



Stabilizing Authoritarianism

The Political Echo in
Pan-Arab Satellite TV
News Media

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Journalistic autonomy is the imperative, [...] for those who want to participate in journalism on a really human level, [...] the concept of press freedom is changed to journalistic social-determinism or press responsibility.

—John C. Merrill (1990, p. 95)

A PRELUDE TO THE BOOK

The book systematically explores critical discourse and semiotic analysis systems, examining their integration into communicative practices intricately linked to political, social, and cultural history. It offers a nuanced evaluation of the intricate relationship between knowledge, power, language, and the evolving landscape of communication sciences. Emphasizing the interplay of theoretical knowledge amid cognitive transformations on a cosmic scale, the book examines their echoes in the Arab region. It particularly focuses on the connection with knowledge systems navigating the media's role within the framework of the institution's or state's interaction, addressing crises of knowledge and the state.

Symbolic space emerges as a geopolitical force intensifying during crises, examined through a cognitive methodology employing analytical models derived from the clash between reality and the virtual. The book navigates the prevalence of hybrid narratives in the Arab world's political conflict, unraveling the complex interplay of political and media roles amid cosmic epistemic transformations. Taking the Palestinian internal division as a case study, the book dissects the discourse elements shaping media action in covering and analyzing the division. It scrutinizes the effects on political, ideological, and functional structures, exploring the impact on Palestinian politics and international political positions reflected in media coverage.

Dr. Hussein engages in a meticulous dialogue on the development of media theorization, delving into structures and contexts that shape meaning and crises. The book introduces a new theoretical approach to

examining the sociocultural role of media in exploring the identical line between media reality and lived reality. Beyond summarizing theoretical epochs, the book contributes to bridging the gap between theory and practice, revealing cognitive backgrounds governing action and crisis in the Palestinian context. It adds depth to political communication, legislating action hegemony over public opinion.

In conclusion, the book offers a scientific and organized methodology for researchers, political activists, and academics. It aims to rescue the cognitive scene from value judgments and ideological classifications, providing communicative and media lessons to trace fundamental transformations in the political narrative context amid global power struggles.

Birzeit University, Palestine

Waleed Al-Shurafa

PROBING PERSPECTIVES

In this comprehensive work, I am exploring the intricate landscape of strategic political communication in the Middle East, scrutinizing its theoretical dimensions and shedding light on its profound relevance to the present and future of the Palestinian cause. Through a multifaceted lens, I address key topics, offering insights from various pertinent perspectives. At the core of my exploration is a meticulous examination of the scientific material that elucidates the impact of media on society, contributing to both the theoretical-epistemological and empirical-ontological levels. The examination of authoritarianism and media control in the Arab world, particularly within the context of the Palestinian internal conflict, not only is pertinent to regional dynamics but also reflects broader global intersections of media and politics. The intricate relationship between state authority and media manipulation serves as a microcosm of larger trends observed in media ecosystems worldwide. Understanding the nuances of media influence within the Palestinian narrative necessitates an exploration of how these dynamics resonate within the broader Arab media landscape and intersect with global media flows. The book chapters scrutinize the complexities of media control and its implications for freedom of expression and democratic processes, drawing connections between local realities and overarching media-political paradigms shaping narratives at regional and global scales. At the core of this book is a nuanced analysis of media impact through news messaging in Arab transnational satellite TV news channels, with a principal emphasis on Al Jazeera, Al Arabiya, and Al Mayadeen. As cases for analysis, these channels are “selected to fill theoretical categories and provide examples of polar types” (See: Eisenhardt,

