabic channel because it targets a different audience. “If you look at the English channel, you will see the difference. Although we share elements with them with respect to Islamic culture, they still speak to a different audience” (J3, December, 2010). Barkho (2010) and Uysal (2010) believe that Arabic and English Al Jazeera differ in their treatment of the news because they are targeting different audiences. Uysal (2010) states that while the Arabic channel adopts a more pan-Arab orientation, the English channel follows a more international approach.

In selecting the news or deciding which angle should be addressed, the framework that is applied to this discussion is the relevance of these topics to an Arab audience as we can see, for example, in the decision about what to present in the Assange story:
In the WikiLeaks matter, I chose topics associated with the Arab world according to their importance. We work on a single link for different subjects. We depend on what is newly published, so as not to give other agencies the opportunity to broadcast the news before us. (J5, December 2010)

Selecting the relevant angle for the audience is demonstrated in the news process. The following excerpt, for example, from the editorial meeting of Wednesday December 8, 2010, explains the issue of the relevance of a topic to the Arab world:

Journalist 1: The Lebanon topic: the Group of March 14 have made remarks about politicising the court.
Producer 1: If WikiLeaks talked about Lebanon we can add it.
Journalist 2: We have only dealt with Hezbollah and the Arab forces.
Producer 1: Begin with Lebanon and then WikiLeaks. Put the clips in the speech about the country.

WikiLeaks material was used as additional information and added to the news events related to Hezbollah and the international court investigating Hariri’s assassination in Lebanon. The journalist explains:

The WikiLeaks news was of no importance in itself because it was denied by Seniora [an ally of Hariri’s political party]. What is important is the impact on the crisis now, in light of Hezbollah waiting for the indictment resolution accusing them of Hariri’s assassination. (P3, December 2010)

It can be seen from the discussion above that journalists choose an element in the story that is related to their audience (Nossek, 2004; Nossek and Berkowitz, 2006). Their particular selection is not detached from trying to be innovative, so that they can compete with other news organisations. We can also see the connections that journalists try to build between two distributed events to come up with a comprehensive story. Their craft is directed by providing the audience with what is relevant to them. However, what is relevant to this audience can be debateable and agreeing what is pertinent can be problematic. A few journalists appear to be apprehensive about whether what is produced by Al Jazeera is really relevant to an Arab audience:

Al Jazeera defines itself, and this is very important, as an Arab organisation with a global orientation. It offers services to Arabic speakers, but it cares about its audience a lot. The important news can be about Guantanamo, Sudan or the Congo... However, it seems to me that there are opinions that say ‘this matters to Arab viewers, this does not matter to Arab viewers’. I do not agree with this view. (J2, December 2010)
Such criticisms were exceptional, and they were mainly concerned with the view of the Arab world being distinguished as being totally different from other countries and that there should be more focus on their local issues. They are part of a global audience, so it might be that they share some common interests with others outside their local region. Similar objections might become, in the future, one of the elements that might change the direction of Al Jazeera’s coverage. However, at the time when the present study was carried out, audience interests were mostly linked to what is relevant to or affects the audience politically and socially.

Another important element deduced from the observation is the decision about the angle of the news treatment as linked to particular Arab views. The main aim of Al Jazeera’s news workers is to present news that is relevant to the Islamic and Arab worlds. It is also important for them to present it the way they think is the Arab perspective, one of the main aims of Al Jazeera since its foundation. Such a norm is an important framework in selecting the news angle and how the topic should be addressed. Having an Arab perspective on Middle Eastern issues can be tricky. While it is easy to define such a perspective via others’ views, it is quite difficult to present a united Arab perspective on internal issues in the Arab world.

*With regards to what is happening on the ground with some sensitive topics, such as conflicts between Sunnis and Shiites, we need to be extremely cautious. Some news you deal with boldly. For instance, two martyrs fall in Gaza and this news is important for the Arab nation and Al Jazeera, without hesitation. But when we say, for example, that clashes have happened in eastern Saudi Arabia between Sunnis and Shiites or in Bahrain, this issue needs caution and editing, because it can have negative repercussions. (SP5, December 2010)*

Objectivity has different aspects and is shaped by each individual case. The political sphere has different aspects. While united on the conflict between Israel and Palestine, it may get more complicated when dealing with different ideologies.

The next section will discuss subjects selected from the observation period (December, 2010) and highlight the construction of the news agenda to understand how they are related to journalists’ views on form and audience.
6.3 The Arab-Israeli conflict

There is an agreement among journalists that the Middle East issues are at the core of Al Jazeera’s work, and that their viewers are interested in Palestinian issues. Therefore, by covering this conflict, Al Jazeera journalists think that they are responding to their audience’s need to hear the news from an Arab perspective. “I think all Arabs find themselves in Al Jazeera. Al Jazeera represents them all. When we cover Palestinian issues we cover all Arabs because they are all interested in this topic. It is their main concern,” said J8 (December 2010). The journalist’s words highlight the fact that the importance of the Palestinian topics comes from its direct relationship to all Arabs. Although it is news mostly about a specific country, this conflict concerns all Arabs.

Al Jazeera’s interest in Arab-Israeli issues is one of the reasons behind its popularity and success. Its performance in covering the First and Second Intifadas increased its ratings among Arabs, despite what some Palestinians who dislike Al Jazeera think (Miles, 2005; Zyani, 2005). In two week, Palestine received 7.9% coverage and Israel 4.9% (note that the researcher treated news about the Al Karmal fire as news about Israel). In 7 out of 15 days, Palestine/Israel formed the headline stories. Sudan, which was facing separation problems, received 10% of the headlines, and Egypt, that had election problems, 7%. Although the Palestine-Israel issue is one of the core on-going subjects reported on Al Jazeera, its coverage may vary.

6.3.1 Constructing the Arab/Israeli conflict

To understand the news agenda it is important to examine how the stories are constructed. Data from the observation shows that journalists discussed the Israeli/Palestine topic with more sympathy towards Palestinians. An example of this practice will be presented here to show how journalists dealt with this conflict after the announcement of the peace negotiations.

There was an early discussion that focused on the problem and presented it differently from other news channels. The following is an example from a Hasad Alyoum
meeting. Instructions from the bulletin producer were given to the journalist who was working on the story:

*The demonstrations in Israel: we have to focus on the policy of discrimination. Is the discrimination issue suffered by the Arabs limited? The ‘Judaization of Jerusalem’ and forcing upon them the issue of Israeli identity must be clear in the form of graphics or reports. (December 8, 2010, Hasad Alyoum editorial meeting)*

It is clear that news is framed here to make a point about Israel’s aggressive behaviour towards the Palestinians. The following excerpt shows the journalist’s understanding towards the Palestinians’ plight and condemnation of Israel’s unjust treatment of Palestinians:

*Producer 1:* From Jerusalem: We have a press conference about those threatened with expulsion from Jerusalem and Ramallah. There is a picket by Hamas to denounce Abutir’s expulsion. There are also the preparations for the celebration of the Human Rights Day by talking about the oldest and youngest prisoners... These topics are good material to talk about Israel’s politics of deportation. We also have the Israeli citizens’ takeover of the water springs and turning them into parks with foreign names. (December 9, 2010, Midday editorial meeting)

The next section will demonstrate how such decisions shape the themes and main actors in the news stories.

### 6.3.2 The Palestinian conflict

Dealing with the Palestinian conflict means to also deal with the different Palestinian parties Fatah and Hamas. These two parties are in conflict, although they generally stand in opposite directions from the same enemy. In the newsroom, there were negotiations on how to keep the coverage of the conflicting parties fair. However, Fatah’s failure provided an opportunity to focus on the other party:

*Producer 1:* There are statements from some Israeli officials that the recognition of Palestine must be stopped.

*Producer 2:* Are you going to include these comments?

*Producer 1:* No, we will add Israel’s new threats. Our clip is about a member of the Political Bureau of Hamas accusing Abbas and the ruling powers of the blocking of the reconciliation efforts. Also, there is another clip about the member of the Political Bureau of Hamas saying that if arrests continue in the West Bank, the file of on the prisoners will be discussed between Hamas and Israel.

*Producer 2:* What is the meaning of this talk specifically?
Producer I: *It means that if the security coordination between Israel and the Palestinian Authority leads to arrests, the Authority has no hand in it. In practice, prisoners who are in the Authority’s prisons are considered prisoners of Israel! They are prisoners of Israel’s governors because they are the ones who give orders, and they are just security coordination representatives. So, instead of asking the Authority to release detainees, we ask Israel, which is the decision maker.*

The above discussion shows that the journalists sympathise with Hamas and consider Fatah as an agent who takes orders from Israel. We can also see that there is clear criticism of Fatah’s strategies in dealing with the failure of the negotiations and its weak stance towards Israel. Witnessing other similar discussions in the editorial meetings, it is safe to assume that the journalists’ feelings towards Fatah’s failure make them turn towards the opposition. It is also clear that they believe that Fatah is a weak player. However, they are still cautious about how to present such disagreements to their audience. The suggestion was made to focus more on the idea of reconciliation and uniting the Palestinian standpoint. The construction here can be linked to what was discussed in Chapter Five, about journalists viewing their audience as contentious and diverse in their ideologies.

6.3.3 The Arab/Israeli conflict in the news content

We move now to analysis some representative news stories and reflect on the above discussion. If we look at a sample of these stories, we can see that the topics were as follows: failure of the peace negotiations, demolition of homes, killings, deportations and human crisis, amongst others. We can see by tracing the news sequence that after what might have been the failure of the negotiations between Israel and Fatah that Al Jazeera increased the amount of news about the Israeli attitude and their injustice towards the Palestinians. The failed negotiation efforts were usually placed in between news about aggressive Israeli behaviour. They framed and structured the order of the news stories carefully so that it reflected the failure of the negotiations and showed Hamas struggling for their rights.

Through using vocabularies such as the United States (US) “admit” and “give up”, the US is shown as failing in its peace negotiations, and that it is weak towards Israel’s demands. The US talks about peace but acts differently. The following is an excerpt
from the *Midday* programme, “From his side, Mitchell said that the United States insists on continuing efforts to establish an independent Palestine with credibility, despite all the difficulties and barriers that stand in its way” (*Midday*, December 2010).

This news story was framed to show that US’s actions are predicted. They do not take serious actions towards Israel. Firstly, it was placed between a human rights report about Israeli abuse and Fatah’s statement about its new discussion to focus more on ending Israeli occupation. Additionally, the video accompanying this statement is a still picture of Mitchell smiling in front of an official building. It looks more like a souvenir picture taken by a tourist. The picture does not reflect what is said in the statement.

Israelis are referred to as occupying forces. During the peace negotiations, the Israeli government is killing and demolishing Palestinian homes. They are even not homes; they are tents and humble houses built from meagre and unstable materials. The Israeli government also has a history of abusing Palestinian youth and imprisoning underage children. The Palestinians are shown as the victims. Children are jailed and are far from their homes. They lived in tents but even those are demolished. They are deported from their country by force. This information is revealed in the news by human rights organisations, some of which are Israeli organisations.

In the news above, Fatah is presented as a weak party, relying totally on US promises. They are apparently failing. Fatah’s statements are reactions to US and Israeli behaviour. This is clear in the comment made about President Abbass, “It is not possible for his dignity to continue to be the President of the authority that does not exist with the continuation of the occupation, in an implicit reference to the possibility of dissolving the Palestinian Authority” (4 December 2010). The story suggests Fatah’s weakness, and that it does not have any authority or a clear aim.

There were two stories about Hamas, one about martyrs and another about a live airing of a Hamas leader’s speech. Both stories, seen in the context of news about Palestinian/Israeli issues, emphasise the struggle for Palestinian rights.
6.3.4 The Palestine/Israel conflict: Cultural context

The above section showed the construction of the Palestine/Israel conflict. This section explains how this construction is shaped by journalists’ visualisation of their audience culture. This mode of coverage was premeditated as shown above. Journalists made the decision clear in the editorial meetings. In the coverage of the failure of the peace negotiations they shed light on the Israeli attitude towards the Palestinians. Showing more sympathy towards Palestinians is justified by Al Jazeera journalists. They see the issue from the Arab perspective and as the truth, as stated below:

*Al Jazeera is trying not to be biased to any party, especially if the party is an Arab one. You cannot have your correspondents stay neutral in the Arab-Israeli conflict or in the Hamas-Fatah conflict. I cannot be neutral in Iraq. As an Arab, I feel I belong to this country, and you ask me to be neutral about Iraq and the Americans. You can be objective, but you cannot be neutral because you cannot deprive your correspondent of his feelings... Al Jazeera is closer to people’s hearts because they deal with Arab issues with some elements of understanding and empathy... In our reports on Gaza, when Wael Dahdouh was doing an interview, he wept with the girl when she mentioned that no one had survived from her family. It makes no sense to ask him not to show any emotion... However, you alert your correspondent to be objective and not sentimental. He should not say, for instance, that Israel fired on the demonstration and dozens were killed when the reality is that four or five were killed only. We ask him to look at the Israeli perspective, too. (SP4, December 2010).*

The quotation shows that journalists, as part of the Arab region, cannot be detached from their natural feelings for the Palestinians. It was explained previously, in Chapter Four, that objectivity is a hard task to achieve fully. News organisations work in certain political and cultural contexts and become, to some extent, a part of those contexts. Several studies justify Al Jazeera’s empathetic stance towards Palestine as a way of countering the bias in western media, which usually takes the Israeli side (Hartmut and Adolphsen, 2008; Barkho 2009; Al-Khuri, 2011). Many journalists state that, when it comes to Palestine, they cannot be fully objective because they have to face the other side. Others said that they are objective because they are standing by the victims’ side and that is objectivity as they understand it.

It might be helpful to put our investigation of media objectivity and its role in the context of the type of relationship between countries and different parts of the world. Seib (2005) and Al Theidi (2003) suggest that Al Jazeera counters the dominant western voice. Huffman (2002) suggests that the US should use Al Jazeera’s
popularity as a stage to explain its policy towards the Arab world. What should be
highlighted here is that news organisations are not detachable from the political
beliefs of their host nations and the political ideology of the audience that they
represent (Nossek and Berkowitz, 2006; 2004).

In Al Jazeera, news from Israel is not just about Israelis and Arabs, but it is also about
Palestine and how it is divided between two groups, Fatah and Hamas, and the
disagreements between these two groups and their different ideologies and approaches
with regards to the Palestinian case. Al Jazeera, as shown above, is one of the first
news organisations to highlight this disagreement. This leads us to the next point.

6.4 The ‘conflicts’ agenda: All Arabs?

The observations and the interviews findings showed that journalists refer to their
audience as unit which criticised by cultural and political diversity. Journalists, also
clime that their news represents this diverse audience. The content and discourse
analysis in this chapter shows that news focus on some countries more than others.
Another feature in Al Jazeera’s agenda is the construction of controversial views
(Table 6.1). The political conflict topics take about 30% of the coverage of the
political issues. From the beginning, Al Jazeera aimed to present Arab viewers with a
different agenda than the other Arab outlets; therefore, it moved from presenting the
so-called ‘protocol news’ to what Al Jazeera believes is the real news about citizens
and ordinary people.

Al Jazeera had a very strong beginning, challenging the long political control of the
media. Al Jazeera was interested in surprising its Arab viewers by revealing what was
considered taboo. They started to discuss minority group issues, as this journalist
explains:

*Al Jazeera’s problems started when it first appeared. It began to speak about the delicate,
sensitive problems in the Arab region, such as ethnic groups, different minority groups, the
Kurds in Iraq, the Copts in Egypt, the Christians in Sudan, the sectarian structure in
Lebanon, or the issues dividing the Shia, Sunni, and Ismailis in the Arabian Peninsula.
These are all issues that have never been dealt with by any media organization. The Arab
regimes were trying to cover up all of these issues so as not to aggravate anybody. (SP2,
December 2010)*
This account shows that Al Jazeera presented news about different ethnic groups in the Arab world and brought attention to their relationship with each other and the complex political struggles between the local government and different ideological groups. It is clear how the understanding of this multicultural, contention audience leads journalists to pay attention to issues considered minor and sometimes covered as if they do not exist in the Arab world.

Table 6.1: *Midday* political news topics (December 1 to 20, 2010)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political topics</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visit</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political statement</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>29.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political negations</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political change</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Rights</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting/summit</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority situations</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal political conflict</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International relation conflicts</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other politics</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>108</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.4.1 Constructing the conflict: cultural and political view

Conflict themes are shaped by journalists’ visualisations of their news form and how it should address the political and cultural audience’s needs. Further evidence is presented below supporting the argument that Al Jazeera, besides being interested in broadcasting news about minority groups in the Arab world, is also keen on presenting it from controversial angles, that usually differ from other Arab media organisations, as journalists visualise their news form.

The following is an email sent by the producer on the Assignment Desk, giving instructions to the reporter in Syria to come up with a new story about the Syrian Muslim-Christian Brotherhood conference.
Email December 15, 2010

Syria Muslim-Christian Brotherhood conference in Damascus with the participation of thirty countries. We want a report but in a different spirit from what is in the news below. We want to touch through this conference the real issues of concern to the relationship between Muslims and Christians and the impact of the problems in the region, for example Iraq and Egypt, on the relationship between Muslims and Christians in Syria.

The opening and the start of the special events of the conference at ten thirty this morning

Syria hosts an international conference on Muslim-Christian Brotherhood with the participation of thirty countries.

Damascus, Jerusalem Press Service

The Ministry of Awqaf and Christian churches in Syria host tomorrow, Wednesday, December 15, an international conference entitled Muslim-Christian Brotherhood with the participation of delegations from more than thirty countries in the Umayyad Palace for Conferences. The conference will discuss the importance of fraternity and unity to face the challenges and dangers that threaten the values and principles that came in the heavenly religions. According to those who support it... He said this conference is one of the serious steps that all Syrian religious institutions take to introduce the fraternal Islamic-Christian unity in Syria, a move that comes in order to entrench unity between Islam and Christianity, and they are the two main religions that form Syria. The Larsa conference is a message to the others. We are proud of the coexistence of a Muslim-Christian model in Syria, and we want to export it to the world.

Rajah confirmed that the Conference is purely religious and has nothing to do with politics, said this is purely religious message we want through it the unity that is enjoyed by Syrians, between Islam and Christianity, to permeate the whole world, a move that comes at the invitation of the Ministry of Awqaf and Christian churches in Syria, specifically for this purpose as he said.

The producer here insists on linking the news to the political struggle that exists in the Arab world and that negatively affects the relationship between Christians and Muslims in several Arab countries. The original news based on the Syrian government’s viewpoint focused on presenting a peaceful image of the relationship between Muslims and Christians in Syria. In this example, the news was selected and framed to challenge the political statutes and the Arab official media discourse. Several studies show the same results (Pintak, 2011; Lynch, 2006; Touzani, 2011). Such framing agreed with what Matthews and Cottle (2010) referred to as the contention frame. They suggest that in this type of frame both government and opposition views are reported fairly. However, it is difficult to assess the balance her.
6.4.2 Covering Arab region: Cultural negotiation

The above section stated the controversial agenda in covering Arab internal issues. In this section, we will discuss this feature further and see if it applies to all Arab countries. Although Al Jazeera claims that it aims to present Arab news in the widest context possible, journalists share a different view.

After a deep look at the subjects covered, it seems that Al Jazeera news is mainly related to the general political conflict and struggle in each country. These take up about 9% (Table 6.2) of the overall coverage. In the Arab world, where the media is monitored, stories at a local level about regulations, women’s rights, political corruption and others, need to be investigated. This is not to say that covering the conflict between governments and citizens or opposition parties is not important. The question here is whether giving attention to such subjects captures the real needs of Arab citizens and helps to provide a dialogue between disagreeing parties and ideologies: did it develop understanding? Was it enough to establish new values for democracies? Did it just feed the existing mass antagonism?

