Excerpt
Media Power and Global Television News
The Role of Al Jazeera English

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The Kidnapping of a Journalist

The journalistic construction of the Alan Johnston case is 'newsworthy' due to the involvement of the media itself in this political story. The kidnappers took a member of the international press corps to attract international attention. It is also worth noting that at the same time, there were other hostages who were taken captive in the Middle East, but this news story was one that gained an increased attention due to the captive being a BBC journalist. While this news story includes a sequence of events, the period of analysed news broadcasts for this study focuses on two of the last events in the story, namely the 100th day vigil organised by the BBC and the day of Johnston's release. Although the day of Johnston's release attracted the bulk of the media coverage, the two days of reporting shed different light on the Johnston case: the 100-day vigil reporting takes a sombre tone, and the day of release is more celebratory.

The story of Alan Johnston's kidnapping may be summarised as follows: Johnston had been working as a BBC reporter in the Gaza Strip for three years until the time of his kidnapping. He was the only remaining Western reporter residing in Gaza, which meant that if a Western journalist was to become a target it was he. Johnston was kidnapped on his way home from the office in his media car on the streets of Gaza by a Palestinian militant group called Jeish Al Islam, translating from Arabic to 'The Army of Islam'. During the period of his kidnapping, which lasted 114 days (around four months), Johnston appeared on the group's website twice. The first tape showed Johnston wearing red and asking for the release of Muslim prisoners from foreign jails, and the second time he was wearing an explosive jacket. During the period of kidnapping the British Consulate in Jerusalem was negotiating his release with Hamas, which was the newly elected Palestinian leadership at the time, and other political fronts; and it was Hamas who was able to secure his release after reaching a deal with the kidnapping group. The three stages of the thematic structure have correspondingly revealed the following three points in relation to the Johnston case. In the first step of the thematic structure, the deletion process involved the reduction of the news text by eliminating the thematic items of the news story that were similar across all three channels. These items included in the reports provided, more or less, the same basic news items across the three channels. This reflects that global news networks provide similar factual information, however the discursive contexts vary, as we shall go on to see.

This leads to the second point where although the 'factual' information is similar, the construction of the story varies from one channel to another. Thus the selection of which secondary information is to be included and omitted reveals the editorial decisions made

during the making of the news reports. It was noted that this editorial decision on what angle to pursue in the structure of the news reports reflects each channel's political-economy be it a British, American or Arab representation. For example, the BBC, as a British broadcaster and also an actor in the story, focused on the diplomatic relations between Britain and the Palestinian leadership, insinuating that the kidnapping was not an official Palestinian position. This was evident in the use of government sources where reports adopted an editorial stance consistent with the UK government. On the other hand, CNNI strongly focused on highlighting the terrorism discourse by making connections to the kidnappers and Al Qaeda, which may also be 'indexed' to government agendas or appealing to popular concerns regarding terrorism. As for AJE, it was keen to emphasise that the diplomatic relations between Britain and the Palestinians were not tarnished, in addition to highlighting the good will of the Palestinian leadership and the efforts it went through to secure Johnston's release. So although there is an area where all three channels overlap in their reporting, there is a distinctive version of the story that each channel brings to the global audience and which was revealed through the thematic structure process.

On the 100th day of Johnston's captivity, the BBC report includes most of the elements that are of interest to them. Interestingly, the report highlights that there is a difference between the Palestinian kidnapping group Jeish Al Islam and that of other Palestinians by showing the images of rallies that were conducted by the Palestinian journalists who are heard chanting 'Free Free Alan'. Here the reporter points out that this rally was held '[i]n the days immediately after' the kidnap when the Palestinian journalists 'took a leading role demanding his release'. Here the lexical choices 'in the days immediately after', refer to the urgency of the action through both the word 'days' enforced with the word 'immediately', thus emphasising the keenness of the Palestinian journalists to support Johnston's release. To add, it is notable here that by describing the Palestinian journalists through the lexical choices of taking a 'leading role', it portrays these Palestinian journalists as taking initiative in this case, thus showing their support for Johnston and their disapproval of the kidnapping, and in turn distancing them from the Palestinian kidnapping group.

