

Between Orientalists and Al Jazeera : Image of Arabs in the West (Comparative inquiry)

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Abstract

Western writers, designers, and artists turned their attention to study and analyze the cultural, social, intellectual heritage, as well as languages, peoples, history, and politics of the Near-Eastern societies. However, despite academic and referential value of these studies, they largely contributed to the creation of a unique stereotyped personality for the Orient in general and the Arabs in particular. The accuracy and authenticity of that unique personality have never been verified by other sources. Hence, the deep-rooted collective image of the orient in the western mind has been largely relying on the representation which the orientalists provided about Arabs and their culture and history. In fact, despite the basic change in political and economic landscape in the last decades, particularly after the end of the cold war and the lapse of the Soviet polarity, and although we live in an era marked by the explosion of information and globalization, orientalists views on the East continue to be the first consulted source for western intellectuals, policy makers, and media. Indeed, orientalism literature is a key source of reference that is regularly consulted by the Arabs themselves and intelligentsia circles in particular, in subjects ranging from the Arab and Islamic history to the problems of Arab identity.

However, due to the rise of unforeseen transformational factors in the Arab world in the last decade, mainly in communication and mass media, such as the Arab media recent liberality, the establishment of various Arabic television broadcasting channels, chiefly the renowned Al-Jazeera, the old monopoly of the orientalists seems likely to lose its inherited influence. The local new sources of information and analysis are increasingly offering a more genuine image of the Arabs to the West in particular, and the entire world in general. This paper will shed some light on the role of Al-Jazeera channel as one of the most efficient means of communication and dialogue with the West, so as to convey and explain the true image of the Arabs to the Western public opinion. It will also try to measure the success of Al-Jazeera in changing or questioning the credibility of the classic western stereotype about Arabs planted by both, the early Orientalists and western politicians in the minds of people. Furthermore, the paper will analyze the degree of success that Al-Jazeera achieved in helping its Arab viewers to reconstruct their self awareness and interaction with the persistent issues in the Arab world, especially after the long years of official channel and media control over the public, which continued to reproduce an official message that never reflected the reality of life.

We are aware of the difference in nature between the two elements of this study; orientalists' views based on studies, and Al-Jazeera presentation as media. Nevertheless, our prime objective is to address the effects of the endeavors of both, orientalists and Al-Jazeera in the common western memory. We will try to highlight the efforts of Al-Jazeera in changing the impression of western men on Arab's culture and personality. Our objective is to contribute to the efforts that strive for better understanding between Arabs and their counterparts, and preferable perception towards the affairs of the Arab world, in order to achieve a better communication between two powerful cultures, based on mutual respect.

Key Words: Orientalists, Al Jazeera, Arab world, Western societies

Introduction

Edward Said explains the significance of the Orient to Europe The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies. The source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the other.¹

¹ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*. Penguin Books. Reprinted with a new afterword 1995, England, pg 1.

On the basis of this significance, western writers, designers and artists turned their attention to study and analyze the cultural, social, intellectual heritage, as well as languages, peoples, history, and politics of the Near Eastern and Far Eastern societies. However, despite academic and referential value of these studies, they largely contributed to creating a unique stereotyped personality for the orient in general and Arabs in particular. The accuracy and authenticity of that unique personality have never been verified by other sources. Even Arabs themselves, the subject of those assumptions, never got the chance to counter balance the orientalist approach. In fact, as rightly stated by Greta Little, "Thus, the view of Eastern culture is constructed by western observers and translated by them to western readers."²

Hence, the deep-rooted collective image in western mind about Arabs and their culture and history has been largely relying on the representation which the orientalists provided throughout the years. The dependence on this projection is mainly because of the failure of Arabs themselves to display any other alternative on the one hand, and their failure to present themselves and their culture in the shape they think is reflecting the truth on the other hand. Simultaneously, modern intellectual Arabs failed to display their history and culture in an objective manner. Ultimately, they found themselves part of two extreme groups, one that is passionately attached to the western culture, and advocates its way of life, while the other is anti-western, and aggressively rejects its fundamentals. Al-Jazeera establishment in late 1996 was a peculiar and unprecedented step in the Arab world, perhaps even in the entire world, because news of the Arab world -a region that represents a centre of political, economic, and geographical gravity- occupied the forefront of the news of the world since the end of the cold war and the collapse of the red bloc, perhaps even before.