Journalists justify this by explaining that these regions are the “hot spots” in the Arab world, and they are part of the international power conflict. Reviewing their practice, most journalists share the need to include more sectors and regions in their daily coverage. The News Director explains that they realise that some neglected parts of the Arab region do not get enough media attention for their problems. He states:

*While Al Jazeera is getting bigger and extending, it wishes to send a message to its viewers that it is not just interested in the core or main issues that are relevant to them or even to the whole world; it also wants to deal with internal and local issues in all Arab countries. One can see this in Lebanon and Egypt where there are historical reasons, such as the professional staff in our offices there, the cooperation they receive, and also because of a historical culture that is interested in this part of the Arab region more than all other Arab countries. Therefore, maybe in the future, we will think about creating techniques to produce more local issues... Al Jazeera might consider applying something similar to the attention it gives to the Moroccan part, or other regions, such as the Gulf countries for example.* (ND, December 2010)

This statement shows that Al Jazeera treats news topics in Arab countries differently. While there is obvious and understandable interest in some countries, such as Egypt, the Gulf countries, on the other hand, do not receive the same attention. Al Jazeera seems to divide the Arab world into ‘key players’ and ‘other countries’, whose news
they consider to be local and not affecting or not related to core international issues. To remain close to its viewers, Al Jazeera is thinking of extending its coverage. The Head of the Planning Section explained,

*Viewers would like to see themselves in news programmes. When I watch the news I would like to see topics about my country and my society’s problems and, if I do not find them on Al Jazeera I would search for them on the local news television and slowly lose my connection with Al Jazeera. (HPS, December 2010)*

Al Jazeera has already started to diversify its news coverage. For instance, in an editorial meeting, the news director gave instructions to include topics from Moroccan countries:

*I note the absence of eastern Arab issues. It is important to focus on the presence of the north Arab African countries’ issues and not in the newsletter dedicated to Morocco only. When the issues are similar to others they must be present. I know that there are technical problems and it should not be addressed. But that should not prevent us from reporting their issues and interviewing guests from the north Arab African countries as well. It is true that there are issues that concern only them but, for example, Abdelaziz Bouteflika situation in Algeria as well as Algerian European contains something important for all. (ND, December 2010, Midday editorial meeting)*

Such instructions show that there is an intention to get out from the ‘hot spot’ circle of news coverage and thinking of including other regions. The viewpoint of extending the coverage to cast light on some countries that have been considered for a long time as ‘shadow countries’, such as Morocco and some Gulf countries, is still in progress as it showed in the Table 6.2 and there is not a clear policy with planned strategies. On the other hand, this diversification still exists in the same areas that attract the media, such as Egypt, Lebanon, and Iraq. As many journalists state, this area is a hot spot in the Arab world and its news does not just affect its citizens but has international importance also.

**Table 6.2: Midday news coverage of the Arab countries December 1 to 20, 2010**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arab Countries</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Palestine</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>24.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gulf countries</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moroccans Countries</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.5 Arabs and the Others

This section will focus on the way the relation between Arabs and others are constructed and how this is shaped by journalists’ visualisation of their audience. The data shows that selecting news from outside the Arab region is usually defined by its relationship with the Arab world. This interest is linked to the political and cultural association between these countries and Arab viewers or on the impact of these countries’ policy on the Arab region.

Journalists distinguish between different news topics from different parts of the world and treat them differently. For example, when journalists were asked how Al Jazeera sees news from Iran, the response was related to viewers’ political and cultural perspectives on Iran. This journalist explains it thus,

*Iran is from the region’s fabric. It has a lot in common in the region, while Israel is not... America is not. Turkey has a lot in common in the region. We deal with Iran with great caution, in the sense that we are neutral when a crisis occurs in Iran. The Al Arabiya channel, for example, attempted to portray the crisis and portray the collapse of the system, we tried to cover the two parties: conservatives and reformists... I mean, there is caution in the matter... a case involving the persecution of the Arab community in Europe... we try to highlight how they suffer persecution with objectivity.* (SP4, December 2010)

This shows how journalists are aware of how they differ in viewing Iran, for example, differently from other Arab news outlets, such Al Arabia. This deliberated mode of viewing is justified by Al Jazeera’s understanding of the cultural relationship that links Iran to Arab viewers.

Journalists share a collective idea of form and audience needs, but this collective view does not mean rejecting the heterogeneous political opinions of the Arab viewers. Matthews and Cottle (2012) addressed the political disagreements within the context of the journalists’ collective understanding of their audience’s culture and political characters. They believe, “The political in this sense becomes complexly infused inside the field of journalism, in its practices and communicative forms, and not solely in interaction with the surrounding (heteronymous) political field” (p. 105).
Chapter Six: Al Jazeera News Agenda

The journalist’s account above explains the way in which Al Jazeera produces Iranian news as an Islamic country that has a controversial relationship with Arab countries. This encompasses the Gulf countries, including Qatar, which funds Al Jazeera. The journalist admitted being objective, unlike its competitor Al Arabia which is funded by the Saudi government.

6.5.1 Covering Iran: Two approaches

Iran has a complex relation with the Arab world. In what is called an “internal issue”, we can see that journalists are cautious. They provide coverage, in a more natural tone, and they justify that by referring to a balanced coverage and the obligation for objectivity:

Producer 1: We contacted a reporter to do a story about the removal of subsidies. Today it enters into force.

Producer 2: We look at the effect on the people and come up with an analysis. We only take a clip because they did not talk about it officially. We talk about Ahmadinejad’s justifications, so we do not misjudge him, as well as the reaction of the people and how it will affect them and whether this continues or not. Midday (December 19, 2010)

News from Iran is important. There is emphasis on the ordinary people and their reactions but, most importantly, there is this concern to “explain” and “justify” what is happening. Further explanation of this issue is detected in the interview below:

An event has connotations. When bombings happen in Iran, which rarely happen, and they have serious dimensions with regard to the tense relations between Iran and the international community, or some rebel groups, the Sunnis claim that Iran oppresses them and they make moves. The bombings there have indications of interest to a segment of viewers so we need to tell them all about the bombings and their significance and we can come up with a story. (SP1, December 2010)

The account shows that it is difficult to ignore the news from Iran because there is interest in this news from two directions: first, the relationship between Iran and the international community, and second, the relationship between Iran and some groups in the Arab region. These complex relationships shape the construction of the news to present two images of Iran as we can see in the following section.
6.5.2 Iran and the Other: Cultural and political view

The two dimensions in covering Iran reflect the cultural and political views of some Arab audience not necessarily in a balanced manner but it shows this complex relation as we can see from the findings. The first dimension is about Iran’s relationship with western countries. Usually, this is understood as Iran’s involvement and its relationship with Hezbollah and its public support for the Intifada in Palestine.

Journalists reflect in their viewing of Iran the two different opinions of their audience. The complexity comes from the religious conflicts that interfere with the political stance; therefore, in most cases, these two elements need to be separated, as the journalist here explains in relation to a previous news item about Ahmedinejad’s visit to Lebanon:

_The visit is highly political, having a religious Shiite dimension. However, this is not the primary headline. We deal with the event as a political item. It is known that Hezbollah is Iran’s ally. The event is linked to a greater event, that is the presence of Israel in the region. Iran has called more than once for the elimination of Israel from the area; therefore, the news is not without a political dimension, a dimension that is more important than the sectarian religious elements. (J2, December 2010)_

The journalist explains how Ahmadinejad’s visit to Lebanon was discussed from a political angle and condones any sectarian dispute because in the case of the visit there is the concern of viewing Iran as an actor beside Arab viewers and sharing the same enemies with them. In this context, any political disagreements between different Arab parties and Iran are minor and the religious differentiation is not linked to it. However, it has to be said that Qatar has a more stable relationship with Iran and, for years, has led peace negotiations, at least before the recent events in Bahrain and Syria. That implication was not spotted during the observation, but this background cannot simply be ignored. Additionally, and this is more relevant to the current research, Iran’s announced stance on Israel is assumed to have had an impact on many Arabs.

We can see similar attitudes towards stories about Iran’s uranium activities. As the following example demonstrates:

Producer 1: We have the Manama summit in Bahrain.
Producer 2: Of course the topic is important. Hillary Clinton will be there.
Producer 1: The reporter was excluded.

Producer 2: No the topic is important and should be addressed... I do not care about the summit itself, but the presence of Hillary Clinton... Iran and America speaking with each other. (Morning editorial meeting December 12, 2010)

We can see that Iran is mainly viewed as being in the opposition when it comes to western countries. The two actors are seen as enemies. The meeting was held outside the usual discussion of relations between the US and Iran as the Summit in Bahrain was more related to Gulf counties issues. Still this meeting became more important than the Summit itself.

This journalist emphasised the same points: “When the US Foreign Minister meets Salehi, the Iranian Foreign Minister, the meeting is important because the Iranians have refused to meet the Americans. The news starts from this point” (P2. December, 2010).

Both the discussion in the editorial meeting and the journalists’ comments suggest that Iran is equal in force to the US. Iran in this case is seen as a part of the Islamic region.

6.5.3 Iran and the Arabs

The second dimension is Iran’s relationship with the Arab countries, especially the Gulf countries. These two views are handled differently; however, if the news is a story related to one of them it is definitely newsworthy.

This is an excerpt from the time of the coverage of the Gulf countries summit. It reflects the journalists’ concerns towards Iran’s attitude:

Journalist 1: I do not expect that there could be a chance of an agreement between Iran and America.

Journalist 2: Why not, Iran could do it, then the fears of the Gulf countries are legitimate and justified. Do not forget the long historical disputes in the region. (December 5, 2010, Hasad Alyoum editorial meeting)

This discussion shows that first there is a cautious approach in covering news about Iran. It is viewed differently when it comes to its relation to the Gulf countries
specifically. Here there is doubt about Iran’s intention towards its neighbour. The news is not about Iran versus the West rather about Iran/the West versus the Arabs.

6.5.4 Covering Iran: Examples from the news content

The two dimensions of the coverage might be well illustrated in one of Hasad Alyoum’s headlines: “Gulf States demanding a role in the dialogue with Iran and Tehran anticipate Geneva talks by declaring going a step ahead in its nuclear program” (Hasad Alyoum, December 5, 2010).

In this headline, both views are embedded and we can see how two types of relationship are framed linguistically. The first element is that of Iran and the Gulf countries. In this relationship, the Gulf countries are “demanding” and the use of the vocabulary here gives impression that it is the Gulf countries that are in a secure situation, asking for their rights from the other party. The other party is Iran and the western countries that are now equal and might be collated in one unit. On the other hand, there is a relationship between Iran and the Western countries in the second part of the sentence and, in this relationship, they are in an obverse relationship and it seems that Iran is achieving a step ahead in this debate between the two with the anticipated Geneva talks. Journalists’ claim that these complex views are shows the wider Arab public disagreement about Iran. "The Arabs do not have one view. The Arabs’ feature is that they are different and it is not Al Jazeera’s mission to gather or divide or unite them; it is a service channel” (J1, December 2010).

Arabs are divided in the way they understand Iran and that is what is unique about Al Jazeera. We can see from above examinations that the complexity in the political discourse and its integration with cultural elements are evaluated according to professional understanding of the news form that shaped news stories with different layers of political and cultural messages. As there is no shared Arab perspective about Iran in relation to regional issues these disagreements find its way to the news. Now, we cannot ignore the Qatar relation with Iran that is also have its own stages, and from the above we cannot see that view was giving more weight, what is demonstrate here that news output agenda is complicated reflecting the complexity of the wider political and cultural context.
To summarise what has been discussed, it seems, selecting the news topics, and construction the story themes and actors, journalists are guided by their recall for their audience political and cultural context, as they informed by certain understanding of their news form. They assess the relevance to their audience, informed by their understanding of the audience relation with the subjects but also, in their constructing of the stories they follow an approach will fit with Al Jazeera form as they understand it: so it is relevant but have to be from Arab perspective, it is relevant but have to be challenging, it is relevant but also indicative. The examination shows how political and cultural views are embedded and integration with journalists’ professional understanding of their news form and they are not outsider forces monopolising the journalists’ activities as other studies stated. Additionally, we could see that Arab perspective, is varied from topic to another and the conflicts views are acknowledged too, although, journalists might not refer to these conflict views in balanced approach, they are prescribed as part of Arab political and cultural context, and linked to Al Jazeera production culture as it distinguished by its oppose to highlight this disagreements.

The next section tries to shed light on what is assumed, by Al Jazeera, to be light or non-political news and to explain how it is framed uniquely by Al Jazeera to meet their understanding of their audience and their needs.

6.6 The other news

This section is related to the slight change in Al Jazeera’s agenda. It was revealed in Chapter Five that Al Jazeera launched This Evening to attract a more young audience and give more space to culture and human-interest stories. Some studies suggest that the present news production is characterised by tabloidization style and more soft news stories driven mainly by economic factors and audience demand for lighter news (Tebbutt, 2006; Bennett, 2007). The data in this study shows that Al Jazeera presents a different case. Human-interest stories are selected and constructed to reflect journalists’ visualisation of Arabs’ core political and cultural values.

To satisfy audience needs, Al Jazeera found itself needing to review the character of its ‘hard news’ channel. This review led to more interest human-interest stories: Al
Jazeera reviewed its policy of exclusive coverage of political issues, and this change in its policy reflects a new tendency. The following quotation shows that reporting human-interest stories is used to expand the scale of the audience:

*This news is important and Al Jazeera falls short in this aspect. You must recognize the diversity of the viewers; not all people like news of death and destruction. Life has variety. Al Jazeera’s direction is in dealing with political angles. For example, you make a report on the ethnicities in Eritrea and their diversity. I could take up this in order to lead to political clashes, but I choose to avoid it and deal with the diversity of dance and music. Maybe some people think I have done something less, but I find I have done something more enjoyable.* (J1, December 2010)

This review takes a rather sceptical approach. As was explained in the previous Chapter, Al Jazeera’s definition of the news is political; therefore, it neglected the interests of its audience in other non-political topics for a long time. Studying journalists’ interviews, a sample of *Midday*, human news stories, *This Evening*, indicates that Al Jazeera views soft news stories in a different way from usual. This is explained in the following section.

### 6.6.1 Criteria for the other news

In selecting the news human-interest stories, journalists apply specific frameworks that filter this news according to viewers’ interests and Al Jazeera’s news form. This is highlighted in the following excerpt:

*Most feature news must be scrutinized with very precise standards. Viewers are no longer preoccupied with a rabbit delivering twenty-one babies or a chick somewhere… silly things. There are deep things like scientific discoveries, things that help communities to develop their lives… we saw before a report from the old pigeon houses in Turkey. Pigeons used to have houses at that time; today people no longer have houses.* (J4, December 2010)

We can see that although there is an angle of entertainment in this news, they do, however, focus on deep social and cultural values that are shared by Al Jazeera’s viewers. This news can also be connected in one way or another to political situations and more serious topics, such as poverty and homelessness. Additionally, sometimes this human-interest news has direct political values or a serious angle as the journalist here put it:

*The feature reports are not everything that is not political. No, a feature report is all that is not a headline. Sometimes reports are described as a feature report, and they are really serious reports… we often have serious reports described as feature reports.* (J2, December 2010)
So the feature reports are not totally entertainment stories. This news aims to present serious topics that might have political and cultural values. However, as they are presented in a different style compared to traditional political news, they should be enjoyable. This view is reflected in this quote:

*It is possible to be meaningful, it is true; but it is not my role to be educational. However, sometimes you play a meaningful but enjoyable role... For example, that we have someone from Eritrea who has invented a device for blind people; you as a community have the ability to produce and be a creative society. It should be planned in a good way to learn how to pull the viewer in and present him with enjoyable material.* (SP2, December 2010)

It is shown here that, firstly, the entertainment side is the distinguished element of this type of news. Secondly, the entertainment is found in the topics themselves and in the way they are written and presented. Finally, these topics are used as something encouraging and positive, the bright side of the shared viewers’ values.

In the debate about hard news and what is called the ‘popularising’ of the news (Cottle, 2002; 2003; Prior, 2003) researchers start to draw a line between the categories (Langer, 1998). Matthews and Cottle (2012) suggest alternative framing, proposing that there is news that serves cultural needs more than political information. They set a list of these cultural frames, stating that there is the collective interest frame, the cultural recognition frame, and the mythic tales frame. Through my conversation with the staff, it appears that Al Jazeera is trying to protect its prestige. In the previous Chapter, it was explained that Al Jazeera neglected some of its audience’s interests in light news despite the voices of some young journalists who do not agree with this policy. However, Al Jazeera has found an alternative to what is called ‘soft news’, that is, it chooses soft topics that are more suitable for its audience, as explained here: “We are different from western audiences. We have deep values and principles and are not interested in gossip and celebrities” (HPS, December 2010).

Journalists explained how their view of their audience as conservative communities whose interests differ from a western audience shapes their understanding of light news. In this case, the type of news selected as an offering to this audience is far from being soft topics about famous people, actors, and others. However, Al Jazeera realised that there is a demand for soft news because it has been accused of being very serious and bland. It needs some news stories that are lighter than the usual political
and hard news and, at the same time, it needs to adhere to its aims and ethos. The Head of Assignments desk explains:

*Reports transmit movement within the community not just political, cultural or social elements. What goes on in peoples’ imagination? Many reproach Al Jazeera for screening of bloody scenes, killings, and strikes. So we are asked to search for new aspects and show positive things so the viewer will not remain in a continuously violent situation.* (HAS, December 2010)

The definition of these news stories is shaped by a view of the audience’s needs, but it is also constructed by Al Jazeera’s views of the form of its production. Therefore, these news stories in general aim to capture movements in societies. These movements have positive and happy sides but are not totally detached from the overall political context.

### 6.6.2 Human interest topics

To maintain its mission and to present light topics according to journalists understanding of Al Jazeera’s form, journalists use a number of techniques. The first technique is creating slots in the main news programmes about culture and history. The journalist explains and justifies these slots in the following quotation:

*Al Jazeera has presented many things on the human side of things, countless, but it is more important to keep Al Jazeera’s mission and to offer commitment but at the same time devise modern methods to talk about the issues and concerns of the people... In the last five years, Al Jazeera has devised a programme called Eye on a Direction. Its subjects – in special programming – shed light on a place not usually highlighted. Perhaps you’ve seen it happen in Sudan, Turkey, Russia, and Iran. Maybe we can go to Australia, to the minorities that are not known, to the Arabs, who have settled there, the Arab presence in Africa, the Islamic presence in America.* (J4, December 2010)

This slot is more like a documentary report talking about music, art, and culture in these areas. It also sheds light on how Arab and Islamic cultures contribute positively to the dynamic of civilisations. Al Jazeera also increased light stories in its news programmes; however, these news stories, as we shall see, are selected and constructed to reflect the values and principles of the imagined audience, as highlighted in the previous quotations. By analysing the human-interest news subjects we can see that they are mainly about environmental issues, scientific discoveries, art, culture, sports, and successful projects (Table 6.3).
Table 6.3: *Midday*, human interest stories, December 1 to 20, 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Human Interest topics</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scientific discovery</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art, culture, human interest</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>37.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successful projects</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disasters and accidents</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christmas celebration</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>29</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These subjects, in general, share positive values. On the other hand, some light news items have been presented by taking a political angle. Therefore, we can divide this news into two types: positive and soft political news.

6.6.3 Positive news

Positive news in Al Jazeera is selected as a response to viewers' needs, as explained here:

*Feature reports are short breaks. The nature of the issues in the Arab world is that it is a society that has little relevance to the future and making the future. It ruminates on the condition of disappointment the death of dreams... We are trying to make the viewer relive and become more aware of this reality and to enable him to live in his time as much as possible. (J7, December 2010)*

As the statement above shows, one important aim of human-interest stories is to highlight the bright side of the daily dark realities and to present examples of model achievement. To illustrate the positives, firstly it was explained at the start that the environmental issues were presented as part of covering the Canon Summit, that became an opportunity to increase awareness among Al Jazeera viewers about the environment. So it had an educational value about an important global issue. Second, Al Jazeera presents several stories about Christmas celebrations and other news with a ‘happy’ side, including scientific discoveries, achievements, projects, such as the story on the Indonesian bloggers who launched a site similar to the famous WikiLeaks on the World Wide Web (*Midday*, 13 December 2010); “The story continues. Let us highlight the conditions of the Somali educational institutions that have experienced
success at various levels and have adapted to the fluctuations of serious security on various levels” (*Midday*, 17 December 2010).

These news stories are about a variety of subjects, but the common feature among them is that they provide the viewers with a happy time. However, this pleasure is selective because it is not about strange things or celebrities; it is about presenting a good example and sharing a good or a ‘model’ experience or happy moments related to respected cultural events. This type of news agrees with Matthews and Cottle (2012) cultural framing of the news. These news stories are, as Langer (1998) found, special and remarkable, suggesting that they include news about ordinary people’s achievements. Langer (1998) finds that this type of news places emphasis on ordinary people regardless of their ordinary actions. The focus here was more on the achievements of communities, presenting any aspect of their successful projects. Examples of this are the Kuwaiti NGO succeeding in helping and decreasing the number of drug addicts or the Somali education institution being built and supported by individuals educated in Somalia and challenging the unpleasant political conditions and educating many Somali youth.