It is worth pointing out that the news anchor introduces the kidnappers in this story as 'a group calling itself "The Army of Islam"' without any descriptions such as 'terrorist group' thus giving them a politically neutral labelling through the use of the lexical choice 'group'. This portrayal reflects that the BBC's discourse is distinguishing between the kidnapers and the Palestinian people without also criminalising the kidnappers, which serves to focus on maintaining positive diplomatic ties with the Palestinian front as we shall go on to see. Accordingly, the BBC appears to be advocating the goodwill of the Palestinian people, which is interesting to point out since the BBC is a victim in the specific news story.

The inclusion of the kidnappers' website, in the BBC report, with the kidnappers appearing wearing black hoods brings the viewer's attention to the dangers that Johnston is going through. Images of the kidnappers making online demands are typical of a terrorism scene, and thus serve to identify this group as terrorists. The kidnappers are shown here requesting the release of Muslim prisoners from foreign jails. Alongside these images, the reporter points out that 'the group also stressed that negotiations are going on'. The use of the lexical item 'stressed' in this proposition serves to emphasise that the group is keen to negotiate, thus bringing some hope to this part of the report despite the images showing a more sombre representation. This 'verbal-visual correspondence' (Chouliaraki, 2006) provides both the

sense of danger through the images yet softens this affect through the proposition that the kidnapping group is stressing that a solution is underway. It is interesting to note that in this example, although the selected images provide a factual representation, the commentary which accompanies these images helps frame the report towards a different specified discourse. So although, it is interesting to note the BBC in this report includes images of the kidnappers making online demands, where the inclusion of the kidnappers' image reminds the viewer of the terrorism frame, it points out that a diplomatic solution is underway. This again emphasises positive diplomatic relations, which is a point that the BBC stresses throughout its reporting on the Johnston case.

The AJE report that day also shows images of the Palestinian journalists' rally holding plaques with 'Free Alan' on them. Interestingly CNNI did not include this shot, although the BBC did. However, like the BBC, AJE as an Arab broadcaster seems keen to portray Palestinians as disapproving of the kidnapping and calling for the release of Johnston. Accordingly, the report ends by mentioning that Hamas is playing a role in trying to secure Johnston's release, issuing an ultimatum to the kidnappers two days previously: 'Hamas has issued an ultimatum demanding his release two days ago but nothing's been heard from the group calling itself "The Army of Islam" since then'. This information is not mentioned in the BBC World or CNNI reports but is an important recent act by the Palestinian leadership and one that shows the active role Hamas is playing in this story, and which is also a significant local element of the story. AJE is, therefore, emphasising that the Palestinian journalists and Hamas do not support the kidnapping of Johnston, despite the kidnappers being Palestinian. This is an important point for AJE to make which, similar to the BBC, is keen to distance the Palestinian journalists and Hamas from the kidnapping group.

It is also notable that the AJE report ends with images of Johnston making an online appeal in red, similar to the CNNI report. At first sight it is questionable whether AJE is framing the story through a terrorism discourse, since this image is broadcast through AJE. Nonetheless, it becomes apparent that this is not the case throughout the day of Johnston's release, as CNNI expands on the terrorism discourse and AJE focuses on the role of Hamas in securing the release. Arguably, also, this image is not as confronting as the image displayed by the BBC which shows the images of the kidnappers covered and holding guns. This BBC image is one that global audiences have associated with images of kidnappings and beheadings conducted in Iraq.

