Lines in the Sand:

Problematizing Arab Media in the Post-Taxonomic Era

By Adel Iskandar

A practical botanist will distinguish at the first glance the plant of the different quarters of the globe and yet will be at a loss to tell by what marks he detects them.

Carolus Linnaeus (1707-1778)

Introduction: From scientific taxonomy to media typology

The 18th century Swedish botanist and zoologist, Carolus Linnaeus is often credited with being the father of taxonomy in contemporary science. His manuals-turned-encyclopedia of classification, *Systema Naturae,* is still regarded as the most comprehensive attempt at systematically cataloguing living things in nature according to the rules of binomial categorization. Perhaps Linnaeus' greatest legacy though is a categorical and systematic way by which entities, natural or artificial, are grouped depending on properties of commonality or difference (1768). Such a hierarchical classificatory procedure shook then-conventions on inquiry and revolutionized scientific

research. However, at its core, Linnaeus' effort was epistemologically founded upon the immutability of natural characteristics which defined the differences between organisms. In support of this, he is quoted as saying "[t]he invariability of species is the condition for order [in nature]."

Some 250 years later, Linnaeus' approach has not only shaped the natural sciences; it has greatly influenced all methods of inquiry in the humanities and the social sciences, transforming even the study of culture accordingly. Beyond the realm of socio-biology and evolutionary psychology, taxonomy has become central to the way we typologize, theorize, and thereby comprehend all potentially observable phenomena, tangible entities and measurable variables. Even sociologist Emile Durkheim's (1915) folk taxonomies resorted to the classification of socio-cultural institutions, practices and expressions of religion by applying a system originated by Linnaeus. Durkheim's work differed only to the extent that the categorization avoided claims of objectivity and universalism. Nonetheless, Durkheim appeals to a genealogical study of origins à la Linnaeus to comprehend the precursors of modern religious ritualism, e.g. totemism.

If one can momentarily suspend concern for what may seem to be an abrupt disciplinary and temporal leap, it can be argued that methods of typologizing in the realms of naturally-occurring organisms and human-made structures and systems have more similarities than differences. Sociological, cultural, and economic structures have often been conceptualized through metaphors of the corporeal body, their function observed as organic, and their appearance as phenotypic. Criteria for describing

organizations as political economic entities and sites of cultural production and

reproduction, is a result of the pervasive adoption of these classificatory techniques

within the social sciences and humanities that regarded media organizations very much

like organisms. Therefore, it should come as no surprise in the far more contemporary

study of media systems, the principal approach to categorization and speciation furthered

in the natural sciences quickly became a mechanism by which information systems were

grouped. However, bringing the epistemological foundations of systematic classification

to media research has only reproduced in that research the problems faced by other fields.

        Some of the earliest categorizations focused exclusively on the relationship

between the media and the state (read the national political structure) as the prime

determinant of subsequent taxonomic speciation. The most notable and influential of

these is the Siebert-Peterson-Schramm Typology which outlined that the key features of

media systems were determined by the degree of influence exerted by the state which

produced different media "organisms" listed as authoritarian, libertarian, social

responsibility, and Soviet-Communist models. Throughout the duration of the Cold War,

international communication and global media research relied heavily on this typology

which became a benchmark from which most global media systems were identified,

classified, and thereby comprehended. However, more recently, significant shifts in the

political economic structure of global media through corporate monopolization,

significant growth of asymmetrical small-scale broadcasting, more nuanced revisionist

histories of global media, and the increasing influence of once-considered peripheral

broadcasters have produced complex accounts that do not corroborate many of these

typologies and render them questionable. From the Soviet-era *samizdat* (Downing, 2003) to EZLN radio in Chiapas, Mexico (Russell, 2005), and from Al Jazeera in the Arab world (El-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003; Miles, 2005; Zayani, 2005) to RTLM Radio in Rwanda (Kellow & Steeves, 1998), the transformative development of contemporary electronic broadcast media has complicated conventional typologies that offer cogent classification of such institutions under categories of national, private, public, and alternative.

Countless analyses have critiqued these typologies on the basis that they overlook non-Western media modalities. Wells (1997) explains that such typologies generally— and the Siebert-Peterson-Shramm version specifically—ignore neocolonial trends in the form of international commercialism. By focusing primarily on the role and impact of the state as the formative force in international communication, Wells argues that the rise and impact of multinational corporate media monopolies are underreported and unexamined by these typologies. Furthermore, he contends that media typologies are outdated due to their overlooking the extent to which the majority of media institutions within all but a few of the categories they provide have become increasingly driven by the generation of profit over their obligations to the state or the public (Wells, 1997, p. 16). Other inconsistencies in these systems of media classification include their inability to account for the intrinsic diversities within each category (such as alternative and radical media in Soviet/communist states).

Categorizing Arab Media

In the case of Arab media (read Arab *news* media throughout this manuscript), it has perhaps inaccurately been suggested that typologies of press and media were first articulated in the 1970s by Western scholars and observers of the media development in the region. Instead, some of the earliest accounts that offer categorical classifications of press in the region date back to the beginning of the late 1940s with Abdo's (1949) historical analysis of printing and press in Egypt through to Askar's description of the Syrian press (1972) and the rest of the Levant (1982). These and numerous other studies offer extensive assessments of both national and regional presses offering many varied classifications. However, with increased Western media influence in the region since the 1930s and the advent of Radio Bari from Italy, BBC Empire Radio Arabic from London, and the subsequent rise in Radio Monte-Carlo Moyen Orient and the Voice of America, national and academic interest in the state of the Arab press and media rose significantly. For it was upon two primary and overarching premises that these institutions were justified to broadcast in Arabic: first, by extending and serving the national interests in the region of the states for whom they broadcast; and second, to become competitive disseminators of knowledge in an area deemed overwhelmingly deprived of information due to state control. By extension, most descriptions of the Arab press until the mid-1970s in the Western literature reproduced the same premises upon which such Western broadcasts were justified. However, the ascendancy of pan-Arabist discourse in the region through much of the twentieth century shaped the outlook of a cadre of Western academics who privileged regional trends over distinctive features of various Arab press and media environments. Little effort was made to distinguish between various national

press systems and all too often monolithic descriptions of the "Arab media" were

uncritically reproduced.

The first departure from this trend came in the form of historical and descriptive

analyses of individual national media systems. Some of the early writings in English

charting the development of broadcasting in the Arab world were produced by Douglas

A. Boyd on the 1950's Egyptian-based pan-Arab radio behemoth Voice of the Arabs

(Boyd, 1975), the early evolution of Saudi television (Boyd, 1972), and the impact of

video cassette recorders in "Third World countries" including Arab states (Boyd &

Straubhaar, 1985). During this time, much of Boyd's writings were concerned strictly

with the development of mass media on a state-by-state basis and focused primarily on

specific media outfits. In 1983, Boyd combined his observations and research on

broadcast media in the Arab world into a multi-chapter volume that details the media

environment for each Arab country. The cumulative qualities of this manuscript provided

exhaustive contextual observations of media in each nation state. In this way, Boyd's

(1999) volume on Arab broadcasting systems provides specific historical contexts for the

development of mass media in each of the Arab states.

However, in this authoritative manuscript Boyd had fundamentally resisted

developing an overarching typology of the Arab media. Even in the most recent 1999

edition of *Broadcasting in the Arab World: A Survey of Media in the Middle East,* Boyd

again chose not to produce an explicit taxonomy to describe the Arab media. So while

Arab media can be understood to show common characteristics as well as notable

distinctions in Boyd's work, the media systems were not organized into categories.

Instead, he supplemented his detailed historiographical "surveys" of media in most Arab

nation-states with a chapter about what he described, albeit reluctantly, as the common

characteristics of and obstacles faced by Arab broadcasters. Here Boyd focuses more on

topical and sociological criteria than on structural and institutional ones, in contrast to the

typologies that followed.

Substantial industry developments in recent years have produced new trends

within the Arab media environment that question traditional assessments. Numerous

analyses have suggested the significant impact of Arab transnational satellite

broadcasting—both through conflict news coverage and entertainment programming—on

the construction of Arab identity/identities (for examples, see Armbrust, 2000; Douglas

& Malti-Douglas, 1994; Iskandar & El-Nawawy, 2002, 2005; Khoury-Machool, 2007;

Kraidy, 2006; Lynch, 2006; Matar & Dakhlallah, 2006; El-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003).