### 6.6.4 Politicising the soft

These topics are still rare in Al Jazeera news programmes, and it seems that most Al Jazeera journalists think that Al Jazeera needs to work more on this element because the audience needs such subjects, as this journalist explains:

> *Arabs are disappointed communities; they need hope, they need to believe in themselves, see their successful experiences and joy and happiness in their dark realities. That is why I do not agree with presenting hard, negative news all the time. I do not think that this western theory/style is suitable for Arabs.* (*P2, December 2010*)

Thus, we can see from the statements above that these news stories are presented in a positive mode to help the viewers to overcome their tough realities, although they are still less frequent than many journalists would like. This view suggests that positive news heal communities. Beside these novel news values, politics is also presented in light news, as the views below explain.
Chapter Six: Al Jazeera News Agenda

Such a way of addressing topics is similar to what Matthews and Cottle (2012) call the ‘community service’ frame, which explains the impact of political events on the community’s daily life. As it is interested mainly in politics, Al Jazeera cannot drop its traditional approach of viewing everything, even culture and art, with a political judgment. To explain this more here are some examples of some representative examples of light news in the *Midday* programme.

*The desire to emigrate amongst the youth in Gaza in search of a better life embodied in a theatre performance presents the suffering of Gaza’s youth and their struggle with unemployment and poverty in a cynical show.* (Midday, 8 December 2010)

*Filmmakers in the west are often inspired by the Egyptian pharaonic history, the ancient ruins, and the famous movies produced in this aspect are the evidence. However, have such films succeeded in complying with the realities of history? In the last Cairo Film Festival an attempt was made to answer such questions.* (Midday, 19 December 2010)

Such stories related to culture, history, or other non-political subjects are framed to send political messages. The first example, for instance, is about a “celebration”; that is the introduction, but the report was not about festivals and dancing; it was more about democracy in Chad. Similarly, in the story about the film festival, instead of talking about celebrities who attended the festival and the event itself, the report was an analysis of the relationship between the East and the West and how western filmmakers viewed Egypt.

The following analysis of an ironical show about Palestinian immigration illustrates this view further:

*Figure 6.1: News Report: Sarcastic Show, Midday, December 8, 2010*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quite a few young people in Gaza are trying to migrate, or at least thinking seriously about it.</th>
<th>Young man carrying a bag, walking, shooting from behind; young man with a telephone, a zoom on the phone while he is pushing buttons; zoom out; a young man with a phone in his hand and a young man next to him looking faraway.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Even those who have succeeded there. Their reasons are many. As they say, the standard of living is worsening in Gaza and there is no future on the horizon. There are no work opportunities available that equal the level of study.</td>
<td>Young men and women – Medium – in a public place. View of simple, ordinary people and a picture of a neighbourhood of a low standard of living.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**In addition, there are the implications of the siege, occupation and internal Palestinian division as well as the dream of experiencing life in other countries.**

**Different shots – Medium Long – young people and poor neighbourhoods and the noise of traffic and cars.**

**Long – Road with two divisions.**

**Ahmed is one of thousands of Gaza’s youths, who has tried and is still trying to emigrate to a country, any country, after graduation from university. He has found no opportunity to sort out his life and he aspires to this migration to escape the turbulence of life here, as he says, and to search for a future that he imagines to be better.**

**Close – on Ahmed’s face.**

**Medium – Ahmed and his friend.**

**Long shot – Ahmed and a group of friends apparently sitting in a cafe.**

**An interview with Ahmed: our situation in Gaza does not give us a chance to think about ambition; our ambition here has limitation and barriers. Our economic situation is not good; it does not help us, inspire a person to open a project, do something.**

**Snapshot – Blurry, on Ahmed, then – a Medium snapshot – Ahmed alone.**

**Medium shot – Ahmed’s friends.**

**Ahmed Madookh wants to emigrate – Subtitle**

**“Sixty-three” is not the last play presented by youth to remind people about the plight of the deportation of Palestinians sixty-two years ago, in addition to current rumours about a new predicament of deportation.**

**Medium shot – the play of young man wearing a Palestinian dress and presenting a mocking scene: I swear to God, I will not leave you my country whatever it takes...**

**Footage of the play and the audience**

**Who wants to emigrate? Who wants to leave this country? Here are your passports, whoever wants to emigrate – voice in the play**

**The goal, as participants and organizers say, is to keep the eyes and the energies focused on home and not the outside.**

**Quiet audience watching in the dark and appears to be well dressed**

**They insist on the claim to change the current circumstances for the better, to reverse the decision to migrate to the outside world.**

**Meeting: But the question remains, how? How can we get back what the play presents? If it is possible to get it back, the definite answer will be if the state of division and strife ends. There will be one government and one people, and**

**Theatre director**
then we will have a single programme through that we attain the possible achievements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reporter: Then the message seems to be clear to every Palestinian youth who dreams of migration or lives it, and the meaning of this makes the main objective to return home, in spite of all the circumstances, to build and defend the country, no matter how long it takes.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Footage of young people in the street – Long Shot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street – Youth passes and vehicle of the United Nations is seen.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Studying this representative news story, we can see how the coverage was more about the message of the play than about the play itself. The first half of the report was to construct an image about the difficult life of the Palestinian youth and the reasons for emigration. Ahmed becomes a symbol of the Palestinian youth. The close-up shot links the viewer with Ahmed; he becomes the centre of the news, and then the sub title under his video says he wants to emigrate. In the Arabic version the verb ‘wants’ is presented in the noun form, which gives it the meaning that this desire to emigrate has become a name, an identity for Ahmed. Then there is the medium shot of Ahmed with other Palestinian friends, the nebulous shot, and a long shot of the friends who share the same destiny. Even when the report moves to talk about the play itself, it talks about its message and meaning. The report ends with a positive message asking the young people who are thinking of emigration to come back one day. This example illustrates that Al Jazeera goes beyond the event news and the cultural side of the topic to shed light on political struggles.

6.6.5 Constructing the Other news: Cultural view

The above section illustrated how the story is constructed to demonstrate a political message although it is about a cultural event. Shaping the news in such a way is one of the main features of Al Jazeera’s production style. This is not only related to the aims and ethos of Al Jazeera but also to the ideology behind such news and how journalists view Arab issues. That is why there is resistance from senior journalists to making any changes, and they try to define and protect this way of viewing Arab issues. The following example of the arguments in editorial meetings might explain this:
Journalist 1: To begin the coverage of a war as a creative action is provocative. There is a report on the sculptor and the person who speaks, starting with a citizen in Gaza and saying that Gaza has ceased to be in a state of war and is now in a creative state. I am now in front of a sculptor, while the Gaza war is very current, there having been missiles and other things over the past four days. Do you see how the buildings have collapsed and the people are in shelters and tents? We turned this situation into a creative case to say, “Today we honour the memory of the Gaza war”.

Journalist 2: You saw the report.

Journalist 1: I saw the introduction, and saw the talk and it is...

Journalist 2: The report comes in the context of being preceded by a talk about an uprising. It means it comes in the context of Gaza, preceded by the press conference, and we have another report about the atmosphere of the war, that hangs over the region and then there comes all this talk.

Journalist 1: Allow me a moment... Let me, let us, suppose there is no uprising... the news topic does not exist... we talk about prearranged things and the memory of Gaza and there is no uprising... Is it logical to talk about the disaster of war as a creative case?

Journalist 2: Mate, see the report.

Producer 1: If you have five reports on Gaza, start with the political and humanitarian. Do not start with the feature report.

Journalist 2: I think that this report is very inflammatory for the victims of the war and the viewers of Al Jazeera.

Journalist 1: Let us see the report. Sometimes the creative case can be more important.

We can understand from this conversation that Al Jazeera views Arab conflict topics in a very sensitive way, viewing the issues as war and painful topics and the audience as wounded societies. It seems that Al Jazeera does not see itself as broadcasting in natural, normal times; it is broadcasting during conflict, war, and a time of transformation. These views are not just about Gaza, they are generalised about the whole Arab world. Therefore, Al Jazeera is sensitive towards anything that might lessen the importance of such a historical time of struggle and change.

There is the debate between the old way of thinking and new journalists who are trying to shift and change Al Jazeera’s form and its understanding of its audience. One of the young journalists told me that he did some news story reports about Ethiopia, presenting its culture, language, music and lifestyle, but he was criticised by many senior journalists who thought that he should have related the social reality to the
political context of international relations. As he said, it is “hard to avoid politics in Al Jazeera” (J1, December 2010).

Further evidence can also be found in the This Evening news programme. In addition to the ‘light’ slot, Al Jazeera established a new programme in 2006 that was aimed at all the family members and covered, in addition to political news, light stories and topics related to social, cultural, and scientific subjects. The programme mainly emphasises that light news is about the positive and is another way to see politics. The programme usually includes at least one or two pure political headlines. Its news topics are also selected to the same ‘novelty’ criteria. For example, on December 1, 2010, the subjects were as follows:

- Christians’ second marriage in Egypt
- a debate between the state and the clergy
- Sans Frontiers doctors report on human rights violations in Gaza
- World Day to combat AIDS
- Cairo thirty-fourth Film Festival
- Pollution of rivers in China
- Tacos and Argentina Cinema Festival
- Succession in southern Sudan and preparations for separation
- A European project to explore space
- Putin and nuclear weapons
- The arrest warrant for Assange
- The European Security and Cooperation Summit in Kazakhstan
- Tour around the world: Christmas, children's theatre in Iraq, a hotel in Germany, resisting divorce, audio-visual presentation in India tells the stories of ordinary people.

We can see from the examples above that the non-political news stories are still about important subjects. Even the last slot in the programme, that presents, in a short voiceover, groups of what are supposed to be light and unusual stories, contains some news with serious concerns. Ayish (2000) and Althedi (2003) suggest that Al Jazeera is interested in political topics and tends to exclude human and cultural topics. Although the analysis here shows that Al Jazeera has started to extend its coverage
and increase the cultural and human-interest stories, aiming younger viewers, it still treats them mostly from a political angle. Ayish (2002) explains that Arab views differ from those of western audiences because they believe that politics is a core element in their daily life.

6.7 Conclusion

In this Chapter, the Al Jazeera news agenda was explained in detail, showing how these news themes reflect Al Jazeera’s views about their audience. The Chapter looked at the angle of the news treatment by studying the language used in the headlines. These findings were supported by quotations from interviews with journalists and from editorial meetings. The Chapter suggests that selecting news that is relevant to their audience is the core value that influences journalists’ selection and structure for their news stories. Responding to the richness of their audience’s cultural and political backgrounds and aiming to gain more popularity in competition with other channels, Al Jazeera attempts to represent its entire audience. These views are also defined by Al Jazeera’s interest in presenting minority group situations and opposition groups’ opinions, countering the long tradition in Arab media to ignore such topics. As part of the dynamic change in the media organisation and in response to its audience critics, Al Jazeera is in the ‘thinking stage’ in expanding its coverage and presenting more news from Gulf countries and North African countries, for example.

There is another change in Al Jazeera’s agenda as a part of its response to audience demand and its critics that the organisation is a ‘dark medium’. Al Jazeera has started to give more space to ‘human interest’ news stories. However, these stories, as with all the other selected topics, are chosen and structured according to Al Jazeera’s understanding of its audience and its news form. Therefore, these stories aim to be a representation of the Arabs deep traditions and their core values. They also aim to provide the viewers with knowledge and positive encouragement. The next Chapter will provide further details of Al Jazeera’s modes of address.
Chapter Seven

Al Jazeera Presentation: Mode of Address

7.1 Introduction

In this Chapter the findings will show how mode of address is designed in line with journalists’ views of the programmes’ features and their targeted audience (Matthews, 2010; Dupret and Ferrié, 2007). Mode of address here refers to journalists responding to their audience needs through their construction of the aesthetic elements in the news discourses in a deliberated mode (Tolson, 1996). The mode of address explains the relation between the producers of the message and their audience (Bignell, 2002; Helland, 1993). In depth discourse analysis is used in this Chapter to examine the way journalists shape the language and images in the news stories. The findings of the interviews and the editorial meetings are analysed to understand the context of the news discourse. The findings in this Chapter show that there is more complexity in the news production at Al Jazeera, and it is more than a result of economic forces that contradict some studies (Bennett, 2012; Hamilton, 2004; Langer, 1998).

The Chapter is divided into two sections. The first section will establish how the journalists’ views of the audience and their understanding of Al Jazeera form shape the general presentation outlook of Al Jazeera. Second, it suggests that the journalists used mainly three approaches in addressing their audience: the provocative informing mode of address, alignment, and the equality mode of address.

7.2 The visualized audience and the shaping of news presentation

This section will demonstrate how Al Jazeera’s journalists construct the mode of address that distinguishes their production from other news outlets. The data shows that journalists share a collective image about their audience characteristics and their news form, and these views frame the language and visual of the presentation mode (Matthews, 2010). We start by explaining Al Jazeera news presentations in general through the study of Al Jazeera’s main logos and explore its relation to the organisation’s assumption of its targeted audiences.
News organisations create logos to signify their presentation in the competitive media market (Matthews and Cottle, 2012). The logo is also seen as representing the news organisation's views and position (Helland, 1993). The news organizations’ mottos can provide additional information to viewers regarding the organisations' various cultures (Matthews and Cottle, 2012). Al Jazeera was one of the earliest broadcasting channels in the Arab region that adopted the western presentation style (Ayish, 2001; Boyd-Barrett and Xie, 2008). This style was used and modified to reach its targeted audience. For Al Jazeera, its logos were chosen to establish its distinguishable presentations and views to its audience. The main logos and their selection motivations suggest that Al Jazeera attempts to be recognised as an objective, impartial informative news organisation – making the audience’s point of view the centre of its news production and presentation.

7.2.1 Objective and informative news organisation?

Al Jazeera presents itself to its viewers as a medium that reflects reality. Al Jazeera's main catch phrases, “The view and the other view” and “More than one opinion” briefly express Al Jazeera’s culture and show its understanding of its audience. Based on the explanation of one of the journalists who participated in the decision-making of selecting the main logos, we can understand the motives of choosing such logos:

*It was not a rhetorical or aesthetic concoction although one could have chosen some of those colourful ringing words which have no substance. To be frank and honest, I feared that this then would not be acceptable because it would commit the channel to a certain path involving difficult confrontations which would challenge the familiar and the traditional in media and official circles on the Arab stage, but as it was a summary of ideas discussed in founding management meetings, before lunch, its acceptance was further evidence of the sincerity behind a serious proposition of this kind. (Jamil Azer, 2006, p. 31)*

Jamil Azer, one of the founding team members of Al Jazeera, shows in his testimony here that from the days of its early foundation, Al Jazeera challenged the Arab political and media status quo. Thus, it can be said that Al Jazeera offers alternatives views and voices from its audience and facilitates the shaping of dialogue in the Arab public opinion. In this respect, Al Jazeera can be considered as a platform in the Arab public sphere through which the audience can access a variety of voices contrasted with the idea that media are agents of promoting the state’s agenda.
It can be argued that the motto “The view and the other view” indicates that Al Jazeera simply strives to maintain an objective position in the arguments and conflicts in Arab countries. It also highlights that it is an objective device that is not dominated by one particular ideology, in this case Qatar’s political agenda and ideology or an Islamic orientation. The motto implies that, firstly, it is simply trying to build a bridge for dialogue between different ideologies in the Arab world; secondly, it states clearly that these views are in opposition to each other. In stating that there is a view and a counter view, Al Jazeera shows that there are different views/opinions that can sometimes be conflicting, whether this counter-opinion is that of the enemy, a government, or part of the audience. The idea of the different views has a special importance in the context of the Arab media and politics. Before Al Jazeera, it was dominated in general by one ideology that refused to accept a public debate with the Other. Through its motto, Al Jazeera still claims that it is impartial. In this respect, Al Jazeera distances itself from being dominated either by the viewers who are usually affiliated with a certain ‘view’, or by ‘the other view’, adhering to its professional, objective claims of informing the audience and presenting different angles or perspectives of the stories.

7.2.2 Taking the audience’s side

Al Jazeera’s second motto is “The voice of the voiceless”. In this respect, Al Jazeera first suggests that in the Arab world there are people whose voices have been marginalised by the dominant ideologies and elites and through Al Jazeera voiceless people are given a chance to air their voices. Secondly, Al Jazeera is taking the side of the oppressed people who are oppressed by their governments. With this motto, Al Jazeera is not trying to establish that it has an objective relationship with both the Arab governments and the public sides, but rather that it is building a closer, partial relationship with its audience, and in doing so, it also plays a part in leading the audience to see themselves in a certain way, namely as victims who have multiple and conflicting views. The General Director explains:
It was necessary for Al Jazeera to feel its way through this reality, reaching out to both in power and those who remain outside its realm. How can we use the camera to shed light on all that is darkened by power? How can the screen accommodate and offer a space for action at both the centre and the periphery, a periphery that has been denied recognition as part of reality by the structure of the existing power? While the official Arab media considered the viewers as a mere receiver of official political propaganda, Al Jazeera chose from the beginning to be the “voice of the voiceless.” (Wadah Khanfar, 2006, pp. 14-15)

The account shows that Al Jazeera’s priority of presentation is to illuminate the margins in the political context of the Arab world. Despite some criticism that Al Jazeera is not always objective towards certain marginal groups, it is nevertheless seen as having more sympathy for ordinary people and sidelined political voices (Touzani 2011; Abu Al-Shabab, 2011; Rinnawi, 2012).

One of Al Jazeera’s early presenters explains the close relationship between Al Jazeera and its viewers. She states that Al Jazeera decided to reach the ordinary people – the lower class in Arab communities – and showed that it understands their feelings or concerns and presented them to the world on their behalf:

As for Al Jazeera, the only aim was to change the nature of this relationship. And it has changed it, revealing an unlimited thirst for a range of freedoms... a comprehensive view of the world... distinguishing the Arab viewer, with some degree of cynicism with regard to the humiliation and injustice befalling the Arab world.... I say that and more about the viewer-citizen who has had enough of being treated as a minor... I remember how many viewers called the last decade the ‘era of masses’ and others who suggested that the slogan ‘Al Jazeera, the platform for those with no platform’ be used as a substitute for the original one. (Laila Chaib, 2006, p. 56)

We can understand from this account, firstly that Al Jazeera views its audience as victims suffering from marginalisation and contentious. Secondly, there is a noticeable response from the viewers, and a new relationship has emerged where the media channel not only reports the news but where the audience has the feeling that this news organisation is on their side.

In sum, if the first motto “The view and the other view” enhances the objectivity the second one “The voice of the voiceless”, as was suggested by Al Jazeera viewers in one of its live programmes and adopted later by the Channel, is also softens the idea of authority and shows more sympathy and a closer relationship with its viewers. This claim is supported by journalists who all shared the idea that Al Jazeera is an advocate of Arab voices. Many journalists express the opinion that Al Jazeera is more than a news channel to its viewers. The Head of Assignment Desk explains: “We are the
voice of the voiceless; the common man in the Arab world has no one. When we broadcast the issues of people in Jordan, we were asked to do the same thing in Morocco”.

The account above shows that the ordinary people’s struggle is a shared feature among Arabs, and Al Jazeera understands their feelings and provides its viewers with a link or platform where they can share experiences and ideas. Thus, Al Jazeera does not only link Arabs’ lived experience but also shows the missing elements in the Arab local news outlets, as explained here:

In the Arab media there is neither real understanding of the Arabs’ needs nor recognition of their right to know; the fact that he/she has a right must be claimed. Other media outlets have taken a condescending attitude towards people, underestimating their understanding rather than supporting and helping them to deliver their voices. (J7, December 2010)

This sample of quotations shows that Al Jazeera journalists share a collective understanding of their news organisation’s culture. They also agree that one of the main needs of the audience is to be able to present its views and expose their problems. To be able to promote itself as the mediator who takes the viewer’s side, Al Jazeera emphasizes this idea in its promotional footage and in some occasional news about Al Jazeera itself. During the observation in December 2010, Al Jazeera’s bureau in Kuwait was closed. Al Jazeera covered the closure of its bureau over two days in such a way as to first shift its position from being merely a news organisation to a news organisation that shares with its Arab viewers the injustice and marginalisation practiced by Arab governments. Secondly, Al Jazeera supporters, as can be gleaned from the interviews conducted during the coverage of the story, include other journalists who do not work for Al Jazeera, writers, and human rights activists. Here is a sample of the news in covering the story of the closure of Al Jazeera’s bureau in Kuwait:

Kuwait closes Al Jazeera bureau

“The Journalists’ Protection Committee that is based in New York condemned the decision to shut down Al Jazeera’s bureau in Kuwait and called on the Kuwaiti authorities to allow Al Jazeera to resume their work there” (Midday, December 14, 2010).

“A number of journalists in Syria criticized the decision of the Kuwaiti authorities to close
In the three preceding headlines we can see how Al Jazeera puts itself in the place of its viewers as a victim of injustice, and its viewers become the voices that speak for it. Equality with the audience and the idea of a partnership is insinuated through Al Jazeera’s promotions and other occasions such as the above.