Overall, there seems to be some overlap between AJE's coverage and that of the BBC and CNNI through the inclusion of similar footage. Yet the overall framing of AJE's reporting through differing discourses, offers a different reading to these images. The AJE report presents a discourse similar to that of the BBC, which is distancing the Palestinian leadership and journalists from the kidnappers. Each news network, however, is doing it from differing positions: AJE being an Arab broadcaster is keen to focus on how the Palestinians are disapproving of the kidnapping act, and the BBC being on the other side of the news story is also keen to promote this point as an emphasis of positive relations between the Palestinian and British positions. Interestingly, it can be argued that both the BBC and AJE are practicing public diplomacy yet for different reasons. This is not to suggest that AJE is being dictated by any government position, but rather that AJE – as an Arab broadcaster which has historically supported the Palestinian cause – is keen to show that the act of kidnapping foreign

correspondents is not one which is approved by all Palestinians, thus distancing the Palestinians from the terrorism discourse.

On 4 July 2007, 14 days after marking Johnston's 100 days in captivity on 20 June 2007, Johnston's release is announced and unlike the reports marking the above event this coverage is extensive and breaking news. Since this is a major event, all three channels feature long reports and continuous coverage. In these reports, all three channels feature similar footage of Johnston being escorted to his car after his release, with chaotic scenes of media around him trying to catch a glimpse of him in order to get a quote. In addition to this scene, a press conference is held on the day by Johnston and the Hamas leadership. Furthermore, some reports feature Johnston having breakfast with Hamas senior officials, a sign of positive diplomatic relations.

The BBC's report on the day of Johnston's release is, not surprisingly, delivered with a celebratory tone in response to the news of the safe release of a BBC employee. A quote by Johnston sheds further light on what happened to him during his confinement where Johnston talks about the uncertainty he felt during his captivity. Here he uses propositions that are quoted frequently in other coverage broadcast that day which describe his feelings, such as being 'removed from the world' and 'like being buried alive'. Here the rhetorical tropes 'removed' and 'buried', by implication, serve to emphasise how frightening Johnston's experience was. Other propositions that are stated by Johnston include: 'in the hands of people who were dangerous and unpredictable', emphasising that the kidnappers were a frightening group. Although the report states that Johnston had not been beaten, Johnston describes incidents of violence that he endured, and provides details:

> About three in the morning, on the first night, they rolled me up and put
> a hood over my head, and handcuffed me and took me outside, and of
> course you wonder that way how else it's going to end.

This detailed description and multiple quotes from Johnston on his agonising experience during his captivity highlight the terror that Johnston endured from the kidnappers, thus stressing the risks and dangers involved in this kidnapping. This point further builds towards the importance of this story, and focuses on the dangers associated with kidnappings. This is the first account we hear from Johnston since his kidnapping, so it is an important aspect of the report to include especially since Johnston is a BBC reporter.

The next part of the BBC World report focuses on the diplomatic relations between Britain and the Palestinian leadership, and includes a positive framing of Hamas. The report states that Hamas secured Johnston's release and includes a quote from senior Hamas leader, Mahmoud Zahar, who stresses that Hamas would not allow such actions to happen in the future: 'It's a clear message: we will not allow illegal actions against anybody, we are going to make law'. This quote, where the Hamas leader is identifying the kidnapping as an 'illegal' action, shows how Hamas is disapproving of the kidnapping. This lexical choice of 'illegal' by Hamas to describe the kidnappers' actions aims at distancing Hamas from the kidnappers. The report tells how it was Hamas who helped release Johnston despite its negative image in the Western world: 'But it was this organisation, shunned by the international community, which did most to secure his release'. In the first clause, the transitivity participants here are 'organisation' and 'international community', where the action verb is 'shunned' which

reflects a strong notion of rejection on behalf of the international community towards Hamas thus emphasising how the world disapproved of Hamas at a global level. This comment is made against images of Johnston having breakfast with the Hamas leadership, where this verbal-visual correspondence showcases the good relations between Johnston and the Palestinian leadership, and almost frames Hamas as legitimate as opposed to being 'shunned'. This comment places Hamas in a positive light, and the fact this statement comes from the BBC, a party directly affected, makes it all the more notable. Here, the manner in which the BBC presents Hamas in a positive light further feeds into its discourse of the positive relations with the Palestinian leadership. This is emphasised even further by a statement taken from the British Foreign Secretary, David Miliband, naming the Hamas leaders and recognising 'the priority that's been given to the issue' by Hamas. This recognition of Hamas's efforts by a top British official, aligning with the discourse of British/Palestinian relations adopted by the BBC, suggests that the latter's discourse is itself supported by the British government's diplomatic stance.

