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Al-Jazeera and the Democratic Transition in the Arab World: Empowering Arab Civil Society and Compensating for the Decline of Political Parties

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By

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To my Mom, Dad, and Sisters

To my mentor, Dr. Bouchikhi

To all the peace seekers

Abstract

Al-Jazeera has recently become a point of research interests for many scholars representing various academic disciplines. However, few of them have considered this controversial transnational TV network as an important player in the undergoing democratic transition throughout the Arab world. This thesis argues that Al-Jazeera can be an important contributor to the democratic transition in the region; an argument which remains contrary to that of the democratic transition theory. Democratic transition theorists highlight the important role of elites within political parties and civil society organizations in the democratization process. In contrast, they tend to downplay the role of media claiming that it is very likely to be controlled and influenced by governments and lobbies. The thesis draws a picture of dysfunctional Arab political parties and a fledgling Arab civil society with a little or no potential contribution in the democratic transition. In so saying, using a combination of content and discourse analyses of Al-Jazeera's website and broadcasts as well as cross-national surveys and short case studies, the thesis shows Al-Jazeera's strong potential in recompensing the role of these two players through empowering Arab civil society and indirectly performing some of the functions of the declining Arab political parties. Thus, the thesis concludes that Al-Jazeera can be a strong player in the democratic transition throughout the region.

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Introduction

Writing about Al-Jazeera Arabic has become a trend among scholars from many walks of academia, especially media and communication scholars, political scientists, and sociologists. Some of these scholars attempted to examine this controversial TV channel as a potential actor in the undergoing democratization process throughout the Arab world. More particularly, few researchers (e.g. Hafez, K. 2004; El-Gody, A.M. 2009; Saghieh, H. 2004) have ventured into discussing Al-Jazeera's ability to compensate for the declining role of political parties in the Arab world and empowering the emerging Arab civil society. In fact, most Arab states are still striving to establish well-functioning democracies with efficient and effective political institutions and trenchant parliamentarian oppositions. Political parities are usually deemed to be necessary institutions to democracy owing to the functions they usually perform in their societies (Van Biezen, 2004). These functions include but not limited to integrating, aggregating and articulating people's interests and concerns. In addition, political parties are usually able to mobilize people for collective action and provide venues for political debate and discussion on democratic reform. The overall decline of secular political parties in the Arab world results from their failure to perform most of these functions (Al-Ma'aitah, 2004), which I shall further discuss in the third chapter of this work. As a result, the Islamic political wave has flourished and remained popular but not always welcomed by both Arab constituents and Arab secular regimes (Robbins, 2009).

The decline affects particularly the liberal and socialist parties. These parties were very influential nationalist movements such as *Wafd* in Egypt, the Algerian FLN[1] and USFP[2] in Morocco; they have always advocated for independence, social and economic change as well as

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[1] French: Front de Libération Nationale. Or National Libération Front.
[2] French:: Union Socialiste des Forces Populaires. Or Socialist Union of People's forces.

reviving Arab nationalism; in fact, these issues have always appealed to most Arabs despite their ideological stands. However, it seems that these parties have lost their ideological distinctiveness in the last decades resulting in a failure to establish and implement genuine political programs. For example, the parties that still keep the word 'socialist' as their label no longer support socialist policies and mostly embrace market economy (Ottawy, 2007). Similarly, most liberal parties refuse to be identified as secular lest they would lose the votes of the increasingly increasing religious constituencies in the Arab world (Hamzawy, A. & Ottaway, M. 2007).. On the other hand, the Islamic parties are getting stronger but their attempt to perform the functions of political parties is limited and restricted by most of the secular ruling regimes in the region (Garcia-Rivero & Kotze, 2007). Thus, political parties in the Arab world seem to encounter many difficulties in carrying out their functions, which explains the increasing trend towards deserting political parties and joining civil society organizations in an attempt to influence public policies.

The overall inability of Arab political parties in aggregating and articulating people's interests and translating them into political programs as well as their incapability of establishing a political space where issues of democratic reform can be discussed and debated triggers one's curiosity to find an alternative platform or institution that recompenses the decline of political parities in the Arab world. Earlier in this introduction I mentioned that Arab intellectuals have turned towards civil society in an attempt to influence policies and create a space where issues of democratization and civil liberties can be discussed and debated. However, the concept of "civil society" in the Arab world seems to suggest a different notion than the one conventionally used in the West (Karajah, 2007). To illustrate, while the general focus of the modern Western society is to encourage individual initiatives, the Arab society tends to focus on leaders and states whose

social cohesion are conditioned by compromising the individuals' initiatives and their contributions in the political life. This explains why many of Arab civil society groups are charitable organizations and a considerable number of them are somehow related to the state; in fact, some scholars (eg. Al-Halfi, 2007) consider them "semi-governmental" institutions. This does not imply that there is no genuine and autonomous Arab civil society as there has been a significant development in many Arab countries in this regard, which I shall elucidate in the first chapter. However, this development is relatively slow and most civil society organizations in the Arab world are still fledgling and encounter various challenges that prevent them from effectively contributing into the democratization process. One of the most salient challenges is the lack of a communication tool by which and through which civil society can address Arab constituencies and raise their awareness about pressing issues of direct concern to Arabs. This is mainly due to the state control of media, especially the TV sector. In fact, although few Arab regimes have liberalized parts of their media systems such as the internet and the press in Morocco and Jordan, none of them opened up the TV sector, except for few Gulf countries such as Qatar and UAE, because of the broader reach of this particular medium (Sakr, 2001). Similarly, Lipman (2009) argues that although Russia has encouraged diverse and lively media in the early post-communist years, the TV was kept under a state-control because "the state relies on national television channels as an invaluable political resource" due to their ability to "shape public opinion by boosting, playing down or ignoring any figure or event." (p. 2). This is also true for Eastern European countries during the early years of post-communist transition. These countries have adopted some progressive measures to liberalize the media, except broadcasting. Splichal (2000) states that "censorship has been legally abolished in all the former socialist countries in Eastern Europe but not yet the state control of broadcasting." (p. 8). Clearly, it seems

that liberalizing and democratizing part of the media as well as keeping control of the TV sector remain a pattern in the countries that undergo a democratic transition as well as those countries where authoritarian rule is still dominating. The emergence of transnational broadcastings may offer a good alternative to the nationally-controlled one, but they can also be subject to control as this paper shall demonstrate.

The decline of the role of political parties in the Arab world and the challenges that encounter Arab civil society organizations necessitates looking for other institutions that compensate for the decline of political parties and empower civil society organizations in order to facilitate the democratization process. The present work argues that the newly emerging Arab satellite channels, especially Al-Jazeera, fulfill these functions. Thus, the goal of this paper is to examine the following research question: *How does Al-Jazeera compensate for the decline of Arab political parties and empower Arab civil society?*

Theoretical Framework: Media as an Important Contributor to the Democratization Process.

Earlier in the introduction, I mentioned that most Arab countries are still in a period of democratic transition; a period where political liberalization and political democratization is undertaking a slow progress. The political liberalization usually involves the expansion of public space through recognizing and protecting civil and political liberties, especially those related to the ability of citizens to engage in a free political debate and freely organize in order to pursue common interests. On the other hand, the process of political democratization is mainly about expanding the scope of political participation which grants citizens the power to collectively control policymaking. The connection between political liberalization and political democratization is the core of democratic transition theory since it is difficult for citizens to

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effectively participate, organize, and freely choose among political alternatives without a context of political freedom (Brynen, R., Korany, B., & Noble, P., 1995).

The processes of democratic transformation have often been a point of academic interests since the early 1980s, especially for political scientists. This academic surge started with examining the democratization of the remaining authoritarian regimes in Southern Europe in addition to the continuing processes in Latin America. This was followed by a relatively similar process in East and Southeast Asia, Africa- to a lesser extent- as well as the most dramatic transformation of former communist regimes which took place in Eastern and Central Europe. This marked the beginning of a new era of scholarship which is often referred to as the third wave of global democratization (Huntington, 1991). Surprisingly enough, the process of democratization in the Arab world was given a little or no attention by scholars of comparative politics. To illustrate, O'Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead's (1986) ground-breaking comparative study of transitions from authoritarian rule do not refer to any Arab country in their volume. Similarly, Dimaond, Linz, and Lipset's (1988) four-volume study of democratic politics in the developing world excluded most of the Arab world claiming that "the Islamic countries of the Middle East and North Africa generally lack much previous democratic experience, and most appear to have little prospect of transition to even semi-democracy." (p. xix). The interests started to emerge in the mid 1990s, especially from social scientists who focus on the Middle East. However, most of these contributions (e.g. Yom, S.L. 2005; Plattner, M.F. & Diamond, L. 2002; Handelman, H. Tessler, M.A., & Kellogg, H. 2000; Pratt, N.C. 2007; Ottaway, M. & Choucair-Vizoso, J. 2008) remain ad hoc in the sense that they were not able to identify the theoretical issues to studying the specificities of political change in the Arab world such as the important players which usually take part in the democratic transition and lead the process of

enhancing democratization. In other words, they mostly examine the Arab democratization process in the light of previous transitional democratic experiences, especially in Southern, Eastern and Central Europe. In so saying, I was interested in the available literature on the vital actors which escort and lead the transition process.

The mainstream transition theory emphasizes the role of political elites and civil society in carrying out the political reform and leading the democratization process within the countries that undergo a democratic transition (Herbert, 2003). Political elites operate within political parties which reflect large segments of society; to put it differently, political parties reflect the self-conscious elites who usually aggregate the political will of different social structures, articulate it and, ultimately, design and develop political programs leading to the establishment of a democratic project. Similarly, Stepan and Linz (1996) argue that the role of political elites, especially at important moments and crises, is decisive in the democratic transition of a particular society. On the other hand, Baker (2002) relates civil society associations and movements to the role of the elites and argues that these organizations provide the conditions for the elites to negotiate the democratic transitions. In brief, the democratic transition theory considers the political reform and democratization a function of political elites and political parties and, to a lesser extent, civil society organizations, but not of mass media. However, unlike the democratic transition theory suggested by political science, some communication scholars (e.g. Jakubowicz & Sukosd, 2008) do consider media an important factor for political change and democracy although their arguments remain restricted to a particular region (Central and Eastern Europe) and, therefore, seem hard to generalize, especially pertaining to the TV sector. The Arab TV sector which is predominantly state-owned and the only means that reaches

a broader audience, especially in a region with high illiteracy rate.[3] This explains the fact that although some Arab regimes liberalized the internet and the press, very few of them did the same with TV sector.
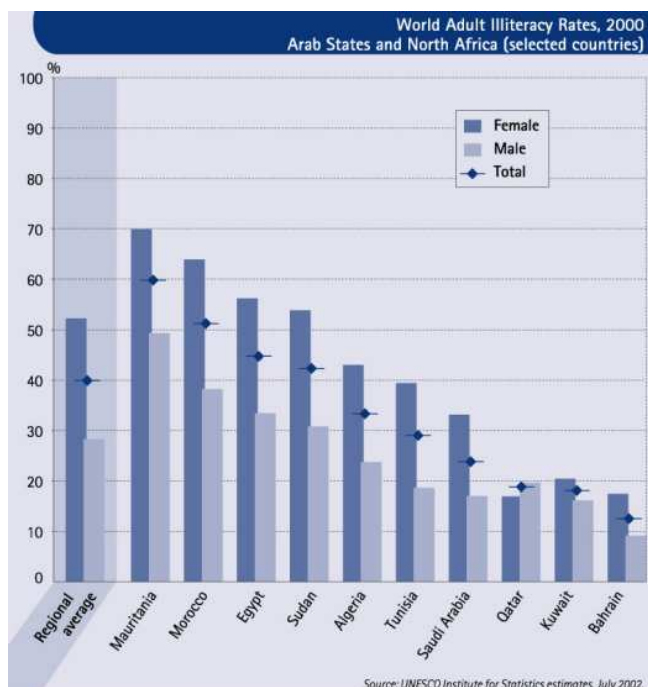
Clearly, the mainstream democratic transition theorists have rarely considered media, especially TV, to be a catalyst for democratic change. McConnell & Becker (2002) attribute this assumption to two major factors. First, they argue that politics or market forces seem to dominate the media which can either be subject to industrial forces or be controlled by the state. Second, media content is mostly influenced by actors such as governments, lobbies and political parties. This makes the media a re-actor rather than a pro-actor in the democratic transition as it cannot be a driving force in this process because it is a vulnerable player which is usually forced to follow the flow (Garon, 1995). An attempt to read the transition theory in the light of this paper's research question reveals two main limitations for this theory. First, the theory was mainly

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[3] The Regional Report on Education for All in the Arab Countries, The Regional Arab Conference. Assessment 2000, UNESCO, Cairo, Egypt, 2000, p. 65.

concerned with the state-based media but not for the transnational satellite channels that transcend Arab countries' national borders in an attempt to establish a new public space where issues of democracy and political reform can be debated. Second, the case of Al-Jazeera ridicules the second factor because although it is funded by Qatar's royal family, it enjoys an unparalleled margin of freedom in the Arab World which was a source of a lot of diplomatic tension between the Qatari government and the Arab as well as Western governments; the Qatari government keeps turning down the complaints about Al-Jazeera's coverage of certain issues and emphasizing the editorial independence of Al-Jazeera (Gabriel, 2002). This has been said, I am encountered with two options. The first one is suggested by the transition theory and that is the inability of media to contribute in the democratization and liberalization process, which remains the privilege of political elites, political parties and civil society. The second option is to examine the possibility of a transnational satellite channel to contribute in the democratic transition through compensating for the decline of Arab political parties and empowering the fledgling civil society. *This paper chooses to pursue the second option through examining Al-Jazeera's potential in compensating for the declining role of Arab political parties as well as empowering the newly emerging Arab civil society.*

Literature Review

Earlier in the introduction I mentioned that while there is a plethora of literature on Al-Jazeera, very few researchers attempted to examine it as a means of compensating for the declining role of political parties in the Arab world as well as a tool for empowering the emerging Arab civil society. This section shall highlight a primary and secondary review of literature on Al-Jazeera with a focus on the works directly or indirectly related to the research question of my thesis.

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Hafez (2004) is one of those few contributors who suggest that the emerging Arab satellite channels can be an alternative to political parties in the Arab world. He states that "since political parties and parliamentary oppositions in the Arab world are still rudimentary, Arab satellite television seems to be performing their role." (p. 1). Hafez focuses on Al-Jazeera, but he also generalizes his assumption to other satellite channels such as Al-Arabia and Abu-Dhabi. First, Hafez provides no explanation for generalizing his assumption to other transnational satellite channels, which I think was too much of a case stretching. To put it differently, claiming that Arab Satellite Broadcastings can be an alternative to political parties without specifying which channels and what are the differences between them makes his claim harder to support. This is because Arab satellite channels are numerous and they differ in many aspects which include but not limited to the content, ownership, viewership and reach as well as the margin of editorial freedom they enjoy. As a result, some of these channels are more controversial and attractive than others and, therefore, some are more likely to fulfill specific functions of the political parties as opposed to other functions. In so saying, it is very important to focus on one channel and justify the case selection rather than claiming a generalization which remain harder to support.