To sum up the above discussion, this section showed that Al Jazeera’s decision to look for its own ways of news presentation and addressing its audience is based on certain assumptions or this audience concern of their welfare. Additionally, there are different layers in addressing the audience: first, there is the professional objective aim to present reality and inform the audience; second, there is another presentation mode that is based on emotional empathy towards the audience. Finally, there is the equality approach that is used to establish a closer relationship with the audience and gain their trust. The three approaches will be explained in detail in the following section.

7.3 Provocative mode of address

To inform is a key aim of the broadcaster. News stories are shaped to an audience who are seeking to know (Ekstrom, 2000). What distinguishes Al Jazeera in its approach to inform the audience is that it adopts a provocative style. It is true that news headlines and lead paragraphs are shaped usually in a more informing style. The findings in Chapter Five, that addressed journalists’ understanding of Al Jazeera news culture, demonstrate that journalists view their news programmes as challenging the political status quo. They also view their audience as contention groups whose desire for the information is motivated by their opinions about both local Arab governments and western media views. Also the analysis of the news agenda in Chapter Six demonstrates that one of the main news values in Al Jazeera’s selection of the news stories is its interest in the internal conflicts and the influence of Arab governments’ policy on the audience. An in-depth analysis of the news stories and data gathered
from the interviews shows that the informing objective in Al Jazeera’s presentation is shaped by its view of the Al Jazeera style as it presents the reality through ‘The opinion and other opinion’ as one of the journalists explained: “We care about presenting different views in the story. It is our motto. When we give access to the opposition groups we also ask the governments to present their views. If they refuse, then it is their fault. That is why they are sometime absent from the news stories” (SJ3, December 2010).

News stories that challenge the political sphere are framed in a provocative manner. As the journalist explains, Al Jazeera, in its provocative style is stirring stagnant waters: “Al Jazeera stirred the stagnant water, became a political tool to educate. Through following Al Jazeera, people in the Arab world get more information that has created a state of consciousness among the Arab viewers” (SP5, December, 2010).

The account above shows that this informing objective is mainly related to stimulating this approach. Such an approach is mainly driven by Al Jazeera in an attempt to pull the viewers in a new way of thinking and understanding, countering the local Arab media discourse.

7.3.1 The Use of language in the production of programmes: The provocative mode of address

The provocative mode of address is reflected in the content in many ways. Sometimes by the selection of the interviewee who can create a challenging mode as one of the journalists describes below:

*Abdelbari Atwan is offensive, easy to provoke. He has the unique ability to criticize strongly. For example, during the discussion of the Goldstone Report in the United Nations, the Arabs were against it. Someone like Abdelbari Atwan can poignantly express the indignation of the Arabs. (J13, April 2010)*

We see here how the selection of the guest –interviewee– is framed by his personality, his skills in addressing the topic, and how that is related to the audience’s expectations and in that way is presumed to influence them. Additionally, in topics such the Goldstone Report where journalists have the assumption that their audience do not
accept the Report and it angers them. The selection of the guest matches these expectations, as he is known for his provocative criticism.

Al Jazeera is known for its provocative way in giving access to non-conformist voices. Nonetheless, it faces criticism from the audience when it gives a chance to opposition groups to present their views, such as giving access to Israeli figures to contribute in the programmes. The provocative informing style can be seen also in highlighting sensitive or expected points in the news stories, as the account here shows in the editorial meeting of *Hasad Alyoum* (Sunday 14 December 2010), when journalists were deciding the way to present a news story from Palestine. The news editor suggests:

*I suggest getting closer to the Palestinian Authority... I do not think they are thinking now in the same way. There is an internal conflict... There are differences in views between leaders and people who do not appear in the media. We did not meet the people who are in leadership and have absolute power only... there is division in the Palestinian Authority.*

The news editor’s suggestion shows that the selection of the interview and the angle that needs to be highlighted depends on the unexpected in the story. They decided to focus on the conflict and division in the Palestinian Authority. The main topic was the failure of peace negotiations and the public disappointment faced by the Palestinian Authority. Here we can see that Al Jazeera interviewed “people who do not appear in the media” in Palestine who had different views from their leaders to show that there are conflicting ideas within Palestine.

Besides deciding on provocative voices and sensitive topics, the use of language and images also reflects this provocative mode. In the following example from the headline of the news about the election in Egypt one can detect provocative mode of address: “Despite the absence of the opposition, violations and violence in the Egyptian election and justices dispute the legitimacy of the next parliament – subtitle: Egypt's opposition is absent and presents abuses and judicial doubt” (*Midday*, December 5, 2010).

The vocabulary used to describe the election process, such as ‘violence’ and ‘violations’, creates a dramatic atmosphere where other words can be used such as ‘encroachment’ and others. This chaotic ghost of the election is attributed here to the
ruling party not to the opposition who are ‘absent’. Another headline reads: ‘opposition absent, judicial doubt and violence’. This mode of address is constructed, as shown above, based on journalists’ assumption of the audience that desires information on the resilience ideology of the Arab reality. This provocative style may vary from one story to another according to its importance to the audience and the subjects that are being addressed.

7.4 Alignment mode of address

The third mode of address used by Al Jazeera is identified in this research as alignment. Alignment mode of address means the use of visual and language to show that the news organisation is taking the viewer’s side. The news organisation here adopts a certain stance and manages to link the news to ordinary people that show that the news organisation and the audience do not just share the same agenda but also support it.

It was explained earlier in this Chapter that Al Jazeera considers itself ‘the voice of the voiceless’. In presenting itself in this way, Al Jazeera speaks to its audience as victims, marginalised, and oppressed and adopts their point of view. This presentation mode is motivated by Al Jazeera’s assumption that it speaks to everyone in the Arab world and it is interested in attracting the ordinary people and highlighting their issues. One of the producers explained it thus:

*Al Jazeera does not produce news just for the ruling elite. It broadcasts for all Arab viewers. An important part of this coverage is simple people, how these people see news, politics and politicians. His opinion, especially about news that relates to his daily life, for example, the high cost of living, parliamentary discussions, influence people’s lives. Al Jazeera has the duty to ask people on the street about these subjects. I think Al Jazeera cares about the street view more than the other organisations do.* (P3, December 2010)

The main point highlighted in the above quotation is that the interests of ordinary people, which include issues like politics and implementation of certain government policies, are at the heart of Al Jazeera’s presentation. Thus, Al Jazeera’s idea of being on the side of the people versus others gives Al Jazeera an upper hand in having a close relationship with the audience. This closeness is then applied in the presentation of the news stories, as we shall see below in the quotation from one of Al Jazeera’s
senior producers. Thus alignment practice is motivated by journalists’ assessment of their audience’s needs:

*The viewer is first of all human. What we seek that sets us apart from others is this humanity in some things. We work with a policy that everyone else works with. Sometimes we need a specific target that gives you a value... Your viewer is a human and this human in some areas of the world is poor, oppressed, a human who has lost his humanity.* (SP3, December 2010)

The account above shows that the decision on humanizing the stories is based on journalists’ assumption about their viewers as mere humans in the first place. Consequently, journalists will be interested or more interested in any political topic if it touches their emotions, concerns, and daily life interests (Ekstrom, 2000). In this respect, alignment, as Al Jazeera’s journalists explained, enables Al Jazeera to distinguish itself among its competitors. These views are also motivated by journalists’ experiences that humanizing the presentation creates empathy and masses moral obligation to move for change. This is explained in the quote below:

*Sometimes it makes a change in people’s lives. A 17-year-old young man in Egypt was on the Internet. They came and took him and tortured him to death. You cover the case. It became a big topic and a great story in Egypt.* (SP4, December 2010)

So as these representative accounts above show, there is a gap in giving access to opposition or showing the lower class struggles in Arab countries. Al Jazeera is trying to fill in the gap in the local Arab media where ordinary people cannot find themselves being represented without fear or favour in the news topics The findings here explain more about Al Jazeera agenda that was discussed earlier in chapter six, which showed that Al Jazeera is focusing on the conflict topics in the Arab countries. These needs can, in general, as the interview data showed, be classified as conflicts with the governments. Journalists tend to view their audience as suffering people who have lots of demands. Al Jazeera, as they claim, has learned that this practice (of focusing on ordinary people) facilities the path to change and democratisation of Arab societies to some extent.

Taking into consideration ordinary people’s opinions, Al Jazeera constructs news stories in a way that touches people’s feelings, addresses them directly, and meets the emotional needs of the Arab audience:
Here they know how people think. It is important to test the pulse of the street, and that's part of the news to put people in a wider picture. Sometimes people's feelings are important, especially if the subject touches their lives in general, such as the elections in Egypt and the Palestinian case. (J5, December 2010)

So based on the idea of emotional audience, that have great interest in politics and no way to express their views, it seems that inviting ordinary people to participate and provide their opinions and share emotions is the best way to reach them. This interest in humanizing the news or making it appeal to the people in the street is used in certain cases. This changed historically in Al Jazeera, as it will be explained in the next section.

7.4.1 Alignment with the masses: From elite to ordinary people centred presentation

The interview findings show that most journalists agreed that alignment mode of address – considering ordinary people in their presentation of news only recently became clearer and more deliberate. At its inception, Al Jazeera targeted the educated elite and was interested in politics as a subject isolated from economic and social influences. This excerpt explains it in the following manner:

Indeed there had been in the past a focus on the security and political aspects. There was a move away from the human side. But in times of crisis, Al Jazeera approaches people too much. During the wars in Palestine, Gaza, Afghanistan, Al Jazeera got close to people. Finally came the program Lil-qissa Baqiya (There is a sequel to the story) that speaks to the whole world, human stories of reality. (J3, December 2010)

It is during war and crises times that Al Jazeera used to humanize its coverage, as not only educated viewers are interested in politics. Such a decision was based on Al Jazeera’s desire to reach the lower class in the Arab region. It wanted to explain the complex political issues to Arab viewers and link politics to the daily life of ordinary people, as this representative quote shows here:

Al Jazeera realized that politics is the tree that obscures the forest, in the sense that our coverage focused on the decision makers only, especially on political decisions because of the Arab world’s thirst to know the facts and understand the policies of their rulers. They want to know where their country stands in general and politically. Despite its importance, it obscures other things because society and individuals, women and children, and spheres of social life reflect what whittles these policies in their lives. Then the easy solution is that you give the microphone and the pulpit and the camera to whoever has the leadership role, whether in power or in the opposition. But there is another part of the story. Their concern is the general public and their field is the community. (SJ2, December 2010)
As a channel that was fully trusted in representing big political events, Al Jazeera used to focus on the human side of important conflicts, such as Iraq. However, its interest in marginal political parties and opposition movements was clear from the beginning (Ayish, 2001). This interest now extends to include the daily lives of ordinary people. So it still shows and addresses people facing injustices in disaster zones but supplements these with stories of people in more stable regions, such as Jordan, Egypt, and Morocco.

Al Jazeera’s inclusion of personal, ordinary stories can be divided into two types: first, situations of political and natural crises; and second, those that concern the daily life of Arab citizens. By presenting the news in alignment style, Al Jazeera represented ordinary people’s voices and added a new element to its early interest in political opposition groups, which were silenced in other Arab media.

After describing journalists’ views of Al Jazeera’s mode of address, we now move to analyse some demonstrative examples from the news content. The examples in the next section will provide further examination of Al Jazeera’s mode of address and assess the extent to which it reflects the journalists’ views.

7.4.2 The use of language images in the production of programs (the alignment mode of address)

In the following examples we can see that Al Jazeera uses linguistic and visual elements that portray ordinary people’s pain and make the masses the focus of the news, linking them with the viewers and creating a close relation between the viewers and the topics.

The example below shows the struggle between Arab viewers and enemies, such as in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The journalists here are deciding on how they should report the festival of the right to return to Palestine. The festival is happening at a time when the right to return was neglected in the peace negotiations between the Palestinian Authority and Israel:

*Journalist 1: We have in Lebanon a decision about the right to return to Palestine: festivals.*
Journalist 2: Better than a report is to ask their opinion about negotiations using the camera. All refugees in the camp are responding negatively.

Producer 1: After what happened, Abbas boasts that refugees in Lebanon have priority.

Producer 2: The occasion is known. There is no need to give lessons about it, but people’s comments are important. We do not want people on the doctoral level. We want people from the street, a simple man, or an old woman. (Editorial meeting, December 10, 2010)

We can see from this discussion that the news team decided to present ordinary people’s views in order to illuminate the situation in the most direct way: let them speak for themselves. A clear view of such a focus on ordinary people’s pain is provided by several examples of the video wall – a screen behind the presenter in the news studio – showing the studio presentation mode for stories about Palestine. We see, for example: A close, frontal shot of a Palestinian child looking through insulated wires. His hands are on the wires and a sad expression on his face as if he is looking nowhere. The close-up shot of the child’s face takes half of the frame, demonstrating a very personal relationship with the viewers, inviting the viewers to share his sadness and pain. It can be argued that these images on the video wall were used to trigger the audience’s emotions and feelings by showing what a Palestinian child goes through every day in his life – living behind a fence in his own land for the rest of his life.

Figure 7:1 Palestine departure / Midday December 19, 2010
A further example in covering the Palestinian deportations on Midday (December 19, 2010)

People are shown in the video in a medium-long shot. Some of them are wearing traditional costumes, and they are all looking down which shows humiliation. Also,
there were women and children carrying their belongings on their backs. The people were shown walking in a long queue, symbolizing the continuity of their struggle. The video connects the audience to the daily life of the Palestinians who have turned into refugees. In the Arab world, seeing women and children suffering as the video had shown, makes the audience sad yet no tangible solutions have been achieved to end the suffering of Palestinians.

The above examples illustrate the empathy towards the Palestinian which was showed in the previous chapter that journalists conceding it a connecting topics which link all the Arabs. The coverage of topics which maintain the connection is one side in AlJazeera presentation as it also showed in chapter six that it aims at all Arabs with all their ethnicities and beliefs, therefore, personalising the language and the presentations is also a strategy which is used to show minority situations in Arab country as it is found in the coverage of Iraqi Christians *Midday 7/12/2010* as a representative example.
The report addresses the problems by relating the personal experiences of Iraqi Christians and by focusing on their grief and suffering. Approaching individual groups in Arab societies and showing their pain and concern shows that Al Jazeera represents everyone in the Arab world; that it stands with whoever needs help.

Commenting on the report ‘The Christian Middle East’: No human being should feel that he is ignored by any news channel. We cannot ignore a specific category... news space should cover all segments of the public, even include a small part of their life; however, I do not think that the time is available for all segments that suffer from marginalization. (P2, December 2010)

The quote indicates how this sympathy is a feature of the news report. First, most shots in the report are close or medium-close shots, suggesting a personal and close relationship with the subject. Second, there is a focus on Christian symbols, such as the natural prayer sounds in the cries to Jesus, repeatedly focusing on them shows respect to this group in Arab societies. The sense of sympathy is shaped by playing with creative shots, such as a close-up of the baby's face, showing the Christian family
as trapped behind a window open on one side, the packed suitcases, the baby again in the end when he is moving from the shadows to the light away from the camera.

We can see that the main actors in the stories are shown as ordinary, decent people who represent different age groups, giving a feeling of family or neighbourhood, as Arabs respect family values. The report is constructed to create a sense of empathy for this group. However, despite reference to some statistics and the presentation of some facts and information in the interviews, the report seems removed from its context, with no investigations, at least at the time this report was broadcast and no explanations of why it was happening. Additionally, the report was not followed up unlike other reports. This report was an occasion or session report, planned to be aired synchronously with the conference of Muslim-Christian co-existence.

This demonstrative feature, in its address mode, includes other stories from outside the Arab world, such as a report on the situation in Ivory Coast (December 15, 2010) there was an emphasis on focusing on the struggle of ordinary people.

Journalist 1:  Today in Ivory Cost there is a strike from Gbagbo. Ansar, our reporter, will send us a report from there.
Producer 1: He wrote a note, a mean one, a little bit [laughter].
Journalist 2: Yes, saying where are our reporters’ stories from there?
Producer 1: No, you remember the decision we made that day? We said that it is important that he shoots maximum, as much as he can. And he should give attention to what happens on the public level and how this affects people's daily life, human stories not just politics.

The talk in this editorial meeting makes a clear, representative case of presenting issues through the presentation of ordinary people’s struggles and its effects on their life. It is the introduction to explain the political subjects. Below is the example of a report from Ivory Coast in Midday.
We can see that the images projected on the video wall were of ordinary people. We see citizens waving symbols of victory that could be interpreted as their determination to continue fighting to oust Gbagbo. Further, in a frontal close up shot an image shows a citizen raising his hand pointing at the viewers that can be perceived as someone asking for help from the international community. These images on the video wall show the angry facial expressions of ordinary people who were demanding that Gbagbo should go. The focus on ordinary people’s actions and aspirations link the subjects to the viewers to be interested to follow the news about people like them. In this video wall we see the ordinary people are shown in active ways: demanding, angry, strong, and ready to fight for their rights.

The above story shows the conflict between governments and oppositions outside the Arab region. In covering such conflicts in Arab countries we can see the same presentation modes that portray the conflicts as: first, between governments and the public; second, it is legitimized conflicts and the opposition groups are shown in positive images and as representatives of Arab viewers. The best way to understand such a view is to look at news stories that show topics of conflict between some groups and their government. Al Jazeera’s journalists justified their use of alignment
mode of address by suggesting that they feel the street beat, understands it, and shows it.

The next example is from Yemen where demonstrations were organized by opposition groups. The journalist explains: “The event in Yemen is seen as a movement, a public movement towards a democratic system; therefore, it’s very important to cover the situation there” (J3, December 2010).

In showing its alignment with ordinary people in Yemen, Al Jazeera projected them on its video wall as follows: oblique angle in a medium shot shows members of the opposition groups holding signs. The writing on these signs demonstrates what they are demanding, such as: no to inheritance, referring to President Ali Abdulla-Saleh who wanted his son to be his successor, and demands for more jobs. The men are standing in one line, shoulder to shoulder, and some of them are wearing the traditional Yemeni costume. These opposition groups are peaceful but determined to go on with their demonstration regardless of the presence of armed forces. Showing them in organized, peaceful protests using posters to state their demands makes viewers to sympathies with them. Although the angle of the shot is oblique, they are shown in a medium shot that, as Kress, G., & Van Leeuwen, T. (2006) suggest, enables the viewers to have a social distance to what they are seeing. Choosing a shot that shows some of them in traditional costume increases the viewers' sense of affinity, as they will see them as part of them, i.e., as ordinary Arab citizens and for

Figure 7.4: (Midday, Yemen/December 13, 2010)
Yemeni viewers, as representatives of the Yemen society. Kress, G., & Van Leeuwen, T. (2006) call this central subjective image, where the viewers are invited to see the image from a certain perspective.

On the same story, demonstrations in Yemen, apart from the images, the language chosen also appealed to emotions and empathy, supporting the demands of the demonstrators. In presenting this news story, Al Jazeera used the language that supported the opposition groups and referred toing the group as speakers who speak on behalf of the public. In this respect, Al Jazeera’s alignment legitimised demands of the opposition in Yemen. The narrator says:

*The opposition Joint Meeting Parties and the Preparatory Committee for National Dialogue in Yemen called for what they called 'public commotion anger' until people get back their rights, as Mohamed Salem, President of the Preparatory Committee for National Dialogue, said. This comes as the background of the General Ruling Party approval for the election law amendments and the quest to hold parliamentary elections next April, regardless of the opposition's position. (Midday, December 4, 2010)*

Broadcasting the statement of the opposition group of calling a 'public commotion anger' at the beginning of the news story emphasises Al Jazeera’s aligning with the opposition, amplifying its voice, and linking these voices to the demands of citizens. In this alignment mode of address these opposition groups are presented as speaking in the name of the citizens. What supports the argument of the opposition groups is that when Al Jazeera was broadcasting the Yemeni government's opinion, it was still displaying the same image of the opposition groups as a background for the news. Thus, the above examples show how Al Jazeera, in times of conflict, links the topics to the ordinary people and presents the news in a way to show their empathy towards them.

The findings in this thesis show that Al Jazeera’s alignment mode of presentation can also be detected in its news covering peaceful events, such as the elections in Egypt and the referendum in Sudan. Interestingly, journalists who participated in this research revealed that in their planning of the coverage of the elections in Egypt and the referendum in Sudan they were interested in including ordinary people's voices and showing their opinions and their feelings. They also revealed that Al Jazeera had already taken a decision to report news stories about ordinary people in the south of Yemen.
Sudan before the referendum had started as ‘the voice of the voiceless’ that gives ‘more than one opinion’.