The report that was broadcast on CNNI that day incorporates more extensive coverage than that of the first event. Before the report is presented, the news anchor provides a general recap to the story as an introduction to Johnston's release. However, in these few lines there is a mention of Johnston wearing an explosive vest where the anchor says: 'Very little had been heard about him, apart from two tapes, the second of those tapes showing him enwrapped by a suicide – what looked like a suicide vest'. The repetition of the lexical item 'suicide' in the second clause acts as a confirmation that Johnston is in danger. Additionally, the interruption in the flow of the proposition tends to place additional emphasis on this image of the suicide vest through the use of the lexical items 'what looked like', thus linking the commentary to the image of Johnston in the suicide vest through a verbal-visual correspondence. The modality presented in this example, where there is a focus on the word 'suicide' by repetition, serves to present the story through the terrorism discourse, where the anchor is not just conveying information but presenting it through a terrorism framing. It is interesting to note, therefore, that although the occasion of this event is Johnston's release, the report is introduced with a focus on the suicide vest which is not part of the events of that day altogether. This form of presentation through the verbal-visual correspondence used where the inclusion of Johnston wearing an explosive vest and stressing the word 'suicide', makes the story newsworthy according to CNNI since this places the Johnston incident within the broader frame of the war on terror. Here CNNI from the start is advocating the terrorism discourse, and this is evident throughout its reporting on this story.

The CNNI report starts with the words 'Free at last!', which is a description of Johnston's current situation, and then follows by stating that during the length of the period of captivity Johnston endured: 'one hundred and fifteen days in captivity – one hundred and fifteen days of fear'. Although the first clause of the proposition is a simple statement of fact since it states the exact number of days Johnston was in captivity, the second clause of the proposition restates the number of days by substituting the lexical items 'in captivity' with the lexical choice of 'fear' thus providing a description of Johnston's experience. This presupposition that Johnston's experience was terrifying is carried out through the substitution of the words 'in captivity' with 'fear' thus marking a move from a statement of fact to a suggestive claim. A statement of quality, therefore, is assigned here through the word 'fear' connecting the captivity with terror, thus reiterating the terrorism frame adopted in this story. A quote selected from Johnston serves to support this where he narrates how there was talk of him

being killed by his captors during his captivity: 'they chained me up for the twenty-four-hour period, they talked about the possibility of killing me over the next two days'. The possibility of him being killed is raised for the first time here, as it is not mentioned in the analysed BBC World reports studied that day. This serves to reaffirm the previous proposition of 'one hundred and fifteen days of fear' as a credible claim. This, therefore, connects the group to terrorist violence as it implies that the group did not just hold him for negotiation purposes. Although it would have been expected that the BBC would include this quote as an affected party, CNNI has opted to include it as a selection that feeds into its choice of the terrorism discourse.

The CNNI report then provides some background to the kidnapping and introduces the group by describing them as 'shadowy' through the proposition 'Johnston was kidnapped in Gaza on the 12th March by a shadowy group called "Jeish Al Islam" – The Army of Islam'. The mode of this proposition is mainly unmarked apart from the lexical description of the group as 'shadowy' which through modality places the kidnappers in a negative frame, thus further emphasising and advocating the terrorism discourse. This choice of words becomes notable when compared to AJE's use of a more politically neutral description of the kidnappers in the analysis of the AJE report to follow.