Second, Hafez stresses the fact that Arab countries are undergoing a process of democratic transition in which political parties, and potentially the media, play an important role through the functions they perform in their societies. However, he says a little about these functions and he does not specify whether there is a difference between the functions of political parties in a period of transition and the ones performed after the transition or in a period of 'normal politics.' In addition, the paper does not empirically show how does Arab satellite broadcasting fulfill some of the functions of political parties. Instead, Hafez chooses to examine

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the democratization agenda of Al-Jazeera through conducting a content analysis of the English version of Al-Jazeera's website (http://english.aljazeera.net). In so doing, Hafez was mainly interested in the way Al-Jazeera covers the issue of democracy and political reform. He found few articles dealing with democracy and political reform in few Arab countries, but the majority of articles he found revolve around the Arab-Israeli conflict and the American occupation of Iraq. Thus, he concludes that Al-Jazeera and other Arab transnational channels do not maintain an agenda of democratization. I identify, at least, three limitations of this analysis. First, it is too much of a conceptual stretch to deem Al-Jazeera as an *alternative* to political parties since it is merely a media outlet with an exceptional reach in the Arab world. However, it is fair to consider Al-Jazeera as a means of compensating for the declining role of Arab political parties through metaphorically fulfill some of their traditional functions. Second, I think it is not helpful to conduct an analysis of the English version of Al-Jazeera's website while the unit of analysis is Al-Jazeera Arabic. A short investigation of the two versions of the websites (http://english.aljazeera.net and http://www.aljazeera.net) reveals a clear difference both in form and content. Third, the website, as a medium, mainly targets the computer literate populace, which requires a different coverage of issues from broadcasts that reach more people, especially in a region with a high illiteracy rate such as the Arab world. Consequently, drawing a conclusion from analyzing Al-Jazeera's website in English does not provide a clear picture of Al-Jazeera's agenda. *My present work shall fill up some of the gaps left by Hafez through conducting a content analysis of the Arabic version of the website along with a number of other broadcasts and a couple of short case studies to examine Al-Jazeera's potential not as an alternative to political parties; rather, I shall examine its ability to recompense this decline through fulfilling some of their functions.*

Another contributor who attempted to approach Al-Jazeera as an alternative to political party is El-Gody. El-Gody (2009) states that "Al-Jazeera is believed to be one of the key 'Arab political parties' with more than 50 million 'members' [audience] across the Arab World; with its own political agenda, ideology and followers." (p. 12). He claims that Arab transnational satellite networks have not only challenged the official narrative of their local governments, but they are also becoming a proactive tool in the undergoing democratization process throughout the Arab World. In addition, he argues that these networks are becoming an alternative to political parties where the 'common person' can actively take part in live discussions and communicate his/her concerns about some specific issues pertaining to his/her daily life. Furthermore, he considers Al-Jazeera to be the 'herald of the democratization process' in the Arab world only because it de-legitimizes Arab political systems through a spate of political and financial scandalous news. While allowing the 'common person' to participate in live debates about pressing issues and de-legitimizing the political systems are important components of the democratization formula, this latter is not as 'simple' as El-Gody states it is. This is because El-Gody's paper lacks a theoretical framework within which he can examine his claim. As it was previously pointed out, democratic transition theory highlights the important role of political parties and civil society in the democratization process. In so saying, the creation of a free and open public space through allowing 'common people' to freely communicate their thoughts as well as the legitimization of the political systems are some of many functions performed by political parties and civil society. Therefore, I think it is not accurate to deem Al-Jazeera as "the herald of the democratization process" in the Arab world just because it diffuses political scandals and allows Arab citizens to go on air. *Making such a claim necessitates a further*

examination of Al-Jazeera's potential to indirectly fulfill other functions of political parties and empower Arab civil society.

Similar to El-Gody's claim, Saghieh (2004) identifies three factors which helps explain why Al-Jazeera has become "the most popular 'political party' in the Arab world." (p. 1). These factors involve a combination of political and technological elements. The first factor is the advances in global communications which makes transnational broadcasting accessible to most Arabs thanks to the developments of the audio-visual technology. Second, there has been a decline in Arab nationalist cause which was triggered by the so called "National Liberation Movement." This latter was replaced by religious, ethnic and sectarian factions that can be united only by a common hostility towards an outsider epitomized by the US. This was exploited by Al-Jazeera which appeals to the majority of Arabs due to its harsh criticism of the US government. This criticism allows Arabs to be bound together by a common cause; that is, a total dissatisfaction with US foreign policies in the Arab World. Third, there is a decline in the institutions which connect the individual citizen, the state and society. These institutions are the political parties, especially the *Ba'ath* and socialist parties which were fueled by Nasserism. Additionally, Arab trade unions have rarely been able to mobilize society in a poorly-industrialized region. Saghieh argues that the Arab transnational satellite channels, especially Al-Jazeera recompenses this decline and alleviates the sense of loss and failure among Arabs. In fact, *these factors remain important in explaining the popularity of Al-Jazeera as a news network in the Arab World; however, they do not help to explain its popularity as a "political party"* as Saghieh argues.

In addition to this brief primary literature, I shall include a secondary review of relevant literature on the role of the channel in establishing an Arab public sphere and setting the agenda

for Arab governments. Lynch (2007) provides an inclusive overview of the historical rise of new Arab media and public spheres that aim at breaking prejudices about Arabs and allowing various voices to voice out their views and ideas which are usually absent in both their state-controlled and Western media. Building on Habermas's (1992) approach to the rise of the bourgeois public sphere in eighteenth century Europe, Lynch identifies progressive features of a new Arab public sphere and argues that the emergence of the internet and satellite TV channels such as Al-Jazeera have positively contributed into creating a new public sphere which recognizes the virtue of debate and differences and allows disagreement. In addition, Lynch claims that "Al-Jazeera has forced politicians to justify their policies resulting in creating a new level of accountability" (pp. 3-4). However, I think that such a new public sphere is not safe from some paradoxes. The over-emphasis on those who disagree and the tendency to publicize the unknown about the repressive regimes might lead to demonizing the outsiders in order to preserve and strengthen internal cohesion. Therefore, *the question is whether this new public sphere, created by Al-Jazeera, is really liberal in the sense that it provides a space for tolerating opposing views and presenting diverse opinions.*

In addition to creating a public sphere, some scholars have discussed Al Jazeera's role in setting the public agenda. The idea that news networks do set the agenda is not a novel one. In fact, some networks are more influential than others and are capable of performing this function; for example, the CNN has emerged as a prominent global network owing to its coverage of the first Gulf War. Robinson (2002) examines the 'CNN effect' in shaping political actions and setting the agenda for politics and diplomacy. Similarly, Seib (1997) discusses the CNN role in moving the world leaders to take actions in remote parts of the world and set the agenda for the public. Today, Al- Jazeera seems to yield the same effects in the Arab/Muslim world as many

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scholars (Cassara & Lengen, 2004; Rugh, 2004; El-Nawawy & Iskander 2003; Seib, 2008) pointed out. *I shall elaborate more on the CNN and Al-Jazeera effect in the fourth chapter with more examples and short case studies.*

This was a brief review which included a few relevant references on Al-Jazeera's role as a political party and its contribution in creating a public sphere and setting the agenda. In fact, they all include good normative assumptions, but they either miss empirical evidences to support their claims or they lack a theoretical framework through which their assumptions could be examined, which made fall in a conceptual stretch by considering Al-Jazeera as a political party or an *alternative* to political parties. The following section maps out the content of the chapters of the thesis.

Chapters' Outline

This thesis comprises four chapters. The choice of the chapters was directed by the research question and the theoretical framework which states that political parties and civil society play a leading role in a democratic transition. The first chapter commences with providing an overview on the mainstream Arab TV channels followed by a brief discussion on the rise and growth of Arab satellite broadcasting and their role in revolutionizing the media sector in the region with a focus on Al-Jazeera. This discussion shall be pursued by another one on the birth and development of Arab civil society as well as the main challenges it encounters. The second chapter examines how does Al-Jazeera lessen these challenges resulting in empowering the nascent Arab civil society organizations.

The third chapter discusses two points. First, it provides an overview on the birth and development of political parties in the Arab world as well as sources and manifestations of their decline. Second, it outlines the basic functions of political parties, which can hardly be

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performed by Arab ones. The fourth chapter attempts to discuss Al-Jazeera's role in compensating for this decline through indirectly fulfilling some of these functions. In short, while the first and third chapters shall be conceptual, the second and the fourth ones use a combination of content and discourse analysis of Al-Jazeera's websites and broadcasts in addition to short case studies to provide empirical evidences for the arguments made in the conceptual chapters. The paper concludes with a summary, concluding remarks, and questions for further research.

Chapter One

The Arab Satellite Broadcastings and Arab Civil Society

1.1 Introduction

The Arab world is undergoing an accelerating development in the political, social, economic and technological makeup of many countries that comprise it. These developmental changes are having extensive effects on the Arab people, Arab culture, and Arab regimes; in fact, some of these regimes have recently attempted to engage in a process of modernizing, liberalizing and democratizing many sectors of public life including the media. One of the clear manifestations of the ongoing developmental changes in some Arab countries is the emergence and growth of many innovative satellite TV channels such as Al-Arabiya, Abu-Dhabi and Al-Jazeera. These transnational news networks have made tremendous inroads in the Western dominated flow of news, allowing the Arabs to have an effective globalization tool to inform the world about their pressing issues and emerging problems. In so saying, they played an important role in activating and empowering civil society in many Arab countries. Al-Hail (2000) argues that "the relationship between civil society and satellite broadcasting in the Arab world is becoming clearer and more significant owing to two simultaneous and related developments." (p. 4). First, he emphasizes the growing importance of satellite broadcasting in the region; second, he highlights the fact that Arabs are becoming more aware of civil society issues.

This chapter commences with providing a brief overview about the mainstream TV channels in the Arab world followed by a short discussion on the rise of the ground-breaking Arab satellite channels which revolutionized the media sector in the region; in so doing, I will focus on Al-Jazeera as the most controversial satellite network among the emerging ones. The chapter finishes with a discussion of the growth of civil society in the Arab world and the challenges that encounter its development. The second chapter investigates the role of Al-Jazeera in lessening these challenges resulting in empowering Arab civil society.

1.2 The Mainstream Arab TV Channels

The role of Arab media in general and Arab TV channels in particular has always been influenced by the national political system in which they operate. Interestingly enough, Arab governments tend to consider a TV station as a symbol of national status rather than a communication tool which can be used to address citizens in an objective and impartial manner in addition to being a platform where issues of political reform can be freely and openly discussed (Dajani, 2005 p. 582). In fact, although few Arab regimes have liberalized parts of their media systems such as the internet and the press in Morocco, Jordan and Egypt, none of the Arab states attempted to open up the TV sector, except for few Gulf countries such as Qatar and UAE (Sakr, 2001). Some scholars (e.g. Price, 2008; Amin, 2008) argue that the advancement of information technology and the exponential increase of transnational satellite channels have made Arab national borders more permeable and amenable to other transnational channels. However, I (along with Selber & Ghanem, 2004) think that the national political systems in the Arab world are still the dominant factor which shapes the structure and behavior of Arab media in general and transnational satellite broadcasting in particular; the newly signed Arab satellite broadcasting charter is a clear example of this dominance.

The Arab League summits have mostly been opportunities to prove and enhance the widespread cliché that 'Arabs agree to disagree'. However, it seems that this cliché fades away when Arab regimes aberrantly and unanimously agree on manipulating laws to ensure that they maintain a strong grip on media in general and satellite broadcasting in particular. On Tuesday February 13, 2008 in Cairo, the Arab League adopted a non-binding document which was entitled "Principles for Organizing Satellite Radio and TV Broadcasting in the Arab Region"; a long title for a relatively short charter. The charter was the brainchild of Egypt and Saudi Arabia;

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it was signed by twenty Arab countries and only Lebanon and Qatar refuted to sign it. Abu-Fadil (2008) stated that this document "eerily parrallels the existing legislation in a number of Arab countries whose fledgeling private broadcasters had hoped to establish a foothold in an otherwise state-controlled media landscape." A landscape where goverments act as gatekeepers and dictate a steady diet of harmless news and talk shows.

The fact that Qatar and Lebanon refused to sign the charter implies that Al-Jazeera and LBC were targeted as they are mainly funded by Qatar's royal family and Pierre Daher, a Christian Lebanese politician and businessman, respectively. Al-Jazeera and LBC are two of many Arab transnational channels which has recently emerged, grown, and revolutionized the media sector in the Arab world due to the relatively larger margin of freedom they enjoy in comparison to the mainstream Arab TV channels. In so saying, they seem to be a more promising alternative to the state-owned TV channels in most Arab states. Unlike most Arab national channels, the newly emerging Arab satellite broadcasters provide a space for political parties, social movements, and civil society institutions to engage in an open and free debate, criticize the Arab authoritarian regimes and uncover corrupt policies of their countries. Clearly, Arab regimes do not only control their national TV channels but they also attempt to do so with the Arab transnational satellite broadcasters to which I shall turn in the following section.

1.3 The Rise and Growth of Arab Satellite Broadcasting

While it is difficult to comprehensively encompass all the factors that have contributed into the emergence of Arab satellite channels, I briefly highlight some of the important ones. Rinnawi (2006) attributes the formation of Arab Satellite Broadcasting, especially news-oriented channels, to a combination of Arab domestic politics and the advancement of technology. The first important factor was the Lebanese domestic politics which is characterized by the presence

of three major sectarian groups each of which is embodied by a charismatic and wealthy leader or a strong party. The articulation of each group's interests necessitated the formation of different media outlets. These are Al-Hariri's *Al-Mustaqbal* channel for Sunni Muslims, Hezbollah's *Al-Manar* for Shiites, and Pierre Daher's LBC for Maronites. Nowadays, these channels are major players in the landscape of Arab satellite broadcasting as their target audience goes beyond the Lebanese to reach a wide range of pan-Arab audience. The second major aspect of Arab politics refers to the tiny and wealthy Gulf regimes which have aimed at putting themselves on the regional political map through establishing critical news networks such as Qatar's Al-Jazeera which I consider a major league channel in minor [Arab] league countries. These two factors were enhanced by the advancement of technology which makes the broadcastings transcend local borders to reach most of Arab households throughout the region.

In addition to Rinnawi's factors which have contributed into the rise of Arab satellite channels and especially news networks, I identify various factors which played an important role in the growth of these innovative outlets. To begin with, the costs of satellite dishes are increasingly decreasing which allowed most Arabs to have access to these channels. Interestingly enough, these dishes mushroom even in such places as Alger's *Kasbahs*, Cairo's slums, the suburbs of Damascus, and the desert's tents of Arab Bedouins. Another important factor is the poor performance of the state-owned media which tend to present one-sided stories resulting in excluding a wide variety of views that are represented by different groups from civil society. This brief overview on the causes that engender Arab satellite channels and the factors that contributed into their growth reveals an important assumption; that is, the emerging Arab satellite channels can play an important role in activating and empowering civil society groups in Arab countries. However, before examining the validity of this assumption through conducting a

content analysis of Al-Jazeera's website and a thorough investigation of the participatory nature of its programs, I shall provide another overview on civil society organizations in the Arab world and the challenges they are encountering. This way, the chapter will have provided a helpful background on the mainstream national TV channels in the Arab world, the emerging transnational Arab satellite channels and Arab civil society. These backgrounds provide a basis for examining the role of Al-Jazeera in empowering Arab civil society taking into consideration the failure of the mainstream TV channels to perform this function due to the states' control and censorship.