Various illustrative examples, below, have been selected in relation to the findings of the interviews and what have been observed in the newsroom indicate how this interest in ordinary voices was applied in practice to news production. Although by time of the first observation phase, the elections in Egypt were almost finished; however, Al Jazeera was still following the event by focusing on people’s reactions:

The report video wall on (Midday, December 5, 2010) shows a medium-close up shot of ordinary Egyptian people surrounding the ballot boxes. The viewers can clearly see the facial expressions of the people participating in the elections. The angle of the shot and the size of the image are displayed in a wide-shot that shortens the distance between viewers and subjects.

The headlines, too, expressed the mood of the voters, where people expressed concerns about the elections:

*Judicial decisions by the Egyptian court to dissolve the parliament before its formation and the ruling party fights for the second round of elections alone. (Midday, December 5, 2010)*

*Despite the boycott, candidates of Alwafeed and the Brotherhood win the Egyptian runoff election round, and losers from the ruling party protest (Midday, December 6, 2010).*
The language that is used portrays the opposition groups positively – as Egypt’s saviours – compared to the ruling party, that is shown as isolated and ignorant and facing difficulties. This is conveyed by the use of vocabulary such as “alone” and “the loser” to describe the ruling party.

This alignment mode of address, that focuses on ordinary people, became even deeper and sharper during the street demonstrations in February when an Al Jazeera journalist referred to Egypt’s revolution as a revolution led by people from all walks of life: “Egypt's revolution is a public revolution, an intellectual revolution. It is led by the artist, the farmer, the average worker, and the political and human rights activist. All of these opinions must be taken seriously” (J12, April 2011).

In the example above Al Jazeera is taking a position – to be with the public in their revolution – and help them make their voices reach the world. News programmes during the demonstrations were devoted to promote a wide range of citizens’ views, testimonies, and opinions against Mubarak’s regime. It is not clear if the selection of people to give testimonies and views was guided by their political affiliation or interest. Al Jazeera selected these voices as representatives of the different Egyptian communities. This selection in general focused on ordinary people who were in favour of the demonstrations and supported the revolution to change Egypt (Rinnawi, 2012).

Besides constructing the language and the image to link the topics to ordinary people, producers also insert in the programmes stories based on ordinary people’s experiences. Two weekly slots are devoted to these stories: From the People and The Rest of the Story. Both slots take a personal experience, an achievement, a public project, or a story about the violation of human rights.

Journalists claim that personal stories create a closer relationship with the news subjects and lead to a more in-depth understanding of the topics. The journalists believe that this strategy explains complex political issues and influences their audience emotionally, as the account here shows:
The humanitarian aspect of the news connects the viewer to the story. When we show the viewer the suffering of a refugee rather than report about the unjust political decisions that led to the current situation, the viewer links him with the big picture. This news then sheds light on two aspects of a news item: humanitarian and political. (J6, December 2010)

It is the moral obligation that makes the story more appealing to the public. There is another ideological and political goal in humanising the news. The journalist here is to put this news story/struggle in a wider political context. He explains how it aligns to problems that are created by certain policies. It links the ordinary people with the political reality as part of their daily life. This is explained more in the following quotation:

The appearance of the normal citizen means to the viewer that his aborted dreams and pain are political. This means that the trick did not fool anyone, and the news was able to reach him. Al Jazeera does not broadcast in a vacuum. It targets specific audiences; therefore, there is a complementary relationship between Al Jazeera and the receiver. (J7, December 2010)

We can understand that, first; there is a strong link between political policy and the people deportments which is the core of this presentation mode. Second humanising the news and linking the stories to individual are a cautious decision based on AlJazeera’s awareness of its targeted audience and their assumption about what motivate them. We move now to the last approach the Equality mode of address.

### 7.5 Equality in the mode of address

Al Jazeera modifies its language to suit its target groups. In its search to be unique, present different views, and attract younger viewers, Al Jazeera started to use Facebook in the program *This Evening*. Through their Facebook page, Al Jazeera receives audience opinions about the day's topic in the programme, and the presenter selects several and conveys them or directs them as questions to the guest. The journalists who were working on the programme explained why such a practice is used: “The idea started a year ago. The purpose was to engage the viewer and let them choose the subject” (J11, December 2010).

This practice gives kind of pleasure and excitement to the viewers as it engages them and attracts their attention. However, there is more than just this simple goal:
You say what the common media does not say. You are the citizen's voice, and you do not exclude news. I rebelled against its familiarity until I made it feel different, addressed the citizen’s point of view... who lives in a shanty town, until I make him feel I am taking news from his angle... so that the citizen feels that the question you ask and the question that he wanted to ask are very similar. In the end it is a legal question so that there can be a negotiation and a withdrawal from the comfort zone. (J11, December 2010)

The journalist's explanation shows that choosing Facebook as a technique mainly in the evening programme and not in other programmes and selecting more social and cultural topics for the audience to participate in represents the way Al Jazeera is adjusting the style of its news programmes to meet the audience's requirements. It also highlights the political aim and leads the audience to believe that the news is playing the traditional role of journalism, namely, to be the voice of the people. The viewers’ voice and the journalists’ voice become the same, or in other words, it is structured to give the feeling that they are equal, thus suggesting a closer relationship with the audience.

This strategy that allows the audience to partly participate is viewed in an argumentative approach by studies of discourse analysis. It advocates an on-going debate by news production scholars. If we take journalists’ motivation into consideration, it seems that such a mode of address is intended to create a sense of interaction between the audience and the news subjects. The presentation style that is constructed to meet the audience needs and match the programme form, is also motivated by competition and the political aims of the news organisations. These factors are integrated to create specific news presentations that distinguish Al Jazeera programmes.

7.5.1 The use of language images in the production of programs

Equality in the news presentation aims at gaining the audience’s trust and creates a close relation between news organisations, the audience, and the subjects. An extract from This Evening programme is selected to illustrate the equality sense in the mode of address. The presenter selected some comments from the Facebook page and addressed them to his interviewees. The talking point was about women remaining single in Jordan:
Of course there are reasons, perhaps social, that have to do with women’s entry into universities and work, and there are economic reasons related to men. I will tell you about Salwa, who says: ‘I do not consider myself a spinster if I am 26 years old because if I want to marry I would get married. I want to live and not just to get married. I have goals in a marriage; therefore, even if I became 35 years old I will not agree to the things that do not satisfy me.’ This is regarding Salwa’s participation on Facebook. I will tell you what Omar said and why he did not get married. Expensive dowries? High cost of living? The latest car? A house, an apartment, honeymoon? All of these things exacerbate the problem. (This Evening: December 5, 2010)

In this extract we can see that the comments present both men and women. The presenter was integrating the viewers’ comments with his questions. He was also presenting the comments with the viewers’ names calling them in a causal way which gives the impression that they are known or they have a close relation. These comments are opinions not experiences. They are opinions on social issues, and the interviewee is an expert in the field. Putting these comments versus his explanations encourages the audience and gives them a prestigious position.

Linking the viewer’s subjects occurs by making the news itself personal and narrating by the individual. In the following example is an interview with an old Palestinian man. This interview was part of Hasad Alyoum that is aimed at the political elite. The interview was not part of the report, but the old man was shown in the screen. The interview was divided between him and a representative from a human rights organisation. Here the equality is between the old man and the news presenter. It is also between the old man and the elite viewers, and finally between the old man and other actors in the stories that are mainly political. This mode of equality creates a close relationship between the viewers and the topic, “A Palestinian citizen, a guest via satellite from Ramallah, suffers from the practices of the Israeli occupation and what is happening to his homeland. We want you to tell us about your suffering under the Israeli occupation” (Hasad Alyoum, December 19, 2010).

In this news story, we see that journalists cover the news through the personal experiences of ordinary people. They choose, for example, an old man and identify him as “Hajj Abbas”. Such a mode of presentation suggests an influential relationship with the audience, first in that he is an old man, and second in that the word “Hajji” in Arab culture shows respect and trust to the one who holds this “kunai” (polite nickname). Also, he was speaking in the simple Palestinian dialect that has a spiritual
influence. After the interview, journalists conducted another interview with the human rights representative, which makes the two figures equal. The news was supported by the findings of the UN’s Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in the Palestinian territories. In this case, we see that the presentation of a personal story is actually supported by research reports and analytical views from well-known international human rights organisations. The testimony was simple and pure, and it was not broadcast in the middle of a sensational report; rather, it was a natural, ordinary participation. Such a mode of presentation is seen as one that aids in the understanding of a complex situation (Örnebring, 2007).

Journalists refer to this strategy as natural practice which shows that the news organisations operate within a community that share with it its daily life, as the journalist suggests:

*You are giving the news, but you feel the people’s need. You feel that you are part of those who are part of you. When you make a report about people, it is a close feeling that you are part of these people, part of the fabric, of this family. And viewers want to know what happened in this country.* (SP4, December 2010)

With Al Jazeera, this personal experience is used to explain complex political and economic forces. Bonner and McKay (2007) discussed similar news and suggested that in these news types, although the story is addressed in an intimate approach, it still presents core values of the societies and through these stories important social and political issues.

We see that the personal mode of address is used to simplify political issues. This mode of address is not only used to promote certain political ideologies but also change, whether we see that change as democratizing (Kunelius and Renvall, 2010; MacDonald, 2000) or as propaganda (Fang-Sim, 2007). The interest in ordinary people's emotions, the difficulties of their daily lives, and in their opinions on local political issues was introduced only recently to Al Jazeera’s production.

This interest in ordinary people's situations is defined by two important lines: first, its relation to the important political events, as exemplified above in the coverage of the elections in Egypt, or the demonstrations later, or its depiction of individual human suffering. There, is a notable absence or at least less interest in presenting and
commenting on other important political and social issues to effect a real change in the current situations. For example, there was the case of the girl who was burned in Yemen, that was broadcast on the *Midday* programme of December 18, 2012. Al Jazeera reported the incident as an individual case, implying that an effective reaction from the audience, citizens/ordinary people, was not required, and the news was not followed up. According to Al Jazeera's standards, a local issue does not serve the interest of the wide audience, even though there might be similar cases in other countries.

The same can be said about the worker's story that was analysed in this Chapter. Although there was a mention of a case that challenged the dominant political discourse and that might encourage others to follow (Bonner and McKay, 2007; Kunelius and Renvall 2010), in this case the participant was presented as a victim who lost his job in the end. It changed his life, and it did not seem that there was hope for him. Additionally, influential reactions that followed the incidents and a demand for public and official reaction was not emphasised. While Al Jazeera claims that it is interested in supporting ordinary people, speaking for them, and casting light on human rights stories, it seems that it constructs this view under the umbrella of political disagreements between opposition parties and their governments more than pressing for a real change in Arab societies. Al Jazeera presents them as individual cases. Although some argue that Arab media in general are incapable of addressing such local issues, in the case of Al Jazeera it claims that it is taking on that responsibility. The data collected for this study show that it is failing to do so.

Al Jazeera has achieved influence over its viewers on global disaster issues and in countering the dominant western media coverage of Arab and Islamic issues. At the same time, though, it only manages to tell half of the story about Arab democratization issues. By focusing its coverage on the tension between governments and opposition parties and personalising this tension to appeal to ordinary people, Al Jazeera suggests only one way of change and reduces the chance to construct a stable democratic system in the Arab region. Hafiz (2012) suggests that media cannot build a democratic political system.
Interest in ordinary people's situations is defined by two important lines: first, its relation to the important political events, as exemplified above in the coverage of the elections in Egypt, or the demonstrations later, or its depiction of individual human suffering. Second, there is a notable absence or at least less interest in presenting and commenting on other important political and social issues to effect a real change in the current situations.

7.7 Conclusion

The Chapter examined the main mode of presentation in Al Jazeera productions. The mode of address is examined through a qualitative analysis of news production. It examined the journalists’ view of their audience and how they shaped their decision on the story presentations and the news content and look.

The findings suggest that mode of address take different styles, and it is not a standardised form. The mode of address is constructed to certain journalists’ understanding of their programme features and their targeted audience; It was shown that Al Jazeera mainly uses three approaches in addressing their audience, the provocative informing style, alignment, and the equality mode of address.

Al Jazeera expanded its interests to more ordinary people-centred presentation in covering different political topics, not just in time of war and disaster. The three modes of address approaches are designed to capture the emotional needs of the visualised audience. As journalists are guided by political and cultural understandings of these needs, they are on the other hand integrating these understandings with the aim and the acknowledged features of Al Jazeera news form.

After examining the modes of address, the discussion will now move to look into details of framing of the visual and language elements in the news stories, what shapes their selection, and how it creates a specific style.
Chapter Eight

News Style

8.1 Introduction

Chapter Seven showed the way how Al Jazeera modifies its modes of address to target specific audience groups. These approaches are creatively crafted, using language and images that capture the emotional needs of the network’s Arab audience. The Chapter will present a detailed qualitative analysis of the data to illustrate Al Jazeera’s broadcast style by studying selections from its language and accompanying images. It will begin by explaining the general framework that journalists apply when determining a story’s presentation style. It will then proceed to discuss relevant news presentation approaches.

8.2 Shaping news presentation

Al Jazeera journalists demonstrate an awareness of the relationship and shared values between them and the audience (Hall, 1980). This discourse of creativity is defined by a certain understanding of the audience’s needs and the organisation’s culture and news forms. Journalists work according to professional norms, incorporating lexical selection, visual imagery, and sound bites. These are done to create a mode that can be encoded by the audience (Hall, 1980; Fisk, 1989).

In their shaping of news stories, journalists set a professional framework. The latter is based on journalists’ understanding of their news form and visualisation of their audience. In Chapter Five we saw that journalists highlighted the diversity and complexity of their audience’s cultural and political context. In Chapter Six it was demonstrated that one of the defending elements in Al Jazeera news form is its aim to protect Arab heritage and to present conflicting views in the Arab region in an attempt to challenge the local and international media discourse. These journalists’ views on the audience image/needs and the news form drive their conceptualisation of their professional practice.
In this Chapter we will see that to inform the audience or to cover the different elements in the news stories as general journalistic norms are also related to the political and cultural presumptions of Al Jazeera’s form and its targeted audience. The following section of this Chapter will demonstrate this by describing the frameworks that journalists set in their selection of language, visuals, and interviews.

8.2.1 Language and visuals: Professional guidelines

Al Jazeera claims to rely on professional journalistic practice to construct its news by using balanced, objective language. Journalists set certain criteria for the selection of visuals and language elements in their news presentation. Their first defining frame is the aim to inform and tell the story to their audience: “The journalist is free to constitute an article; however, he wants to do it by following regulations... I cannot change the story. I do not want to repair the world, but I want to say what happened exactly” (P5, December 2010).

Because these journalists want to be seen to be working within the accepted structure of their professional field, the claim is usually that their reporting reflects the event, similar to Epstein’s (1973) findings regarding American journalists. The goal to inform others does not mean the use of a template or standard linguistic form. Journalists craft linguistic and visual elements when telling their stories, as will be shown later.

Another important element in this situation is the audience’s interest. A representative example is the Midday programme on December 19, 2010 when a journalist was writing a report about weather conditions in England. The producer commented on the language and said, “Do not include in the report specific details of the street names. It does not interest our viewers. They do not live in the UK and probably have never been there. Such details do not concern them” (SP2, December 2010). Here we see that the language has to be clear and understandable to viewers, with details selected according to the audience’s needs and familiarity with them.
In addition to lexical selection, journalists understand professional and stylistic applications as important to the image when attracting their audience. This is seen in the excerpt below:

*The report on the EU Summit in Brussels is an economic issue. Farmers’ are demonstrating, demanding higher milk prices. They are entering Brussels with their tractors. From here we begin the story of the Summit. This atmosphere is related to the story and gives it a human dimension that pulls in the viewer. The story may be distributed in several places. For example, in Lebanon we want to talk about the possibility of a sectarian war. There is no war now, but there is an escalation. There are statements and archival images and a reading of the current situation.* (P5, December 2010)

We understand from the above account that video images can bring a degree of credibility by showing the audience the actual scene. Furthermore, it offers the audience a sense of engagement by presenting the human side of the visuals. The video footage serves a basic material that helps in the construction of the stories, giving the news a sense of coherence and relevance. These professional and stylistic understandings form the basis of cultural and political frames.

### 8.2.2 Language and visuals: Political and cultural guidelines

Working within a wider multicultural context that includes conflicting political ideologies journalists perform an integrating role (Hall, 1980). They learn from experience that there exist political and cultural values that should be respected. The findings of this study show that Al Jazeera’s journalists respect the political and cultural values of their audience, as demonstrated below:

*The Palestinian who is killed is called a martyr. The one who blows himself up in Palestine is called a freedom fighter. We do not call it a suicidal act. This is an agreed policy. The other thing is related to the use of specific terms for cities. For example, we decided to use Beijing instead of Peking. We do not say ‘observers say’ because you are obliged to tell people who said it exactly. And you should not use an ambiguous word, like a huge demonstration. What is the meaning of ‘huge’ here? There is a problem in the definition.* (P2, December 2010)

The journalist explained that in selecting their vocabularies journalists make a conscious choice which shows that Al Jazeera understands the Arab perspective. This is seen in the example of referring to Palestinians killed by Israel as ‘martyrs’. Barkho (2010) confirms the same findings, suggesting that Al Jazeera respects its audience’s feelings and their views and uses terminologies that reflect Islamic attitudes. He suggests that this culture of respect in Al Jazeera news presentation grants the network...
The findings show that Al Jazeera journalists working in conflict zones and dealing with sensitive issues have gained cultural knowledge and political experience through their work in the field: “Our news coverage of a certain subject may gain us wide popularity or raise questions. All this affects the news industry, and news drafts next time” (SP1, December 2010). Such recognition of political and cultural contexts determines journalists’ use of language. The initial copy referred to ‘Arab, foreign countries, and other nations allied to Israel’. The journalist deleted the term “allied” so as not to exclude countries such as Jordan and Egypt.

Within a specific cultural framework, journalists pay attention to the taboos and values of that culture. Referring to the influence of many nationalities working together in Al Jazeera, one of the journalists explained: “A person’s culture forms a basis for their life. If articles are about Sudan, you will find a Sudanese theme. You will find that a shared social background has an impact on the writing” (J7, December 2010).

This type of cultural respect and a strict editorial language policy is observed in the newsroom. One example is when the news producer was on the telephone, commenting on a report draft sent by a correspondent for *Midday* on December 3, 2010. The reporter had described the fire as ‘The wrath of mother nature’ and the producer commented: “We should not say nature's fury. It has religious connotations and disregards the possibility of the fire being deliberately started”. The latter sample shows that the programme producer assessed the language, demonstrated his integrity in terms of journalistic values including accuracy, balance, and truthfulness, and
cultural and political understanding. Al Jazeera newsroom’s editorial committee is also responsible for assessing the language used in broadcasts. This team is responsible not only for reviewing the language in terms of grammatical and structural accuracy but also for assessing all its elements, political and cultural (Al Theidi 2003).

8.2.3 Professional guidelines for selecting interviews

Interviews are a highly important component of Al Jazeera’s news discourse. In the context of Al Jazeera productions outside their main news programmes talk shows have been one of the major factors in the network’s popularity. Conversational guests and their opinions have shocked Arab viewers (Ayish, 2005). Observation of the main interviews in Al Jazeera news programmes reveals that they can be equally contentious. The station’s main objectives in performing news interviews are equivalent to those of other news organisations, where professional journalistic standards require that the news is covered from all angles, as shown in this example:

*In Syria the Syrian President issued decrees to reinstate the Supreme Court and to end the emergency law. Consequently, demonstrations took place. We should highlight this and conduct interviews because this indicates that people are not satisfied and have increased their level of demand. We want to understand what they want and why the demonstrations happened? (J13, April 2010)*

This account shows that when more information is needed to provide a predictive sense of an event, interviews can help obtain further details and explanations. Professional guidelines are also informed by audience needs and requirements of the news form. Interviewees are selected in a way that demonstrates to the audience a sense of the organisation’s objectivity. The following excerpt shows the importance of taking the audience’s concerns and doubts into consideration: “We get a guest from Banias in Syria because the event is happening there. If the guest is not available, we get someone from the opposition because all of them have the same geographical orientation” (J 13, April, 2011). The journalist means that selecting a guest from an event’s original location is a priority, as it suggests a commitment to truthfulness.

Besides guests’ personalities and their knowledge of a subject, time spent on interviews can also be influenced by individual guests and the topic of discussion. The
following journalist puts it like this: “The interview period in the news bulletin is about three to four minutes. But when interviewing the ‘big fish’ it is possible to stretch it to ten minutes or a quarter of an hour” (J13, April 2011).