It is worth noting that in this report, CNNI has chosen to include all three tapes released during Johnston's period of kidnapping: the tape of Johnston dressed in red saying that he is being treated well and is in good health; the second tape where the kidnappers are shown covering their faces and holding machine guns – similar to the tape shown in the BBC World report; and finally the tape where Johnston is making a plea in an explosive vest. It is notable that, alongside the image of the masked kidnappers, the reporter points out that the kidnapping group is requesting that Britain release Muslim prisoners from foreign jails, a point also mentioned in the first BBC World report. However, the CNNI report goes further, outlining the kidnapper's request for the freeing of 'Al Qaeda's spiritual ambassador in Europe'. This mention of Al Qaeda, which is the group linked to the September 11 attacks against the US, associates the kidnappers to this top terrorist group. This contextualises the kidnappers as part of the wave of terrorism that the Western world is fighting, and by framing them in this way the terrorism discourse is further emphasised.

The third tape used in the CNNI report is of Johnston in an explosive vest, and is accompanied by the use of the lexical item 'chilling' to describe the tape: 'But the most chilling video came a few weeks later when he appeared to be strapped with a bomb'. This proposition uses the lexical choices 'most' and 'chilling' as a form of overtextualisation where the lexical item 'most' provides a superlative to the lexical choice 'chilling' to accentuate and intensify the effect of fear. This is then followed by a snippet of the video where Johnston is quoted as saying: 'As you can see I've been dressed in what is an explosive bomb which the kidnappers say will be detonated if there's any attempt to storm the area'. This proposition carries a threat to the viewer, however since this is being included in a report broadcast on the day of Johnston's release this threat no longer carries a sense of present danger. It is therefore questionable why there was the need to include Johnston's quote that day, which seems to be more of an assertion of the terrorism discourse which CNNI is adopting to frame this story.

The few examples of verbal-visual correspondence in the above analysis emphasise the terrorism discourse, such as the image of Johnston strapped to a bomb and the reporter

describing this as 'chilling', in addition to the images of the kidnappers holding weapons and the reporter linking their requests to the release of Al Qaeda's spiritual leader. This selection of words and associations against the images shown, frame these images through a terrorism frame. In comparison to BBC World and AJE, which also show images of Johnston and his kidnappers, there is more of an emphasis by CNNI to present Johnston's kidnapping through a popular American discourse of terrorism. Although the connection between Johnston's kidnapping as an act of terror is legitimate, there are other aspects of the story that exist as presented by the BBC and AJE. Nonetheless, CNNI have chosen to emphasise and advocate a terrorism discourse as an American broadcaster, which is an indication that CNNI's reporting is based on a topic which is high on the agenda in American politics. This is an interesting example since it showcases how global news networks tackle their political coverage through nationalistic interests and framing.

Interestingly, the first report analysed for that day by AJE was not that different from the BBC coverage, in the sense that it also stressed Johnston's personal experience. There was also more focus on Hamas's involvement and success in securing Johnston's release. The AJE report includes the quotes from Johnston on his experience:

> Like being buried alive really, removed from the world and occasionally terrifying. I dreamt many times, literally dreamt of being free again and always woke up in that room. It's almost hard to believe that I'm not going to wake up in minutes in that room again, I don't think so the way things are going.

The choice to include this quote by Johnston, which includes the rhetorical tropes of 'buried alive' and 'removed from the world', reflects Johnston's negative experience during his captivity. However the remainder of the quote focuses on the optimistic moments of his kidnapping through the lexical items of 'dreamt of being free again' and 'I'm not going to wake up in minutes in that room again' This description highlights the feeling of relief that Johnston has, which is a positive one. So here the AJE report is generally descriptive, and although it includes a terrifying account of his kidnapping, it does include a quote which states that the terror is over. Although the personal account of Johnston's kidnapping is included in the reporting by the BBC and CNNI, AJE offers a similar account but clearly not as accentuated as the threat of being killed as in the CNNI report.