The satellite-driven pan-Arabization of the region's media has been complemented by the

pluralization of access to new channels (such as Al Jazeera, Al Arabiya, Abu Dhabi TV,

Rotana, and so on). Indeed, other trends have complicated state-based views of the

region's media.   These include the growing economic nexus between Saudi financiers

and Lebanese talent in entertainment television (Kraidy, 2007; Sakr, 2001), the growth of

production locales across the region, and the increasingly galvanizing issue-based

coverage of "Arab" affairs. These trends have all contributed to the rejuvenation of public

discourses on Arabism, illustrated the possibilities of multinational pan-Arab

cooperation, and demonstrated practical examples of resource and skill-sharing (such as

Al Jazeera's Media Training and Development Centre).

Volumes that offer similar surveys of the cross-national media in the region

include Kamalipour and Mowlana's (1994) edited anthological handbook of mass media

in the Middle East. By providing reviews of media in each country, the book suggests

regional analogies among Middle Eastern media and provides a general justification and

necessity for the engagement of and subsequently the publication of research on media

organizations in the area. Nonetheless, despite focusing on the commonalities and

differences among these media systems, they also refrain from the task of devising

overarching taxonomies.

A mere seven years since the publication of the Boyd's last edition (1999) and 13

years since Kamalipour and Mowlana's (1994), developments in the Arab media

environment (as well as in global media) have been nothing short of dizzying. The

exponential transformations in the regional media contexts have rendered documentation

and analyses of these changes excessively problematic. Today, the task of monitoring and

archiving changes throughout all Arab nations is now at best painstaking, and at worst

futile. Instead, these volumes and others are now increasingly relevant for an altogether

different purpose—they now provide a unique historical document for the forces which

facilitated current-day trends in regional media.

Arab Media Typologies Emerge

The first published work in English to make an attempt at the holistic analysis, characterization and typologization of the Arab press (and later mass media) environment culminated in several now-classic volumes by long-time Ambassador to the region and media observer William A. Rugh (1987, 2004). For the next two decades, variations of Rugh's typology have been examined, grappled with, adopted, and critiqued by scholars of the regional media both within the Arab world and beyond. By adapting the Siebert-Peterson-Shramm models to the Arab World context, Rugh (1987) accurately highlighted the significant impact of the nation-state on the structure of Arab press and media. However, his work has also been subject to intense criticism for a variety of reasons which will be outlined below. One particularly pertinent criticism is that Rugh transplants classical typologies of media institutions wholesale from their Western contexts to the Arab world with only minor modifications that serve to affirm an increasingly outdated view of Arab media.

Rugh's typology proposed four groupings that best encapsulate the press in each of the 18 Arab countries he assesses. These include Arab countries whose media systems fall primarily into or showcase characteristics predominantly associated with a) mobilization media, b) loyalist media, c) diverse media, and d) transitional media (Rugh, 2004).

I will not spend time here reviewing these typologies as Rugh himself has done so comprehensively in his numerous works and in his feature article for this issue. Instead what I wish to focus on are the problems faced by this and other typologies of the Arab media. From the outset, Rugh's analysis and speciation of the Arab press (and later mass media) into these four categories appears too ambitious an undertaking almost to the point of being inconceivable. The substantial diversity that exists between Arab nations, their political institutions, and their publics suggests that Rugh's typological undertaking is in fact impossible.

However, given Rugh's research and familiarity with the trends that helped foment the Arab press in its early days, his assessment is a fairly accurate depiction of the Arab press scene up until the early 1990s. Prior to that time, it was rather uncontroversial to speak of authoritarian press systems in the Arab world as the status quo. Furthermore, the assumption that the state was the most significant if not sole purveyor, disseminator, and controller of information among most Arab countries was widely accepted.

But despite the focus on state politics, Rugh's typology acknowledges that press and media systems analysis cannot overlook the stark disparities between the region's socioeconomic strata—the vast income margins between oil-rich nation-states and the comparatively poorer states outside the Gulf. Rugh could have done more to look at socioeconomic considerations including the contrasting levels of education and literacy, not only within each country but across the region.

Critiques of Rugh: Towards an "Arab" Journalism

While at the time of its publication, Rugh's typology (1987, 2004) was critiqued for asserting the heterogeneity of Arab press systems (for example by arguing that the Kuwaiti press system allows for multiplicity of opinion and is therefore equivalent to the famously-independent Lebanese press), by contrast today the very same typology is subject to contestation for hinging its assessment on too narrow a taxonomy of the Arab press. This is perhaps the irony that comes with the swift changes in both global media patterns and subsequent inquiry about their function.

Many of the critiques of Rugh's typology provide alternative interpretations of media systems in the Arab world based on different theoretical premises. While Rugh highlighted the primacy of the state in the design of Arab media models, Abdelrahman (1983) explores these systems using dependency theories of the media thereby explicating the long-standing colonial and imperial influence on the uneven distribution of information in the Arab world and subsequent dependency on foreign institutions. Others have appealed to social responsibility models of the media which highlight the role played by press and broadcasting entities to inform the public, uphold the public good, act as a system of checks and balances for government, and serve to promote civic participation under a developmental rubric (Hamada, 1993). Abu Zayd (2000) extends these to suggest a fully-integrated developmental model for the Arab media within which the political, economic, and cultural progress of each nation-state's infrastructural, civic,

and governmental institutions are responsive to the development objectives of the nation whilst ensuring the citizenry are full participants in this process (Khalifah, 1976, 1980b).

Recently, Mellor (2005) provides one of the more substantial engagements of Rugh's typology, which centers on three main premises. While Rugh discusses how states shape media institutions to affect publics, Mellor argues that the typology overlooks the more open relationship between the Arab press and public opinion and the media's ability to set the public agenda and frame news. The second point of divergence relates to Arab press published outside the region. Mellor argues that comprehending the structure, motivation, purpose, and relation this press has to the region and its public is incompatible with Rugh's typology of the Arab press. Lastly, Mellor suggests that Rugh's typology fails to take account of the socialization and professionalization of Arab journalists in the region.

Part of Rugh's speciation of the Arab media focuses on the professional role of journalists within each media system (2004). Certainly one cannot negate the role state actors play in restraining and controlling the work of practitioners in the region. From systematic political intimidation and self-censorship to the enforcement of occupational norms and courtesies, until recently, the only force a journalist needed to account for was the state. Furthermore, the existence of social and political taboos that remain entrenched and resilient can often affect the likelihood of important issues being addressed in the public media. While such circumstances continue to prevail in many part of the Arab

world, there is also a growing chorus of unfettered and unadulterated news content which thrives on providing critiques to the political structure, and whose immunity to state intervention is increasingly tangible. Audiences are also becoming aware of the "end of silence" on the part of journalists. With the emergence of a unique trend in investigative journalism, such as Yosri Fouda's show *Siry Lil-Ghaya* on Al Jazeera and equivalent programs on private satellite stations across the region, as well as a spike in the number of independent and party newspapers across the region, the doors of public discourse are being pushed open. However, the privileging of the state as a primary unit of categorization may explain why coverage of taboos in Arab media content remains understudied.

Nonetheless, as Mellor explains, there is a rich and vibrant professional tradition within the Arab press whose history dating backing to the Ottoman Empire has been documented throughout the region (see Abdelrahman, 2002; Awdat, 1990; Abdo, 1949; Tarrazi, 1914). The most inventive and adventurous of these traditions took root in the Lebanese and Egyptian presses through the second half of the nineteenth century and continues to be instrumental in the conception of journalism across the Arab world. It is this dimension of Arab media which has been overlooked and deserves the greatest attention. This is especially true in light of the recent trend for Arab press syndicates to reject pressure from Western governments and professional organizations urging them to revisit and rearticulate their policies, conduct and codes. Arab journalists who identify with a uniquely Arab journalistic tradition often oppose the lavish media development programs sponsored by Western agencies such as the International Center for Journalists

(ICJ), the Salzberg Seminars, USAID, and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). Many Arab journalists see these programs as an attempt to impose foreign conditions and values on their profession.