We can see that the three programmes differ in their interviewee selection criteria. While Hasad Alyoum prefers well-known experts and analysts as guests, Midday devotes a whole section to interviews with field reporters to update viewers with the latest news: “The Hasad Alyoum bulletin is an analysis of a full day’s news. It depends on high-caliber guests. There are three major titles and four files with two interviews for each file. This way various parties display their views” (J13, April 2011). Each programme has its own type of preferred guests. For example, “In This Evening we are more interested in scientists and other experts” (J13, April 2010).

As this discussion indicates, professional journalistic understandings of the components of the news form determine the selection of interviewees. Furthermore, the audience’s political and cultural contexts also influence interviewee selection, as will be discussed in the next section.

8.2.4 Selecting interviews: Cultural and political guidelines

Selecting a particular guest or interview subject is not as simple as it may seem. Interviewees have different personalities and ways of delivering information that helps to create a deliberate, specific mood. For example, journalists on the interview desk justified thus: "Haroon is a man of bold positions and brings a sense of criticism” (J12, December 2010). The capacity for criticism is here recognised as a feature that justifies the selection of the guest.

Sometimes interviewees are selected because it is believed that they will have a particular influence on the viewers and will be received with trust. For example, during the second phase of observation in April, a journalist on the interview desk explained why Azmi Bshara and Yousef Al-Qaradawi were repeatedly interviewed during the ‘Arab Spring’. He explained that both guests are popular in the Arab world and sections of their audience believe what these people say. He stated:
Yousef Al-Qaradawi, a religious figure, historically led Egypt in the seventies. His views are sometimes more like fatwas (religious decrees). He is president of the Association of Muslim Scholars. Arabs are emotional with regards to religious matters. Religiously, their position towards revolution is of obedience to the ruler. But Al-Qaradawi, for example, justified the right to kill Gaddafi, and at the same time gives spiritual support. Revolutionaries asked Al-Qaradawi to pray for them... and Bshara is one of the intellectual Arabs who is popular among our viewers. (J13, April 2011)

The important issue here is not merely the use of popular figures to promote a particular opinion but that those particular examples are also controversial. While Al-Qaradawi is a religious figure known for his affiliations with Islamist movements including the Muslim Brotherhood, Bshara is an Arab Christian and a former Israeli Knesset member known for his Arab nationalist ideology. In fact, Al-Qaradawi gained fame through Al Jazeera, and his interviews with the network have gone beyond topics of religious to become part of the broadcaster’s political discourse (Barkho, 2010). Religion and politics are interconnected in the Arab world. Thus, we see how the selection of a particular guest is framed by his personality, his skills in addressing a topic, and how that relates to audience expectations.

Interview selection is also framed by audience interest and political considerations, as we can see in this discussion concerning a news interview covering demonstrations in Syria:

**Journalist 1:** Robert Fisk wrote a beautiful article about the Syrian situation. Why don’t we conduct an interview with him for a change instead of repeating the same guests? At the same time, we will bring in a westerner to raise critical awareness.

**Journalist 2:** He or anyone else from Britain. We want an expert in Middle East affairs. We can also get a government spokesperson, an opposition figure, and a human rights activist.

**Journalist 1:** Do you want an opposing perspective from abroad?

**Journalist 2:** No, I prefer local because the argument is always that people suspect outside interests from abroad. (20 April 2011)

This discussion indicates that journalists try to vary their coverage to present different angles and provide various guests so viewers are offered new perspectives. Furthermore, we can see that in this case journalists demonstrate caution by selecting an Arab voice representing opposition groups because there is widespread criticism that these groups have western agendas and promote the interests of western countries. Journalists try to avoid that charge by looking for interviewees who voice
opposition groups’ opinions from inside the country, as was suggested in the findings of Handley and Rutigliano (2012).

The above discussion reveals how journalists create frameworks for their news presentation styles. This framework is shaped by professional journalistic roles, an understanding of the wider political and cultural contexts, and journalists’ attitudes towards their audience and the form of their news programmes. Thus, journalistic practices in the creative presentation of language and images are shaped by Al Jazeera’s understanding of the views and characteristics of the audience in all its richness and complexity, as will be explained in the following section.

8.3 Al Jazeera’s stylistic approaches

The prime aim of Al Jazeera, as shown on its website and revealed by its journalists, is to protect Arab culture and present Arab views on Arab world news topics as well as international news. Notes from the observations and the news content data indicate that these messages can be categorised into four style types: documentation, analogous reality, trivializing the enemy, and presenting heroes.

8.3.1 Documentation

Intensive coverage is one of Al Jazeera’s defining features (Touzani, 2009). Al Jazeera adopts an intensive approach when addressing news topics. Matthews and Cottle (2012) refer to this style as “thick description framing.” This approach by Al Jazeera can be divided into two categories according to their purpose: democratising and historical. Al Jazeera adopts the contextualising form when the news seems to be relevant and important to its audience. In presenting background news, journalists attempt to make the news clear and contextualised in the viewer’s mind. For example, the issue of groups planning to demonstrate in Yemen was raised in the Hasad Alyoum editorial meeting:

Journalist 1: Do you think that we are covering the situation in Yemen in the right way?

Journalist 2: We are on the right track, but there are things that must be clarified about the background of the crisis and its associations to outside news.
Journalist 1:  That is what I am saying. It seems we present other viewers with stories that are cut off from their historical, social, and cultural context. We simply present something that is difficult for them to fully understand. (December 14, 2010)

The conversation above is a journalist’s evaluation of his own work. It reveals an interest in explaining the context of the news to the audience outside Yemen because such complex issues are difficult to explain while covering day-to-day events. In such circumstances Al Jazeera frequently prepares a series of reports, as was the case with Sudan. At the time of observation in December 2010, a regular feature began airing that talked about daily reports from Yemen. The professional journalistic value of informing an audience is integrated with political and cultural perspectives. The following section will explain this further.

8.3.1.1 Democratisation

Al Jazeera plans intensive coverage of important events. For example, coverage of elections in Egypt and the referendum in Sudan began before the actual events and was planned to run throughout those events and to provide continued coverage after the elections and referendum. In the case of Sudan, the news editor explained that this involves journalists commencing by providing a bigger picture of what is happening in the region. This was achieved primarily by feature stories that explain different aspects of people’s lives relating to various issues. It was important to have a guest from Sudan because although this is news for all Arabs it is particularly important to Sudanese who should be made to feel present in the analysis.

In the above example reporting what happened is not enough; the news form employed by Al Jazeera requires investigation of why it happened. First, journalists prepare viewers with stories that create background for the later messages. Then they start to build an image through a series of reports. This image is shaped to reveal why the journalist presents the particular topic. This is described below:
Sometimes we discuss an issue and prepare a report about it, and then we bring guests to complete all aspects of the coverage. Sometimes this is not enough, so you need a discussion show. Sometimes we work in a series of reports, for example, the secession of southern Sudan. Why? Where does this idea come from? And we see southerners as Sudanese people... the whole of Sudan is underdeveloped. I mean that the people there feel neglected and marginalized. We discuss the idea of separation, show it and explain it to the viewers and put them in the picture because not all our viewers are equally informed. (SP4, December 2010).

Journalists covering these stories are presenting a record of what happened by choosing to focus on the context of events, describing a series of separate but interconnected issues. This documentary approach offers access to different voices in the Arab world. Thus, expanded coverage is not limited to the selected topics but also to different voices to be heard in related news interviews, providing an indication of the complex ideologies, relationships, and struggles affecting the Arab World. When studying the voices that are present in these news interviews, we can see that access was given to government members, opposition figures, Arab intellectuals, and experts from different nationalities and ideological groups.

During the observation an emphasis on the presence of voices from many nationalities could be noticed. This appears to be a way of indicating Al Jazeera’s status as a representative of all Arabs. Secondly, as the data the interviews showed, certain controversial guests were given space to speak on the Midday programme, some in interviews lasting for half an hour. For example, covering the Carmel fire incident Al Jazeera interviewed Israeli police officers and government representatives, leading to criticism for giving space to the ‘enemy’ to speak. Al Jazeera has always given representation to political opponents and members of parties banned in the Arab world including, for example, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Syria. Other examples include meeting the Al-Saleh Mahdi, President of the Umma opposition party in Sudan and Vice President of the AKarama forum for human rights in Morocco. These particular interviews are most evident in the Hasad Alyoum programme and less so in the This Evening programme.

While this suggests that Al Jazeera presents diverse ideologies and nationalities among its interviewees, it is difficult to accurately examine Al Jazeera’s objectivity and its claim to give fair access to all ideologies and parties. The diversity of voices found in the data reveals a clear reflection of Arab society’s richness as well as a
strong focus on its struggles and disagreements. Hafez (2004) suggests that Al Jazeera plays the role of a political party. Some journalists may have personal disagreements with this approach, yet they remain obliged to follow the organisation’s culture:

Frankly, if it were in my hands I would settle for news only, meaning the news at the time. But so far Al Jazeera’s motto has been: ‘The opinion and the other opinion’. Of course opinion is based on the real story; therefore, all news influences views, and Al Jazeera’s motto does not change. For example, the BBC’s motto is ‘news first’. They are committed to it. As long as Al Jazeera’s motto is ‘The opinion and the other opinion’ it will focus on and sometimes exaggerate its news presentation, repetition, guests, and different viewpoints, and so on. (J2, December 2010)

The intensive presentation of varying opinions is the driving force behind Al Jazeera’s culture as a medium of ‘The opinion and the other opinion’. Most journalists agree that interviews are necessary to provide in-depth coverage. This documentary style fits into professional journalistic practice of informing the audience and updates them with previous information that they might have missed. The excerpt below testifies to this:

Do not expect the viewer to have the same background the journalist has. For me, the concept is already clear. I know the story. But I do not expect that the average viewer who works in other fields has the same background and follows the news every day. In these cases, he needs the news report to be put in its historical and political context. (J6, December 2010).

The journalist here explains the professional justification for this mode of reporting. Analysis of other journalists’ testimonies suggests that this practice helps to insure delivery of the messages to viewers who do not know everything about the news item. They also justify this approach by its capacity to explain specialised aspects of a story, such as military operations, to the general viewer. The following journalist puts it this way:

In Libya there were two tracks, political and military; therefore, it is important to explain both tracks. The military reports will explain the mechanisms that can be used by each party, and the viewer will receive and assimilate the information in a detailed and clearer way than if it were put in the context of a single report. (J13, April 2011)

The above examples indicate that journalists understand that they are speaking to Arab viewers from different regions. When a local political situation is not understood, Arab viewers cannot be seen as a homogenous unit. In these circumstances broader contextual coverage of news stories reveal more of their constituent elements.
In addition to retaining audience interest in a topic, the documentary approach responds to the audience’s appetite for more information. A concerned audience who may not trust other information sources look to Al Jazeera for answers, as in the cases of in-depth coverage of the elections in Egypt and the referendum in South Sudan:

*Generally, in normal circumstances, Sudan does not grasp anyone’s interest among modern power struggles. But now Sudan is different in many ways and that draws people’s attention to an Arab African country that is divided in the era of calls on people to unite. It is divided in the support it receives from international bodies. I talk about unity locally, regionally, internationally... Scenes are presented to the viewer of conditions in Sudan... he wants to know the implications on sports, social activities, and security. You are agreeing to provide a delicious dish to the viewer that he wants to eat. Egypt's elections may not mean much for the world, but the effect on the audience I am targeting in my media message is great. Therefore, I must dive in the depths of this election in the way you are seeing. Al Jazeera covers large areas so that the viewer watches what he wants. (J4, December 2010)*

In-depth coverage is targeted to satisfy audience needs and fulfil their desire for information. So the news is extended to include within one main political theme other economic, social, and cultural aspects of the story. This is firstly because these explain more about the political situation for ordinary people, and secondly they expand the news coverage to satisfy the audience’s interest in issues such as social, cultural, and economic topics.

We can see in Table 8.1 news about the referendum relating to cultural and social aspects was 71% of the total news about Sudan. This represents response to a regional audience and their interests and also an appeal to wider Arab connections. At the same time, it directly relates to the existing professional standard of providing a complete picture and presenting something that can compete with other news organisation and keep the audience attached to this broadcaster. In addition to this goal of informing the audience or of campaigning for certain cases there is a further objective for such intensive coverage. This will be explained in the following discussion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 8.1 Coverage of the Sudan referendum (December 1 to 20, 2010)</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Referendum / procedure</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referendum / people and other</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>71.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8.3.1.2 Chronicling

In addition to informing, documentation may be undertaken with the aim of communicating with an audience member who already assumes that he or she is attached to their culture. The case of the Carmel story illustrates this:

Journalists 1:  It is Israeli land now. We have to cover it as that.
Journalist 2:  Where is it exactly?
Producer 1:  See, that’s what I mean. This land is actually ours. Your grandfather and my grandfather planted those trees. We know that, but the new generation does not.
Producer 2:  Ok, we can present some information about that. (Hasad Alyoum, December 5, 2010)

As we can see, the decision was made in this editorial meeting to present the Carmel story as more than merely the report of an event. Journalists here are trying to explain the value of Carmel as a place in the collective memory. Therefore, they prepared an information graph about Carmel and presented it after the news story about the fire. We also identify the same motivation and characters in the report covering the Carmel fire that day. The journalist who wrote the news report explains his choice of language:

I start with a passage from a poem, then I describe the Carmel site so that the viewer knows where Carmel is situated. Suppose the Arabic viewer is not Palestinian, then he will not know. This is to remind the viewer that Carmel is basically a Palestinian city that has now become Israeli. (P1, December 2010)

Here is the text that introduces the news story:

A mountain overlooks the sea and the memories behind the two lakes and the coast of the prophets... This is Carmel that was engulfed in flames a few days ago in the Palestinian territories... Carmel overlooks the Mediterranean Sea and the adjacent city of Haifa, that is described by the Palestinians as the bride of the north... the fire destroyed about ten thousand acres of Carmel forests, including oaks and almond trees, and the flames did not stop but reached the city of Haifa, and killed more than forty people, most of them trained officers, and displaced more than seventeen thousand others. (Midday, December 5, 2010)

We can see how the language conjures up history, beginning with a quote from a poem about Carmel, describing it with romance and nostalgia. From the description of lakes and mountains it moves to the frightening images of the fire, emphasising memories of the place and revealing the sense of destruction at its loss. The narrator reading the report adjusts his tone to capture the emotional feeling suggested by the
text. To maintain Carmel’s status as an Arab land in the viewers’ collective memory, the language uses poetry and reminiscence of Carmel, all the while lamenting the disaster. Presenting Carmel through the metaphors of an Arabic poem shifts its status from being just an answer to the question of where the news happened to an iconic symbolic of on-going contention and nostalgia for the homeland.

Each Friday the Midday programme includes a slot entitled ‘The Rest of the Story’ that returns to an event previously covered by Al Jazeera. Journalists explained that this is important for viewers to remain connected to what happened, and that in fact actually their viewers want to be updated with this information. They are interested in following a story even if it is no longer an immediate news topic:

*These are huge events and their repercussions still exist, and sometimes people like to know what happened later. When the tsunami happened in Indonesia, Al Jazeera covered it throughout the month. There were appalling conditions, hard for any human being to describe. A year later we repeat the coverage on the anniversary of the tsunami and we find, for example, the Aceh territory, that was destroyed. How are things now? Why does the devastation still exist? (SP4, December 2010)*

In addition to putting news in its historical context for better understanding, history is presented as a series of continuous events. For example, during the observation on December 9, 2010, the researcher was shadowing a journalists working on this Friday slot. The story that day was about the memory of the Ibrahimi mosque massacre. He explained:

*Fifteen years have passed since an Israeli killed fifteen worshipers. Israel decided after that to divide the mosque and give sixty percent to Israel, which made entering the mosque difficult because there is only one door. We return to it now. Last year there were talks about the mosque, there are people survivors of the massacre, their testimony is still being heard even now. The dialogue that took place between the Palestinians and Israelis… Netanyahu wanted to include the mosque within the Jewish heritage site… a statement announced by UNESCO considers it part of the Palestinian territories, part of human heritage. (P5, December 2010)*

We can see that the idea behind the story is first to document the incident and recall its memory so it stays present in the mind of the new generation. This recall is presented as part of an on-going struggle to define Arab heritage and rights. While the journalist was working in the editing room it could be observed that he constructed the story as a flashback, starting with a testimony from a young man who witnessed the incident. His brother and father were killed there. The report lasted for four minutes and was divided by the appearance of the reporter between two parts – the
past and the present. The producer called the segment ‘The Wound is Still Open’, meaning this wound is still open, it is open to this young man who still feels the pain, it is open to people like him, that is why the title should reflect the story. In addition to the title, the word ‘still’ indicates the continuity of the history and the link between the past and the present.

Recalling the events in this manner of recording or chronicling is linked to journalists’ assumptions about their audience’s interests:

_The second anniversary of the war on Gaza cannot be overlooked. Beside the enormity of disasters that occurred unnoticed, there has been a great deal of injustice and victimization. Such a big event should be called back to memory, remembering what happened in the details of daily battles that took place in Gaza. Various reports show how the Gaza Strip was and how Gaza lived after this psychological, social, and economic war. The viewer wants to know that. In my view, Al Jazeera’s keen appreciation of this treatment stems from its keen viewers and their yearning to see and know how Gaza is a year after the aggression. (SP5, December 2010)_

The account shows two general lines of thought shaping this form of news; first, educationally the audience requires facts and information; second, culturally the event is now a part of the history and collective mind of a society. This is explained in the following quotation:

_This is very important because at this moment you are trying to record history in a particular country, whether it is Egypt’s elections, the Sudanese referendum, or a summit meeting of the Arab League. It could be a specific anniversary event. When you cover such intensive events and have reports, correspondents, interviews, and a wider explanation using illustrative means such as graphics or others and give full package to the viewer, you tell him/her this is not an isolated event. It is a major event that happened in particular economic and social circumstances, and we are trying to give them this image. On the one hand, you are giving the viewers a full meal, you are talking about a particular event so they can understand it fully, and on the other hand you are making or recording history. You are showing the event in its entire context instead of in isolation. (P2, December 2010)_

This role of historian is achieved through the contextualising form of news production by presenting a historical background to events. It comes from journalists’ understanding of the Arab audience’s attachment to their culture. It can be seen as appealing to audience interest in such decisive and critical topics as political movements in the Arab region. Mellor (2009) states that journalists play the role of historian. In Al Jazeera this historian role is filled through the reproduction of the news in documentary form. In defending the collective memory of their audience, journalists state their cultural authorisation of society (Mellor, 2012).
Al Jazeera journalists’ awareness of Arab diversity and recognition of their audience’s interests do not mean that the intensive coverage approach can never be detached from the political agenda, retaining just the pure intention to inform. Certainly providing in-depth reporting requires delivery of specific information. Provision of information cannot be entirely separated from journalism’s role in democratising societies. The journalist’s words above suggest that emphasising an important topic and presenting detailed information about it serves to enhance journalism’s role as a force for change. The following explanation is relevant here:

*We try to keep the viewer in the event, sometimes intentionally to highlight an issue, such as Gaza. When we highlight that the blockade is still continuing and this is a pressure on Egypt, we are focusing on the tragedy, and it is not your job to resolve it, but by highlighting it there comes pressure to solve it.* (SP4, December 2010).

The account shows that journalists are aware of the political and cultural context within which they work, and their reporting practice takes that into account. It is assumed by journalists that this approach reinforces the viewers’ position and their existing knowledge. “The Arab citizen feels that he is always behind cognitively and intellectually. We raise the morale of the citizen and provide him with the necessary knowledge to give him strength” (SP5, December 2010).

To summarise the analysis and discussion in this section, we can see that journalists select, construct, and integrate the language, images, and interviews in their reports according to various values. These include professional norms, such as the aim to keep their viewers informed and loyal. They also seek to provide recollection of events for cultural understanding of their broader contextual meaning, reflecting the journalists’ perceived role as protectors of the collective memories of their societies and recorders of history from an Arab perspective. These views are necessarily related to the broader political aims and context. All these elements are shaped and defined by journalists’ view of their audience’s needs and Al Jazeera’s culture.

### 8.3.2 Analogous reality

In the previous section we saw how Al Jazeera provides details that viewers cannot acquire easily from other news organisations – details that may relate to the viewers and their complex cultural and political situation. It was suggested that Al Jazeera
uses narrative discourse in an attempt to play the role of historian, often reflecting on the idea of an aggrieved audience who are emotionally attached to their culture and roots. Following a similar idea of documentation and providing its viewers with intensive messages about similar topics, in addition to topics from Arab countries, Al Jazeera sometimes goes beyond the situation in the Arab world and constructs a comparative image where viewers can see similar situations in other countries. The following examples will explain this further.