1.4 Civil Society in the Arab World: Definition, Development and Challenges

To begin with, it is important to point out that there is no consensus among contemporary scholars on what constitutes civil society, what it is and what it is not, and what components should be included and which ones should be excluded from the definition. However, most of the scholars (Kaldor, M. 2003; Dahlgren, P. 2008) agree that civil society includes a wide range of formal and informal groups such as associations, syndicates, federations, clubs, unions, guilds, and social movements that are autonomous from the state and bound by legal order or a set of shared rules. Diamond (1997) states that these groups usually include citizens acting collectively in a public sphere to express their interests, exchange information, make demands on the state and hold state officials accountable. Furthermore, I think that the concept of civil society suggests an important value of civility which implies pluralism and tolerance. The question is to what extent the above characteristics of civil society, which are mainly Western-oriented, comply with the Arab context.

The concept of "civil society" in the Arab world seems to suggest a different notion from the one conventionally used in the West (Karajah, 2007). First, while the chief building blocks of the modern Western society lie in encouraging individuals' initiatives and their effective roles as citizens, the contemporary history of the Arab world reveals a focus on leaders and states where enhancing the status of the regime is favored over encouraging individual initiatives and contributions in the political life and the public sphere. This explains the fact that most of civil society groups in the Arab world are charitable organizations whose main aim is to provide material help to the less privileged among the Arab populace. Additionally, many of these civil society organizations are related to the state and they might even be considered as "semi-governmental" institutions as Al-Halfi (2007) pointed out. Generally, the concept of civil society in the Arab world entails different definition from the one that exists in the West; this is due to the environment where it operates which is characterized by low rate of activism and volunteerism as well as the lack of autonomy which is a product of the state dominance. In any rate, this overview cannot be generalized to include all Arab states as there is a considerable variance among them in terms of the extent to which civil society institutions have evolved.

Al-Sayyid (1995) categorizes Arab states into three groups based on the extent to which freedom of associations is respected and upheld. The *first* group includes countries that allow a reasonable margin of freedom of association in which political parties are authorized and the establishment of professional associations is permitted. These are the countries which have chosen to get on the train of political liberalization such as Mauritania, Tunisia, Morocco, Jordan, Algeria between 1988 and 1991, Yemen, and Kuwait. In fact, I think that Kuwait is a debatable case because political parties have only recently been legally authorized although there are various civil society institutions which have explicitly criticized the government's policies.

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The *second* group is characterized by the existence of a variety of civil society associations, but they are heavily controlled and restricted by the presence of a dominant or single party. This group includes the Arab countries that used to be- or still- deemed as radical such as Libya, Syria, Iraq and Sudan. *Third*, there are the countries where freedom of association is not witnessed whether for political parties, professional associations, or trade unions. This is the case of most Gulf countries, except few liberal ones such as Qatar, Kuwait and UAE. Based on Al-Sayyid's classification, I identify three types of relationships between Arab civil society and Arab political systems. The first type reveals an embryonic civil society with a relatively friendly relationship with the political systems within which they operate. The second type discloses a relationship of suppression from the part of political regimes; the third type divulges a non-existence of any relationship owing to the non-presence of civil society institutions. The type of relationship between civil society and political systems does also suggest that there is a correlation between political liberalization and the emergence as well as the growth of civil society. In other words, there is a mutual enhancement between the process of democratization and the development of a strong civil society in which each one contribute into stimulating and developing the other.

Despite the difference in the level of developing a strong civil society between Arab states, Ibrahim (2008) has generally considered this development a promising one and identifies many factors that have contributed, and will contribute, into the emergence and growth of Arab civil society. I categorized these factors into internal and regional. First, the internal factors include the increasing establishment of new socio-economic entities such as trade unions, professional associations and social movements; the autocratic regimes could not cope with and suppress these steadily growing organizations. The regional factors refer to the prolonged

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regional armed conflicts which have drained states' resources and weakened their power. These factors have pushed the agenda of civil society forward in many countries, but the progress remains sluggish. In so saying, it is important to emphasize the fact that that the Arab experience of civil society is relatively new and it goes without saying that new experiences often encounter numerous challenges.

The first and foremost challenge which encounters civil society in the Arab world is the inability of its components to communicate their ideas and put their messages across. This is mainly owing to the state's control of the media, especially the TV sector. This control goes beyond the national level to include collective legal measures which attempt to prevent Arab transnational broadcasting to reach Arabs. The previously mentioned "Principles for Organizing Satellite Radio and TV Broadcasting in the Arab Region" is a clear example of these measures. Lacking a communication platform by which and through which civil society can address Arab constituencies remains the key challenge that hinder the development of the sector. Without such a communication tool, civil society can not uncover the oppressive practices of Arab regimes against human rights orgnizations; additionally, they cannot effectively raise peoples' awareness on certain pressing issues of direct concern to Arabs. In short, without a powerful communication tool, civil society in the Arab world can hardly fulfil the aforementioned functions and, therefore, it is difficult to talk about empowering civil society in the Arab world and its potential contribution in democratization.

1.5 Summary

This short chapter discusses three main points. First, the mainstream Arab national TV channels are predominantly state-owned and it is difficult to view them as a free space that encompasses different voices which represent various civil society organizations, Second, the

emerging Arab transnational broadcasting seems to embody a hopeful alternative owing to the relatively margin of freedom they enjoy and their ability to transcend borders to reach a broader Arab audience. Third, there is a fledgling Arab civil society which has emerged in the last decade and stumbles upon many challenges. The second chapter examines the role Al-Jazeera plays in easing these challenges and empowering Arab civil society organizations.

Chapter Two

The Role of Al-Jazeera in Activating and Empowering Civil Society in the Arab world.
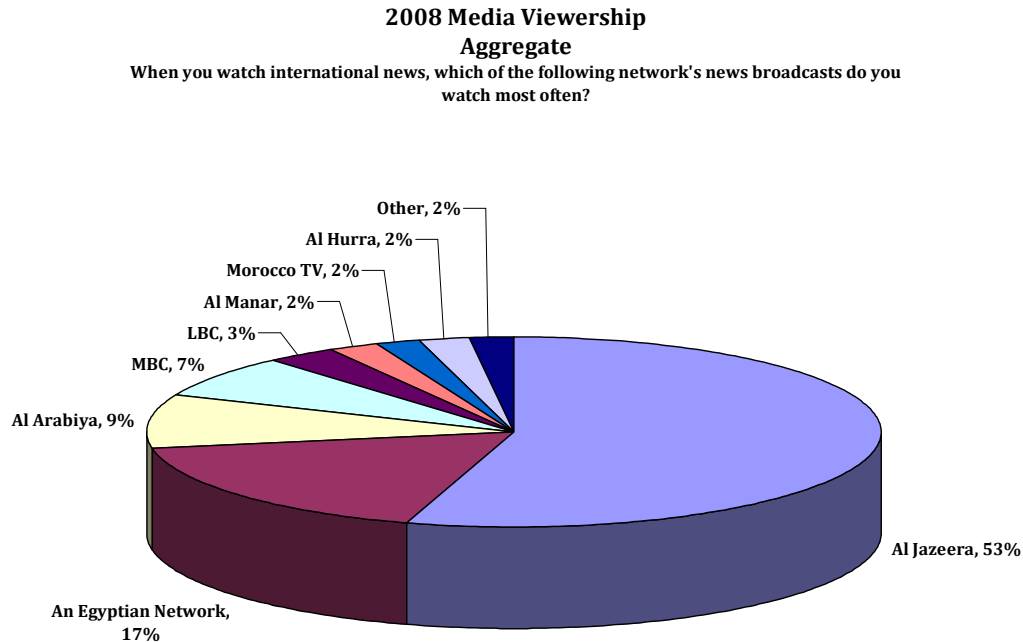
Before venturing into investigating how does Al-Jazeera activate and empower civil society in the Arab world, it is important to justify its choice from a wide range of other Arab transnational broadcasters. First, Al-Jazeera continues to command the largest share of the Arab news market. According to the 2008 annual Arab public opinion poll conducted by the University of Maryland, 53% of Arabs polled identified Al-Jazeera as their first choice for news, Al-Arabiya as the second (9%) and MBC comes third (7%).[4] This large share reveals the overarching reach of Al-Jazeera in the Arab world. Another reason for choosing Al-Jazeera is the relatively large margin of freedom it enjoys in comparison with its counterparts in the region (El-nawawi & Iskander, 2002). This allows the channel to encompass various views on different issues. Last but not least. Al-Jazeera is also the most controversial among the newly emerging Arab satellite broadcasters not only in the Arab world, but also in the West; this was translated into banning and boycotting the channel's broadcasting in many Arab countries the last of which was Morocco after the 2007 Moroccan parliamentary elections. All these reasons make Al-Jazeera a unique case for examining the role of Arab satellite broadcasting in empowering civil society in the Arab world.

Unlike most of the states' owned media in the Arab world, *Al-Jazeera seems to play an important role in empowering civil society organizations, especially those working on issues of freedoms, human rights and political reform*. In so saying, *Al-Jazeera gives a considerable attention to such organizations both in its website and broadcastings in an attempt to make their voice heard and help them to voice out their concerns*. In order to test the accuracy of such a hypothesis, I did a content analysis of www.aljazeera.net and three broadcasts.

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[4] 2008 Annual Arab Public Opinion Poll. Survey of the Anwar Sadat Chair for Peace and Development at the University of Maryland (With Zogby International). Professor Shibley Telhami, Principle Investigator. Survey conducted March 2008 in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE.

2008 Media Viewership
Aggregate
When you watch international news, which of the following network's news broadcasts do you watch most often?

- Other, 2%
- Al Hurra, 2%
- Morocco TV, 2%
- Al Manar, 2%
- LBC, 3%
- MBC, 7%
- Al Arabiya, 9%
- Al Jazeera, 53%
- An Egyptian Network, 17%

2.1 Al-Jazeera's Website

Fig 3. aljazeera.net home page

I did a short content analysis of Al-Jazeera's website (www.aljazeera.net) in Arabic in April 10, 2009. It is important to point out that the date was randomly selected as it coincided with writing this chapter. The purpose of the content analysis was to find out how much attention does Al-Jazeera give to issues pertaining to civil society organizations in the Arab world. The website's menu contains four main sections which are entitled *akhbar* (news), *almaarifa* (knowledge), *iktisad and aamal* (business and economics), and *huriyat and hukuk* (rights and

freedoms). I found around 56 entries/articles in the four sections which cover a wide variety of issues ranging from politics, economics, natural disasters, human rights violations, to name a few. Some of these articles were published on April 10, 2009 and others dated back to a couple of days before. I skimmed over the titles in an attempt to decrease the number of articles and rule out the irrelevant ones based on two main criteria. First, *the article should be related to the Arab world in general or to a particular Arab country*. Therefore, the articles that are related to other countries were ruled out. Second, *the article should deal with issues related to the activities of Arab civil society organizations.*

The above sifting left the analysis with 19 articles most of which are related to rights and freedoms. As far as the geographic division is concerned, these 19 articles cover many countries which include Morocco (1), Egypt (2), Yemen (1), Libya (1), Sudan (1), Tunisia (1), Qatar (1), Palestine (3), Mauritania (1), UAE (1) in addition to six general articles about the Arab world. As far as the subject matter is concerned, the articles mainly covered the activities of the organizations that deal with rights and freedoms. Understanding that analyzing the content of these articles remains beyond the scope of this chapter, I shall provide a brief summary of the issues covered. The most salient issue was freedom of speech and the everlasting battle between Arab governments and journalists' associations which keep struggling to gain more freedom and less governments' censorship. Second, there are the Arab human rights associations which tirelessly denounce human trafficking in Gulf countries which remain a common destination for South and Southeast Asians. These latter serve as domestic workers and unskilled laborers, and they often fall victims to involuntary servitude, excessive working hours and nonpayment of salaries as well as sexual and physical abuse. In addition, there was a reference to the Arab human rights associations' advocacy for improving the situation of detainees in Arab prisons and

guaranteeing fair and transparent trials for political prisoners. Another salient issue was the active Arab businesswomen association which had met in Oman and came up with a set of recommendations for the G-20 summit that took place in London April 2, 2009. This is in addition to other miscellaneous issues such as children's rights and the untiring efforts of Arab organizations to limit child's labor and promote girls' education. *Table 1* below summarizes the titles of these articles.

Table 1. **Al-Jazeera's Website: A Content Analysis of Al-Jazeera's Coverage of Arab Civil Society Organizations.**

Country/Region	Title of the Articles
General to the Arab World	• Who can realize the motto "Children First" • Arab human rights organizations reject deporting 1200 Tunisians from Italy. • The family of a Yemeni prisoner in Afghanistan asks Obama to release him. • Prisons in the Arab World. • The stumbling blocks for establishing freedoms in the Arab region. • Arab Businesswomen Association's recommendations to the G-20 in London.
Palestine	• The Palestinian Center for Human Rights condemns the Israeli arrests in the West Bank. • The situation of human rights in the occupied territories is worsening. • Palestinian journalists protest against censorship.
Egypt	• Egyptian human rights activists and journalists ask Mubarak to stop arresting bloggers. • An urgent plea from Arab human rights associations to Cairo to respect its promises for freedom of press.
Qatar	• A Qatari institution launched a campaign for human dignity against human trafficking.
Sudan	• The battle between Sudan and Arab human rights organizations.
Tunisia	• The Tunisian opposition accuses the government of marginalizing it after banning its newspaper.
Yemen	• A Yemeni human rights organization accuses the Yemeni government for torturing female detainees and sell their children.
Mauritania	• Nouakchott releases a journalist and dis-bans an electronic newspaper.
Morocco	• Human rights movement in Morocco between promises and consensus.
Libya	• The compensation verdicts revealed issues of torture in Libya.
UAE	• Human rights activists criticize the new communication law in UAE.

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The fact that there is a significant attention from the part of Al-Jazeera to covering various activities of Arab civil society organizations would play an important role in empowering them due to the wide reach of Al-Jazeera's website which is the most visited website in the Arab world (approximately 2 million page views a day) and one of the top 200 most visited websites in the world according to Alexa.com.[5] This would ease the main challenge that encounter these organizations; that is, the lack of a communication tool whereby they can voice out their concerns and put across their messages. However, one might argue that despite the wide reach of Al-Jazeera's website, this latter can only be used by the elite or, more correctly, the computer literate, which represent a small part of the Arab populace. For this reason, a more encompassing analysis of Al-Jazeera broadcasts is needed owing to their broader audience reach.