Orientalism: Meaning and Historical Background

Orientalism in its simplest meaning is the western attempt to understand the east, particularly the Arabs and Muslims and their faith, through studying their cultural heritage, language, type of personality, and the different structures of their society. In the expression of Edward Said it is described:

The most readily accepted designation for orientalism is an academic one, and indeed the label still serves in a number of academic institutions. Anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the orient –and this applies whether the person is an anthropologist, sociologist, historian or philologist- either in its specific or its general aspects, is an orientalist.³

No one can deny that orientalism has made great contributions to the study of Arab culture and history, and to the religion of Islam. Orientalists were and still are standing as experts in Arab-Islamic culture. They accumulated very rich knowledge and experience in this field of inquiry. In fact they made tremendous contribution to research, translation, and ultimately to the preservation and indexing of Arab-Islamic heritage.

As Arabs, we have to admit that the orientalists preceded us in studying and penetrating many areas of study in our Arab-Islamic culture that we could not manage to reach even with the privilege of living and thinking in the same culture. However, not all orientalists were positive in their approach towards Arab-Islamic culture.

In fact, it is possible to classify orientalists into different schools. However, any assessment of this movement ought to be precise. We need to take into account the factors of time and ideological affiliations of the orientalists. For instance, the French school of orientalism is normally described as being "unfair" towards the Arab-Islamic culture, while the German school remains more moderate in its attitudes towards the orient. Nevertheless, the truth is that orientalism, whether it is French, German or any other European affiliation had never been a pure academic discipline that used scientific methods to investigate and analyze the various social, cultural, political, economic, and language phenomena in the East. On the contrary, orientalists' assumptions have mostly been formulated over historical, religious and political prejudices, in which many of the orientalists themselves were heavily involved. These assumptions are due to two main factors:

The first one is related to the religious issues and aims that created obstacles in the way of some orientalists to establish cultural bridges between Europe and the Muslim East.

The second one is:

The European writer on Islamic history labours under a special disability. Writing in a western language he necessarily uses western terms.

² Greta. D. Little, *Representing Arabs; Reliance of the Past*, Chapter 20, pg 263, in *Cultural Diversity and the U.S. Media*. Edited by: Yahya R. Kamalipour and Theresa Carilli, State University of New York Press (October 1998)

³ Edward Said. *Op.cit.*, p. 2.

But these terms are based on western categories of thought and analysis, themselves deriving in the main from western history. Their application to the conditions of another society formed by different influences and living in different ways of life can at best be only an analogy and may be dangerously misleading.⁴

Ultimately, these two factors created huge barrier between the “learner’ and the “learned” subjects.

It is interesting to note that the views on the East as corrupted and decadent existed even before the advent of Islam. The Greeks first, and the Romans later, defined themselves as far civilized communities in comparison with the barbaric societies.⁵ However, the real instigator of the wave of dehumanization against the Arabs in particular, was the military clash that occurred between Muslim Arabs and Christian Europeans in the medieval ages, as new developments in the Anatolian and Mesopotamian regions accentuated the fear of Christian kings in Europe. When the Seljuks seized Palestine and disrupted Christian pilgrimage to Jerusalem, the Christian rulers of Europe, with the full support and blessings of Church authorities launched their first crusade, a military campaign in 1095 to recapture Jerusalem and the Holy land from Muslim rule.

The devastating seven crusades or so brought huge loss of lives and wealth to the two sides, but also deep wounds and lasting sense of hostility and mistrust between Christians and Muslims. For the former, the religion of Islam was a constant threat to Europe, and those who believed in it were like an enemy on the border.

The Christian intellectuals along with Church’s scholars forgot their differences and engaged in a united front against their Muslim opponents. Muslims were for some reasons called in European Christian literature Arabs, and Mohametans sometimes. Zachary Lockman informed that:

Roger Bacon (1214-1320), and Church scholars urged the Church to foster the study of Islam and Arabic in order to arm Christians with the tools they would need to convince Muslims that their faith was false and Christianity was true.⁶

As such, a large body of literature concerning the faith, its prophet and his book was written. Sadly, this literature was short of objectivity. On the contrary, it was mostly of subjective projections, and full of ideological distortion and bias.