The AJE report subsequently shows Johnston hand in hand with the Palestinian leadership, before sitting down for a press conference. Here AJE highlights the role Hamas has played and proposes that, according to many, Hamas's involvement in Johnston's release was a bid to improve its image and gain international recognition. AJE states this explicitly: 'Many believe Alan's release is a sign that Hamas wants to start positively building its reputation internationally'. This proposition starts with the lexical items 'many believe' as an attribution of what is to follow. This reflects possibly either a general opinion or a constructed message where many journalists often attribute what they want to suggest to anonymous sources such as, in this instance, 'many believe'. Therefore, this presupposition, that assumes that Hamas wants to improve its international image, reads more as a suggestive claim than an attributed fact. Here AJE is suggesting that Johnston's release is proof that Hamas wants to improve its reputation globally. This is significant coming from AJE, as an Arab broadcaster, which would want to convey this message. Here, AJE does not use strong words such as the BBC

World's lexical choice of 'shunned', rather it takes a more positive framing of how Johnston's kidnapping is an opportunity to build 'its reputation internationally'.

The AJE report also tells of the ordeal behind Johnston's kidnapping. It uses the lexical choice of 'masked gunmen' to describe the kidnappers. It is interesting to note that AJE here describes the kidnappers as simply 'masked' and 'gunmen' thus not overtextualizing the description of the kidnappers. Hence, this is quite a politically neutral description that does not carry much political connotation. The report then says that Johnston's kidnapping took him 'from the world he was passionate about' in reference to the Gaza Strip, thus emphasising that Johnston was emotionally interested in the Palestinian cause. At the same time the report is quick to point out that 'he knows all too well the risks on the streets of Gaza', meaning that what happened was not an unexpected scenario. One significant point that was not present in this report is that it does not include any footage of Johnston's tapes in the explosive jacket, nor any other online statements that were made by the kidnappers themselves, it merely describes them as 'masked gunmen' thus avoiding the terrorism discourse.

In this report it seems that AJE is careful to minimise the impact and description of the kidnappers, where it is attempting to avoid the terrorism discourse. It is interesting to note that through the same news story, one channel such as CNNI can accentuate a particular discourse such as terrorism, and another channel such as AJE attempts to minimise it. This provides an example of how media power in the construction of news discourses operates within a global arena, where discourses are a reflection of the national affiliation of the global news network.

A second report by AJE has been incorporated as part of this comparative analysis because it offers a slightly distinct discourse to the AJE report discussed above. This second report provides more background on Palestinian politics as a backdrop to the kidnapping, which would be more of interest to an Arab audience and hence would be the kind of reporting usually found in Arabic media. One possible explanation for this difference in reporting within AJE itself is that while the first AJE report is compiled by a Western reporter, the following report is presented by an Arab reporter. It may be the case that the Arab reporter's cultural identity and acculturation within an Arab news production environment contributes to this difference in emphasis. Examples of the difference between the AJE Western reporter and the AJE Arab reporter include the use of the Arabic name of the kidnapping group, Jeish Al Islam, by the Arab reporter meaning The Army of Islam. The reporter describes them as a 'fringe Palestinian group', which is quite a different description from that of the CNNI's overtextualisation of 'shadowy'. The word 'fringe' positions the group as operating on the edges, as opposed to 'shadowy' which has a more negative undertone. Moreover, although this description of 'fringe' is more politically neutral in description in comparison to the CNNI report, it does hold more of a political positioning by situating the group as operating on the edges than the AJE Western reporter who merely describes the kidnapping group as 'masked gunmen' as a description of their image. Such examples illustrate how discursive media power is constructed.