2.2 Al-Jazeera's Broadcasts

In addition to analyzing the content of Al-Jazeera's website, I did a similar analysis of three programs which were broadcasted live in the first and second week of April, 2009 (April 1-12). It is also important to emphasize that this timeframe was randomly selected as it just coincided with writing this chapter. These programs are *Lil-Nissa' Faqat, Al-Ittijah al-Muakiss* and *Hiwar Maftouh.* Since the main purpose of this chapter is to find out how does Al-Jazeera activate and empower Arab civil society organizations, I was mainly interested in the topic, guests, and the issues being discussed in each program rather than engaging in a discourse analysis to examine how the issues were framed. Before summing up the findings, I shall briefly introduce the chosen programs.

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[5] قناة عربية إخبارية تعمل على مدار اليوم. يمكنك مشاهدة بث القناة من خلال الموقع
http://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/aljazeera.net

For the fifth year in a row, *Al-Ittijah al-Muakiss* (the opposite direction) continues its tireless pursuit of daring controversial topics, and remains one of the most popular talk shows and most interactive programs amongst the Arabic-language Satellite Channels. Every Week, Dr. Faisal Al Qassem, a former BBC journalist, moderates a debate between two personalities with opposing views on a particular issue. The other program is entitled *Lil-Nissa' Faqat* (for women only) which is usually presented by Montaha Al-Ramahi and geared particularly towards women. Women from all over the world, especially Arab women are invited to express their points of view about critical social, political, scientific and environmental issues. As it is the case with most of Al-Jazeera's programs, audience input is vital to the show where Arabs and especially women participate directly to the program through phone calls. Last but not least, there *is Hiwar Maftouh* (open dialogue) where Arab decision makers and intellectuals answer questions live from the audience on topics of Arab interests.

2.3 Analysis

2.3.1 Lil-Nissa' Faqat

A picture from the program

Lil-Nissa' Faqat was broadcasted three times during the chosen period of analysis. The first one was on April 3; it was hosted by Fairuz Zayani and the topic revolves around sexual exploitation of children. There were three guests representing three different organizations; namely, Sarour Qarwany, a consultant

for a humanitarian development possibilities; Maha al-Hamssa who is a manager of the program for children's protection in the Jordan office of UNICEF; and Iza Karim, professor of education

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at the national center for social and criminal research. The discussion included examples of children's sexual exploitation in Morocco, the social and psychological effects of sexual exploitation on children, and the protective solutions against sexual harassment. The second episode was on April 7 and it was hosted by Louna ash-Shebl. The program received three female activists from different backgrounds. Azat al-Hur Marwa who is the general coordinator for the Lebanese national project to eliminate discrimination against women; Moha Aby Diya Shimass, the head of the woman's center for the direction of constitution in Cairo; Aliya al-Karady who is an Iraqi researcher for gender and women's affairs. The guests discussed women's civil society organizations in the Arab world and the external agendas as well as sexual freedom in relation to Arab women's enablement. The third episode was in April 10 and it was hosted by Louna Ashebl who chose the culture of voluntary work in the Arab women's charitable organizations as the topic of discussion. They discussed the lack of a culture of volunteerism in the Arab world, which remains the building block of the concept of civil society. Discussing such a topic in Al-Jazeera shall raise Arabs' awareness of the importance of voluntary work in a social and political life of any society. The studio was peopled by three female guests. Amany Qandyl who is the executive director of the Arab Network for Arab national organizations; Iqabal Doghan, the former president of the Lebanese Women's Council; and Mana Shishtar, an activist in the domain of voluntary work. The three guests discussed many aspects of voluntary work including the role of Arab women in the underdeveloped areas, the performance of Arab charitable organizations, and the customs and traditions that controls women's participation in a voluntary work. The findings are summarized in *Table 2* below.

Table 2.: Lil-Nissa' Faqat: **A Content Analysis of the Program's Discussed topics and Received Guests**

Date	Host	Topic of Discussion	Guests		Point of Discussion
			Name	**Position/Organization**	
Apr 3, 09	Fairuz Zayani	Sexual exploitation of Children,	Sarour Qarwany	consultant for a humanitarian development possibilities	- Examples of children's sexual exploitation in Morocco. - Sexual exploitation of children and the lack of statistics. - Psychological effects of sexual attacks on children. - Social effects of children's sexual exploitation. - Ways to identify molested children. - Protected methods against sexual harassment.
			Maha al-Hamssa	is a manager of the program for children's protection in the Jordan office of UNICEF.	
			Iza Karim	, professor of education in the national center for social and criminal research	
Apr 7, 09	Louna ash-Shebl	The New York Conference and Women's rights	Azat al-Hur Marwa	general coordinator for the Lebanese national project to eliminate discrimination against women	- Arab civil society organization and the external agendas. - Ignoring cultural differences in Beijing's agreement on women's rights. - true sexual freedom and women's enablement.
			Moha Aby Diya Shimass	head of the woman's center for the direction of constitution in Cairo	
			Aliya al-Karady	Iraqi researcher for gender and women's affairs	
Apr10	Louna ash-Shebl	the culture of voluntary work in the Arab women's charitable organizations	Amany Qandyl	executive director of the Arab Network for Arab national organizations.	- the role of the Arab women in less privileged areas. - evaluation of the performance of Arab charitable organizations. - women's role in the work of charitable organizations. - traditions and customs that hinds women's work as volunteers.
			Iqabal Doghan	the former president of the Lebanese Women's Council	
			Mana Shishtar	activist the domain of voluntary work	

2.3.2 Al-Ittijah al-Muakiss

Al-Ittijah al-Muakiss was broadcasted twice during the timeframe I selected for the analysis. The first one was on April 1; it was, and has always been, hosted by Dr. Faical Al-Kassim. He hosted two guests to discuss the [Nairobi] peace accord in Sudan. The first was Ghazy Suleiman, the chairman of the

A picture from the program

National Coalition to restore Democracy in Sudan; the second was Hassan Saty, a Sudanese journalist and writer. The two guests debated issues related to religious, cultural, and political pluralism in Sudan and the danger of dividing the country. They also discussed the issue of political participation and the division of wealth between the North and the South of Sudan. The second show was broadcasted in April 7 when Dr. Faical Al-Kassim hosted two guests representing opposing views to examine the issue of police states and the political friction in Lebanon and Syria. The guests were Abd al-Razaq Eid who is the founding member of the committee for reviving civil society in Syria and, on the other side, Karim al-Shybany, the head of the Syrian National Democratic Party. The findings are summed up in *table 3* below.

Table 3. *Al-Ittijah al-Muakiss:* **A Content Analysis of the Program's Discussed topics and Received Guests**

Date	Host	Topic of Discussion	Guests		Point of Discussion
			Name	**Position/Organization**	
Apr 1, 09	Faical Al-Kassim	the [Nairobi] peace accord in Sudan	Ghazy Suleiman	chairman of the National Coalition to restore Democracy in Sudan	- Religious, cultural, and political pluralism and the danger of dividing Sudan. - Dividing the wealth between the North and the South and its problems. - The foreign role behind the peace accord and its implications. - The situation of Sudan during the transitional period.
			Hassan Saty	A Sudanese journalist and writer	
Apr 7, 09	Faical Al-Kassim	of police states and the political friction in Lebanon and Syria	Abd al-Razaq Eid	founding member of the committee for reviving civil society in Syria	- The Syrian internal movement Vs the security core. - the discourse of the opposition against Syria. - the reasons behind the Syrian political rigidity.
			Karim al-Shybany	head of the Syrian National Democratic Party	

2.3.3 Hiwar maftouh

A picture from the program

Hiwar maftouh met twice between April 1 and April 12 and both meetings were moderated by Ghassan Bin Jeddou. The first one was in April 2 when the guests discussed the issue of Arab political reform. The discussion involved two prominent political activists including Burhan Ghalioun, professor of sociology at the university of Paris and director of the Center for Contemporary Oriental Studies, along with Moustafa Al-Faqi, the head of the Egyptian National Assembly's Foreign Affairs Committee. The two activists debated various points including the

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secret behind the silence of Arab audiences, Arabs between reform and change, reform between civil society and authority, and the internal dispute about openness and external intervention. The second episode was broadcasted on April 9 with the same moderator but different topic and guests. The guests included Issam Khalifa, a professor of history in the Lebanese University; Assa'ad Abu-Khalil, professor of political science in the University of California; and Ala Maddy from the foundation of the middle party and the *Kiffayah* movement in Egypt. They all tried to examine the Arab popular movement and the opportunities for change, popular pressure and the external intervention as well as Arab popular movement in the context of global movements. A summary of the findings is in *table 4* below.

Table 4. Hiwar maftouh: **A Content Analysis of the Program's Discussed topics and Received Guests**

Date	Host	Topic of Discussion	Guests		Point of Discussion
			Name	**Position/Organization**	
Apr 2, 09	Ghassan Bin Jeddou	The Arab future and the issue o freeform	Burhan Ghalioun	professor of sociology at the university of Paris and director of the Center for Contemporary Oriental Studies	- The secret behind the silence of the Arab population. - Arabs between reform and change. - Reform between civil society and authority. - the internal dispute about openness and external intervention.
			Moustafa Al-Faqi	the head of the Egyptian National Assembly's Foreign Affairs Committee	
Apr 9, 09	Ghassan Bin Jeddou	The Arab popular movement	Issam Khalifa	a professor of history in the Lebanese University	- Popular pressure and the opportunities for change. - Popular pressure and the external intervention. - Democracy between national and foreign agenda. - Arab popular movements in the context of global movements.
			Assa'ad Abu-Khalil	Professor of political science in the University of California	
			Ala Maddy	foundation of the middle party and the *Kiffayah* movement in Egypt	

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2.4 Discussion

Taking into consideration that the selection of the timeframe when the three programs were broadcasted was not purposive except that they coincided with the period of writing this chapter, the above content analysis reveals a strong attention from the part of Al-Jazeera to civil society organizations in the Arab world. This attention can be effortlessly inferred from the topics chosen by the hosts and the guests who mostly represent civil society organizations. The appearance of such domestic organizations on Al-Jazeera shall doubtlessly empower them, especially if we know that 70% of Arabs who own satellite dishes tune in to Al-Jazeera for news and political information, which also include Arab communities in the US and Europe (Rugh, 2004). This is in addition to its command on the largest share of Arab news market as, approximately, 60% of Arabs mentioned Al-Jazeera as their first choice for news. In so saying, Al-Jazeera plays an important role in removing the major stumbling block that hinders the development of Arab civil society organizations; that is, a popular communication platform whereby they can present themselves to the Arab populace, channel their mission, and put their messages across. Furthermore, the topics discussed and the guests received in these programs reveal a clear focus on issues of political reform and freedoms in the Arab world which indicates the role of such a media outlet in creating a free and open space where issues of democratic transition can be debated freely and openly. In fact, this open and free debate, which is often orchestrated by civil society organizations, is a source of many complaints about Al-Jazeera from the part of Arab governments (Zayani & Sahraoui, 2007). Some of these governments boycotted and banned the channel because of hosting what they referred to as "dissidents" who are, in fact, political activists that represent various Arab civil society organizations. To Illustrate, Vallely (2005) states that "almost all Arab governments boycott Al-Jazeera's advertising," which, he

claims, "about the only thing Arab information ministers can agree on." Despite this boycott and the pressure to sell the station, the Emir of Qatar still subsidizes the channel with approximately 30 million dollars a year.

2.5 Summary

This chapter shows that Al-Jazeera plays an important role in activating and empowering civil society in the Arab world. This is clearly manifested through the considerable attention it gives to the Arab civil society organizations across the region, especially the ones pertaining to human rights and freedoms. This attention can be effortlessly noticed from the number of articles in aljazeera.net that cover the continuous struggle of transnational and domestic Arab civil society organizations to obtain more rights and freedoms. This can also be taken in from the topics being discussed and the guests received in Al-Jazeera's talk shows and other participatory programs such as the ones analyzed in this chapter. All in all, it seems that having a strong Arab media, whose mission is to represent diverse voices, is a prerequisite for a strong Arab civil society whose main challenge remains holding a communication tool through which and by which the messages can be communicated and the objectives can be achieved. The few recently emerging Arab satellite broadcasters seem to fulfill this function but the question is how long Arabs have to wait for a positive and more encompassing reform of their domestic Arab media systems. A domestic media capable of establishing a public sphere where civil society plays a key role and where it can accompany or even lead the democratization process. The third and fourth chapters are about the second contributor in the democratization process; that is, political parities. The third chapter shall examine the decline of political parties in the Arab world and the fourth one discusses Al-Jazeera's ability to compensate for this decline though fulfilling some of the parties' traditional functions.

Chapter Three

The Decline of Political Parties in the Arab World
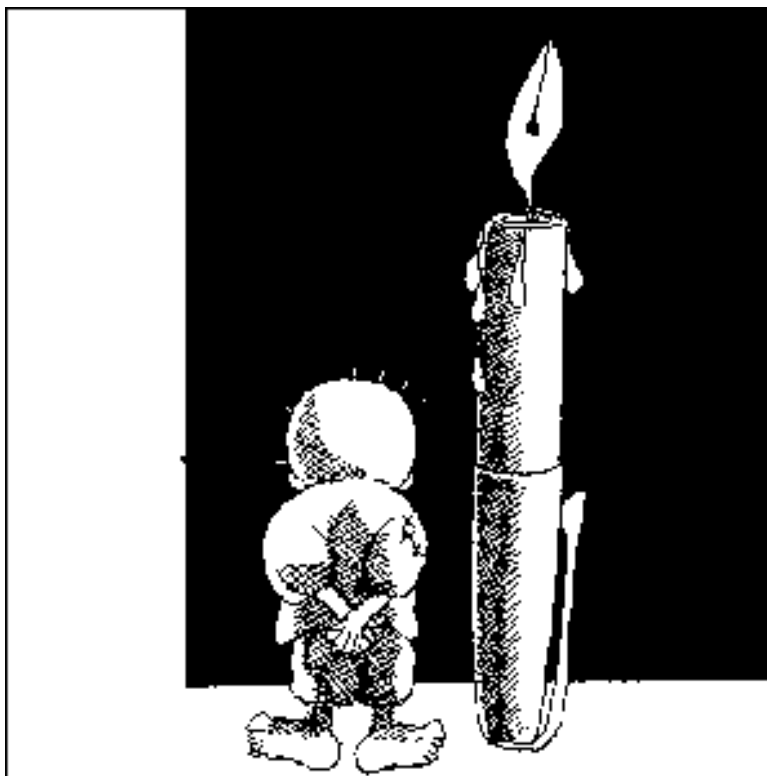
3.1 Introduction

Understanding the decline of political parties in the Arab world necessitates delving into the factors that brought these institutions into existence. The birth of political parties in the Arab world was mainly a product of the colonial era. The Arab elite were influenced by the emerging idea of nationalism which remained widespread in Europe and was imported to their colonies by the Arab elite. The Arab elite found the idea of nationalism a very appealing tool of mobilizing Arabs against the colonizer. This marked the birth of the first political parties in the Arab world, which were secular pan-Arab movements with an ethnic rather than a religious orientation. After gaining independence, many Arab states were, and still, ruled by secular nationalist parties whose values no longer appeal to most Arab constituencies. As a result, Islamic parties blossomed, but remained very limited in their scope of operation, drawing an overall picture of dysfunctional and declining political parties in the region. This is translated into very low electoral participation, diminishing party membership and affiliation, and increasing distrust in political parties.