The tradition of orientalism continued to be stereotyping the Arabs throughout the preceding ages (Enlightenment and modern ages). It is unfortunate that despite their stature and significant contributions to reforms and social theory enrichment, most of Europe’s philosophers and reformists, such as Immanuel Kant (1724 – 1804), David Hume (1711 – 1776), and François-Marie Arouet, better known as Voltaire (1694 – 1778), adopted extreme racial discriminatory positions Vis-à-vis the Arabs. Their assumptions were poor in terms of objectivity and scientific neutrality. For instance, in his book, ‘Moral, Political and Literary’, David Hume expressed his gross racial stand in the following comment:

“There never was any civilized nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any individual eminent action or speculation, no ingenious manufactures among them, no arts, no science.”⁷

The comments of Hume reflected an epistemological and cultural complex that accompanied orientalists’ dealing with the east, in which western philosophers studied the eastern culture with a pre-normative judgment, motivated with a subconscious sense of superiority over subjects and culture that is considered barbaric and backward.

The harsh treatment of Arabs remained tainted by inaccurate myths and stereotypes, even when the scholarly orientalism emerged in the eighteenth century, a period which witnessed active colonial enterprise. Orientalists from France, England, Holland, Russia and others, closely with military and colonizing commanders, conducted many social and linguistic inquiries in the east. Their mission was primarily to belittle and reduce the contribution of Islam and Arabs to the progress of human civilization. In generalized and politically motivated tones, leading western thinkers such as Sir William Muir (1819-1905), Ignác (Yitzhaq Yehuda) Goldziher (1850-1921), Ernest Renan (1823– 1892), Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770 – 1831), and Oswald Arnold Gottfried Spengler (1880 -1936) expressed similar views, in which, they consistently promoted Arabs and Islam as monolithic.

⁴ Bernard Lewis, *The Arabs in History*. Hutchin Son’s University Library. London, third edn, 1956, Pg 19.

⁵ Lockman Zachary, *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism*. New York. Cambridge University Press, 2002. Pgs 13-14.

⁶ Lockman. *Ibid*, 39.

⁷ Eric Morton, *Race and Racism in the Works of David Hume*. *Journal of African Philosophy* (2002): 1, 1. Available at <http://www.africanphilosophy.com/vol1.1/morton.html> (accessed 1 February, 2009)

Image of the Arabs according to Orientalist Projection

The liaison between orientalist's views and western political interest, injected with a long standing history of religious enmity continued to shape the assumptions of orientalists about the Middle East in the modern and contemporary ages. No matter how subjective in its projections, displaced in its affect, distorted in its ideological stand, and biased in its religious assessment. We are not promoting the theory of conspiracy and aggression, but these critics of orientalism have been highlighted by western researchers themselves.

Any writer who embarks on an attempt to describe and interpret the contemporary Arab world to western reader is confronted by a set of formidable difficulties. At the superficial Islamic religion which is closely associated with them in the westerner mind. A more complex problem is that the average educated westerner is unaware that he suffers from prejudice towards the Arabs.⁸

However, this does not contradict the fact that there are many orientalists who maintained a moderate view on Arabs and their religion, especially in the contemporary twentieth century. Their studies were at once, "profound, authoritative and sympathetic. But they are scholars whose writings influence only a tiny minority."⁹ This minority includes some academicians, activists and Non-Governmental organizations who normally work for humanitarian causes. Meanwhile, the majority of western public and elites maintained classical stereotypes towards Arabs, mostly influenced and designed by the classic works of orientalists. Fundamental in this stereotype is the image of the Arab man who maintains "Bedouin" characteristics.

Anatomically, he is a bundle of nerves, bones and sinews. The leanness and bareness of this land show themselves in his physique. His daily food is dates and a mixture of flour, or roasted corn with water or milk. His raiment is as scanty as his nourishment: a long shirt (Thawb) with a belt and a flowing upper garment (abā) which pictures have made familiar. The head is covered by a shawl (kūfiyah) held by a cord (Iqāl). Trousers are not worn and footwear is rare. Tenacity, endurance (Sabr) seems to be his supreme virtue enabling him to survive where almost everything else perishes. Passivity is the observe of this same virtue ... Individualism another characteristic trait is too deeply ingrained that the Bedouin has never been able to raise himself to the dignity of a social being of the international type.¹⁰

Although the above image was dominant and related to the typical Arab man before the advent of Islam, it persisted in the western mind as a typical identity stamp for the Arabs fourteen centuries after that.