While most Western descriptions of the Arab press classify media into distinct groups, similar undertakings in the Arab world produce characteristics that highlight the similarities among the Arab press and media environments. Indeed, projects to document the collective progress of journalism in the Middle East are often undertaken for the purpose of narrating a coherent *Arab* history for an *Arab* journalism. One of the most extensive inventories in this vein is published by the Arab League's Organization for Education, Culture and Science. Produced on a periodical basis it offers an extensive encyclopedia of the Arab press and journalism in print (see for example Awdat, 1990). Each multi-volume edition is comprised of a state-by-state review of press history in each country from its conception to the present day and in some instances includes detailed archives of legislation governing the media and press operations. The project is supervised and authored by faculty members from schools of journalism, media and communication in each country. An additional supplement is an almanac and registry of "migrant" Arabic media based outside the Arab world. The most vital observation in this encyclopedia of Arab journalism is the communitarian ideal that underlies it. Most of the narratives in the text showcase Arab presses as possessing a common purpose and goal; thereby the authors avoid constructing a typology which would disaggregate them.

One alternative typology to Rugh's accounted for the rise of commercial press and corporate media in the region as extra-state actors. Ayish (2002) instead proposed a three-category classification: traditional government-controlled, reformist government-controlled, and liberal commercial. Like most typologies of Arab media, but more so than Rugh, Ayish's description falls short by not addressing novel forms of alternative media, diversity within particular state/non-state media systems, the content of media, and cultures of journalism.

Another intriguing account grew out of a recent conference entitled Arab Journalism in a Changing World which was convened in the UAE (Abdullah, 2005). The meetings produced a voluminous proceeding publication that represents the Sharjah meetings in which 170 media officials, journalism faculty, and diplomats from across the Arab world met to discuss the role of the Arab press and media in a "changing world." Much of the manuscript offers acknowledgements of the Arab press' ability to keep up with advancements in technology and the changes these produce in journalism practice. It also noted the many obstacles that Arab journalists face today. While not producing a typological description, the conference followed six primary themes that best describe the direction of Arab media. Most notable among these were the freedom of the Arab press, the Arab media's responsibility towards the Arab public, and the challenges faced by media in the region. Many of the discussions that unfolded during the conference dealt directly with the possibility of characterizing the Arab media into categories which describe their relationship to state regimes, publics, the journalistic profession, and media trends in the world. A recurring theme in these discussions and beyond is the nature of

Arab media as a voice for a unified regional public versus each country producing

distinct identities and priorities (*Hurriyat al-sihafah,* 2000).

What ensues is a return to the more elementary but nonetheless compounded

question of: What are the national media? With Ministries of Information and State

Information Services still in place throughout the Arab world, with censorship and

intimidation of media personnel a perpetual condition in many countries, how do

national, subnational, municipal, transnational, and extra-national components to all Arab

media organizations serve to bypass these institutions of state control? How does the new

Arab media environment challenge the state-centric agendas of traditional national media

systems? One of the significant problems of Arab media typologies is their inability to

reconcile between segregated categorization into state media systems on one hand and

addressing overarching common themes on the other (Western categorizations focusing

on the prior and Arabic accounts on the latter). Foreign typologies of Arab media are

concerned primarily with the systematic analysis of each nation-state as a singular media

environment, with some attention to similarities and differences among these.

Conversely, regional descriptions of Arab media view these as transnational broadcasters

whose content cross national political borders and share a pan-Arab audience.

Arab Media: Between De-Westernization and Identification

Much of the discussion surrounding the Arab media since the events of September

11, 2001, either explicitly or implicitly, suggests the existence of a battle of ideas

between news narratives from the Arab world and the West. This has further invigorated

the contestation of discourses about media institutions in both regions and their varying

approaches to news. However, these debates precede 9/11 and are instead an extension of

a substantial body of literature from both the dependency theory and the cultural

imperialism traditions—traditions which have also influenced attempts to describe and

categorize regional media systems. Abdelrahman (1989), for example, questions Rugh's

typology of Arab media on the premise that it imposes Western theories of the press on

the Arab World. She further argues that this omission overlooks the possibility that the

region's media have been shaped by the specific social and cultural history of the Arabic-

Islamic World. While the take-up of technology, innovation, and institutional practice is a

far less exclusive terrain for Arab and Islamic media, the argument nevertheless

possesses much currency in the region.

Decades of Western colonialism throughout the Arab world and numerous foreign

military engagements in the region have set the ground for published works tackling the

relationship between the two media systems—Western and Arab. In most cases, both

environments are cast as separate and distinct. Indeed, many works written in the Arab

world see Western press and broadcasting as a threat (Abdelrahman, 1996, 2002; Abdo,

1949; Abdullah, 2005; Awdat, 1990; Fahd, 1975; Haris, 2006; Khalifah, 1980; Saab,

1984). For example, Abdelrahman (1996) discusses the extent to which Arab journalism

is capable of confronting "Zionist propaganda", a model of Arab journalism that Western

observers of the Arab media seem to have overlooked in the Arabic literature..

Examining the role played by journalists in producing sociopolitical change in the face of

perceived (or actual) external threat, Abdelrahman highlights a social history that is

unaccounted for in the discussion of characteristics of Arab media. Her assessment

suggests that Arab journalism, in this sense, constitutes an alternative and revolutionary

press which advocates for freedom, liberty, and independence.

Although for many in the West, a key role of Western Arabic-language

programming is to enable greater freedom for the region's media, Arab scholarship tends

to see things differently. Some notable Arab analysts believe that foreign government

programming (or what the US government refers to as public diplomacy) is a euphemism

for propaganda. Three expressions are used commonly throughout the Arab media to

refer to "public diplomacy" (Iskandar, 2005). The most neutral of these is a direct

translation of the same term, *al-diblomasiya al-sha'biya*. The second, *al-i'lam al

muwajah,* translates to "directional media." The third term, *Al-ikhtirak*, is the most

common, and also the most subversive. The term translates as "penetration." In a

Freudian reading of the term, it signifies the violation and dispossession of the body and

mind, especially when stated as *al-ikhtirak al thihny* (penetration of the mind). In other

Arabic media writings, such as Abdelrahman's study of "Zionist broadcasting" intended

for the Arab world, this notion of *ikhtirak* is understood not only as a violation of

viewer's mind but also a transnational force that *penetrates* political boundaries. Hence it

is important to comprehend how Arab media studies in the region have constructed and

reproduced a sense of common belonging in their classification of Arab media. As a

response to foreign broadcasting and the perception of an imperial media project, the very

term Arab media comes denotes a pan-Arab journalistic tradition with a sense of common

belonging—a necessary component of any discussion of Arab media typologies.

In an attempt to describe the Arab dimension of "Arab media," Rugh's typology

makes the appeal to the "strong cultural and psychological ties" that bind the peoples of

these countries (Rugh, 2004, p. 1). He goes on to state that Arabs share a single culture,

language and religion. This argument is less about the actual connections shared by 300

million Arabs in twenty-two Arab countries and a global diaspora so much as it is an

explicitly stated ideal. The idea of shared cultural experience between Arabs is abstract.

As I have argued elsewhere, "It's not a military alliance, political truce, an economic

cooperative, or a simple linguistic tie. It may not even be reduced to a common religion.

Instead, what brings Arabs together is a notion of joint destiny" (El-Nawawy & Iskandar,

2003, p. 20). It is this perception of a common predicament that is collective, a future that

is inextricably intertwined, which facilitates the emergence and maintenance of an Arab

imagined community a la Benedict Anderson (1991).

So while Rugh's claim that most Arabs share a common religion, language and

culture seems like an immense oversimplification, and appears inaccurate from the outset

given the diversity that characterizes the modern Arab world, his attempt to articulate

commonness underlies a priority that is part and parcel of this identity. In fact, this

attempt to homogenize a common discourse about identity is an integral characteristic of

discussion about Arabness, and by extension about Arab media more so in the region

than outside it. Prominent accounts about Arab media published in the region by Arab

scholars, critics and commentators are often explicit in their expression of congruence in

Arab identity and the collective responsibility of Arab media. In these discussions, all

signifiers of difference—be they political, economic, cultural or social—are assimilated

into a unified discourse. Hence, while the new media environment in the Arab world

produces multiple forms of contesting nationalisms—from a rejuvenated minority

identity (Coptic national politics and their representation on the Agaby satellite station

and its émigré contenders), to sectarian political activism (Hizbullah's Al Manar and

other Lebanese factional broadcasters)—assertions of Arabness and references to Arab

media remain centered on the integration of pluralism. So as some broadcasters in various

regions in the Arab world (the Gulf countries and the Maghreb) carve out identity niches

which explore sub-Arab sub-regional, local, ethnic, religious, factional, political and

municipal identities, these are rendered obsolete and voiceless in most academic

discussions (Western and Arab alike) of "Arab" media. Hence, whilst references to

national media systems often suggest distinctions between these, Arabic writings on Arab

media often highlight the similarities and common goals of Arab journalism and

broadcasting in the face of its non-Arab counterparts.