1989, pp. 532–550). The analysis critically appraises these channels’ performance in covering conflict, specifically focusing on their political affiliations to regional power blocs, their role in shaping the political process, and their impact on political culture within Palestinian society, marked by internal civil conflict. The analytical chapters encapsulate profound interviews conducted with a select group intimately connected to the research problem, including prominent experts and key figures in the Palestinian political and media arenas—the “insiders.” Given the sensitivity of their testimonies and the associated risks, a judicious decision was made to distill and summarize their insights. This approach aims to protect the contributors from potential harm, considering the delicate nature of the interview content at both the media and political levels. Amid the persistent challenges of division and Israeli occupation, this work intentionally avoids sliding into debates that could detract from the book’s objectives, steering clear of issues that may fuel further division and disagreement among readers, particularly within Palestinian society and broader Arab communities. It seeks to prevent the work from becoming a platform for ideological, intellectual, and political disputes, and seeks to maintain a focused trajectory. Designed to cater to researchers, academics, and university students interested in unraveling the intricate relationship between media and political logic in Palestinian and Arab society, this book offers valuable insights. Furthermore, it aspires to provide actionable guidance to decision-makers in media and political institutions, offering strategic perspectives on leveraging the potential of news media outlets to foster dialogue, understanding, and conflict alleviation in conflict-ridden regions.

Hussein AlAhmad

ABOUT THE BOOK

The book under review provides a comprehensive examination of the intricate relationship between media institutions, power elites, and society within the context of ongoing internal conflicts in Arab societies. This analysis addresses a pressing contemporary research issue, particularly relevant amid the intense global competition for influence and control in the Middle East. The book's focus on the Palestinian internal conflict as a case study—of global political interest—offers valuable insights into the dynamics of conflict, media representation, and political influence in the region.

The introductory chapters of the book contextualize the conflict by setting the stage by scrutinizing the unique characteristics of Arab societies,—a region characterized by “organized chaos” marked by political instability and turmoil. This term encapsulates the political instability, social upheavals, and economic challenges prevalent in many Arab countries. The Palestinian internal conflict serves as a microcosm of these broader issues, highlighting the complexities of power dynamics, identity politics, and external interventions within the region.

One of the central themes explored in the book is the role of transnational satellite networks in shaping public perceptions and narratives regarding ongoing conflicts. The author thoroughly analyzes the symbiotic relationship between satellite TV news media outlets and political authorities, emphasizing how these platforms often serve as conduits for political agendas rather than objective reporting. Through critical discourse analysis (CDA) and in-depth interviews with key insiders, the

book decodes media messages to uncover underlying power dynamics and hidden agendas.

A significant contribution of the book is the testing of the “Bargaining Power” model (Hussein AlAhmad, 2023), a theoretical framework that distinguishes itself from existing models by considering not only structural and economic dimensions but also cultural and sociopolitical aspects of media influence. This innovative model offers a structured approach to understanding the complex interactions between media logic and political logic within mediatized conflicts in the Middle East. By systematically examining the editorial policies, performance, and messaging of major Arab satellite channels, the book reveals how these channels navigate conflicts while aligning with political interests.

The methodological approach adopted in this research integrates the “Bargaining Power” model, with empirical analysis, critical discourse, and content examination. By considering not only the structural and economic dimensions but also the cultural and sociopolitical aspects of media influence, the novel model distinguishes itself from available frameworks employed in the examination of ongoing conflicts (Herman & Chomsky’s “Manufacturing Consent” (1988), Wolfsfeld’s “Media Contest” (1997), Strömbäck’s “Mediatization of Politics” (2008), and Kellner and Durham’s “Media Culture” (2013)). Through a meticulous study of key mainstream Arab satellite channels such as Al Jazeera, Al Arabiya, and Al Mayadeen, the book deciphers the meanings embedded in media messages and uncovers the underlying dynamics shaping media narratives and political affiliations. This methodological rigor ensures a nuanced understanding of media-political dynamics and their impact on societal perceptions amid ongoing conflicts, occurring in undemocratic environments, irrespective of their motivations and nature.

The book’s contribution to scholarly discourse lies in its depth of analysis and originality in examining media-political dynamics within conflict-ridden regions. By focusing on one key internal ongoing conflict in the Middle East, the research enriches our understanding of how media institutions interact with power structures and influence public opinion during turbulent times. The concept of “Stabilizing Authoritarianism” introduced in the book provides a critical lens for dissecting the intricate mechanisms through which some authoritarian regimes manipulate media narratives to maintain power and project stability.

Beyond its academic contributions, the book has practical implications for policymakers, media professionals, and international stakeholders

involved in conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts. By highlighting the complexities of media influence and political dynamics, the research offers insights that can inform strategic decision-making and interventions aimed at fostering dialogue, reconciliation, and social cohesion in conflict-affected societies.