The History of orientalist's prejudices towards Arabs and their religion were clearly reflected in their writings. The projection of Arabs and Islam developed into two major forms:

First, they considered Islam as a natural continuation of nomadism, it reflected the Bedouin mentality. Hence, Islam was demonstrated to the entire world by "men from nomadic background, who still retained much of the social, moral, and intellectual outlooks of the desert."¹¹

From another point of view:

To the average and perhaps even above average educated westerners, Islam appears as a fanatic, bloodthirsty, reactionary, xenophobic, and largely destructive force. The obvious present-day poverty and backwardness of most Islamic countries (due to a variety of causes which I cannot go into now) are all too easily equated with Islam itself. The contribution of the Arab Islamic world to western civilization through its preservation of the Graeco-Roman heritage during the Dark Ages is usually underestimated.¹²

The result is that many westerners still regard and understand Arabs and Muslims in terms of west's oriental history (mainly through the violent common memory of the crusades), not in the context of followers of a great religion that shares much with both Judaism and Christianity. There is a profound ignorance about Arabs and Islam, which enabled these inaccurate and prejudicial views to flourish.

Second, in light of the current political situation in the Middle East, which includes among many, the long standing conflict between Arabs and Israel, the occupation of Iraq, war against terror, and most recently the Israeli military assault against Gaza, the American politicians –who proved themselves as excellent protectors of Israel- developed some significant perceptions about the Arabs and started to promote them to the western public opinion.

⁸ Peter Mansfield, *The Arabs*. Penguin Books, Great Britain. 3rd edn, 1992, Pg. 479.

⁹ *Ibid*, 482.

¹⁰ Philip K. Hitti. *Op.cit.*, p. 24.

¹¹ Montgomery William Watt, *Mohammad: Prophet and Statesman*. London, New York. Oxford University Press, 1978, Pg. 100

¹² Mansfield. *Op.cit.*, p. 482.

Expressions like, “others”, “they hate us” and “they carry strange values and beliefs” are of orientalist and more alarmingly of crusade tone that cannot escape ears. The link between Islam and terrorism, the portraying of Arabs and Muslims as terrorist or potential terrorist has become habitual in the work of institutions which shape the views of ordinary westerners, such as the media, literature and entertainment enterprises. This trend of demonization of Arabs has been existing for long time. In fact:

In the ninetieth century, the adjective “fanatical” was almost automatically prefixed to “Muslims” (or more probably the widely used misnomer Mohammedan) by journalists, travel writers, or even reputable historians. The underlying prejudices has scarcely diminished today.¹³

The picture of Arabs in western propaganda is determined by western interests. The picture of rich Arabs in robes became a more popular theme in western movies (as an example) during and after the oil crisis of 1973. Meanwhile, beginning from the early nineteenth century, the picture was replaced by another one. The Arab terrorist, villain, evil and bloodthirsty is common figure in western movies.

There are over 1 billion Muslims throughout the world who are not terrorists, stretching from Singapore to Nigeria and from the United States to the Central Asian Republics. Radical terrorist groups may be of Christian, Jewish, or Hindu persuasion. Their religion is irrelevant: first and foremost they are terrorists who often cloak their actions in a cause, sometimes adding the veil of nationalism or religion to justify their crimes. Most terrorists are self-serving thugs, more concerned about gaining power and influence than in helping the people or the cause they supposedly represent.¹⁴

Orientalist tradition played a fundamental role in shaping the way public and western leaders make sense of the Middle East. Assumptions that Arabs are monolithic mainly because of their monolithic religion were actually orientalist revelations that influenced and still influence the policies of the United States of America in particular, and the West in general towards the Arab region. Writers such as Daniel Pipes¹⁵, Robert Bruce Spencer¹⁶, and Stephen Suleiman Shwartz¹⁷ are the spearheads of contemporary western trend that demonizes Muslims and Arabs, and smears Islam in general.

In the collective myth of the West, a typical Arab is portrayed as wealthy but dirty and lazy, fanatic and barbaric but sexist and polygamist. For instance, in some works such as “Le bain Turc” (Turkish Bath), painting by Jean-Léon Gérôme 1862¹⁸, the scene of the painting displays a group of naked Muslim women in provocative sexual posing. In fact the Orient is often - consciously and unconsciously- displayed in the works of western artists, as a mirror and reflection of western culture itself, in which there is no taboo about the illicit description of body. Similarly, in the novel of Gustave Flaubert “Salammbô”, ancient Carthage in North Africa is used as a foil to ancient Rome. The Arab Islamic culture is portrayed as morally corrupting, an image that is borrowed from One Thousand and One Night stories, in which women –portrayed as harems- are living luxurious life in charming castles and confined for sexual services. Obviously, levels of fantasy and alluring eroticism have been dangerously exaggerated in a conservative society that breathes religion and virtue.