In the following example journalists were discussing the coverage of an edict issued by Jewish rabbis, forbidding the sale of lands to Palestinians:

   **Producer 1:** My attention was drawn by news of a religious edict of 50 rabbis prohibiting sale of lands to the Palestinians. Yesterday that was news, but today we should address it. What is its significance?

   **Journalist 1:** Help us to understand the religious situation in Israel.

   **News Editor:** It is appropriate to talk about this topic... Is it like Sunnis and Shiites? Is Chief Rabbi a formal position? Do different sects follow a different rabbi? Proceed from the religious opinion to the advisory opinion to discuss its general effect... give awareness to Arab viewers of the role of religion in Israel.

   **Journalist 2:** You need a guest because it is a complex subject. It cannot be discussed in a report... we lack information.

   **News Editor:** We have a large office there to gather information.

   [A reporter is contacted through the Assignment Desk]

   **Reporter:** I do not know anything about this issue...

   **News Editor:** You speak Hebrew better than they do. The reactions of the Arab on the street, the prominence of these rabbis in Israel, for example, are important angles. Is there a religious institution like the Christians and Shiites, for example, condemning subservience to religious symbols? People’s opinions about the importance of the pronouncements matter a lot. (Midday, December 8, 2010)

The value in this story was the comparison between the two cultures. The discussion above reveals that journalists were interested in showing how the role of religious organisations and figures in the Arab world is not unique or different from other societies. Journalists’ cultural knowledge and communication skills are used here not just to obtain information but also to access a more in-depth view of cultural religious meaning. The cultural aspect of religion is also related to the political discourse surrounding the issue. To see the cultural and political similarities and differences
between Arabs and others is part of understanding the conflict and defining ‘who we are’ and ‘who they are’.

Besides these cultural comparisons, comparisons of political perspectives can also inform the construction of certain images. This can be seen in coverage of the President of Kazakhstan and his attempt to change the Constitution to ensure that he could remain in power longer. Journalists compared him to other Arab rulers who were trying to do the same at that time:

Producer 1: Parliament met and addressed the President and begged him to stay until 2020.
Producer 2: They amended the Constitution for him to remain.
Producer 2: There is a report? This is our “hot story”.
Producer 1: Our report is about Parliament itself.
Producer 2: The President said yesterday he made a joke. He was joking. He said he should request Parliament to invent an immortality drug so he could remain in power... [laughs]
Producer 1: Yes, he said we shall call in experts and specialists to invent this drug, and circumstances would lead Parliament to meet and take this decision.
Producer 2: That means, the first president to visit Kazakhstan is Zain El-Abidine Ben Ali.
Journalist 1: No, and in Yemen there is a similar move for the President to remain for good.
Journalist 2: Yes, the declaration in Yemen is for this approach, it seems unanimous. (Hasad Alyoum, December 29, 2010)

We can see from this example that journalists are linking the situation in Kazakhstan with events in Yemen and Tunisia. Although it was a coincidence that these events were happening around the same time, it is notable that deliberate framing is utilised to group them in one presentation mode. Descriptions of principal characters in the stories and the general atmosphere that is created show that the three stories occupy the same context. Both stories follow the same grammatical and linguistic order – the ruling party, parliament, proposed constitutional amendments to extend presidential power, and opposition reactions. The same vocabulary was used in each case. The grouping also includes reports of the situation in Tunisia.

Discussions in editorial meetings such as those mentioned above reveal aspects of journalists’ motivations. They show that journalists form general connections between
their news stories and that these connections are part of their message to their audience. The language in these news stories is constructed to show the similarities and links between the two situations:

Yemeni and Kazakhstani Parliament

In Yemen, parliamentary intermediaries said in the Republican Conference of Yemen's ruling party that the constitutional amendments that were proposed to be submitted to the Parliament next Saturday included the addition of a new article giving women 44 additional seats. In addition to amending Article 112 of the Constitution to specify the presidential term to five years and cancel the two sessions set forth previously, the opposition Joint Meeting Parties bloc described the move as a cancellation of democracy and a return to autocracy.

The Parliament in Kazakhstan submitted a draft law that includes new amendments to the country's Constitution to allow a referendum that allows extending the powers of President Nur Sultan Nazarbayev until 2020. Yes, the Parliament members also voted unanimously to the request addressed to the President, calling him for the approval of these amendments. Nazarbayev has invited Kazakhstani scientists to search for an anti-aging and youth sustaining drug. (Hasad Alyoum, December 29, 2010)

We can see that both stories were constructed along similar sequential lines, showing the Presidents and their supporters on one side and the opposition group on the other. Each story reports action towards change on the part of the government and a disapproving reaction from the people. The threat to democracy was the main theme in the three stories.

These news stories are presented to complete the circle of intensive coverage during which the audience are continually exposed to similar themes and messages. Their consecutive presentation also creates a sense of narrative flow and thematic unity in the bulletin, and journalists off-air repeatedly remarked that the day’s programming was a special package. Of course, such links between stories are not always available, but when journalists come across this kind of connection they construct bulletins in a way that highlight these links. These real-life stories running in parallel enhance the mood of suffering and injustice described and illustrated in the previous Chapter.
8.3.3 Trivializing the enemy: Questioning authority

The following discussion will explore how news producers deliberately create two counter images: enemies and heroes. The first set of images relates to authority figures and powerful personalities, usually presented in negative and critical language. Several examples will be provided, starting with the Carmel fire story, where the notion of attachment to the Palestinian homeland was apparent in the coverage. However, when the story addressed Israeli reactions to the disaster significant emphasis was placed on Israel’s weak, ineffectual response. A journalist who worked on the story explains:

The fire enters its fourth day. I start the report from a new point and with new information: American aid to Israel. The intervention of an Israeli ally... Israel fails to control the fire. I do not comment, but throughout the assembly of the report I can cleverly add excerpts from Netanyahu’s comments and from the USA. (J10, 5 December 2010)

Here the journalist addresses the wider topic by focussing on the Israeli failure to tackle the fire. From the journalist’s explanation we can see how he tries to construct the message by carefully linking selected facts to create a suggestion of failure and weakness. Analysis of the images in the report provides similar findings:

Israeli Prime Minister rushed to the core of the event, and Israel tested the limits of its power. The fire went out of control... and all that these authorities were able to do is to arrest teenagers suspected and emphasized that it resulted from negligence rather than a terrorist act. That made the Prime Minister of the largest military force in the Middle East to admit the inability of the military forces to handle such a disaster. Israeli Prime Minister, you can be a superpower country and a developed country. You have the greatest technology and the greatest army, but this type of disasters that we are talking about requires international cooperation... Netanyahu’s talk did not reassure many of his citizens who were angry because of the government’s inability to deal effectively with the fire. They demanded serious investigation to find out the reasons for this failure and the responsible. (Carmel story, Midday, December 5, 2010)
First the video showed a mid-range shot of Israeli men wearing traditional costumes including hats, long hair, and beards. The men have their backs turned to the camera and seem to be watching the fire that is growing higher and stronger. Listening to the language and watching the video images used in this news story we can see how the Israelis were portrayed as weak. The image of Israelis wearing traditional Jewish costume is frequently associated in Arab culture with the idea of Jewish extremism. They had their backs turned to the viewers, that in an Arab context shows disrespect, suggesting that they are in conflict with the audience. This is heightened by the vocabulary used in the report, such as the Arabic expression meaning ‘to rush, being afraid’, and expressions such as ‘Israel tested the limits of it power’. The same mood can be sensed in the ironical comments related to the accusation that two teenagers had set the fire on. We also see it in the emphasis on the citizens’ anger towards their government. The word “failed” and various other words were repeated in quick succession during news reports and interviews covering Israel’s failed attempts at containing the fire. Overall, the story was intentionally shaped to show the weakness of the Israeli government and its allies and their failure to extinguish the fire.

In covering Obama’s visit to Afghanistan, the journalist explains how he constructed messages by presenting facts related to certain aspects of the reality which shows a contrary view to that which the American authorities were trying to promote:
In the report ‘Afghanistan: Declining confidence in Obama’s policies’, I try to explain meanings so that Arab viewers can understand them. Obama's visit, the military operations in Kandahar, the size of previous losses... First, the information has great credibility... It represents more than one area and all these have the same orientation... Barack Obama speaks contrary to what is revealed in the report. He presents a rosy picture and refutes elements like the status of the relationship between America and Karzai... The background of the subject is placed in context for the audience to understand... Cook the broth with all elements of whatever comes in. So I will not be superficial and present a readymade meal... Al Jazeera says something with a message. (SJ7, December 2010)

The journalist explains the way he shapes his report while discussing survey results. The latter show that most American citizens are against Obama’s policy in Afghanistan. The survey was synchronized with Obama’s visit to Kandahar. We understand from the journalist’s explanation that there is a “message” in his report that is not purely news. Although it does try to recount actual events, it also aims to reveal a counter message that the US government is trying to promote. He is challenging the view commonly held outside the Arab world about what is happening in Afghanistan. In his explanation the journalist justifies this approach by referring to his target audience, reminding us that it is an Arab audience he is speaking to. These stories are constructed according to the idea that the Arab perspective differs from the western one on certain issues or at least that western points of view cannot be accepted without some investigation.

We can see similar treatment of rebellions in certain news stories based outside Arab and traditionally Muslim regions. In the editorial meeting for the December 20 Midday programme, the journalists discussed the situation in Ivory Coast:

**Journalist 1:** On the issue of Ivory Coast, it is good to talk about the relationship between the national state and the international community. This relationship continues to penetrate the concept of national sovereignty, but it means that the international community will not always intervene so strongly in such countries.

**Journalist 2:** There is the issue of elections and the legitimacy of elections. You have the example of Belarus today, for example. They dealt with the opposition in a strange way and issued several statements of condemnation, not even sanctions, and nothing else.

**Journalist 1:** Exactly. Since when does Ban Ki-Moon demand that the head of a country resign?

**Journalist 2:** For example, in Sudan the elections were rigged. Elections in Egypt were rigged too. Double standards.

**Producer 1:** Good point, maybe... It is possible to try to clarify the picture. When the international community stood by Al Hassan Wattara for this
time. Is it because the elections were fair and honest? Or there is a hidden American French conflict agenda?

Journalist 3: This time the American French conflict is unseen because France stands against Gbagbo because he is the one who expelled the French businessmen and others... for whom America stands at the moment, along with the international community... This is on one hand, and on the other hand a harsh war continued for years in the Ivory Coast with the existence of the reserve security forces from the United Nations; this could justify the international attention.

Journalist 1: But this international attention, you do not see it in Somalia for example.

The debate here is about a non-Arab country. The conflict is between two parties, one of that is Muslim, with the UN forces supporting the Muslim party. The journalists’ conversation highlights this political atmosphere but they do not restrict themselves to Islamic/Arab discourse. The above discussion shows that approaching authority figure is usually shaped by suspicion. Additionally, this approach is used carefully to allow authorities to hear the positions of dissenters and opponents. However, as can be seen in the above editorial meeting, it should be noted that journalists base their terms of debate and narrative on their own political understanding and comparison to similar situations in Arab regions.
We can also observe how these news producers framed their language and the visual elements of their reports to create a mood of scepticism towards the United Nations’ goals. Significant portions of the video the shot shows UN forces heavily equipped with weapons, presenting them as a strange feature that stands out against the landscape. The moving camera angles show them as an invasion force, looking desperately at the people. We can see the same in the shot of the French building towering over local poor people while on the other side people look on from above with a telescope. Quotes taken from opposition groups accuse the UN troops of robbing the country. This is supported by the opinion of the expert interviewee that matches the opinion of many ordinary citizens demonstrating against these forces. Overall, this creates an image of interfering, which runs counter to the UN’s claims.

In addition to the element of ‘Arabness’ (Rinnawi, 2006; Tatham, 2006) in the Carmel story, there is also a focus on Palestine as a recognised and distinguishable nation. Focus on Egypt and Sudan presented them as countries that have their own internal political issues and social contexts (Philips, 2012). Ultimately, the creation of a ‘them and us’ notion is not limited to international views of different political and cultural regions, such as Israel and the Arab world, the US/West and the Arab world. Above all, it focuses on the idea of people in power and people who are not.
8.3.4 Presenting heroes and promoting examples

The above discussion analysed how news about the ‘other’ was shaped to construct images of weak, easily defeated enemies and to question authority figures. These images are enhanced by presenting counter images of heroes or at least recognisable figures who are standing against powerful figures. Journalists justify this practice as providing the audience with encouragement and support:

*For example a deputy or a candidate in the Parliament from rural Egypt: the audience has not heard about this candidate, only through newspapers taking their information from official Egyptian sources. Therefore, if this candidate was at odds with the authorities in his country, we would not be able to hear about him but rather hear that someone succeeded in the election and thirteen others did not. But when Al Jazeera or any other channel talks about a candidate from outside the ruling party that accuses the authority of fraud and says that he is sure of gaining enough votes to win, this means a lot to him and his supporters, and it means a lot to Egypt ... So when I present a case, for example, of a woman who sacrificed all that she had in her pocket for a charity to serve her community, I am presenting a lesson to this community that may be followed as an example. (J10, December 2010)*

The above excerpt describes the methods and the motivation for presenting personal experiences. The election victory or successful charity work are examples and models that viewers can follow. These news stories are framed in language and visual elements that promote ideas and concepts through the work of individual people, organisations, or even countries. They may also vary to introduce wider aspects, including social and cultural concerns, as in the example of people’s and organisations’ charitable services, and political events such as the victory of a marginal political party.

The following discussion will investigate specific examples of such news stories. The first example is about Qatar winning the right to host the 2020 Football World Cup, and President Obama’s reaction towards it.

*Of course, focusing on Qatar does not mean propaganda for Qatar. This victory has a moral dimension and is a victory for all Muslims and Arabs. It was expected, for instance, that Dubai would take this step first. This event is more than a sporting event, it has a political depth. (J5, December 2010)*

Qatar is viewed as representative of the Middle East and all Muslims. Its achievement in winning the hosting of an international sports event is seen as a political achievement. As a voice from the other side of the world it stands in competition with
powerful, dominant countries. Observing the language and construction of the news stories reveals certain findings in agreement with suggestions made above.

First, looking at the video wall (Hasad Alyoum 3, December, 2012) we see a medium-range shot of happy people carrying the Qatari flag. There is a positive national mood that can be seen in the flag as a symbol of loyalty and victory. Secondly, listening to the language we hear expressions including ‘the USA is disappointed to lose’, showing how Qatar is promoted as a hero playing a noble role.

It should be noted that parts of this discourse have a corporate propagandist role, reminding viewers that Qatar is the host country of Al Jazeera. But the placing of this victory in a broader Arab and Islamic perspective shows the decision to award the tournament to Qatar within a global cultural and political context. In this sense, journalists are keen to remind us that Qatar is the first Arab and Islamic country to host the World Cup.

This observation is also supported by how Al Jazeera quoted Al-Qaradawi’s comments on Obama’s reaction. Al-Qaradawi is a religious figure and his comment was made as part of his Friday religious speech. In this particular story, journalists manage to combine political, cultural, national, Arabic, and even propagandist aspects into one report. The headline’s positioning of Qatar in the Arab and Islamic context stresses the Arab/Islamic discourse and emphasises Arabism as a united identity.
Putting the Qatari flag in the background and repeating the name of Qatar in the headline and in the report encourage the identification of a regional nationality. Philips (2012) found that Al Jazeera’s discourse reflects “superarabism”, with national and Arab discourse presented next to each other.

It is not just Arabs who may be presented as the hero, as the following discussion reveals. Any ordinary person who defeats or stands up to powerful figures of authority can be shown in this light. As a representative example for further linguistic analysis, the following discussion focuses on the Bradley Manning story (Hasad Alyoum, December 3, 2010).

The report reveals that Manning was portrayed differently from official story that accused him of spying on the USA for personal issues. To counter this image, Al Jazeera presented an alternative view that suggested that Manning leaked the information to Wikileaks for moral reasons and because he felt responsible to do something about the injustices he saw in Iraq. This message was enhanced by the images in the report. The close-up shot of Manning’s picture showed him smiling innocently with a direct look at the viewer thus constructing a close relationship with the audience. Video footage also shows a close-up shot of American troops in Iraq in a large military vehicle against a panorama of ruined settlements, a few Iraqis, Americans shooting at civilians, and the sound of gunfire.

Figure 8.4: Prably - Al hasad – December 3, 2010
Although there is an Arab stance against the war in Iraq (Abdel-hai, 2006; Wessler and Adolphsen, 2008), as an American soldier, Manning does not represent Arabs. He is presented in this context as a simple human being facing up to a stronger authority. The basic emphasis of this report is primarily the moral element of bravery as an example that should be respected and emulated.

We can see similar examples with the same narrative discourse celebrating such achievements. For example, in the context of Wikileaks stories, Table 8.2 divides these into two types: news relating to Arab countries and news about Assange as a hero. Thus,

*In the case of Wikileaks, we have to talk about the fate of Julian Assange. Compare what happened to the person who revealed poisoning in Hiroshima with what is happening with Assange. And there is a search for him, like David Kelly, who we are told committed suicide over Iraq. There is a demonstration in London in favour of him. (Midday meeting, December 14, 2010)*

In this sample, it is clear that Assange is being framed as a brave, interesting hero. Interest exists in presenting him as a person, not merely focusing on the documents’ link to Arab viewers. His personality is newsworthy in itself, and this is reflected in the language, images, and themes used in telling the story. Relating to the same idea, we can also see similar modes of language and imagery in certain human stories that talk about successful projects. In this sense, images of heroes are not constructed according to the single aim of presenting a feeling of Arabness (Rinnawi, 2006; Tatham, 2006; Abdel-hai 2006), but also to create a sense of shared human values.

**Table 8.2: Coverage of Wikileaks in the *Midday* program (December 1 to 20, 2010)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wikileaks Assange</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>30.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wikileaks Middle East</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>69.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>13</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To sum up, there is no single solid template (Bennett, 2012) determining the use of language and other aesthetic elements. There is a creative shaping process that follows the general norms that journalists set as frameworks for their writing and editing.
These norms include professional standards, cultural understanding, and political knowledge. These criteria are learned by experience and drawn from journalists’ understanding of their audience and features of their news programmes. The creation of the message involves a combination of all these elements.

8.4 Conclusion

The above investigation suggests that the construction of the news story is not a simple reflection of the event or merely a window through which to look at the world. News involves a culture of production that engages a social and political stance and journalists’ deliberative employment of their writing and journalistic skills. As it seeks to impact its viewers it is also driven by a certain understanding of this audience including their political ideologies, social values, and emotional needs.

This Chapter also revealed how Al Jazeera allows several concerns to shape its news. First, the documentation form aims at changing political situations and recording societies’ histories. Second, it creates a parallel mode by presenting news stories that reflect the situation in Arab countries. Third, it creates two images, one of authorities and a counter image of brave and exceptional individuals from among the ranks of ordinary people. All these forms are shaped carefully through the selection of language, visual elements, and interviews.

News discourse is not simply factual language and real images but rather to some extent a storytelling shaped by the integration of journalists’ values and skills. It incorporates their understanding of and response to the wider political and cultural system, their assumptions about the target audience, and how these fit with views about the forms of the news they produce. These factors that shape the news discourse are complex and integrated, and the product is rich with multiple layers of meaning.
Chapter Nine

Conclusion

9.1 Introduction

This Chapter provides a final conclusion to the research. It discusses the main findings and highlights the significance and contribution of the study. In the final part, it presents the limitations and underlines recommendations for the future.

9.2 The research framework

This research investigated Al Jazeera’s news production and offered an understanding of news forms. This study concurs with other studies that argue that news production is not simply an output of daily routine and standardised actions – it is a creation of journalists’ deliberate practice, visualizations of specific news forms, and expectations of their audience’s needs (Geiß, Jackob, and Quiring, 2012; Wieten and Pantti, 2005). While these studies adopted a discourse analysis approach, the current thesis investigated actual journalistic practices and their engagement in the selection, writing, and shaping of the news.

The research used the term ‘news form’ as a key concept developed by Matthews (2010), referring to news agenda, stance, and style. The thesis looked at Al Jazeera journalists’ perceptions of their audience to investigate their daily practices and news presentations.

The theoretical concepts used in this study offer the possibility to understand the news output within the production context. It also offers the possibility to capture the richness of political discourse that demonstrates different layers and complex links with other cultural discourses. The study provides details in understanding the process of reproducing the rich, complex elements of news output, the dynamics of these elements, and their discursive production in the context of news organisations.
9.3 The research methodology

The research used a combination of methods to address the main questions. It used observation, semi-structured interview, quantitative content analysis, and discourse analysis. Previous studies applied these methods to consider journalists’ activities and ideologies separately from news output. In contrast, this study explored news output and wider news context by linking journalistic practice with the news journalists produced. Explaining news discourse by examining the process of its production provides an in-depth understanding of the news text and the production context.