For instance, in one major volume on the Arab media, the publication's

introduction states that while extensive studies of each country have been conducted and

their histories documented, the collective Arab "heritage" in the press and journalism has

not been previously explored (Awdat, 1990). Furthermore, Awdat's claims are premised

on the necessity to preserve an Arab journalism and media history under threat "from

dangers of carelessness towards its goals of political, social, cultural Arab history and

providing a resource representing the struggle of the Arab public, its aspiration and direction" (p.7). In Saab's work (1984) we see a more engaged attempt at advocating for further unification among the Arab media. Countering Western media encroachment and *ikhtirak* is transformed into heady goals to create an Arab news wire. Saab argues that this is necessitated by the overwhelmingly counterproductive and misconstrued representations of Arabs in the eyes of the western press. Hence, this venture is predicated on the idea that the impression of Arab heritage and culture must be corrected through the design and execution of a pan-Arab news service which is collaborative, complete, advanced, development-centered, economically-viable, and practical (p. 176).

Specific content on various transnational Arabic broadcasters is emblematic of the contradictions between pan-Arab media and national media in terms of both state control and addressing a pan-Arab agenda. Al Jazeera's flagship political debate show *The Opposite Direction* is often credited with challenging the linear equation of government control of information (Lynch, 2006). For this reason, subversive content, opposition leaders, local and regional dissidents are finding themselves on television screens across the region (Al-Kasim, 2005; El-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003; Miles, 2005). The show's host, Faisal Al-Kasim believes his program has forced governments to address their very own citizens through non-national broadcasters thereby stripping away much of the influence of these national media (Al-Kasim, 2005, p. 103)

Within this rubric of an ad hoc opposition party broadcast, Al Jazeera is at times thought of as the news station which circumvented the individual Arab states to produce a

sense of common Arab identification. Al-Kasim, himself a charismatic and galvanizing

figure, argues that this period is characterized by a sense of mediated communalism

among Arabs. He recalls the once-loved Ahmed Saeed of Nasser's Voice of the Arabs as

an admirable figure. This is contrary to most narratives about him which view him with

scorn misrepresenting the 1967 war with Israel and other shortcomings. He acknowledges

Saeed's charisma and ability to captivate audiences. For Al-Kasim, the achievement of

pan-Arabism is viewed as both an ambition and a goal (p. 103). Even *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*

editor-in-chief, Abdel Barri Atwan has made a name for himself as a pan-Arab

commentator alongside the perennially influential Egyptian journalist writer and historian

Mohammed Hasanein Heikal who now has his own show on Al Jazeera. Therefore the

expression of pan-Arabism and its affiliated identity have become integral to the

development of transnational Arabic broadcasting in the region.

While it is important to avoid the urge and tendency to conflate Arab identity with

Islamic identity, it is also vital to acknowledge the influence of an Islamic discourse

within the conceptualization of Arab media and its construction of an alternative narrative

to Western broadcasting models. An additional typological category that is often

dismissed from western characterizations of the Arab press and media is that which

reflects institutions of faith or those that exhibit denominational affiliation. Many of the

classifications expressed by Arab scholars discuss some dimension which acknowledges

the vitality of Islamic presses in the region's history and their continued impact today

(Khalifah, 1980a). One such historical account of the Islamic press in the Arab world is a

meticulous review of each nation-state's confessional media dating to the late 19th

century (Shahin, 2003). By producing a glorified description of the quest for a

communitarian Islamic press in the Arab world, Shahin charts what he describes to be the

triumphs of this press throughout the region: a) advocating and educating public on

culture and values; b) reforming political and social structures and confronting state

oppression; and c) resisting neo-colonialism, imperialism, Zionism and foreign

exploitation.

The last of these regional Islamic press accomplishments is perhaps the most

indicative of a current ferment in the discussion of Arab media. To what extent do these

institutions, in their singular or collective form, pose a challenge to Western domination

of the Arab media sphere. The image of the Arab media as a David versus the Goliath of

Western media is a common motif in the Arabic literature on regional media. In fact, the

discussions about the role of Arab media today are not unlike the debates undertaken

between the 1950s and 70s surrounding the New World Information and Communication

Order (NWICO) and the desire to rearticulate not simply institutional and political-

economic media structures that allow for a more egalitarian competitive global media

environment, but to revisit categorization and theorization in international

communication. Curran and Park (2000) produce perhaps the most overt vocalization of

such a problematic with an unequivocal appeal for the de-westernization of media

studies.

Their edited volume counts as a damning critique and a substantial intervention in

the face of the conventional Western interpretive scheme for global media as devised

some forty years prior by Siebert et al (1956). By questioning the premise behind, utility

of, and prospect for the four categories of media systems (as well as all typologies that

emerge from these) they interrogate the process by which classifications developed by

non-specialists in area studies (Schramm, 1966; de Sola Pool & Schramm, 1973) are

adopted wholesale or adapted to ensure non-western media systems fit (at least in

principle) within these parameters (Curran & Park, p.5).

        More than ever before, it can be argued that descriptors of international media

systems developed during the Cold War which reinforced a theoretical classification

between Soviet media and those of "libertarian" states are of particular value in the Arab

world. The Arab world's engagement with "Western" media models has produced two

competing discourses. The first is one which applies linear developmental schemes that

articulate a passage towards the technological modernization and political

democratization of national media systems (Selber & Ghanem, 2004). The second is one

that posits the Arab media environment as diametrically opposed to this development

project. Interestingly, the outcomes of both are equivalent as they predict and advocate

Arab media's development towards the ascribed categories of "diverse," "pluralistic" or

"libertarian." It is precisely these overt pressures and perceived paternalisms that produce

discourses of resistance that must be acknowledged by any future typology of the Arab

media. As the chorus of de-westernization of media research gets louder, the position

Arab media hold vis-à-vis these debates becomes both immediate and prominent.

The proposition that Arab media is a model for cultural de-Westernization has produced a litany of accounts investigating whether Arab media constitute a genuinely alternative modality. One intriguing example pertains to the rights of journalists in the Arab world (Salih, 2004). In an appeal for the protection of journalists' rights, Salih states that he dreams of a "free press for a free nation" in Egypt (p. 5). As would be expected, he argues this can only be accomplished with the solidarity of professional collectives, journalism and broadcasting syndicates, and public support for journalist rights. But contrary to Western norms, he also advocates contesting what he describes as Western "myths" of objectivity and the over-reliance of Arab journalism on Western models in both language and style. In addition, Salih argues the ideal environment would ensure complete freedom and protection for journalists, but would also expect from journalists responsibility and commitment to the nation. His vision of a thriving native Arab journalism is fundamentally at odds with any American model. Instead, his enthusiasm for what he labels the Arab "freedom-responsibility" theory of the press leads him to suggest that it could be a new model for journalism in the region and serve as an exemplar for the world, thereby reversing the unidirectional flow of communication principles from west to east.

Nonetheless, the prevailing notions that media systems from the West are on a head on collision with their rivals in the Arab world, act to reify and ossify the categorical distinctions between media systems "here" and "there." This is evident in a significant number of treatises on Al Jazeera for instance. The construction of Al Jazeera as inflammatory and unprofessional, Arab national media systems as authoritarian and

regressive, and the private entertainment stations as dulling and numbing can produce a singular image of regional media which is unsalvageable. Elsewhere, Arab media are seen as a positive force—the oppositional "other" vis-à-vis a Western counterpart. The rise of Al Jazeera, as the chief Arab media export, often features prominently in these descriptions where a seemingly concerted counter-hegemonic approach poses significant challenges to the global order of news. The view that Al Jazeera offers a variable model outside classical Western-centric media research extends into studies of mass communication where the peculiar institutional and political economic order of the network Al Jazeera is believed to be inapplicable with the epistemological and methodological approaches to traditional media research (Wojcieszak, 2007).