The first and second chapter dealt with how does Al-Jazeera empower the fledgling Arab civil society and lessen its challenges. *The third chapter discusses the decline of political parties in the Arab world and the basic functions they hardly perform while the fourth chapter examines Al-Jazeera's ability to compensate for this decline through indirectly performing some of these functions.* Chapter three commences with discussing the basic functions of political parties followed by a background on the birth, development and decline of political parties in the Arab world. The decline illustrates the parties' inability to perform most of these functions.

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3.2 The Functions of Political Parties

To begin with, it is important to point out that the decline of political parties does also affect well-established democracies. Diamond & Gunther (2001) pointed out to different factors that have contributed into this decline. They state that "membership in political parties is declining, that parties' ties with allied secondary association are loosening or breaking, that their representation of specific social groups is less consistent, and that public opinion toward parties is waning in commitment and trust." (p. 3). In so saying, Diamond & Gunther suggest that the parties' former functions might be performed or better performed by other organizations such as social movements or interests groups, but not the media.

Diamond & Gunther suggest seven functions of political parties. They argue that although these functions are not exhaustive, they represent a reasonable "common denominator" which can be used to compare parties cross-nationally. The *first* function according to Diamond and Gunther is *candidate nomination* in which each party designates the most qualified representatives through an intraparty election. The *second* function is *electoral mobilization* which involves mobilizing the parties' electoral supporters to endorse the parties' candidates and ease their active participation in the electoral process. The electoral mobilization postulates adopting particular strategies which can either emphasize transient issues or concentrate on more persistent ones which represent a direct concern to some specific social groups. This is referred to as *issue structuring*, which is the *third* function. The *fourth* function involves a process of *societal representation* in which parties embody various social groups and advance particular interests. According to Diamond & Gunther, societal representation is often a win/loss situation in which parties engage in calculations of whether to overtly announce their representation of a particular group or conceal it for fear of losing other votes. *Fifth*, parties are key means of

interests aggregation. The process of interests' aggregation differs from a presidential to a parliamentary system. The former, such as the two-party US system, aggregate interests during the electoral process either through drafting platforms at party conventions or as appeals made to different groups in the midst of a campaign. However, in a parliamentary system characterized by a multi-party system, interests' aggregation is performed after the elections when governing coalitions have to be negotiated and formed. *Forming and sustaining governments* in office is the *sixth* function, which is considered to be an important performance dimension. The seventh and last function is *social integration* in which citizens are encouraged to take part in the political process through making them feel that they have 'vested interests' in its maintenance and success. Diamond & Gunther emphasize the fact that not all parties perform all the functions nor do they perform a particular function equally well.

In addition to Diamond and Gunther's seven functions, which remain common among most experts in political parties, other scholars point to other functions such as *accountability*. Strom, Muller, Bergman & Nyblade (2003) differentiates between parties' internal accountability mechanisms and external constraints which serve as important tools for holding office-holders accountable. The parties' internal accountability mechanisms serve as an "*ex ante* screening device by which politicians with appropriate beliefs, values, and skills can be selected for public service." (p. 651). This is what Diamond & Gunther call *candidate nomination*. On the other hand, the external constraints serve as an *ex post* screening device that hold politicians accountable once they are placed in office. An attempt to provide a detailed account of these external constraints is beyond the scope of this chapter; therefore, I provide examples of such constrains which include opposition political parties, international constraints such as the EU or the UN, corporatism, federalism with two levels of government, presidential powers such as

parliamentary dissolution or cabinet dismissal, courts and judicial review, referendums, central

banks, etc. The authors argue that these external constraints help citizens control their agents

through "protecting rights and liberties, facilitating the provision of public goods, checking the

power of particular agents, dispersing power in general, and enhancing political transparency."

(p. 697). Surprisingly enough, the media was not one of the author's external constraints taking

into consideration the important role it can play in constraining the office-holders by means of

disseminating information and allowing diverse voices to be heard. Chapter four argues that

while Al-Jazeera cannot perform the function of nominating candidates for office through being

an *ex-ante* screening device, it can serve as an important external constraint that holds Arab

office-holders accountable. The question is what does accountability entail and what are its

aspects?

Literally, accountability means being held to account and scrutiny and being required to

provide an account or an explanation. The term has been used by different scholars in different

manners. For example, Sharman (2001) divides the concept of accountability into four aspects.

First, it entails giving an explanation (e.g. from government to parliament) about what is

happening through an annual report that outlines the performance and activity. Second, it

involves providing *further* information beyond the usual account to a selected committee when

needed. Third, it entails reviewing and revising these accounts and information in an attempt to

examine the system's performance and practices, and make the necessary changes. Fourth, it

might involve imposing sanctions if such mechanism exists.

Another way of grasping the notion of accountability is suggested by Staddon (2008). He

distinguishes between 'vertical' and 'horizontal' accountability. The former occurs when the

government is held accountable by citizens through elections while the latter involves

"counterbalancing state institutions which are charged to oversee government- which includes Parliament, an independent judiciary and other constitutional watchdogs, many of which report to the Parliament." (p. 3). In fact, I think that Staddon's horizontal accountability is similar to Strom, Muller, Bergman & Nyblade's external constraints on office-holders. In so saying, chapter four argues that Al-Jazeera can be a watchdog institution and an external constraint on Arab office-holders.

These were the most commonly cited functions of political parties, which I summarize in the following table and which can hardly be performed by political parties in the Arab world as the following section shall demonstrate.

Table 5. The Basic Functions of Political Parties.

Function	Definition
Interests aggregation	Collect interests and preferences and make packages.
Interests articulation	Present the aggregated interests and preferences to the electorate to show their attitudes on issues of the day.
Candidates nomination (elite recruitment)	Each party designates the most qualified representative through intraparty elections.
Electoral mobilization	Mobilize the parties' electoral supporters to endorse the parties' candidates and ease their active participation in the electoral process.
Issue structuring	Adopt strategies which either emphasize transient issues or concentrate on more persistent ones that are of a direct concern to some specific social groups.
Societal Representation	Represent various social groups and advance particular interests: win/loss situation.
Forming and sustaining government	Forming the government, sustaining it and make policies.
Social Integration	Encourage citizens to participate in the political process through making them feel they have 'vested interests' in its maintenance and success.
Accountability	Function as a watchdog institution and an external constraint that hold office-holders accountable for their actions.

3.3 Emergence, Development, and Decline of Political Parties in the Arab World.

The emergence of political parties in the Arab world was one of the effects of the European colonialism in the region, which started in the early twentieth century. Before colonialism, Islam had been the most prominent source of unity between Arab people and territories where the concept of *Ummah,* or Muslim nation, was the most appealing. This is often referred to as 'pan-Islamism.' However, pan-Islamism was confronted by the birth of some new ideas in Europe during and after the colonial era, which include *civil society*, *nation-state*, and *modern state*. These new ideas marked the emergence of the first Arab political parties which found the European idea of nationalism an efficient means to mobilize Arab masses against the colonizer in order to attain independence. To illustrate, parties, such as the *Nasserite Party* of Egypt and the *Baa'th Party* in Syria and Iraq, had advocated for an Arab nation-state whose source of unity is language and ethnicity rather than religion; that is, Arabic and Arab ethnicity instead of Islam. In so doing, they attempted to activate the nationalist feelings of Arab populace to fight the imperial powers all over the Arab world, resulting in creating a common cause among all Arabs. On the other hand, other parties such as *Wafd* in Egypt called for a domestic meaning of 'nation' such as the Egyptian or Syrian nation-state. Clearly, the first Arab political parties emerged as nationalist movements with a different interpretation of the concept of 'nation' which can either include one country, the whole Arab region, or the Muslim *Ummah* that comprises Arabs and non-Arabs. Despite this difference in interpretation, all these movements shared the same goal; that is, to gain independence and liberate the *nation* from the colonizing power.

The mid-twentieth century witnessed the independence of most Arab countries including North African ones. The nationalist movements became secular political parties which gained a significant support from Arab population regardless of their ideological stand. Ottaway (2007) states that "the ideas secular parties stood for, be they independence, social and economic change, development or Arab nationalism, resonated among Arab population and their secularism was not a significant issue." (p. 3). However, she argues that today, the Arab secular parties which have liberal, communist, or socialist ideologies, are witnessing a constant decline owing to several factors. *First*, they no longer have "distinctive ideologies or political programs." For example, the parties which keep 'socialist' as their label embrace market economics and liberal democracy, which might be attributed to an increasingly globalizing world where Arab governments are very much immersed. However, I think it is unethical to claim specific ideologies and adopt totally different ones. In fact, lacking 'distinctive ideologies and political programs' results from the inability to accurately *aggregate* and *articulate* the constituencies' interests as well as *structure the issues* of the day which reflect the particular focus of a particular party. This is because *interests aggregation and articulation and issue structuring* entail, first and foremost, collecting diverse interests and translate them into distinctive programs in an attempt to show attitudes on specific issues of the day and make positions on them. *Second*, most of the secular parties in the Arab world avoid identifying themselves as secular and they keep emphasizing their strong attachment to Islam. This testifies to the fact that these parties no longer perform the function of *societal representation* because, as Diamond & Gunther pointed out, fulfilling this function is a win/loss situation and these parties are afraid of losing the increasingly increasing Arab constituencies with an Islamic orientation.   Furthermore, most of these secular regimes became gradually militarized and corrupted after the independence such as

the National Liberation Front in Algeria, the Free Officers of Egypt, and the Syrian-Iraqi Baa'th Party. Consequently, authoritarianism became an unrelenting phenomenon in the Arab world resulting in hampering the democratic role political parties should play in the political sphere. To illustrate, most of Arab presidents have been ruling for decades without giving freedom of operation to opposition political parties. While there is no political parties in most Gulf countries, opposition parties are either banned such as the Muslim brotherhood in Egypt or restricted such as *Enahda* (renaissance) in Tunisia, the Islamic Salvation Front in Algeria, and the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan. This hinders the opposition's important role in holding the office holders accountable and the function of *accountability* can be hardly fulfilled by political parties. All these factors have contributed into the decline of Arab secular parties and the empowerment of Islamic movements.

The decline of secular political parties in the Arab world has strengthened the Islamic opposition which exerts a powerful influence on social norms throughout the Arab world. In addition to the aforementioned factors which contributed into the secular decline, Hamzawy (2006) adds the fact that "secular parties has lost contact with society" while the Islamic parties "resort to the mosque to strengthen the contact with society, organize popular support and sustain the already existing constituencies." The rise of Islamic parties has been received in two different manners. The first one is characterized by a relatively democratic environment which allowed them to gain power through the ballot box as it is the case in the recently held elections in both Iraq and Palestine. However, the second, and the most common way, is characterized by a combination of repressive measures and election fraud. In so saying, the West, especially the US, is encountering a choice dilemma between supporting the authoritarian regimes led by secular parties, or accepting the democratically elected Islamic governments whose agenda is not always

compatible with US interests in the region. In fact, I consider the US support to most Arab authoritarian regimes another factor that explains the decline of secular parties. This is because there is a great awareness among Arab societies of this support which contributes into detaching them from the ruling secular parties. As a result, the Islamic message gains more credibility due to its denunciation of the Western-imported ideas of secularism and nationalism.

The decline of Arab secular parties and the repressive measures against the rising Islamic ones draw an overall picture of dysfunctional political parties in the Arab world. They are dysfunctional either because they are no longer able to aggregate interests and translate them into political programs, or they are restricted from doing so thanks to the ruling parties' constant attempts to restrict the opposition's domain of operation. This decline and dysfunctionality of political parties in the Arab world have several manifestations as illustrated by the national surveys on the political attitudes in the Arab world conducted by the University of Michigan between 2006 and 2007.[6] First, the electoral participation is increasingly decreasing as the percentage of voters and campaign participators is constantly diminishing. *Fig. 4* illustrates this decline in electoral participation as only 23% of the polled Arabs reported that they voted and campaigned in the last elections. This is considered a very low rate in comparison to an average of 55% in the US, 77% in Western Europe, 54% in Latin America and 60% in Eastern and Central Europe.[7]   Second, *fig. 5* reports that party affiliation remained the least important factor that contributes into deciding whom to support. The same graph indicates that the level of education, issue agreement and religiosity are more important factors in determining voters' decisions. The low rate of electoral participation and the decreasing importance of party

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[6] Tessler, Mark. Political Attitudes in the Arab World: Findings from the First Wave of the Arab Barometer. University of Michigan. Seven Representatives in National Surveys in 2006-2007.
http://www.arabbarometer.org/reports/Oslo%20Workshop.ppt#1
[7] Turnout Over Time: Advances and Retreats in Electoral Participation.
http://www.idea.int/vt/survey/voter_turnout1.cfm

affiliation in determining voters' decisions clearly illustrate the parties' incapacity to perform the functions of *electoral mobilization* and *social integration*. That is, encourage and mobilize the electorate to participate in the political process and endorse the parties' candidates. Third, *fig. 6* discloses that political parties are the least trusted political institution among others such as the prime minister, courts and parliament. To illustrate, only 8% indicated that they very much trust political parties as opposed to 21% who stated that they very much trust the prime minister. Finally, *fig. 7* shows the percentage of electoral participation by trust in political parties. The graph indicates that 40% of those who neither vote nor rally in campaigns expresses a little or no trust in political parties. On the other hand, only 29% of those who neither vote nor rally in campaigns expresses much or very much trust in political parties. In fact, this lack of trust is very much a product of years of corruption in the region.