In other descriptions, Arabs are portrayed as anti-western, and being the folks of a terribly harsh natural habitat, the Arabs are also portrayed as warlike, violent and cruel “in desert land where the fighting mood is a chronic mental condition, raiding is one of the few manly occupations.”¹⁹ They are ignorant, static, irrational, superstitious, and monolithic. This projection as stated earlier has been formed over centuries of stereotyping and propaganda, driven by political and religious melancholy.

¹³ Ibid. 483.

¹⁴ James Emery, Arab Culture and Muslim Stereotypes. Middle East Times. 25. Monday February 2, 2009.

http://www.metimes.com/opinion/2008/06/17/arab_culture_and_muslim_stereotypes/...07/02/1430. Pg 1 of 3.

¹⁵ Daniel Pipes (born in 1949) is an American author, political commentator, and director of Middle East forum.

¹⁶ Robert Bruce Spencer (born in 1962) is an American author. He wrote books and articles related to Islam and terrorism, and currently directs the Jihad Watch

¹⁷ Stephen Suleiman Schwartz (born in 1948) is an American journalist and writer. Though Muslim, he describes himself as a neoconservative, and he is vocal in his criticism of Islamic terrorism. He directs the Center for Islamic Pluralism.

¹⁸ Director of the French Académie de Peinture.

¹⁹ Philip K. Hitti, History of the Arabs. With a new preface by Walid Khalid. Palgrave, Macmillan. 1st edn, 1937. Revised tenth edition 2002. New York. Pg. 25.

However, many western authorities have recently challenged this projection, among them, Michael Hamilton Morgan²⁰, Maria Rosa Menocal²¹, Washington Irving²², Martin Wainwright²³, and James A. Michener²⁴ to name some.

Al- Jazeera Phenomenon

Before the emergence of Al Jazeera, news of the Arab world and the way people dealt with them was closely attached to open and hidden agendas, and stories, mainly written and analyzed by westerners through their mass media coverage. T.V., a powerful medium which shapes the political, cultural and social landscape of the modern men was the public's main source of information about the Arab world. Major cable news in the world such as Cable News Network (CNN), British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), and The Fox Broadcasting Company (Fox) monopolized news of the Arab world until the emergence of Al-Jazeera, which in a short period of time was able to grab more than half of the television market share in the Arab world, and truly became the primary source of information.

The launch of the Arabic language Al-Jazeera satellite channel nearly ten years ago, transformed the television landscape in the Middle East. And over the past three years the channel has gained global reputation and became a name which governments and decision-makers across the world can hardly ignore.²⁵

Some observers attributed the astonishing success of Al-Jazeera and its enormous popularity in the Arab world to many reasons. Among them:

1. Al Jazeera managed to reflect the reality of life in the Arab countries; it provided the Arab audience with "what to think about?" The adoption of new approach in presenting, analyzing, and dealing with Arab issues, in a region accustomed to heavily censored offerings of state-controlled television. "Al-Jazeera's break away from traditional Arab journalism which is marked by a stale, bland, one-sided, and un-engaging handling of news and public affairs in the Arab world"²⁶. Joanne Myres stresses that state of affairs:

For a decade, most discussion programs on Arabic TV stations were non-controversial and did little else but serve as public relations outlets for their respective governments. However, by using the power and persuasion of television, this news channel provided the first exposure to opposing voices, and in so doing has managed to enrage all of the authoritarian Arab regimes at one time or another.²⁷

This approach outclassed the typical presentation that viewers in the Arab world used to hear from the other occidental broadcasting channels, as well as from the old wooden language that Arab channels, controlled by ruling regimes.

The shine of Al-Jazeera increased further following its coverage of the recent military confrontations in Afghanistan in the aftermath of nine-eleven 09/11 attacks upon the United States, then, the American invasion of Iraq on March 20, 2003 and the ousting of Iraq's Saddam Hussein, the July, 2006 Israeli war against Lebanon, and most recently, the Israeli Massacre against Gaza that started on 27 December 2008.