"[Al Jazeera] marks a turning point[…] in the history of information globalization. It is a case of information flow reversal, whereby information is no longer beamed from North to the South or from the Occident to the Orient, but the other way around. The west no longer has a monopoly on 'credible and responsible media'" states Zayani (2005, pp. 30- 31). To a great extent, as the somewhat overly enthusiastic subtitle of my own book states, Al Jazeera is currently being framed not only as a "representation" of the Arab media but also a behemoth whose impact can be no less than the "redefinition of modern journalism" (El-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003). This may seem somewhat hyperbolic but upon closer examination, there appears some currency to these statements given the contemporary structure and function of global media systems. With Al Jazeera English's self-proclaimed agenda for the global south, the station (which incidentally attempts/struggles to retain some characteristics of its Arabic pre-cursor)

incorporates the language of dissent, through shifting the international flow of information, and rearticulating the news agenda from a non-Western perspective as part of its appeal. If one were to perceive Al Jazeera English as an extension of the Arab media sphere, it is only by extension that a station that has made its name as an "alternative" source of news in the Arab world has reproduced an approach which implies the de-westernization of global media content (Iskandar, 2006b).

Lexical Misnomers: Locating the Arab in "Arab Media"

Critiques of taxonomic and typological systems abound but perhaps the most incisive is that of Michel Foucault. In his 1966 monograph *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, Foucault (then as self-proclaimed structuralist) offers a damning critique of the processes by which knowledge systems reinforce and create scientific, and by extension cultural categories, through a process of scientific nomenclature. So the act of naming something, he argues, renders the very entity subservient to that signifier through a process of reification. Hence, the very attribution "Arab media" becomes a space within which numerous descriptors (whether they be institutions, individuals, professionals, audiences, nation-states, media managers, the Arabic language, etc.) are collapsed into a uniform semantic notion that inhabits the word "Arab media." The Foucauldian approach thereby highlights the discursive practices of knowledge-building and their inherent essentialization of phenomena.

Taxonomic classification exercises control over the objects of description by assigning meaning through nomenclature. The designation of a name to best express the properties an entity possesses and/or exhibits is the root of Linnaeus' method. In the realm of Arab media, taxonomy is complicated not only by the permeability of the groupings, but by the very nomenclature used to describe these. Since the 1930s, in identifying the characteristics and function of Arab media, media scholars have effectively collapsed terminological references to include all pan-Arab media, national media in and out of the Arab states, diasporic Arabic language media, even non-Arabic media produced within and for Arab audiences, and several others conflations. The outcome is an unwieldy conglomeration of everything pertaining to what is "Arab" and what are "media" into the expression "Arab media."

At the core of this complication is a lexical distinction that is lost in the translation of the root Arabic word. The designated term used to denote both "Arab media" and "Arabic media" is *I'lam 'Araby* where the word *'Araby* becomes a singular signifier in Arabic for media content that is both "Arabic" in language and which belongs to the larger socio-cultural construct of being "Arab." While the word *'Araby* is used to describe these media both as linguistic and sociocultural/national categories, the English referential terms "Arab" and "Arabic" remain distinct. Nonetheless, in all discussions of regional media, the term "Arab media" is collapsed, thereby suggesting that the two semantic descriptions are synonymous. This is an added complication to any description of media in the region. Can extensions of national broadcasters or media based in the Arab world which publish or broadcast in English, Spanish, Kurdish, Berber, French and

Italian (Lebanon's *L'Orient du Jour* or Cairo's *Al-Ahram Weekly* or the *Yemen Observer*)
be considered "Arab media"? Conversely, is it fitting to consider the Arabic language
émigré press in Dearborn, Marseilles, São Paolo, or London under the definition of "Arab
media" despite exhibiting no explicit or implicit connection to any Arab nation?

With recent developments in the state of Arabic-language media, it is becoming
increasingly difficult to reference the term "Arab media" without taking into
consideration particular characteristics of the term's vernacular complexities. Hence, it is
necessary to observe how the signifier *Al-I'lam Al-'Arabi* (Arab/Arabic Media) is used in
the Arabic language and its connotative meaning. On one level, *Al-I'lam Al-'Arabi* is
used to mean the "Arabic" media . This usage is fairly uncommon, mostly in reference to
geographic locales where the majority press is not in Arabic, such as in the case of the
émigré press. Conversely, the most common usage of *Al-I'lam Al-'Arabi* connotes that
these media are owned by and intended for a contiguous Arab *ummah* (collective
nation)—the people of Arab lands of Arab culture who speak Arabic. This sense is quite
unlike the term "the English media," which would be more commonly used to mean
media in English, rather than media of the English. Examples of this kind of *Al-I'lam Al-
'Arabi* include all transnational satellite stations, pan-Arab print press, and all other forms
whose intended audience is comprised within the "collective" Arab designation.
However, while in some cases the two terms are also collapsed in their Arabic usage
when Arabness suggests usage of the Arabic language, the more dominant interpretation
is a sense of collective identification beyond linguistic knowledge. In such circumstances
Al-I'lam Al-'Arabi includes not only transnational broadcasting but also émigré press

throughout contemporary history from across the Ottoman provinces, Europe and North America. Hence, over the years the term has come to describe a contiguous audience and its media within a greater boundary-defying Arab identity (Abu Zayd, 1993; Musallami, 1994; Qaud, 1983).

This complication applies also to international broadcasting in the Arabic language. To what extent can Arabic satellite stations broadcasting from outside the Arab world be considered Arab media? Can one consider state-sponsored stations such as US-government outfits Radio Sawa and Alhurra or privately-owned and foreign-based Arabic stations such as the new Dandana TV (whose headquarters are in New Jersey) within the singular descriptor of "Arab media"? What term best describes Arab-owned "off-shore" presses such as *Asharq Alawsat*, *Al-Hayat*, *Al-Quds Al-Araby*? And conversely, can long-time Arabic language broadcasters such as BBC World Service Arabic (a hybrid public/foreign office broadcast) and Radio Monte Carlo Moyen Orient (RMCMO) or newcomers such France 24 fall under the rubric of Arab media?

Must these media be territorially-situated in the Arab world or be funded by either an Arab government or individual whose loyalties reside within the Arab world to be considered Arab? Or perhaps these media should be judged on their content and whether they serve the purpose of reflecting, representing and reifying Arabness versus simply uttering in the Arabic language. All these questions raise a previously un-addressed issue which has been overlooked in the rush to typologize and classify Arab media; What are Arab media? This query underlies most of the debates over the primacy of the Arab

nation-state versus other economic, cultural and political forces in determining the nature

of such media.

The multiplicity of meanings imbued within the term "Arab media" and the

possibility of mischaracterizing the phenomena we are describing in our attempt to

classify these should necessitate a revision of this and other terms. This would not only

ensure a more nuanced understanding of some of the intrinsic logic within and among

"Arab media" but also address the categorical question concerning the under-

representation and misrepresentation of the Arabic émigré press in modern typologies of

Arab media (Mellor, 2005, p. 62)

Hence it is imperative for scholarship in this area to distinguish between the terms

Arab media and *Arabic media*. The prior should illustrate the growing (albeit not novel)

"pan-national" and transnational dimension of *Al-I'lam Al-'Arabi* with its centripetal

forces of collectivization and performed communalism. The latter usage of Arabic media

should serve to distinguish these along strictly linguistic lines. Without this distinction,

typologies of regional media are at risk of collapsing categories of definition or

producing inexhaustible typologies.

All this might make us reconsider whether building typologies is a hopeless task. I

argue, however, that typologies are important from a genealogical standpoint to

understand the way in which media organizations and the configurations we are

witnessing today reflect similarities or differences from their precursors and to observe

how common themes may have outlived others. This almost hereditary assessment of

media is perhaps the most important theoretical and practical exercise to contemporary

classifications of "Arab media." Therefore, it is useful to employ taxonomies of the

"Arab media" without submitting to their rigidity and immutability. If we fail to address

the inherent simplification within taxonomies of the "Arab media" and accept

unequivocally the temptation of Linnean classification, these classifications may likely be

rendered irrelevant in a brief span.