Fig. 4. **Electoral Participation in the Arab World: Voted in the Most Recent Election and Attended a Campaign Rally**
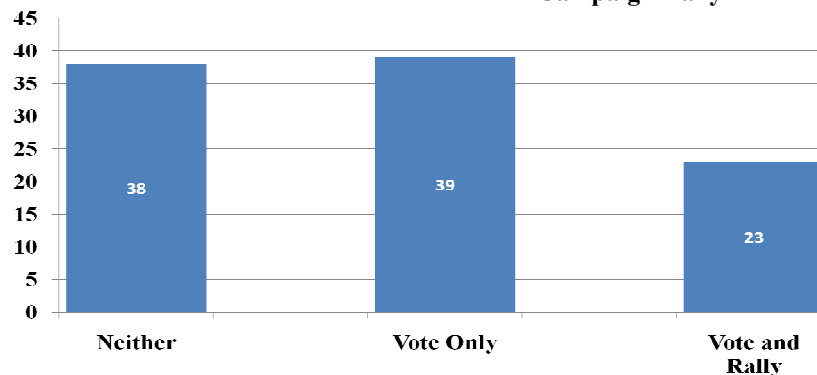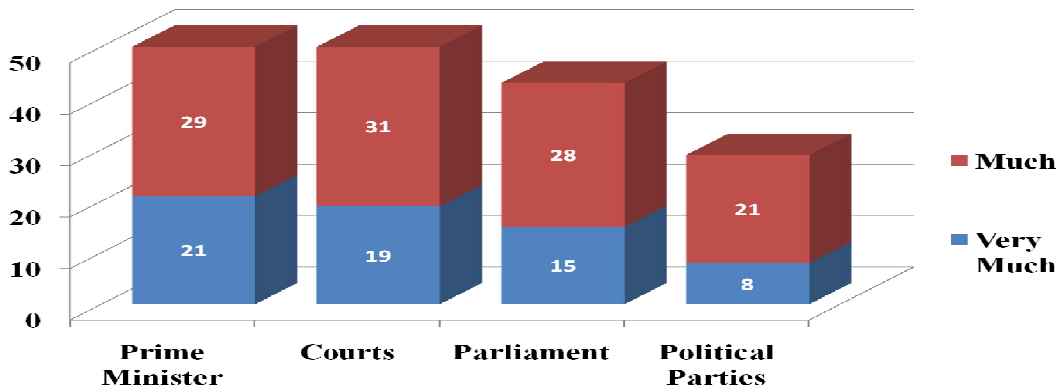
Fig. 5. How Important Would You Consider Each of the Following Factors When Deciding Which Candidate To Support in an
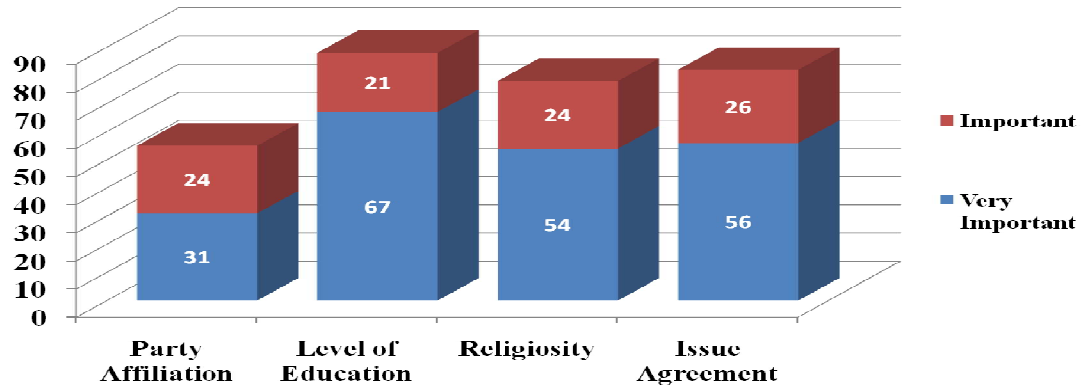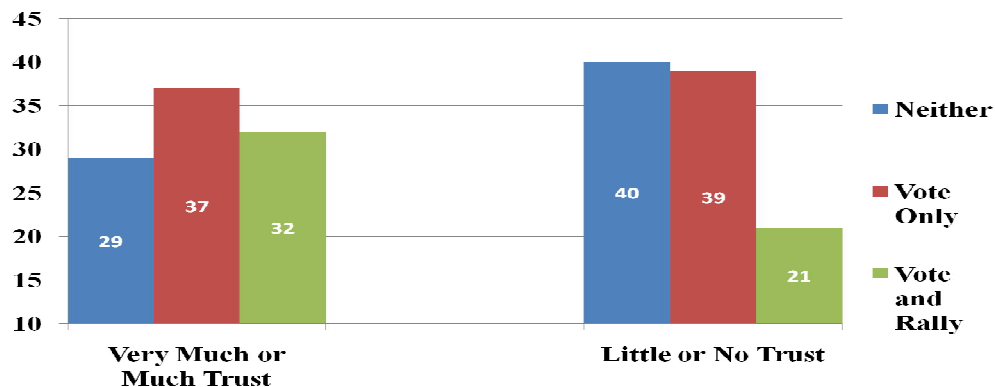

Election

Fig. 6. How Much Trust Do you Have In each of the Following Political Institutions

Fig.7 Electoral Participation by Trust in Political Parties

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All in all, the decline and the dysfunctionality of political parties in the Arab world seem to be a fact in the ground. This can be inferred from the aforementioned literature and the surveys on Arab political attitudes. They reveal that Arab political parties cannot fulfill most of their basic functions, except nominating candidates and forming governments. It goes without saying that every political party or a group of political parties should be able to nominate candidates and form governments. However, it is debatable whether they can *efficiently* and *accurately* perform these two functions. The low rate of electoral participation and political activism reveal that the nominated candidates and the formed governments lack a strong public support.

3.4 Summary

This chapter discussed two main points. First, it highlights some of the traditional functions performed by political parties. Second, it shows the inability of Arab political parties to perform most of these functions resulting in their decline and dysfunctionality. The secular ruling parties, which have been ruling for decades, have lost their ties with their societies and they no longer stand for the values they have always advocated for as nationalist movement during the colonial era. This makes room for an Islamic wave to blossom but its margin of operation remains very restricted by the secular rulers and their chances to govern is low due to fraud in elections and other repressive measures. The dysfunctionality and decline is manifested and translated into a shrinking percentage of electoral participation, an increasingly decreasing number of parties' membership and affiliation, and, more importantly, a perturbing increase in distrust in political parties. Chapter four ventures into examining Al-Jazeera's potential to fill-up this gap and recompense the decline of political parties through indirectly performing some of their functions.

Chapter Four

To What Extent Does Al-Jazeera Perform The Basic Functions of Political Parties?

Al-Jazeera Logo

4.1 Introduction

Writing about Al-Jazeera has become a trend among not only communication and media scholars, but also among other experts from a wide variety of academic disciplines such as sociology, political science, international relations, to name a few. However, a few have ventured into examining Al-Jazeera's aptitude in compensating for the decline of Arab political parties through indirectly performing some of their traditional functions. Chapter three showed that the status of Arab political parties is in a constant decline as they can hardly perform their designated role in their societies. This role entails various functions which include but not limited to aggregating and articulating citizens' interests and preferences, forming governments and making policies, mobilizing citizens to influence the decision making, legitimizing the regime, recruiting elites, and easing the process of accountability. In fact, these functions play a key role in establishing well-functioning democracies whose pillars are efficient political parties, incisive parliamentarian oppositions and a vibrant civil society.

As it was previously pointed out in the theoretical part of the thesis, considering a media outlet as an important actor in the democratization process is not present in mainstream democratic transition theory. This latter emphasizes the role of elites within political parties as well as civil society institutions in leading or escorting the democratic transition. The theory's reluctance to accept media as a key actor in the democratization process was mainly due to the fact that the media is very likely to be controlled by the state or by specific lobbies. However, the theory was mainly written for the national media and did not take into account the recently emerging transnational satellite broadcastings which transcend borders and enjoy a considerable margin of freedom. This chapter examines the role of Al-Jazeera in filling the gap left by the

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decline of Arab political parties through performing some of their functions which were highlighted in the third chapter.

4.2 Interests' Aggregation and Issue Structuring

As it was previously mentioned, interests' aggregation is one of the main functions of political parties; the parties play a key role in collecting peoples' interests and priorities in order to articulate them and translate them into policies. The Arab constituencies' interests and priorities seem to be restricted to some particular issues which remain more salient than others. According to the study conducted by Pintak (2008) on 14 Arab countries, 46% of the polled Arabs indicated *political reform* as the most important issue facing the Arab world where the rule of law and separation of powers should prevail. Political reform was followed by human rights and poverty as the second and third most important issues. *Fig. 8* shows the most important issues facing the Arab world according to the polled Arabs.

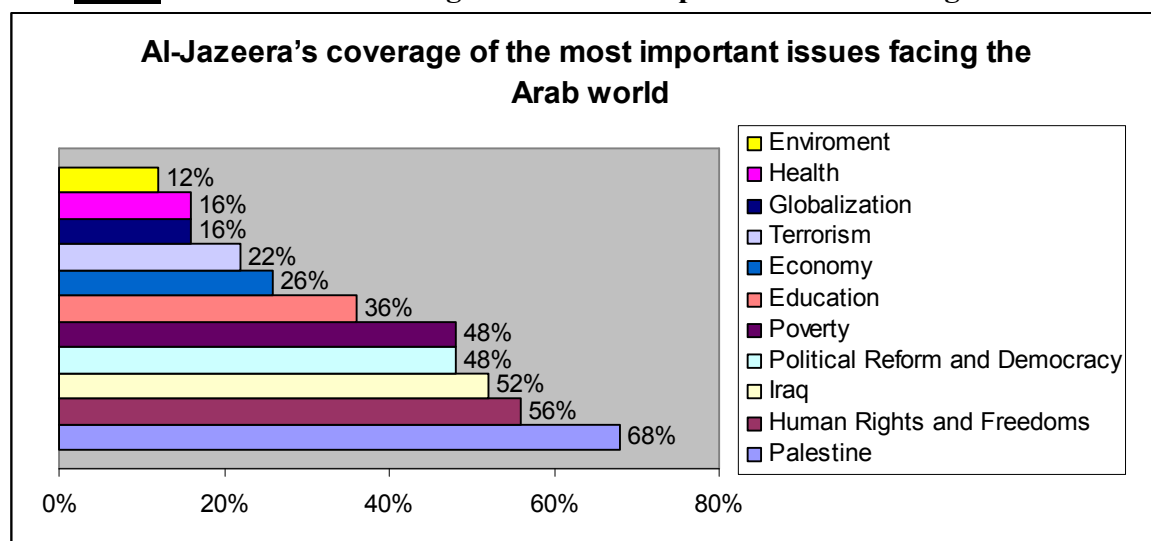*Fig. 8*: **Most Important Issues Facing the Arab World.**

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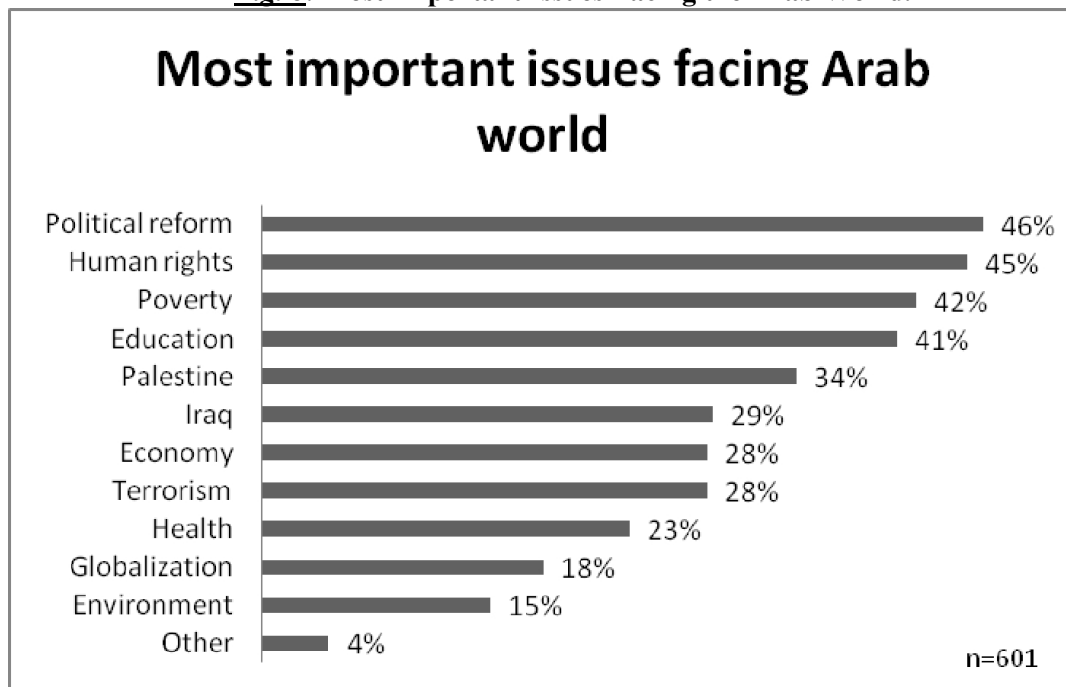
The second chapter clearly shows the attention Al-Jazeera pay to issues of political reform and human rights in the Arab world through covering the struggle of Arab civil society organizations which tirelessly try to push forward the agenda of political reform as well as human rights and freedoms. In order to examine whether Al-Jazeera performs the function of interests' aggregation, I had to find out the most salient issues covered by the channel and compare them to Pintak's study on the most important issues for Arabs in an attempt to ascertain the affinity between the two. In so doing, I conducted a content analysis of Al-Jazeera's Arabic language website, aljazeera.net. I used the advanced internal search engine of the website in order to limit the search to a particular timeframe and a specific issue. First, the advanced search allows the searcher to limit or extend the search to specific timeframes ranging from *anytime*, *last 24 hours*, *last week*, *last month*, and *last year*. I chose the '*last month'* option as a middle-ground choice which is not too short and not too long a period that shall provide the analysis with a good picture of Al-Jazeera's coverage of the most important issues for the Arab world. The *last month* option coincided with the period between April 1 and May 2, 2009. Second, the advanced search also provides three possibilities about finding results according to the words used in the search. These options are: *contains all the words*, *contains this sentence,* and *contains any of these words*. For the sake of consistency, I opted for the first option, *contains all the words,* and used the same wording to search for all issues. For example, 'democracy and political reform in the Arab world', 'human rights in the Arab world', 'education in the Arab world' and so on and so forth. However, I used different words for the topics of Palestine and Iraq as it is usually referred to in the Arab media; namely, the 'Palestinian or Iraqi issue'.

The search yields a total of 1229 results. The results cover the 11 most important issues facing the Arab world according to Pintak's survey which was carried out across 14 Arab

countries. It is important to mention that the search results include Al-Jazeera's coverage of these issues in newscasts, online opinion polls, publications, broadcastings, and online discussion forums. All of these were either related to the Arab world in general or to a particular Arab country. *Figure 9* sums up the results of this analysis and *table 6* provides more details about them with a comparison to Pintak's study, which I shall discuss in the following paragraph.

Fig. 9. **Al-Jazeera's coverage of the most important issues facing the Arab world**

Table. 6. **Al-Jazeera's coverage of the most important issues facing the Arab world: More details and comparison with Pintak's study**

Issues	Number of Results	Percentage %	% x 4	Compare to Pintak's study %	Pintak's issues %
Palestine	209	17		68	34
Human rights & freedoms	172	14		56	45
Iraq	159	13		52	29
Political reform & Democracy.	154	12		48	46
Poverty	143	12		48	42
Education	112	9	**% X 4**	36	41
Economy	79	6.5		26	28
Terrorism	65	5.5		22	28
Globalization	46	4		16	18
Health	45	4		16	23
Environment	36	3		12	15
TOTAL	**1229**	**100%**			

Generally, *table 6* shows the ability of Al-Jazeera to aggregate Arabs' interests through covering their most important issues in an extensive manner. However, the salience of issues being covered slightly differs from Pintak's most important issues for Arabs. In order to compare the two, I multiplied Al-Jazeera's results by four because its N (1229) is about twice Pintak's (601). While the salience of most issues remains approximately around the same percentage in both studies, the most striking findings are those of Iraq and Palestine in which Al-Jazeera's percentage is twice Pintak's for Palestine and almost so for Iraq. To put it differently, the Palestinian issue commands the first position in Al-Jazeera's coverage while it is ranked the fourth most important issue in Pintak's survey. Similarly, Iraq comes as the third most covered issue in Al-Jazeera whereas the same issue is considered the fifth most important in the Arab world according to Pintak's study.