Another interesting example of how the two AJE reports differ is that the Arab reporter explains that the kidnappers are one of three groups that had claimed responsibility for the kidnapping of an Israeli corporal, Gilad Shalit. This explanation provides further insight as to what this group has been involved in, and offers more background about the kidnappers

which is not provided by the other studied channels. In this instance, AJE is providing further background on the kidnappers. The reporter mentions the intervention of the 'Public Resistance Committees' which is the third group that was involved with Hamas in the kidnapping of the Israeli Corporal. The reporter then goes to talk further about a 'trilateral council of religious clerics' who met with the kidnapping group to discuss a potential release. This is a comprehensive narrative that serves as a background to the kidnapping which is not explained in the other studied reports. The report later provides an account of the Palestinian political environment in Gaza and states that the timing of the release coincides with the emergency government paying public sector employees their full wages after not being paid for seventeen months. It introduces this by saying: 'The timing of the release is also significant'. This proposition offers the viewer further insight into the political situation within Gaza, and thus connects Johnston's release to Palestinian discourses. The Arab AJE reporter has thus provided more detailed reporting on the story by linking the group to other ongoing Palestinian political stories, thus positioning the Johnston's kidnapping within an Arab discursive context. Such an example reflects that AJE's reporting does not necessarily constitute a 'challenge', rather AJE is offering insight to the kidnapping that would also be of interest to an Arab audience. In this sense, AJE can be regarded as 'informing' the audience about the contextual links that the Johnston kidnapping has within Palestinian politics, possibly for its own purposes or though its journalistic culture of reporting on the region. Therefore, we see in this report a deeper Arab focus on the coverage of the story which was not present in BBC and CNNI's reporting and, as this analysis exhibited, was also not found by the Western reporter in the first report within AJE itself. Although this report does not offer a 'challenge', it does reflect a form of 'informative' reporting into the kidnapping through an Arab reporting perspective and interest, and could also arguably be seen at times as adopting a public diplomacy role by emphasising Hamas's successful intervention in the case. Again although this discourse is not dictated by Hamas itself, AJE as an Arab broadcaster seems inclined to cover Hamas's role in the Johnston case.

In comparing all reports analysed on the Johnston case, it can be noted that the basic elements making up the story were included by all three channels. However what differs in these reports is the selection of what to include in the news reports; that is, the discourse that each report presents by focusing on aspects of the story that are considered important to each channel. Therefore, the three stages of the thematic structure have correspondingly revealed the following three points.

Firstly, there seems to be similar thematic items across the three channels studied. In the first step of the thematic structure, the deletion process involved the reduction of the news text by eliminating the thematic items of the news story that were parallel across all three channels. These items included in the reports provided, more or less, the same basic news items across the three channels. For example, how Johnston was kidnapped, who kidnapped him, threats made, pleas made, vigils organised, images of his release, quotes from Johnston, quotes from Hamas leadership, breakfast with Hamas, meeting the British consulate, and so on. Although it is not within the scope of this study to explore the sourcing of news, this analysis has revealed that global news networks can provide similar 'facts', however the discursive contexts vary.

Accordingly, this leads to the second point where although the 'factual' information is similar, the construction of the story varies from one channel to another. Thus the selection of which

secondary information is to be included and omitted reveals the editorial decisions made during the making of the news reports. This editorial decision on what angle to pursue in the structure of the news reports reflects each channel's political economy be it a British, American or Arab representation. The BBC, as a British broadcaster and also an actor in the story, focused on the diplomatic relations between Britain and the Palestinian leadership, indicating that the kidnapping was not an official Palestinian position. This was evident in the use of government sources, the indication of the commonality of an editorial stance with the UK government, and the reciprocity of perspectives presented in report and quote. On the other hand, CNNI strongly focused on highlighting the terrorism discourse by making connections to the kidnappers and Al Qaeda, and which may also be 'indexed' to government agendas or appealing to popular concerns regarding terrorism. As for AJE, it was keen to emphasise that the diplomatic relations between Britain and the Palestinians were not tarnished, in addition to showing the good will of the Palestinian leadership and the efforts it went through to secure Johnston's release. So although there is an area where all three channels overlap in their reporting, there is a distinctive version of the story that each channel brings to the global audience and which was revealed through the thematic structure process.