The problem of models for national media systems and the press is precisely that

they are tied categorically to the nation-state as a framework. Today, the Arab world is

experiencing a process by which the nation-state is being bypassed by both media and

audiences. Publics are imagined in both lived and virtual spaces. Transnational "Arab

media" construct dual narratives, one of the state and the other of nation, sometimes in

concert but often in contrast. It may be too early to suggest that idea of the state is being

rendered subservient to transnational structures and identities. However, from the

definitions and priorities of Arab media as stated in the region, it is evident that this very

term is intertwined with a history of transnational nationhood which is easily overlooked

by classification of state media systems in the region.

Hybrid media resist categorization

While there are significant problems with typologies of "Arabic media" that retain the primacy of the nation-state, there are some redemptive aspects to this perspective. One might say that the novel transformation of national media systems is their very "transnationalization" and desire to project outside of their own borders. Hence, it would be naïve to assume the nation-state plays a minor role in regional media governance. But failure to note the increasing influence of extra-national or sub-national entities on Arabic and Arab media would be a very problematic. For instance, given the rise of Hizbullah's influence both in southern Lebanon and as a political force beyond the borders of the nation-state, one might categorize Al Manar as either a *mobilization* or *loyalist* medium operating within a *diverse* national media system. But in a typology that focuses primarily on the relationship of media to the nation-state, it is easy to overlook Al Manar's regional and local mobilization and loyalist role in favor of identifying them within a diverse Lebanese national media system.

Another example of an increasingly composite media system that at times defies typologization is the Egyptian one which has seen near-simultaneous expressions of diversification and loyalism, mobilization and transition. Like many of its regional counterparts, Egyptian state television remains tightly controlled by the government whilst the print press exercises greater editorial independence. The existence of a three-tier press system of governmental/semi-government papers (*kawmiya*), party papers (*hizbiya*) and independent papers (*mostakila*) suggests a diverse print environment (Iskandar, 2006a). This view is accentuated by the unique success of independent newcomers such as the "alternative" private national daily *Al-Masry Al-Youm* and

prominent non-governmental weeklies such as *Al-Dustour*, *Al-Fagr*, *Nahdet Masr* who have been anything but shy in fielding strongly-worded criticism at Mubarak's government and the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP).

However, the state has exercised substantial force in reprimanding and coercing some of these papers including the once influential (albeit nearly defunct) *Al-Ghad* paper of imprisoned presidential candidate Ayman Nour, and the highly publicized arrest of *Al-Dustour*'s Chief Editor for defamation and the harassment of the publication's female reporters. Thus, it can be argued that Egypt's current press environment is an example of the increasingly complex relations between states and the press across the region. This makes Egypt's hybrid media environment virtually impossible to categorize in a typology given the number of competing variables—Arabic versus other languages; governmental press versus party/independent press; print versus electronic media; governmental broadcasting versus private television, and so on.

Another aspect of the critique identifies change in the way media are managed. Sakr's (2001) political-economic analyses of transnational television in the region suggests that the Arab satellite realm has been shaped more by heavy-weight businessmen and cliques within state elites (such as competing branches of the Saudi royal family) than by market forces or ruling parties. Although she provides an extensive explication of globalizing media in the region she circumvents the urge to essentialize Arab media into categorical groups partly because of their increasingly protean hybrid nature (Kraidy, 2005). From a content standpoint, with the growing collaborative

economic and cultural broadcasting forces between Saudi and Lebanese counterparts, customized expressions of national identities now offer a more blurred tapestry of identity representations, allowing for unique hybrid forms to emerge. The significant growth in private satellite broadcasting in the region has brought to the fore a new generation of media owners whose pursuit of profit is occasionally secondary to their pursuit of influence and prestige. For example, the growth of Rotana reflects the increasingly monopolized control and complete vertical integration of the Arabic music industry by Saudi Prince Walid bin Talal (Ismail, 2005). This is also true of news broadcasting. In an increasingly crowded market, news and commentary remain reliant upon subsidization rather than advertising revenue. This trend has produced news channels whose operations, revenue sources and governance are hybrid, combining elements of corporate, public and governmental media. These trends reflect the development of Arab media into dynamic and fluid entities, thus further complicating their classification.

In addition to their increasingly hybrid form, Arab media have substantially interrogated the very definitions of alternative media. With a highly stylized and well-funded operation such as Al Jazeera, the accepted properties of alternative media as low-budget, small-scale, and linked to non-hierarchical social movements are no longer of much utility (for a discussion of how Al Jazeera problematizes definitions of alternative media, see Iskandar, 2005). There are three principal ways in which Arab media represent a near paradigmatic shift in our conception and understanding of alternative media: First, alternative media may reflect the political economic structure and institutions which they

themselves critique; second, the label "alternative media" can be attributed without any regard for authentication by either the medium or the audience, in some cases becoming part of a corporate strategy; and third despite the previous two contradictions, alternative media can express alterity solely through content, coverage and programming that is perceived as counter-hegemonic. These conditions have forced alternative media researchers to reconsider the vernacular of alterity.

Another added complication to typologizing Arab media is the emergence of the Internet as a venue for new configurations of both political expression and identity. The development of these technologies and their impact on the Arab world may have destabilized much of the theoretical ground upon which traditional research on Arab media was built (Anderson, 1999). If the theorization about global trends in new media is on unstable ground, then that must surely translate to a fluidity in the very taxonomies of global media, let alone regional media in the Arab world. Instead, one might consider the rather inventively unpredictable media terrain in the Arab world as a site for the potential dramatic change in the nature of Arab media. As such, it is crucial not to prematurely hasten a typologization of such changes.

Operating outside the realms of any typological categories of the Arab media, the region's online terrain highlights the role of dissident political and cultural spaces that exist in the region but are rarely "broadcast." From websites expressing viewpoints publicly-perceived as perverse or taboo, to websites of groups avowed to the revolutionary change in every Arab nation-state, the Internet, unlike its print and

electronic predecessors, offers Arab audiences/citizens/participants a comparatively

dizzying array of alternative voices that can be engaged with freely with little fear of

retribution. From the websites of dissident political voices and citizen activism groups to

small-scale collectives and personal blogs, the Internet's topical breadth and auxiliary ad

hoc structure offers Arab participants a uniquely independent terrain within which

"spaces of contention" are forged and maintained in ways inconceivable in other media

forms.

Marc Lynch (2006) offers a somewhat optimistic look at what he proclaims to be

Arab World's new Habermasian public sphere. Lynch describes an extensive and

expansive network of civic interplay that transforms the dynamics of what were once top-

down information systems. From the impact of satellite television like Al Jazeera to the

growing influence of online information-processing and delivery systems, this new public

sphere is characterized by what one might describe as alternative mediation. Himself the

operator of a popular blog on the Arab world under the alias name AbuAardvark, Lynch

expresses a hopeful view of the role of blogging as an alternative form of information

relay that encourages audience engagement in ways that traditional regional media

cannot. Nonetheless, the Internet remains very much a luxury available to the privileged

in the Arab World due to access and literacy problems. With a small fraction of all

Internet websites operating in Arabic, knowledge of the online lingua franca is a

necessity that a small percentage in all 22 Arab nations can afford. However, among

youth in many metropolitan centers in the Arab world, the Internet is becoming a

mainstay (Hofheinz, 2005). There is much to consider about the active participation of

citizens in the narrative building and framing of news which would be hard to incorporate into a typology.

Nonetheless, there is growing evidence that blogging and other forms of alternative information delivery that blur the line between message creator and recipient, such as text-messages, are becoming increasingly more visible and active. The Egyptian presidential and parliamentary elections of 2006 offered a unique example of public political expression through alternative means of information creation and dissemination. Several key blogs (*madoonat* or *mudawwanat*) including Alaa and Manal's Bit Bucket, Sandmonkey, and Arabawy became the sites of contentious news material about police brutality during opposition rallies and demonstrations as well as locales for political organization and mobilization. The multi-stripe ad hoc oppositional *Kefaya* (Enough!) movement in Egypt employed the Internet extensively to disseminate critical information. Despite the impediments of access and restriction, similar examples abound from Iraq, Egypt, Kuwait, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Syria, Sudan and others (Abdulla, 2005; Alterman, 2000; Ghareeb, 2000; Hamdy, 2006; Khoury-Machool, 2007; Wheeler 2005).