The striking difference between the two findings in terms of Palestine and Iraq can be attributed to two main factors. First, these two issues are the only transnational ones among others. Therefore, since Pintak's survey was conducted across 14 Arab countries, the respondents are more likely to prioritize the national issues. This explains the fact that political reform, human rights, poverty, and economy were slightly more important than Palestine and Iraq in Pintak's survey as *Fig. 8* shows. On the other hand, since Al-Jazeera is a transnational pan-Arab channel, it is more likely to focus on the most pressing Arab issues with a transnational concern such as the Palestinian and Iraqi ones. The second factor is the critical situation in the occupied territories, especially after the rise of a new Israeli government, the continuous conflict between *Hamas* and *Fath,* and the Israeli settlers' frequent clash with the Palestinians. In addition, security in Iraq is worsening, especially after a number of terrorist attacks. Many events of these sort coincided with the randomly selected timeframe for Al-Jazeera's search (April 1 and Mai 2,

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2009), which explains the prominence of Palestine and Iraq in Al-Jazeera's coverage over the Pintak's survey.

The focus on the Palestinian and Iraqi issues is a clear example of ***issue structuring***, Diamond & Gunther's third function of political parties. In other words, Al-Jazeera's emphasis of these long-term issues, which represent a direct concern of all Arabs in spite of their nationalities, reveals its ability to perform this function. All in all, despite the difference between the two analyses in terms of Iraq and Palestine, Al-Jazeera's intensive coverage of the most important issues for the Arab world reveals its ability to aggregate Arab's interests and perform the function of issue structuring through highlighting persistent issues of direct concern to all Arabs.

4.3 Interests' Articulation, Societal Representation, and Passive Electoral mobilization.

Once interests are articulated and issues are structured, parties usually need to articulate these interests and issues. However, the articulation process is very likely to involve a conflict of interests between different social groups. McKay (2005) emphasizes the fact that there must be some conciliation between competing or conflicting interests if the government is to function efficiently. In so saying, he argues that "political parties often help this conciliation process by providing united platforms for the articulation of diverse interests." (p. 81). The question is whether Al-Jazeera provides such a platform where diverse interests are articulated. More importantly, is Al-Jazeera more inclined towards articulating particular interests? *I argue that while Al-Jazeera does allow diverse interests to be voiced out, there is a clear incline towards criticizing many Arab regimes, which can be inferred from the way stories are framed, the angling of interviewers' questions, and the meticulous choice of dramatic sounds and images*

which are usually inserted as breaks between and within the programs or newscasts. In order to examine the accuracy of this assumption, I present a case study of Al-Jazeera's coverage of the 2007 Moroccan Parliamentary Elections Campaign. The purpose of studying this case is twofold: First, to find out how diverse are the voices presented during Al-Jazeera's coverage of the campaign. The second purpose is to inspect Al-Jazeera's inclination towards articulating particular interests and representing specific groups.

4.3.1 Case Study: Al-Jazeera's Coverage of the 2007 Moroccan Parliamentary Elections Campaign

The Campaign's Logo

During the first week of September 2007, Al-Jazeera allocated between 30 and 45 minutes of airtime each day from 10 p.m. GMT to conduct live interviews with voters, political leaders and members of civil society organizations in Morocco. Additionally, the channel broadcasted many stories on some pressing issues in Morocco such as unemployment, poverty, education, and housing which were the common points of emphasis among all political parties. As a matter of fact, Al-Jazeera's week-long coverage received very diverse voices representing the governing and opposing political parties, civil society organizations, and the 'common man'. However, this diversity of voices was accompanied by subjective coverage of some issues and a clear angling of interviewers' questions which I shall illustrate in the following paragraphs.

4.3.1.1 The Angling of Interviewers' Questions

On September 5, 2007, Al-Jazeera received four guests representing three different political parties (Party of Justice and Development, *Istiqlal* (independence) Party, and the Party of Progress and Socialism). In addition, there was a representative of a civil society organization which works on fighting corruption and bribery as well as a Moroccan citizen who was on the phone from the city of Fez. The general topic was to discuss the parties' political programs and their potential policies pertaining to critical issues such as unemployment, housing, education and poverty, to name a few. Abbas Al-Fassi, one of the guests and the head of *Istiqlal* (independence) Party, was the former minister of employment few years ago and he is infamous for his unsuccessful business operation involving an Emirati cruiseship. He was in charge of managing a large employment contract with an Emirati cruiseship to which more than 34000 young Moroccans applied and paid a significant amount of money for medical tests and other miscellaneous fees before the Emiriti company suddenly disappeared leaving thousands of hopeless young Moroccans vying for jobs. Since then, Al-Fassi was under harsh criticism of the independent press. Lehbib Leghribi, the host and one of Al-Jazeera's anchors, could not miss the opportunity of having Al-Fassi without asking him about his party's potential plans to employ two million Moroccans in five years, and remind the Moroccans of his scandal two days before the day of elections. Al-Fassi was shouting in a live broadcast and considered the question a conspiracy of Al-Jazeera against the *Istiqlal* party and himself; he then declared, on the spur of the moment, that the *Istiqlal* party is boycotting Al-Jazeera.[8]

The *Istiqlal* Party came first in the elections and Al-Fassi was appointed the Prime Minister on September 19, 2007. However, the 30% turnout in the 2007 elections showed that Al-Fassi's

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[8] Al JAZEERA, (2007). The Maghreb Bulletin. September 5th, 2007. 10: 25 pm.

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government received a very weak public support. Clearly, the first part of this case study shows that although Al-Jazeera provided a platform where different interests (parties, civil society, citizens) are articulated, the interviewers' angling of questions implies Al-Jazeera's inclination towards criticizing Arab office holders. This incident resulted in an open battle between the Moroccan government, led by Al-Fassi, and Al-Jazeera. The battle which started after the elections and culminated in banning Al-Jazeera from Morocco after its coverage of *Sidi Ifni* riots, another case study which I shall present while discussing Al-Jazeera's role in holding Arab office-holders accountable.

4.3.1.2 Al-Jazeera Framing of Issues

I conducted a brief discourse analysis of two randomly selected stories in Arabic, which occurred during Al-Jazeera's week-long coverage of the campaign. The two stories covered two critical issues which were very salient in the campaigns of all political parties; namely, the increasing rate of unemployment and the problem of housing in Morocco. Each story lasted for about 3 minutes and was accompanied by saddening sounds and touching images. The first one was about a young man who holds a PhD in sociology and has been hopelessly looking for a job; the second story was about a family of six members who live in a ghetto without electricity and drinkable water.[9] After watching each video four times, I noticed an apparent focus on using the words 'government', 'system', 'regime', 'corruption' in covering these stories. The meticulous choice of such words and their frequent use in framing these stories shows Al-Jazeera's clear attempt to put the blame on, first and foremost, the government for the unemployed young men and the miserable housing conditions of the covered family.

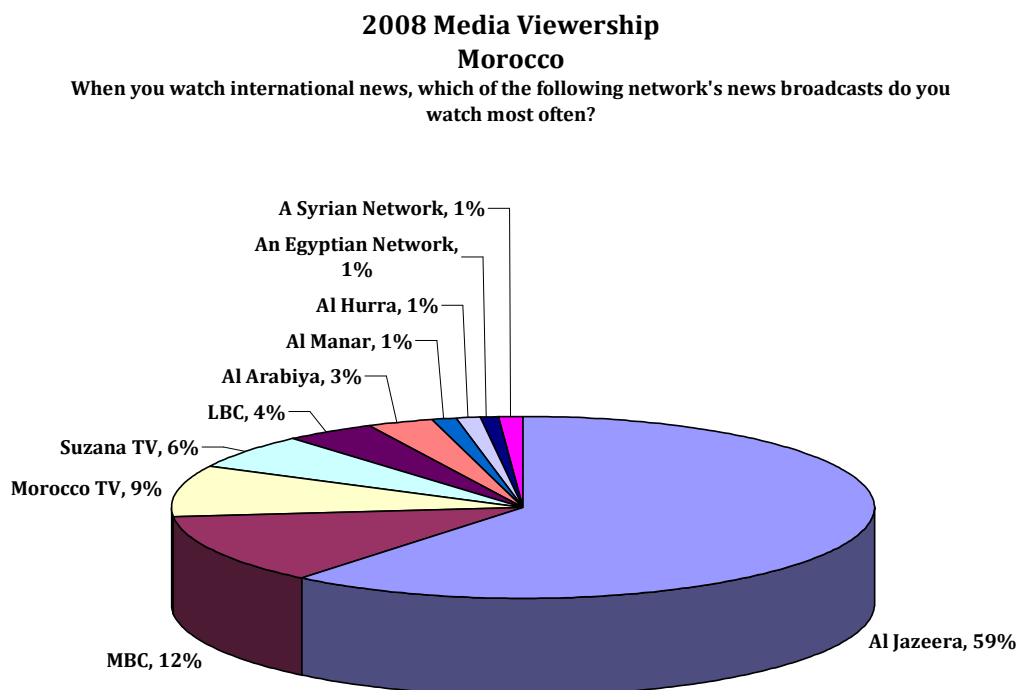[9] The videos are available on Al-Jazeera's website in the following links
http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/C80F9989-0191-4AED-B180-8B20E1690105.htm
http://www.aljazeera.net/Channel/aspx/ReportsNewsPopup.aspx?PostingGUID={23B79587-1F9D-4084-A40F-DA2D845B9EEA}

Although it allows diverse interests to be articulated, Al-Jazeera's thematic coverage of the campaign conveyed a message of distrust towards the Moroccan political system and clearly represents the interests of the underprivileged segments of society such as the unemployed and the poor. The message of distrust in the Moroccan system conveyed by Al-Jazeera through its coverage of the campaign combined with the wide reach of Al-Jazeera in Morocco might explain the low turnout (30% which was the lowest in the contemporary Moroccan history) in the elections. In other words, this may suggest Al-Jazeera's performance of *electoral mobilization* in a passive manner in the sense that it encouraged the Moroccan electorate *not* to take part in the elections through communicating a message of distrust in the system. Al-Jazeera's message of distrust enhances the already declining trust in political parties as it was shown in the third chapter. However, claiming a direct relationship between Al-Jazeera's coverage of the campaign and the low turnout necessitates further empirical evidence.

In sum, Al-Jazeera does allow diverse interests to be articulated. For example, it was the first Arab channel to receive Israeli officers in its programs and it is often accused of being the mouthpiece of Al-Qaeda because it allows their opinion to be put across. (Miles 2005, p. 335). This is in addition to receiving representatives of the governing regimes, opposing political parties with a special attention to Arab civil society organizations. However, Al-Jazeera's societal representation is revealed through its harsh criticism of most Arab regimes and its focus on presenting the underprivileged groups of Arab societies as the case study revealed. This can be inferred from the journalists' angling of questions, the use of influential sounds and tragic images as well as subjective framing of various issues. This latter can be deduced from the meticulous choice of words that focus on Arab regimes as the main responsible for the problems that challenge Arab constituencies. Furthermore, the societal representation, as Diamond &

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Gunther (2001, p. 8) pointed out, is usually a win/loss situation. The Moroccan case study reveals Al-Jazeera's representation of the underprivileged segments of Arab societies. This representation gains the appeal of 53% of Arabs and 59% of Moroccans who indicate Al-Jazeera as their first choice for news. However, Al-Jazeera loses the support of most Arab regimes which boycott and ban the channel because of its thematic coverage and harsh criticism as it was shown by the above case and other cases which remain beyond including in this limited space. Finally, in addition to performing the functions of interests' articulation and societal representation, the 2007 Moroccan parliamentary elections campaign suggests Al-Jazeera's potential to mobilize the Arab electorate not to take part in the electoral process through communicating a message of distrust in the system. However, a further empirical study shall be conducted to examine the direct relationship between the low turn-out in the elections and Al-Jazeera's coverage of the campaign.

2008 Media Viewership
Morocco
When you watch international news, which of the following network's news broadcasts do you watch most often?

A Syrian Network, 1%
An Egyptian Network, 1%
Al Hurra, 1%
Al Manar, 1%
Al Arabiya, 3%
LBC, 4%
Suzana TV, 6%
Morocco TV, 9%
MBC, 12%
Al Jazeera, 59%

4.4 Social integration, candidate nomination, and forming & sustaining governments vs. "Al-Jazeera Effect"

These functions are the ones that cannot be performed by Al-Jazeera. It goes without saying that a media outlet is far from nominating candidates for elections or forming and sustaining governments. However, it is debatable whether Al-Jazeera can contribute into the social integration of citizens; the social integration which involves encouraging citizens to participate in the political process through making them feel that they have 'vested interests' in upholding its success. Although it cannot directly perform these functions, Al-Jazeera's ability to set the agenda for Arab governments and people is well researched. Similar to "the CNN Effect", the so-called "Al-Jazeera Effect" is well documented among many scholars (Ayish 2002; Lynch 2007; Pintak 2006, 2008; Sakr 2001, 2007; Telhami 2002; Zayani & Sahraoui 2007). It is worth noting that the CNN Effect is a theory in political science and media studies which postulates the CNN's impact on government's foreign policies and public opinion where the CNN's coverage of certain issues affects the political consciousness of the American government and people as it was the case with the US involvement in Somalia as well as the Gulf War (Livingston, 1997). Some scholars found similar effects with Al-Jazeera on Arab governments and people. For instance, using cross-national survey data collected in 2005 from six Arab countries, Nisbet's study (2007) finds a positive correlation between the pro-reform agenda of Al-Jazeera and its audiences' attitudes towards issues of political and social change. In other words, the analysis finds out that the higher is the exposure to Al-Jazeera, the greater importance is placed on advancing democracy as well as assuring the maintenance of civil and political liberties. Nibset's study illustrates Al-Jazeera's democratic agenda and its ability to affect Arab public opinion, especially on issues related to democracy as well as political and civil liberties. Having access to the internet was also found to exert the same effect. In contrast, the same analysis found that Al-

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Arabiya, a Saudi-owned transnational channel known for enhancing the regional status-quo, is associated with less importance being placed on issues of democracy and political/civil freedoms.