With these similarities and differences established through the thematic structure, the main question in relation to this study remains: to what extent can AJE be seen as challenging the content of reports produced by BBC and CNNI? This question leads to the third and final point: AJE's reporting did not offer a clear 'challenge' in this instance, rather AJE's performance can be better described as providing a more in depth 'informative' discourse by including more background information and contextual links to the story. Yet there were times when AJE framed elements of the report differently, for example AJE described the kidnappers as 'masked gunmen' and 'fringe', whereas CNNI labelled them as 'shadowy' which holds a more negative connotation. These lexical items indicate the differences in how the kidnappers are perceived by each channel, and in turn how they are potentially perceived by their audiences. Such examples in the choice of words depict AJE as attempting to distinguish itself from Western global broadcasters. Such careful use of wording reflects AJE's concern to avoid dominant global representations, thus reporting on both the kidnappers and Hamas slightly more positively. Although such instances in this news story were small, they do reveal AJE's concern to offer a varying perspective. This variation from BBC World and CNNI, exemplifies how AJE is practicing its own nuance of media power where although its discourses are not that sharply contrasted to those of BBC and CNNI, there are elements of AJE's discourse (such the description of the kidnappers and of Hamas, the lexical choices, and contextualisations and links made) that reveal that AJE is covering the story through its Arab position.

Moreover, within AJE's reporting itself there were further discrepancies. The second AJE report analysed on the day of Johnston's release is an example where AJE has clearly adopted the Arab story in relation to Johnston's kidnapping. This report introduced additional information from an Arab news angle, such as the economic situation in Gaza and the role that Hamas as a new leadership is playing in this. This is not included in the BBC World or CNNI reports since these details might not fit with the angle these broadcasters report from, or might not even be of interest to their audiences. Yet, this representation by AJE cannot be regarded as a wholesale challenge to content found in BBC World and CNNI reports. AJE can be considered as offering more of what Arabic-speaking broadcasters would include in their reports, which is the focus on Hamas's role in Palestinian politics and the various

factions involved behind the release of Johnston. And although no consistent contestation was found in AJE's news reports on the Johnston case, there were examples where its reports did offer moments of challenge, as illustrated in the labelling that AJE adopted when describing the kidnappers or Hamas. The next news story in this chapter will shed further light on these points.

In light of this analysis, it may be argued that AJE's news reporting on the Johnston case was not as radical as might have been expected, given both the way AJE has portrayed itself, and in light of claims made about it in academic debates. Claims made by AJE and others, that present it as a radical 'counter-balance' and 'contra-flow' to dominant international news media, were not matched in the findings of the analytic study conducted on the Johnston case. The reports by AJE that did introduce a different perspective to that of the other two Western broadcasters did not actually contest any information found in reports by BBC World and CNNI, rather, at most, they offered a different interpretive perspective into the same events. It may of course be argued that the provision of different perspectives is significant, not least where it is linked to differences in political perspective, and greater attention being paid to the politics of the Arab world itself. However, it is hard to argue that AJE's coverage provides a radical counter-narrative to the BBC World and CNNI reports.

From this first analysis it can be argued that there were a variety of journalistic influences that shape the discursive output of the studied channels, as discussed in Chapter 1. This relates to Cottle's (2003) argument, in Chapter 3, for the need to contextualise discourse analysis in relation to various influences beyond the text. The implications of this is the emergence of discursive outputs which in turn reflects the various journalistic influences which shape mediated discourse, such as the political economy of the news organisation, and the culture of the journalist, and the sourcing of news. These influences will be discussed in detail in the final chapter. First, however, since the analysis of one story provides a limited basis of evidence, the following story on the six medics who were sentenced to death in Libya sheds further light on this discussion in understanding AJE's news performance in its first year of operation.

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