These trends are particularly interesting in war coverage. One blogger who stands out is the Iraqi Salam Pax. He was able to captivate readers regionally and globally with eye-witness daily coverage from war-torn Baghdad (Pax, 2003). His chilling account of the city's daily bombardments earned his blog, *Where is Raed?,* media attention worldwide for its exceptional style and personal narrative of breaking news coverage. Salam Pax garnered enough media attention to produce a book containing his war blogs

and several noteworthy journalistic spots on Western mainstream media outlets. Other popular Iraqi blogs include Baghdad Burning, Imad Khadduri's Free Iraq, A Star from Mosul, Treasure of Baghdad and Ibn al Rafidain, all of which have played a part in expanding the news narratives from a war zone. Unlike much mainstream news coverage of the war, the blogs depicted a highly complex and nuanced account of day-to-day events in Iraq (Wall, 2006).

Similar circumstances occurred during the 2006 conflict between Israel and Lebanon, where citizen-produced material circulated widely and served as an alternative to news narratives constructed by the regional and international mainstream media. During times of war, media access to certain areas creates impediments for coverage which can often be circumvented by civilian reporters. In Lebanon and northern Israel, blogging reached a crescendo with elaborately-produced citizen journalism that coupled video with text. Popular online video database site YouTube became a virtual warehouse for a large number of personal videos captured with basic digital camera equipment documenting the war on both sides. The minimal cost of the capture-and-edit technology and ease of sharing it on the YouTube server facilitated the mass distribution of conflict accounts whose narratives contrasted greatly with the mainstream press. Further, the gritty footage coupled with a seemingly unadulterated and "authentic" angle on the news offered online viewers a compelling alternative to formatted and stylized mainstream media coverage.

Despite low Internet penetration in the Arab World and limited engagement with this strikingly versatile medium, it is evident that within the current dyadic governmental-commercial electronic broadcast environment, the Internet poses the greatest challenge to mainstream and traditional media in the region. From community-building and political mobilization under the rubric of interlocking blogospheres to providing venues for what Atton (2003) calls alternative journalism, some of the Arabic Internet's content serves as the only regional venue for consistently non-hierarchical, socially-concerned, counter-hegemonic information, thereby making it the regions most appropriate "alternative medium." Despite the evidence that the credibility of blogs is often a result of traditional and mainstream media's coverage of these (Johnson & Kaye, 2004), they still constitute a substantial step towards alternative coverage and community-building

online.

In essence, through a significant and if I may say a cataclysmic transformation of the instrumentation and delivery of information the Arab world, the processes that define the rigidity of national media structures have become less relevant (not less influential). At the beginning of the 21st century, the Arab media environment is a mosaic of near cacophonous expressions of dissent, dissidence, loyalty, nationalism, consumerism and all things in between. The unpredictability and dynamic nature of these institutions make them resilient to anything but ephemeral categorization.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to raise several questions about the applicability of "Arab media" taxonomies by *problematizing* the process of classification, interrogating definitional labels for Arab media, highlighting the multi-sited nature of the literature, and describing additional approaches to evaluate and describe "Arab" and "Arabic" media. By destabilizing the very term "Arab media" (under-theorized as it is) and the typologies created and recreated to explain its progress and development both in the Arab world and the West, I would like to suggest that typologization serves primarily as the historicization of "Arabic media." Therefore, classifications of "Arabic media" should be viewed from the standpoint of historical benchmarks that provide possibilities of comparison and contrast to present-day manifestations (as is *Systema Naturae* today over 320 years since its publication). The immense diversity within each category of classification may not be exhaustible but instead acts to preserve descriptions as archival documents which illustrate how media in a particular time period were perceived.

Furthermore, I attempted to highlight the holistic overtones expressed in descriptions of "Arab media" in the Arabic literature and how these have come to represent a discursive strategy of de-Westernization and alterity. It is necessary to consider journalism cultures across the Arab world, media content alongside institutional structures, the bifurcated national/pan-Arab mediated identities in the region, the increasingly novel expressions of state influence in media, the relationship between media institutions and the public(s), new configurations of alternative media, and the role

of Arab/Arabic journalists as social actors within a culturally-conditioned environment.

Nonetheless, without a critical cultural examination of the multiple sides of the "Arabic"

and "Arab" media terrain, the fervent attachment to the production and reproduction of

taxonomies to describe this terrain at a time of exponential transformation may provide

little more than lines in the sand.

Bibliography

Abdelhamid, M. (1982). *Sihafah al-'askariyah fi Misr (July 25-October 1973): dirasah tarikhiyah naqdiyah muqaranah.* Cairo:

Abdelrahman, A. (1989). *Studies in Egyptian and Arab Press: Current Issues.* Cairo: Al-Arabi.

Abdelrahman, A. (1996). *al-Sihafah al-'Arabiyah fi muwajahat al-tab'iyah wa-al-ikhtiraq al-Sihyuni.* Cairo: Al-Arabi

Abdelrahman, A. (2002). *Qadaya al-watan al-'Arabi fi al-sihafah khilala al-qarn al-'ishrin.* Cairo: Al-Arabi.

Abdulla, R.A. (2005). Taking the e-train: The development of the internet in Egypt. *Global Media and Communication*, 1(2): 149-165.

Abdullah, A. (2005). *al-Sihafah al-'Arabiyah fi 'alam mutaghayyir : buhuth wa-munaqashat nadwat Markaz al-Khalij lil-Dirasat.* Sharjah, UAE: Al-Khaleej.

Abdo, I. (1949). *Ta'rikh al-tiba'ah wa-al-sahafah fi Misr : khilal al-hamlah al-Faransiyah 1798-1801.* Cairo.

Abu Zayd, F. (1993). *al-Sihafah al-'Arabiyah al-muhajirah.* Cairo: Alam Al-Kotob

Al-Kasim, F. (2005). The Opposite Direction: A Program which challenged the face of Arab Television. In Mohamed Zayani (Ed), *The Al Jazeera Phenomenon: Critical Perspectives on the new Arab media,* (pp. 93-105). Boulder, CO: Paradigm Books.

Alterman, J.B. (1998). *New Media, New Politics? From Satellite Television to the Internet in the Arab World.* Washington: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

Anderson, B. (1991). *Imagined Communities.* London: Verso.

Anderson, J. (1999). *Arabizing the Internet*. (Occasional Paper #30): Abu Dhabi: Emirates Center for Strategic Studies & Research.

Armbrust, W. (2000). *Mass Mediations: New Approaches to Popular Culture in the Middle East and Beyond*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Askar, I. (1972*). Nash'at al-sihafah al-Suriyah : 'ard lil-qawmiyah fi tawr al-nash'ah min al-'ahd al-'Uthmani .hatta qiyam al-dawlah al-'Arabiyah.* Cairo:

Askar, I. (1982). *al-Sihafah al-'Arabiyah fi Filastin, al-Urdun, Suriya wa-Lubnan.* Cairo:

Atton, C. (2003). What is alternative journalism? *Journalism, 4*(3): 267-273.

Awdat, H. (1990). *al-Mawsu'ah al-suhufiyah al-'Arabiyah*. Tunis: Arab League.

Ayish, M. (2002). Political Communication on Arab World Television: Evolving Patterns. *Political Communication,* 19:137-154.

Boyd, D.A. (1999). *Broadcasting in the Arab World: A Survey of the Electronic Media in the Middle East.* Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press.

Boyd, D.A., & Straubhaar, J.D. (1985). Developmental Impact of the Home Video Cassette Recorder on Third World Countries. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media, 29* (1): 5-21.

Boyd, D. (1982). *Broadcasting in the Arab world*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press

Boyd, D.A. (1975). Development of Egypt's Radio: Voice of the Arabs under Nasser. *Journalism Quarterly.* 52(4): pp. 645-53

Boyd, D.A. (1972). *An Historical and Descriptive Analysis of the Evolution and Development of Saudi Arabian Television: 1963-1972.* [Dissertation: University of Minnesota]: University Microfilms

Curran, J., & Park, M.J. (2000). *De-Westernizing Media Studies* (Eds). London: Routledge, 2000.

de Sola Pool, I., Frey, F. W., Schramm, W. et al (Ed.) (1973). *Handbook of Communication*. Chicago: Rand McNally.

Douglas, A., & Malti-Douglas, F. (1994). *Arab Comic Strips: Politics of an Emerging Mass Culture.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Downing, J. D. (2003). Radical media and globalization. L. Artz & Y. R. Kamalipour (Eds.). The Globalization of Corporate Media Hegemony (pp. 283-293). SUNY Press.

Durkheim, E. (1915). *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. New York: The Free Press.