2. The adoption of a reliable language strategy, which involved special terminology. In fact the new terminology that Al-Jazeera employs in its reports, analysis, displayed clear opposition and condemnatory stand against the American and Israeli aggression in the Arab lands. The Use of *muqawamah* to describe the Iraqi resistance against the American and coalition forces in Iraq, and:

²⁰ See his book, "Lost History: The Enduring Legacy of Muslim Scientists, Thinkers, and Artists" which as Jimmy Carter, the former President of the United States of America stated "delivers a missing link to the story of an interconnected world: the achievements of Muslim civilization and its influence on East and West."

²¹ See her books, "The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain" and "The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History: A Forgotten Heritage"

²² See his book, "Tales Of The Alhambra"

²³ See his article, "Our Debt to Islam"

²⁴ See his article, "Islam : The Misunderstood Religion"

²⁵ Leon Barkho, The Arabic Al-Jazeera vs. Britain's BBC and America's CNN: who does journalism right? Media Management and Transformation Center. Jönköping International Business School, Pg: 1.

²⁶ Dima Dabbous-Sensenig, To Veil or Not to Veil: Gender and Religion on Al-Jazeera's Islamic Law and Life. http://www.wmin.ac.uk/mad/pdf/WPCC-Vol3-No2-D_Dabbous_Sensenig.pdf Pg 2 of 26.

²⁷ Joanne J. Myers, Al-Jazeera: How the Free Arab News Network Scooped the World and Changed the Middle East. <http://www.cceia.org/resources/transcripts/133.html>

“Suicide bombing” they are for Al Jazeera *al-amaliyat al-istishhadiya*, martyrdom operations, martyrdom in defending the Faith and resisting what Arabs and Muslims deem as injustice is one of the main pillars of Islam. Thus Palestinians killed by Israelis are described as “*shuhada*” martyrs, and English terms like al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, a militant offshoot of... frequently employed by the BBC and CNN may hurt the feelings of many Muslims and Arabs, because they mock the word “al-Aqsa”, one of the holiest sites for Muslims all over the world by associating militancy with it. The Arabic appellation *kata'ib shuhada al-Aqsa*, literally, al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades is a name that most Arabs and Muslims all over the world are bound to cherish, it is the term that Al Jazeera sticks to.²⁸

There are also many other terms that the channel persist on using such as *al-aradhi al-Muhtalla* (the occupied territories) to describe the lands that Israel annexed after the war of 1967, and *al-jidar al-azil* (The segregation wall). I am not going to mention all distinctive terminologies that Al-Jazeera channel uses in its daily address to the Arab world, however, I must emphasize that the channel won the trust of Arab audience to its side, chiefly because it was very careful in the use of terms and words. The channel was fully aware that Islam remains a major impulse for mobilization of the masses in the Arab world; hence it played the tune that the masses favor.

3. Like few other Arab media, Al-Jazeera provided its public viewers with uncensored rooms to express themselves and encounter the armada of official Anglo-American propaganda and unpopular Arab regimes through various shows and forums for debate, such as *Al-Ittijah Al-Mu'akes* (The Opposite Direction), *Shahid Ala Al-'Asr* (Eyewitness), *Minbar al-Jazeera* (Al-Jazeera Forum) and so on. Through this channel, debaters and guests of shows were given the chance to practice their freedom of expression and speech, something predominantly and literally forbidden in the media of their respective countries.

4. The use of visual images: Al-Jazeera managed to display the news live from locations of events without manipulation or retouching. Such transparency granted it great credibility among western viewers. The candid exhibition and examination of state of affairs in the Arab world, together with its problems, conflicts, and aspirations, was in contrast to what is habitually practiced by the governmental propagandist channels, in which the demagogic coverage of heroic achievements that the inspired leaders and majesties dominate over all other news. One major breakthrough that marked Al-Jazeera's course was its great success in exposing the big abyss that separates Arab rulers from their subjects. Such success brought upon the channel accusations that it incites people against their rulers, encourages anarchy and violence, and that it became a harmful element which menaces national unity. The station has been the target of a great deal of harassment from both Arab and western regimes. In fact, many Arab regimes attempted to silence the criticizing voice of Al-Jazeera by slamming shut its bureaus harassing its reporters. In “U.S Moves to Close down Al-Jazeera TV;” Robert Fisk quoted Wadah Khanfar, then station's Baghdad bureau chief in Baghdad, letter addressed to Paul Bremer, Head of the Coalition Provisional Authority and Director of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance for post-war Iraq following the 2003 invasion of Iraq:

Al-Jazeera did not cover Saddam Hussein favorably. Both Yasser Abu Hilala (one of the channel's senior correspondents) and I myself have been expelled from Baghdad by the former regime for our reporting. The Baghdad bureau was shut down twice by the former Ministry of Information for unfavorable coverage, and once by Al-Jazeera itself in protest over attempts at censorship. Al-Jazeera reporters in Iraq have even been physically assaulted by former Information Minister Mohamed Saeed As-Sahaf for daring to broadcast events which cast the regime in an unfavorable light.²⁹

Al-Jazeera suffered same reprisal from the Palestinian National Authority (2001), Kuwait (2002), Sudan (2003), Algeria (2004), Somalia (2007), and Morocco (2008). Before the emergence of Al-Jazeera Channel, western designs for peace and war in the Arab world, used to be demonstrated, explained, and tabulated for Arab public opinion consumption through renowned western media like the CNN and BBC. Thus, the game of winning minds and hearts of Arabs was less competitive, because in cases of war for example, every bit of information on military operations was diligently selected by military experts, then channeled to the outside world through embedded journalists. However, in Al-Jazeera case, the display was completely different, because they offered a more comprehensive coverage of news.

²⁸ Leon Borkho, *The Arabic Al Jazeera*. Op.cit., p. 5.

²⁹ <http://www.counterpunch.org/fisk08012003.html>

During the 2003 American invasion of Iraq, Al-Jazeera coverage included a quite balanced display of both opponents' views on what happens in the battle fields. At the mean time, it provided viewers with an alternative analysis to the war against the stereotype partial projection that American and western media offered. That alternative reinforced recipients mind's resistance to the seduction that western propaganda for war was carrying out.

As a result of Al Jazeera among others, Arab viewers in 2003 no longer depended on American lenses and words to understand battles fought in their own back yard. At the same time these same viewers still had access to CNN's broadcasts, on which they had been totally dependent during the 1991 war.³⁰

Being an Arab channel and using Arabic, Al Jazeera enjoyed natural favoritism from the part of Arab mass viewers as compared to other foreign channels, "for,³¹ hearts and minds in the Arab culture have a very distinguished status and cannot be won easily, especially not in a foreign language."

5. Repetitious type casting in order to have great effect on the audience. What is reported in the news bulletins is discussed in different shows within a certain time frame according to the recentness of the event and its impact on the Arab public opinion. Undoubtedly, within a strategy of persuasion through repetition.

6. The great accessible material and professional capabilities at the disposal of the channel. This supportive power enabled the station to cover the most important events world-wide, even in the most volatile military confrontations that erupted in the last decade, such as Afghanistan, Somalia and Gaza. The live reporting of its big number of correspondents made Al Jazeera one main reference for many big broadcasting stations, including the rival CNN and veteran BBC which monopolized the scoop for long time. Al Jazeera proved itself as a real competitor able to make beat in the Arab world issues in particular and Muslim world in general. The exclusive airing of Al Qaida leader's tapes and the special coverage of the massacres of Al-Fallujah and most recently Gaza cemented that position.

Arab's Image according to Al Jazeera

In contrast to orientalist's projection of the Arab orient that was charged with historical, religious and political prejudices; and free from that cultural complex, Al-Jazeera channel was able to treat the Arab eastern culture with great degree of objectivity. As such, and to some extent, the broadcasting channel was able to change the deep-rooted collective image on Arab -in their robes and turbans, armed with their swords, galloping through the desert, fighting for the survival in a stateless country, and looking for new territories and preys- which orientalist, literature, mass media, and entertainment institutions in the west tried hard to inculcate in the western mind. The opposite image of Arabs that Al-Jazeera promotes is about rational and civic people, who refer to lawful methods of argumentation and reasoning to express their views. Cultured communities, who are proud of their way of life and want to defend the culture they inherited without suppressing others' right to exist.

Al-Jazeera's self-advertised mission statement of providing its viewers with the 'opinion and other-opinion', and the bundle of programs and shows it offers such as *Al-Ittijah Al- Mu'akes*, *Shahid Ala Al-'Asr*, and the popular *Al-Shari'a wal Hayat* (Islamic Law and Life) has to some degree succeeded in changing the discourse that says the West stands for rationality and modernity while the orient stands for religiousness and tradition. By displaying atrocities and horrible destruction of western military might in Iraq, and covering the human tragedy endured by the Arab Palestinian people, Al-Jazeera channel is trying to demonstrate to viewers world-wide that somebody else not the Arabs who are barbarians and obsessed by fighting and thirsty for blood, and that Arabs in Iraq, Palestine, and elsewhere, were exercising their legitimate right to defend their lives, properties, and lands, a right that is secured by all international laws and conventions. Through its shows, Al-Jazeera distinguished itself as a forum for resistance that works hard to correct assumptions about Arabs, who according to this station have fallen victims to unfair and one-sided empire of mass media. Al-Jazeera's moto, 'the opinion and other-opinion' was indeed a new phenomenon that brock through a long standing Arab's journalism culture of un-engaging and dullness.