The observations were used to investigate journalists’ daily practices. Information was gathered by observing editorial meetings and journalists’ activities during three news programmes: Midday, This Evening, and Hasad Alyoum. They explored how journalists view audiences and news forms and how these views are reflected in newsroom structure and journalistic practices. Further interviews were conducted to provide in-depth understanding of journalists’ visualisation of their audience and selection and presentation of news. Examples from news programme contents were then analysed quantitatively and qualitatively to examine how journalists’ visualisations of their audience and news forms shape news discourse. This integrated approach allowed for the investigation of issues from different angles.

9.4 The main findings

As described above, the study tracked news output back to newsroom activities. The research cast light on the integration of the complex political and cultural discourses involved in news production. The study shows that each news organisation has its unique features of news form and journalistic practice. It shows that there are imagined shared views on certain topics, but there are also regional details that appeal to local audiences. The image of the audience that journalists share is defined mainly by the journalists’ understanding of the Al Jazeera news form. The following discussion summarises the main findings of this study.
9.4.1 Al Jazeera’s imagined audience

The concept of the imagined audience was introduced by Schlesinger (1978), who suggested that journalists do not construct a clear image of their audience. This concept was later challenged by many. Studies addressing journalists’ presumptions about their audience have mainly looked at the link between news outputs and journalists’ perceptions of their audiences. The current research extends the investigation of the visualised audience to examine how these views about the audience are present in newsroom activities, news processes, and news production. It provides detailed descriptions of the character of Al Jazeera’s visualised audience, challenging earlier news production findings that argued for the absence of audience presumption in the news process (Tuchman, 1978; Litty, 2001). It concurs with various studies that explored journalists’ presumptions about the audiences of specialised programme forms (Matthews, 2010; Matar, 2007; Wieten and Pantti, 2005).

This study shows that Al Jazeera journalists view their audience as culturally, religiously, and ethnically diverse. They also view them as deeply attached to their cultures and as having problems with their local governments. These views are reflected in the formation of the Al Jazeera newsroom that consists of journalists with different nationalities and religions. In fact the human rights desk is a response to audience needs as understood by Al Jazeera journalists. The newsroom desks are divided into different countries, such as the Iraq, Yemen, and MINA desks. Journalists, usually from a single country at each desk, demonstrate the variety of Arab nationalities not only in terms of political ideologies but also cultural aspects of these various Arab societies. These views do not just inform the newsroom structure but also shape individual journalists’ understanding of Al Jazeera’s approach, allowing them to utilize their journalistic skills and knowledge. These findings offer a new perspective of newsroom structures and journalists’ skills. While early studies described these elements as industrialised structures, the current research shows that news production contexts can be viewed from a cultural perspective. It demonstrates that each news organisation has its unique departments that follow the recognised basic features of international news organisations. These features are guided by
presumptions regarding the organisation’s news form and wider cultural and political views of the needs of its target audience.

This study reveals that the visualised audience and the news form change with time. In its early years Al Jazeera was not interested in targeting young people, as most of its programmes were aimed at the elite and the educated. In 2006, this changed. A new programme aimed at young people and families was established and more attention was paid to sports and culture. Greater space was allocated to ordinary people during news slots like From the People and the Rest of the Story. The findings suggest that the interest in young people was driven by Al Jazeera’s interest in reaching everyone including young people. This shift was guided by the idea that the youth in Arab countries are politically active. They have interests in politics and political issues, as understood by Al Jazeera’s journalists. The examination of the presentations show, for example, the equality in the mode of address is selected to attract the audience and create a closer relation between the audience and the political news. These practices are guided by Al Jazeera’s presumption of their young audience and the journalists’ understanding of their news form.

This study has argued that the visualised image of the audience emerges from or is at least related to journalists’ visualisations of their news form. Journalists have revealed distinguishing criteria for their news form as challenging the political discourse adopted by other Arab news organisations that tend to protect Arab heritage and present different views by putting forward opinion and counter-opinion. The visualised image of their audience is influenced by various factors, including self-experience, journalists’ understanding of their news form, and the shared values held by journalists and their audience. These understandings are defined by journalists’ awareness of organisational policies and aims. They are not idealised imagery views but expectations that have developed from the view of the news organisation itself. In their understanding of the news form, journalists refer to the political and cultural aims stated by Al Jazeera’s ethos, including protecting Arab culture and presenting Al Jazeera’s perspective on certain issues. The study demonstrated that journalists’ understanding of their news form and audience shapes their practice, agenda, stance, and presentation of the news.
9.4.2 Journalists’ practice: News construction and complexity of presentation

The study suggests that the selection of news topics and the construction of their main themes are informed by Al Jazeera’s journalists’ visualisations of their audience as attached to their culture and the journalists’ understanding of their news form. The findings show that journalists select news that is relevant to their audience, while their framing of the news is guided by programme form requirements.

As a pan-Arab medium, Al Jazeera presents a wider scope of the political and cultural variations of Arab audiences. This view of a multicultural audience was unprecedented in the Arab context, despite the pluralism of some news media discourses such as in Lebanon (Dajani, 2005; Nötzolda and Pies, 2010). This view has enabled Al Jazeera to address different groups in the Arab world, as seen in their approach to the Tamazights (Al-Khanbobi, 2011).

The visualisation of the audience as multiculturally and politically diverse shapes journalists’ interests in different ethnic, ideological, and religious issues affecting Arab societies. For example, in presenting the Palestinian issue references are made to two different, contradictory ideologies: Hamas and Fatah. The complexity of ethnicity and political ideologies was also a feature of programmes discussing issues in Sudan. It should be noted that the presentation of such perspectives was shaped by journalists’ presumptions that their news programme criteria should challenge the present political discourse of Arab media. Similarly, the space given to internal conflicts highlight the struggles between Arab governments and their populations.

The diversity of the audience’s ethical and political interests is restricted by the emphasis on certain issues, such as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict or the troubles in Egypt. Recently, Al Jazeera reviewed its modes of coverage and exhibited a tendency to construct regional belonging by focusing on certain local issues, such as the elections in Egypt or the referendum in Sudan. More complex issues include relations with Iran and religious and political conflicts in Arab countries. For example, in their coverage of Iran, sometimes journalists present it as part of the Arab region and other times as the enemy, especially when discussing Iran’s non-stable relations with some Gulf countries. This level of caution indicates the complex relationship between news...
production and wider contexts, showing journalists’ understanding of broader political and cultural situations, their deliberate practice of constructing specific messages that meet their programme forms and their understanding of their audience’s expectations.

The research shows that when journalists decide to present human interest news they are motivated by specific views of their audience and their characteristics and needs. This view is noticeably different from the findings of many western studies that suggest that soft news journalism is a response to viewers’ demands for more light news. In the case of Al Jazeera, journalists share the collective view that their audience has social principles and values that must be respected. These views make the journalists to overlook news on celebrities and scandals and instead select human interest stories about art, heritage, scientific discovery, successful projects and others, thus revealing high principles and intellectual concerns. Human interest stories are defined by a political understanding of this audience and their need for positive examples of ordinary experiences. This view of a politically conservative audience is informed by journalists’ visualisation of their news form.

The above findings suggest that political and cultural elements are not external forces controlling a programme’s agenda, as indicated by some studies that follow a political economic approach. They are evaluated discourses that are debated in news editorial meetings and confirm the requirements of the news programmes’ form. Journalists’ visualisations of their audience as guided by an understanding of their news form are also reflected in the stance and presentation style of the news. From Al Jazeera’s perspective, the Arab region, characterised by conflict and diversity, shares some features that unite the Arab communities. This complexity and richness are also seen in the construction of language, images, and interviews.

9.4.3 Mode of address

In studying Al Jazeera’s presentation style, the research demonstrates that presentational practice is characterised by complexity and richness. The data reveals that journalists’ visualisation of their news form and their audience bring to action the integration of wider cultural political values and issues with organisational elements, such as the professional values of objectivity and informing the audience.
Al Jazeera’s presentations follow a provocative mode of address and focus on images of ordinary people as representatives of the subjects and audience. The findings show that Al Jazeera also used alignment mode of address with its target audience. The findings confirm that ordinary people’s voices are brought to the centre of news presentation (Gal-Ezer and Rinnawi, 2012). This is not to suggest that their news output does not include political messages. The journalists state that these modes of address are designed not merely to attract the audience and explain to them the political issues under discussion but also as a strategy to influence the audience’s stance and to use them as a force for change. Although Al Jazeera manages to present topics that have long been ignored and adds significantly to pluralism in media views (Pintak, 2009; Touzani, 2010; Hafiz, 2011), the study found that internal Arab issues are presented by Al Jazeera in a dramatic and people-centred mode. The latter focuses more on internal conflicts and disagreements, as seen in news about the elections in Egypt.

One of the major achievements of Al Jazeera is its success in presenting a counter-view of Arab issues that challenges western-dominated news discourse. Addressing topics such as the conflicts in Gaza and Iraq has gained Al Jazeera popularity among Arab viewers (Barkho, 2010; Wessler and Adolphsen, 2008; Kolmer and Semetko, 2009). Audience research has confirmed these suggestions and revealed that Al Jazeera’s popularity can be attributed to its approach in presenting Arab points of view (Al-Jaber, 2012; Nisbet and Myers, 2011).

The extent to which this political message meets the owners’ political aims is another issue. This study has revealed that the political view of the audience as visualised by Al Jazeera journalists meets the criteria of Al Jazeera’s news form that is based on the idea of challenging the political discourse of local media and giving voice to a range of political views. The findings also show how these views are linked to cultural elements.

9.4.4 News style

The findings show that the crafting of news presentation is guided by professional values. These include journalists’ obligations to inform their audience and present in-
depth, credible pictures of events that are modified according to the political and cultural background of their audience. The focus on certain cultural and political principles above others is guided by journalists’ knowledge, experience, and understanding of their news form. In their choice of interviewees, for example, guests’ roles, identities, and the expected reactions of the audience are considered in line with the professional aims of covering the topics from all sides and providing in-depth information about the news story.

The data reveals that in their selection of language journalists demonstrate respect and awareness of linguistic codes. For example, when making decisions on presentation style and the writing of news stories, journalists craft their language, interviews, and visual elements to document specific subjects and construct heroic images to be emulated and enemies that to be challenged. Journalists also play the role of historians who wish to protect their societies’ collective culture. This study shows that cultural and political elements are contextualised in the organisational structure, thus confirming suggestions that studies of social organisations can offer a valuable understanding of cultural meanings. These elements become part of the journalists’ skills and professional values, as political and cultural discourses form part of their experience. For Al Jazeera journalists the obligation to inform includes: to document, protect, and democratise, confirming that professional journalistic norms also have political and cultural dimensions.

This thesis studied the relationship between national discourse and news production. It reveals that national discourse has different layers. For example, Al Jazeera emphasises local and regional perspectives by focusing on certain events, for example, elections in Egypt, the demonstrations in Yemen, and news of Qatar winning the hosting of the 2020 World Cup. In their coverage of such topics, journalists employ images of the country flag and traditional customs to emphasise feelings of the local audience. Al Jazeera offers a prominent voice to pan-Arab discourse that suggests that Al Jazeera highlights a national Arab perspective (Handley and Rutigliano, 2012; Cheraoui 2010; Baracko, 2010; Kolmer and Semetko, 2009). This study suggests that Al Jazeera pays attention to regional and local contexts as in the example of their coverage of the referendum in Sudan. The findings
confirm what Philips (2012) calls “superarabism”, where local and pan-Arab discourses are presented simultaneously.

9.5 Contribution of the study

Previous studies on Al Jazeera emphasised either the political monopoly of the Qatari government of Al Jazeera or the validation of Al Jazeera of Arab culture and political stance. Some even assumed that there was a homogenous political ideology that unified all Arabs. The framework used in this study is not an alternative to the political and cultural approach but it provides a closer look at the complexity, heterogeneity, and dynamism of news production. The theoretical framework of this study reveals the complexity of the political and cultural contexts of the Arab world. 

The approach used here presents a new view of Al Jazeera. In many previous studies it was seen as an institution that shaped by the political interests or by the bureaucracy of the management in Al Jazeera. In contrast, the news organization in this study is seen as an institution with its identity shaped by the wider political and cultural contexts. Cottle (2002) argues that power does not have to be an outside force that controls journalists’ actions. He believes that the power is mediated and debated inside the newsroom and reproduced in different ways depending on each individual case.

Narrowing our views in political ideology/class as a force which monopolise the media performance and shape directly its discourses (i) limits the journalists’ practice and the news text in a narrow meaning of an standardized or powerful ideology influence, (ii) which make it difficult to capture the richness in political discourse itself as it have different layers and complex link other cultural discourse(iii) and we miss much details in understanding the process of reproducing all the rich and complex elements in the news output, the dynamic of these elements, its discursive production in the news organizations context which are demonstrated in this study.

The findings suggest that wider political and cultural contexts are integrated with journalistic professional attitudes. These elements can be explained by journalists’ visualisation of the imagined audience and its cultural and political context, and of
their news programmes’ form and related organisational, cultural, and political criteria as it explained in (9.1). The research outcome advance the findings of previous literature on audience images and indicates that the shared understanding of the targeted audience is incorporated in the culture of the production and become one of the elements which form the newsroom’s structure and journalists’ practice.

For example, the treatment of news from Iran underpins the complex wider political and cultural relations, irrespective of relations between Al Jazeera’s owners and their political relations with Iran. Similarly, the study shows that the journalists’ professional values are employed in line with their knowledge of the wider political and cultural contexts. What brings these elements together is journalists’ understanding of their news form and views of their audience. Journalists are seen as active players who are aware of and involved in the news process. Such a distinguished news culture ultimately produces its own copy of news stories.

The study demonstrates that objectivity is not a standardised value that refers to balanced reporting but that it should be considered as a value that is shaped culturally and politically and that emerges from certain professional understandings within news organisations. In this respect, the findings concur with El-Nawawi and Iskandar’s (2003) conclusion that objectivity can be seen as a contextual practice. This thesis examined this concept, and the findings confirm that objectivity is informed by journalists’ understanding of news programme criteria and assumptions about audience characteristics. It also varies from one news story to another. Within Al Jazeera, in theory at least, to be objective means to allow access to different voices. This view is based on journalists’ understanding of Al Jazeera’s motto: “the opinion and the other opinion”. The findings confirm that journalists referred to the audience needs to be informed about the different voices in the political discourse because first this variety of voices is one of the features of the political context in the Arab region; second, because other Arab media discourse are dominated by government ideology or religious ideology; and finally, presenting contested voices is one of Al Jazeera’s main aims. This broad view of different voices is sometimes limited to giving voice to marginalised groups justified by audience needs and requirements of the news programme form.
The study showed that journalists visualised their audience’s expected cultural and political stances in their treatment of Palestinian issues, for example. They assumed a cultural and political attachment that justifies sympathy for Palestine while still giving access to Israeli voices to present their point of view.

Contextualised objectivity can sometimes lead to contradictory modes of presentation, as is the case with Iran. The latter is sometimes referred to as a friend and part of the political and cultural sphere of the Arab region and sometimes as one that cannot be trusted. The analysis of editorial meetings, journalists’ interviews, and news content confirms the contextual view of news objectivity. Al Jazeera’s news presentations empathise with marginal groups and opposition factions, representing them as issues that concern the wider public. Often, they are represented as heroes and those in power are trivialised. Objectivity is shaped not only by national and regional influences but also by a wider moral stance, taking into account other professional, regional, cultural, and political values.

One of the major achievements of Al Jazeera is its success in presenting a counter-view of Arab issues and challenging western-dominated news discourse. In addressing topics such as the war in Gaza or the war in Iraq has gained Al Jazeera popularity among Arab viewers (Seib, 2008; Baracko, 2010; Kolmer and Semetko, 2009). The findings of this study show that in selecting, framing, and shaping of the language, interviews, and aesthetic elements in the news, Al Jazeera sides with its Arab viewers. Such a stance is not unique to Al Jazeera. Cheraoui (2010) argues that in its coverage of the war in Iraq CNN emphasized orientalist views while Al Jazeera took a more pan-Arab stance. In covering national events, journalists tend to adopt a more national discourse (Kitch, 2011; Handley and Rutigliano, 2012). Matar and Dakhllalah (2006) believe that in covering the war in Gaza some Arab media outlets, such as Al-Manar, also offered a more symathetic view of Palestine, producing an imagined community of resistance. Unlike Al-Manar or government-controlled Arab news organizations, what makes Al Jazeera a more, influential news source are its, ability to present the news in a convincing, attractive manner to be appiling to its tagatied audience>
Mihelj, Bajt, and Pankov (2008) argue that national discourse changes from one topic to another and from one political medium to another. They argue that it is linked to an imaginary national audience and that this link is rarely explored. The current research highlights this link and suggests that such a perspective is produced as a response to the audience’s information and emotional needs.

Al Jazeera reminds one that in the modern world of shared values and global audience, media performances are part of global disagreements. News production is based on the idea of cultural conflict and is not limited to regional competitors. Audience research emphasized these suggestions and revealed that Al Jazeera’s popularity may be attributed to its approach in presenting Arab views (Al-Jaber 2012; Nisbet and Myers 2011). This counter-view is seen as serving democracy by presenting a view from the south that challenges the dominating view from the north (Baracko, 2010). However, Al Jazeera’s contribution to the democratization of Arab societies requires a deeper, more robust research.

Although Al Jazeera presents topics that had long been ignored and adds significantly to pluralism in media views (Touzani, 2010; Hafiz, 2011), the study found that, there is focus on contested opinions, such as those stated in the presentation of different parties’ ideologies in Palestine and other Arab countries such as Egypt and Yemen (see chapter seven and eight). News reports from these areas are constructed to satisfy the emotional needs of the target audience, as discussed in chapter five, which Al Jazeera views as politically diverse. This also fits with the journalists’ understanding of their news form, based on presenting different opinions. News focuses on internal conflicts that are often debated in loud, angry voices instead of clam, soft discussions that also offer citizens solutions. Ambiguity in certain issues, such as the relationship between Iran and Arab countries, merely confuses the viewers and increases their disagreements. In certain cases, investigative journalism (or the idea of it) is simply replaced by the term ‘presenting what we see’. There is an understandable fear of examining such complex political and cultural relationships in depth. On the other hand, it is transparency and the evocative debate of such topics that the Arab public is most in need of. While the use of an intimate mode in covering disasters and war may be justified, the use of this mode is not invested in a manner
that leads to coherent, effective debate; rather, it fuels the emotions and anger of the audience.

The overall contribution of this research is that applying the framework used in this study can help to view political and cultural elements as embedded in news practice and the production of the news, rather than as a force dominating the news discourse. This reveals important exploratory insights about the complex relationship between the wider political and cultural fields. Such findings demonstrate and explain the complexity of the news outputs’ agenda and style that indicates the dynamic nature of news production. The research indicates that journalists’ practice and professional values cannot be generalised. They are seen as shaped by a specific understanding of the cultural and political contexts that journalists’ relate to in their professional presumptions of the programmes’ criteria.

![Figure 9.1: Different levels of integration in news production and journalists’ understanding of news forms and their audience](image)

### 9.6 Recommendations for further research

This research provides an overall view of Al Jazeera’s perception of its audience and how this has shaped content selection and presentation across three news programmes. Future studies could consider programmes that use specific news forms to target certain audiences, such as breakfast television or programmes targeting
women. Further findings could reveal more about media performance, variations in journalism, political and social change, and how these are negotiated in the newsroom. As Al Jazeera seems to be undergoing a phase of transformation, tracking changes in Al Jazeera’s operations and how these changes are linked to the findings of the current study will help us to understand more about the role of journalism and its relation to political and social forces.

The framework of this study can be applied to study other news organisations. Dramatic changes in politics, society, and media are underway in many Arab countries. New political systems, social movements, a notable increase in the role of the youth, and the increasing use of digital media mean that it is important to investigate how the media respond to these changes. Are they more interested in acknowledging citizens’ needs? Are they interested in targeting specific groups, such as the growing youth population? If so, how do they perceive these groups? What are their strategies for attracting and addressing them? What is the relationship between citizen journalism and the traditional model? Answers to these questions can tell us about the actual role of journalism in the democratisation process. In defending their audience’s needs and characteristics, journalism may unify shared and global values. It may also reveal the localised values of communities and distinct regional definitions of democracy, religion, and moral values and question assumptions that such values should be uniform.
## Appendices

### Interview Schedule

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