Foucault M., (2002). *The Order of Things*, Routledge: London.

Foucault, M. (1966). *Les mots et les choses - une archéologie des sciences humaines*. Paris: Gallimard.

Fahd, Y. (1975). *Mawaqif ma'a al-sihafah al-'Arabiyah.* Al-Riyadh.

Ghareeb, E. (2000). New Media and the Information Revolution in the Arab World: An Assessment. *The Middle East Journal* 54(33): 395-418

Hamdy, N. (2006). *Alternate Arab voices: A depiction of the usage of blogs and bloggers in the Arab World.* Paper presented at the International Association of Mass Communication Research (IAMCR) conference, Cairo, Egypt.

Haris, S. (2006). *Aydilujiyat al-sihafah al-'Arabiyah fi muwajahat al-nizam al-'alami al-jadid : al-sultawiyah, al-libiraliyah, al-Islamiyah, al-qawmiyah.* Cairo: al-Tab'ah.

Hofheinz, A. (2005). The Internet in the Arab world: Playground for political liberalisation. *International Politics and Society. 3*: 78-96.

Hurriyat al-sihafah wa-quyud al-tashri'at : dirasah fi awda' al-sihafah al-'Arabiyah min manzur huquq al-insan (2004). Cairo: Arab Journalists Syndicate.
Iskandar, A. (2006a). Shifting Tides: Egyptian Media and the Impending Political Revolution. *Georgetown Journal of International Relations, 7*(1).

Iskandar, A. (2006b) Is Al Jazeera Alternative? Mainstreaming Alterity and Assimilating Discourses of Dissent. *Transnational Broadcasting Studies Journal, 15*. Retrieved on January 18, 2006 from http://www.tbsjournal.com/Iskandar.html.

Iskandar, A. (2005). Courting the Enemy: Radio Sawa and the Reinvention of Public Diplomacy. *Global Media Journal (Arabic Edition).*

Iskandar, A., & El-Nawawy, M. (2005) Al Jazeera and War Coverage in Iraq: The Quest for *Contextual Objectivity*. In S. Allan & B. Zelizer (Eds.) *Reporting War: Journalism in Wartime*. London: Routledge

Iskandar, A., & El-Nawawy, M. (2002). Al Jazeera and the Intifada. In Casey, E. & Hilder, P. (Eds). *Peace Fire: Fragments from the Israel-Palestine Story*. London: Free Association Books.

Ismail, M.H. (2005). *The Closed Circle vs. the Discontinuity of the Self: The Influence of Globalization upon the Contemporary ArabMusic Videos.* Paper presented at the International Association of Mass Communication Research (IAMCR): http://profed-iamcr.cci.ecu.edu.au/pdfs/Hossam_Ismail_full_paper.pdf

Johnson, T.J. & Kaye, B.K. (2004). Wag the blog: How reliance on traditional media and the internet influence credibility perceptions weblogs among blog users. *Journalism & Mass Communications Quarterly*, *81*(3): 622-642.

Kamalipour, Y.R., & Mowlana, H. Eds. (1994). *Mass Media in the Middle East: A Comprehensive Handbook.* Westport, CT: Greenwood Press

Kellow, C.L., & Steeves, H.L. (1998). The role of radio in the Rwandan genocide *Journal of Communication, 48* (3), 107–128.

Khalifah, I. (1980a). *al-Wasa'il al-sihafiyah wa-tahaddiyat al-mujtama' al-Islami al-mu'asir.* Cairo: al-Tab'ah.

Khalifah, I. (1980b). *'Ilm al-tahrir al-sahafi wa-tatbiqatuhu al-'ilmiyah fi wasa'il al-ittisal bi-al-jamahir.* Cairo: al-Tab'ah.

Khalifah, I. (1976). *Sihafah : maqru'ah, mar'iyah, madrasiyah, masjidiyah, tijariyah, idariyah.* Cairo.

Khoury-Machool, M. (2007). Palestinian Youth and Political Activism: The Emerging Internet Culture and New Modes of Resistance. Policy Futures in Education, 5(1): 17-27. Kraidy, M.M. (2007). Saudi Arabia, Lebanon and the Changing Arab Information Order *International Journal of Communication 1*, 139-156

Kraidy, M.M. (2006). Reality Television and Politics in the Arab World: Preliminary Observations, *Transnational Broadcasting Studies* http://www.tbsjournal.com/Archives/Fall05/Kraidy.html

Kraidy, M.M. (2005). *Hybridity: or the Cultural Logic of Hybridity.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Linnaeus, C. (1768). *Systema Naturae*. Editio Duodecima, Reformata. Reprinted 1963. Ohio Herpetological Society.

Lynch, M. (2006). *Voice of the New Arab Public: Iraq, Al Jazeera and Middle East Politics Today.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Matar, D., & Dakhlallah, F. (2006). What it means to be Shiite in Lebanon: Al Manar and the imagined community of resistance. Westminster Papers in Communication and

Culture (WPCC). Available from: http://www.wmin.ac.uk/mad/pdf/2%20-%20WhatItmeanstobelebanaon.pdf

Mellor, N. (2005). *The Making of Arab News.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Miles, H. (2005). *Al Jazeera: The Inside Story of the Arab News Channel that is Challenging the West.* Grove.

Musallami, I. A. (1994). al-Sihafah al-'Arabiyah fi al-Mahjar. Cairo.

El-Nawawy, M., & Iskandar, A. (2003) *Al Jazeera: The Story of the Network that is Rattling Governments and Redefining Journalism.* Boulder, CO: Westview.

Pax, S. (2003). *Salam Pax: The clandestine diary of an ordinary Iraqi.* New York: Grove Press

Qaud, H.M. (1983). *al-Sihafah al-muhajirah : dirasah wa-tahlil.* Cairo:

Rugh, W.A. (2004). *Arab Mass Media: Newspapers, Radio, and Television in Arab Politics.* Westport, CT: Praeger.

Rugh, W.A. (1987). *The Arab Press: News Media and Political Process in the Arab World.* Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.

Russell, A. (2005). Myth and the Zapatista movement: exploring a network identity. *New Media & Society*, *7*(4): 559-577.

Saab, H. (1984). *I'jaz al-tawasul al-hadari al-i'lami : nahwa wakalah 'Arabiyah dawliyah lil-anba'.* Beirut:

Salih, S. (2004). *Huquq al-suhufiyin fi al-watan al-'Arabi.* Cairo

Schramm, W. (1966). Two Concepts of Mass Communication. In Bernard Berelson (Ed.) *Reader in Public Opinion and Communication* (pp. 206-219), New York: Free Press

Selber, G.M., & Ghanem, S.I. (2004). *Modernization and Media in the Arab World, 3*(5): http://lass.calumet.purdue.edu/cca/gmj/fa04/gmj-fa04-selber-ghanem.htm

Siebert. F.S., Peterson, T.B. & Schramm, W. (1956) *Four Theories of the Press.* Urbana: Univ. of Illinois.

Shahin, M.A. (2003). *Sihafat al-sahwah al-Islamiyah fi al-bilad al-'Arabiyah.* Amman:

Sakr, N. (2001). *Satellite Realms: Transnational Television, Globalization and the Middle East.* London: IB Tauris.

Tarrazi, V.P. de (1914). *Tarikh al-sihafa al 'Arabiyah.* Beirut: Al-Maktaba al adabiya.

Wells, A. (1997) Introduction. In Alan Wells (Ed.), *World Broadcasting: A Comparative View,* (pp. 1-26). Westport, CT: Ablex/Greenwood

Wheeler, D. (2005). *The Internet in the Middle East: Global Expectations and Local Imaginations in Kuwait.* Albany: SUNY Press.

Wojcieszak, M.E. (2007). Al Jazeera: A Challenge to the Traditional Framing Research. *International Communication Gazette, 69*(2): 115-128.

Zayani, M. (2005). *The Al Jazeera Phenomenon: Critical Perspectives on the New Arab Media.* Boulder, CO: Paradigm.

Adel Iskandar, lecturer at the University of Texas-Austin. He is co-author of Al-Jazeera:

The Story of the Network that is Rattling Governments and Redefining Modern

Journalism *(Westview, 2003), and co-editor of* Edward Said: Emancipation &

Representation *(University of California Press, forthcoming 2007). Iskandar is Visiting

Scholar at the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies (CCAS), Georgetown University.*