³⁰ Inji Galal and others, Operation Freedom or Invasion of Iraq: Arab Interpretation of CNN and AlJazeera Coverage of the 2003 Gulf War. 2004. <http://www.tbsjournal.com/galal.htm> Pg 1 of 9.

³¹ M. Khoury-Machod, Losing the battle for Arab hearts and minds Phil Taylor's website. <http://ics.leeds.ac.uk/papers/vp01.cfm?outfit=pmt& folder= 16& paper= 1007> Pg 1 of 5.

In the march towards realizing its mission statement, the channel was willing to take great risks, including the unprecedented step of engaging Arab's enemy Israel, a taboo that no other Middle Eastern television station was willing to breach in the past. It is customary nowadays that Israeli politicians and IDF army officers appear in Al-Jazeera and present their point of view on political and military related debates. Furthermore, by rectifying the tarnished self-image throughout the modern era, that Arabs are terrorists and backward, Al Jazeera succeeded to great degree to change that picture and present a moderate picture of Arabs, their culture and religion.

Most significantly, Al-Jazeera took the debate between the East and the West to the second level. It de-masked the "other" by revealing that westerners themselves attack, oppress and kill to protect their interests. Broadcasting images of the looting of Iraqi precious museums after the fall of Baghdad in 2003, and the camping of American soldiers in their heavy armors at fragile sites, classified by the UNESCO as protected human heritage, brought back to Arabs' common memory, the Mogul and Tartars barbaric destruction of Baghdad in 1258 A.D., in which large sections of Baghdad were ruined by fire, siege, or looting. Hence, the myth that westerners are angels who bring peace and noble values to others became absurd.

Similarly, images of destruction and merciless killing of civilians, especially children, and the scandal of Abu Gharib prison, in which Iraqi detainees were physically and most sensitively abused sexually, was another breakthrough in the demaskation of the "other" who claimed for long time that he rises above barbaric and uncivilized acts.

Al-Jazeera's broadcasting of Israeli killings of Palestinians; destruction of their homes and properties, and human tragedies caused by the shameful isolating wall was an expressive cry to the world about a just cause, not a crazy terrorist plot.

Last but not least, by employing highly qualified female Arab journalists and correspondents, Al-Jazeera was able to send a clear message to the world in general and the West in particular that Arab women are not harem living in the shadow of their men. On the contrary, they are exercising their rights and undertaking more delicate duties in the service of their communities. The headscarf and veil proved to be not an obstacle towards the road towards fame and excellence.

Conclusion

From the above discussion we conclude that better ways of communication can build bridges of trust, and present opportunities of cooperation and understanding between people and cultures. The normative judgment for or against any culture will certainly waste efforts and widen the gap between individuals and communities. As such, it is in the best interest of all to admit that a culture is considered good as long as it satisfies the legitimate needs of its adherents. The decision of Al-Jazeera management to create a new English Channel in 2006 was a good move to overcome the linguistic barriers, and reach out to much greater audience worldwide. This will certainly contribute to a better communication, debate, and understanding.

Recommendation

- 1- Greater understanding comes through better communication. Veritable perceptions about "the other" need to rely on reliable ways of communication, and avoiding any kind of prejudice and false assumptions.
- 2- It is about time that people in the West start to perceive the East outside the orientalist's outdated vision. We have to admit that not all knowledge produced by them is reliable.
- 3- Youth in various societies need to be taught how to differentiate between "us" and "them" in spirit of respect and quo existence. Norms of arrogance and a culture that is superior to another culture should be totally rejected.
- 4- It is in the best interest of every one to engage in an intellectual dialogue in free of prejudice, which seeks to achieve greater understanding and appreciation of cultures.
- 5- Journalism shall adopt an international chart, in which objectivity, balance, and credibility are core values.
- 6- With the West promoting the concept of globalization, it is the right time for the West to start to look at the East as partner rather than colony. The time of which Hume's, Kant's, and Voltaire's views were welcomed has expired.

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