In addition to having an impact on Arab public opinion, 'Al-Jazeera effect' also affects Arab governments. The effect is manifested through the Arab governments' reactions to the channel's coverage of various Arab issues. Yosri Fouda, one of the leading Arab investigative journalists, argues that the reactions of Arab governments to Al-Jazeera went through three phases.[10] The first phase came as an utter shock for more Arab regimes which have tried to politically interfere with Qatar by withdrawing or threatening to withdraw their ambassadors from Doha in an attempt to convince the Emir of Qatar to wise up. When that did not work, Fouda states, 'the governments went into phase two, which was smear campaigns in their own media, while arresting and hassling Al-Jazeera's journalists and closing down their bureaus around the world.' When this did not work they went to a third phase which is, as Fouda puts it "since we cannot bear them, why don't we try to not exactly join them, but persuade our people with something like Al-Jazeera." The fact that Al-Jazeera still commands the largest news share in the Arab world suggests that Al-Jazeera-like networks created by other Arab governments do not have similar effects. In so saying, I suggest a fourth phase which I previously pointed out to in this work; that is, the 2008 Arab Satellite Broadcasting Charter which was a legal endeavor from Arab governments to silence Al-Jazeera, and which was signed by 22 Arab states and rejected by only Qatar and Lebanon.

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[10] Arab Television News and Al-Jazeera. A Forum organized by the Frontline Club, London. March 2, 2005. The Frontline Forum has been made possible thanks to the generous support of the Open Society Institute. http://stuarthughes.blogspot.com/Al-Jazeera%20edited%20transcript%2028.03.052.doc

To sum up, despite the fact that Al-Jazeera is far from nominating candidates for elections and forming governments or suggesting policies, its effects on Arab public opinion and, to lesser extent, on Arab governments' foreign policies (withdrawing ambassadors from Doha) and domestic ones (establishing Al-Jazeera-like networks) are suggestive evidences of the role it can play in the democratic transition throughout the Arab world through channeling a democratic agenda that affects the Arab public opinion and Arab governments' policies. Do Arab governments' reactions to Al-Jazeera's coverage suggest its ability to perform the function of *accountability* in the Arab world?

4.5 Accountability

Chapter three highlights three important points: First, the key role of political parties in holding office-holders accountable. Second, the inability of Arab political parties to perform this function due to the Arab constituencies' increasing distrust in these institutions. To put it differently, it is difficult to imagine that an increasingly distrusted institution would seek to promote accountability. Third, the definition of accountability entails holding office-holders accountable through what Strom, Muller, Bergman & Nyblade call external constraints and what Staddon refers to as a 'watchdog institution'. I present a case study which illustrate Al-Jazeera's ability to function as an external constraint and a watchdog institution that initiates accountability into Arab politics.

Case Study: *Sidi Ifni* Riots in Morocco

The setting is a harbor town of *Sidi Ifni,* 600 km south of Rabat, the capital of Morocco. The time is June 7, 2008. *Sidi Ifni* was the battleground between a group of unemployed young Moroccans and the Moroccan police. The conflict dated back to May 30, 2008 when an

unspecified number of unemployed protestors against miserable living conditions sieged the port of the city, preventing 89 trucks loaded with 800 tons of fish from leaving. This compelled the police to intervene and arrest some of the demonstrators who reject the police call to disperse and set fire to a vehicle belonging to a civil servant.[11] The Moroccan official report reported no murder and emphasized that the police handled the situation without the use of excessive force resulting in restoring order to the area. In contrast, Al-Jazeera, along with some Moroccan bloggers and human rights organizations, presented a different version backed up by pictures and comments on YouTube, which illustrate ransacked houses, beatings, and rubber bullets being fired irrationally.[12] Additionally, Al-Jazeera reported between 6 and 10 deaths which result from violent police interventions to disperse the demonstrators.

A picture from Al-Jazeera's footage of Sidi Ifni riots which says *"Al-Jazeera Exclusive"*

Being unable to restrain the information in the internet, the Moroccan government started to attack Al-Jazeera, which commands 59% of the Moroccan audience, claiming it diffused the unofficial version of the truth. Following Al-Jazeera's report, the Moroccan government made two actions that illustrate the channel's ability to hold an Arab government to account for their actions. First, Al-Jazeera's coverage of the *Sidi Ifni* incidents and its overarching reach in the Arab world obliged the Moroccan government to move from Sharman's first phase of accountability, which involves

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[11] Maghreb Arab Presse (MAO. http://www.map.ma/eng/sections/box1/aljazeera_s_rabat_bu/view June 13, 2008.
[12] Riots in Morocco: Official Sources Vs. YouTube.
http://observers.france24.com/en/content/20080612-riots-sidi-ifni-morocco-official-youtube-crackdown-violence
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UzUeqieegbo

providing an explanation, to the second phase which requires giving further information. Khalid Naciri, the Moroccan minister of communication and the government spokesperson, made a detailed *account* of the *Sidi Ifni* incidents claiming that Al-Jazeera's coverage was 'inappropriate', 'superficial', 'absurd', 'false' and pointed out that "Morocco is firmly attached to human rights and democracy, but this does not mean that we will allow anarchy to take over."[13] The second action resonates with Sharman's third phase of accountability which entails reviewing and revising the information provided by the government. This phase involved forming a fact-finding commission which interviewed approximately 200 witnesses during a six-week period. The findings came out on December 17, 2008 and were reviewed by the Moroccan legislators in a plenary session on December 24. The commission's members rejected the claims of murder and rape of civilians by the police, stating that there is no conclusive evidence to support such allegations. However, they reported that the security personnel did resort to violence and insults against men and women during the arrests. In addition, the commission received statements from four women who claimed they were stripped of their clothing while in police custody.[14]

To conclude, the main purpose of this case study is not to find the *truth* of what happened in *Sidi Ifni* nor does attempt to discover whose version of the story is right and whose version is wrong; rather, the main purpose is to show the ability of Al-Jazeera to hold office-holders accountable for their actions. In fact, there are plenty of such cases from all over the Arab world. It is important to mention that Al-Jazeera's coverage of Sidi Ifni riots was not exclusive to the channel as there were other Arab and international media outlets that provide similar reports.

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[13] Rabat, June 10, 2008. Al-Jazeera must apologize for 'inappropriate' coverage of sidi ifni riots. http://www.maroc.ma/NR/exeres/C058ABE4-9F07-44F6-ADED-5B7D137B4610.htm
[14] Controversy surrounds official Moroccan report on Sidi Ifni riots. December 23, 2008, http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2008/12/23/feature-01

However, the Moroccan government reacts solely to Al-Jazeera's coverage. In fact, the government's explanation and the further information as well as the fact-finding commission were all measures to denounce Al-Jazeera's report taking into consideration that Moroccans come first in terms of watching the channel in the Arab world.[15] Al-Jazeera's efforts to promote accountability resulted in putting its bureau chief in Morocco, Hassan Rachidi, on trial after being sued by the Moroccan government. Rachidi was fined 6500 dollars on charges of providing false information on alleged murders in the riots.[16] The Moroccan information ministry withdrew Rachidi's accreditations after the trial and suspended Al-Jazeera's live broadcast of a daily bulletin from Morocco for "legal and technical reasons" claiming that "there is no need to give this decision a political dimension," said Mr. Naciri, the Moroccan minister of information and the government's spokesperson, and emphasizing that the channel "was welcomed by the kingdom as a part of Morocco's democratic openness."[17]

4.6 Summary

This chapter shows Al-Jazeera's ability to compensate for the decline of political parties in the Arab world through indirectly performing some of their functions. The most important issues for Arabs are well aggregated by Al-Jazeera. The performance of the *interests aggregation* function is inferred from Al-Jazeera's intensive coverage of the most important issues for Arabs with a slightly different degree of salience between the issues covered by the channel and the issues reported by Arabs. For example, Palestine came as the most important issue in Al-Jazeera's findings while it is the fifth important for Arabs. This is explained by Al-Jazeera's

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[15] Allied Media Corps. Al-Jazeera TV Viewer Demographic: Who Watches Al-Jazeera. Audience Facts. http://www.allied-media.com/aljazeera/JAZdemog.html

[16] Trial Set in Moroccan Al-Jazeera-Sidi Ifni Misinformation Case. http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2008/06/22/feature-01

[17] Al-Jazeera 'Must' Apologize for 'Inappropriate' Coverage of Sidi Ifni Riots. Rabat, June 10- 2008. http://www.maroc.ma/NR/exeres/C058ABE4-9F07-44F6-ADED-5B7D137B4610.htm

focus on transnational issues such as the Palestinian one while the domestic surveys are more likely to favor domestic issues. This does not mean Al-Jazeera's desertion of other issues such as human rights and political reform which remain well-covered as well; rather, it is about *issue structuring* in which some long term issues, such as Palestine, is given more attention. Aggregating interests and structuring issues is followed by the process of articulation. Al-Jazeera's coverage of the 2007 Parliamentary Elections campaign reveals the channel's efforts of allowing different interests to be articulated during the campaign. However, Al-Jazeera's emphasis on *articulating and representing the special interests of the underprivileged* can be inferred from *the angling of the interviewers' questions and the way stories were framed*. These latter communicate a message of distrust in the Moroccan government, which could be considered as means of *mobilizing* the Moroccan electorate not to participate in the elections. Furthermore, *Accountability* is another function performed by Al-Jazeera whose coverage of the *Sidi Ifni* riots in Morocco obliges the Moroccan government to provide explanation and further information as well as forming a fact-finding commission to denounce Al-Jazeera's claims of murder. On the other hand, it goes without saying that a media outlet cannot nominate candidates for office, form governments and make policies, or socially integrate the electorate. However, the chapter referred to examples of the well-researched 'Al-Jazeera Effect' in which the channel has a great impact on Arab public opinion and Arab governments' foreign and domestic policies.

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Conclusion

How does Al-Jazeera compensate for the decline of Arab political parties and empower Arab civil society? It was this paper's research question which I attempted to answer throughout four chapters. The main purpose was to examine the channel's potential role in the undergoing democratic transition in the Arab world through compensating for the declining role of Arab political parties via symbolically and indirectly performing some of their traditional functions as well as empowering civil society organizations in the region. As it was previously mentioned, the political parties and civil society institutions play an important role in leading or accompanying the democratic transition. In so doing, this paper also attempted to re-conceptualize the role of media in the democratization process; the media which is rarely considered an important player in democracies, especially by mainstream democratic transition theorists.

The first chapter discussed three major points. First, the mainstream national TV channels in the Arab world remain predominantly state-owned which denotes their inability to encompass various voices and provide space for free and constructive debates on political reform. Second, this gap seems to be filled up by some Arab transnational broadcastings owing to the relatively margin of freedom they enjoy, their ability to transcend borders and their overarching reach to a broader Arab audience. Third, the first chapter draws a picture of a fledgling Arab civil society which has emerged in the last decade and still bumps into many challenges; the most important of which is a communication tool through which and by which they can reach as many Arab constituencies as possible in order to communicate their messages and mobilize their targets.

The second chapter showed Al-Jazeera's significant role in easing this main challenge resulting in activating and empowering civil society institutions in the Arab world. This was clearly inferred from the extensive attention it grants Arab civil society organizations across the

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region, especially those which work on human rights and freedoms and advocate for political reform. This attention was effortlessly detected from the number of articles in aljazeera.net which cover the continuous struggle of transnational and domestic Arab civil society organizations to obtain more rights and freedoms and push forward the agenda of political reform. Additionally, this attention was also explicit in the topics being discussed and the guests received in Al-Jazeera's talk shows and other participatory programs such as the ones analyzed in this paper. Chapter two concludes that having a strong Arab media, whose mission is to represent diverse voices, is a prerequisite for a strong Arab civil society whose main challenge remains holding a powerful communication tool through which and by which their mission can be channeled and their objectives can be attained. Al-Jazeera does fulfill this function but the question is how long Arabs have to wait for a positive and more encompassing reform of their domestic Arab media systems. A domestic media capable of establishing a public sphere where civil society plays a key role and where it can accompany or even lead the democratization process.

The third chapter discussed two key points. First, it outlined an overall picture of dysfunctional and declining political parties in the Arab world. Second, it highlighted some of the traditional functions performed by political parties in general and of which Arab political parties can hardly perform. The secular ruling parties, which have been governing for decades, have lost the bonds which tied them to their societies because of the values they have always advocated for as nationalist movements during colonialism. This allows an Islamic wave to bloom with a very restricted margin of operation by the secular rulers; therefore, their chances to govern are low thanks to elections fraud and other repressive measures. The dysfunctionality and decline is manifested and translated into a diminishing percentage of electoral participation, an

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increasingly decreasing number of parties' memberships and affiliations, and, more importantly, a worrying boost in distrust in political parties.

Chapter four discussed Al-Jazeera's potential in performing some of the functions of the declining political parties in the Arab region. First, the Arabs' most salient interests and preferences are well *aggregated* by Al-Jazeera. The performance of the *interests aggregation* function was inferred from Al-Jazeera's extensive coverage of the most important issues for Arabs. However, the analysis revealed a slightly different degree of salience between the issues covered by the channel and the Arabs' most important issues. For instance, Palestine came as the most important issue in Al-Jazeera's analysis while it commanded the fifth place in the Arab surveys. This was attributed to Al-Jazeera's clear focus on transnational issues such as the Palestinian one; in contrast, the domestic surveys are more likely to favor domestic issues. In fact, this does not mean that Al-Jazeera abandons other issues such as human rights and political reform, which remain well-covered as well; rather, it is about *issue structuring* in which some long term issues, such as Palestine and Iraq, are granted more attention. Aggregating interests and structuring issues is followed by the process of *articulation*. Al-Jazeera's coverage of the 2007 Parliamentary Elections campaign reveals the channel's efforts of allowing different interests to be articulated during the campaign. However, Al-Jazeera's emphasis on *articulating and representing the special interests of the underprivileged* can be inferred from *the angling of the interviewers' questions and the way stories were framed*. These techniques conversed a message of distrust in the Moroccan government, which could be considered as means of *demobilizing* the Moroccan electorate. Furthermore, *Accountability* is another function performed by Al-Jazeera whose coverage of the *Sidi Ifni* riots in Morocco obliges the Moroccan government to provide explanation and further information as well as forming a fact-finding

commission to denounce Al-Jazeera's claims of murder. Finally, chapter four emphasized the fact that, obviously, Al-Jazeera cannot *nominate candidates* for office, *form governments and make policies*, or *socially integrate the electorate*. However, the chapter referred to examples of the well-researched *'Al-Jazeera Effect'* in which the channel has a great impact on Arab public opinion and Arab governments' foreign and domestic policies.

All in all, *Al-Jazeera does perform many functions of political parties and it does empower civil society organizations in the Arab world.* Therefore, I conclude that the channel has a strong potential in being an important player in the democratic transition throughout the region. However, one might argue that 13 years after the launch of Al-Jazeera, a limited democratic change has been witnessed in the region. Thus, the impact of Al-Jazeera on the Arab audience or Arab governments is not necessarily translated into the process of democratic change. Although this is an important point, it does not mean that Al-Jazeera has no impact on the democratic process in the region as this thesis argued. As a matter of fact, free media is an indispensable piece of the jigsaw. Therefore, a further research should be carried out to disclose the stumbling blocks that transcend Al-Jazeera's impact and hinder the progress of the democratic process. One might venture why do Western powers, especially the US support the Arab authoritarian regimes? Is the US more interested in political stability rather than democracy in the region? What are the different factors that hinder the advance of democracy in the Arab world?

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