The book concludes by outlining potential avenues for future research, including comparative studies across different conflict contexts, longitudinal analyses to track media narratives over time, and interdisciplinary collaborations to integrate insights from political science, media studies, and conflict resolution fields. This call for further inquiry underscores the ongoing relevance and significance of understanding media-political dynamics in shaping narratives, perceptions, and outcomes in conflict settings.

In essence, the book represents a significant contribution to scholarship on media influence, conflict communication, and political dynamics in Arab societies. Its interdisciplinary approach, methodological rigor, and nuanced analysis make it a valuable resource for academics, practitioners, and policymakers seeking to navigate the complex terrain of media-political interactions amid ongoing conflicts in the Middle East and beyond.

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Background and Historical Context

THE PALESTINIANS SPLIT: *A POST-ELECTION CONFLICT*

Palestine is a unique case in “mediatized conflict” research,¹ being a key target for foreign and regional political interventions, accompanied by news media involvement. Those came in the aftermath of several pivotal events that took place in the Middle East (ME) starting with the Second Gulf War in Iraq. The impact of these events was reinforced during the Arab Spring uprisings and the emergence of the regional political/sectarian split in the Arab world, which generated an American-allied pro-Saudi camp versus a pro-Islamist, predominantly Iranian camp (Lynch, 2008). Within this competition, Qatar has also emerged as a third influential player in the region. According to Kamrava, “Qatar has successfully employed a combination of *diplomatic hyperactivism* and hedging, the American security umbrella, economic prowess and branding to position itself as an influential actor in the region and beyond” (Kamrava, 2013, p. 102). One major consequence of those circumstances, the Palestinian split was embodied in a political dispute over power and ideology, which erupted in 2006 in the wake of the Palestinian legislative elections between

¹**Mediatized conflicts:** Coined by Simon Cottle, the concept emphasizes “the complex way in which media are often implicated within conflicts while disseminating ideas and images about them”. (2006, p. 8)

the two main parties—Fatah,² and Hamas,³—two major and powerful actors on the Palestinian political scene. Colonialism and orientalism, as two central factors that played major roles in designing the Palestinian post-Oslo sociopolitical landscape, are also recognized as having contributed to the exacerbation of the ideological paradox between the two major Palestinian parties (Said, 1992). Fatah is secular and to an extent backed by the pro-Saudi camp, as well as the United States, United Kingdom, and European Union, based on the Oslo Accords and for practical purposes is tolerated by Israel. Hamas, in contrast, is an Islamic-nationalist, religious movement, with strong connections to the “Muslim Brotherhood” network in the ME, holding a deep-rooted position against the Oslo treaties, as well as the recognition of “Israel”—which identifies the movement as a pro-Iranian ally and by default an antagonist for the pro-Saudi camp.

Fatah and Hamas are more powerful than the other twelve Palestinian political parties included under the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO);⁴ together both constitute nearly 90% of the Palestinian Legislative

²**Fatah** is the acronym for the Palestinian Liberation Movement, the major and dominant political party under the umbrella of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). It was founded by Yasser Arafat in the 1950s, acted as the cornerstone of the Palestinian national struggle and was the first exile group to launch armed attacks against Israel until involvement in the Oslo accords. The movement led the Oslo process with Israel, which resulted in the establishment of the Palestinian Authority. This was taken over by the movement until the victory of Hamas in the 2006 elections and the occurrence of the political split.

³**Hamas** is the acronym for the Islamic Resistance Movement, the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood movement (MBM) in the Middle East & North Africa (MENA). Originally established in the Gaza Strip in the late 1960s by Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, it is an Islamic society with a social service focus and with a strong reference to religion. It expanded gradually to the West Bank. The movement’s shift to its current structures came in 1987 as a response to demands for change, arising from the outset of the First Palestinian Intifada (Uprising) against Israel’s occupation. Currently, Hamas is the largest of several Palestinian Islamist groups. Alongside its social service wing, it has a strong military wing. Since 2006, Hamas has been the governing authority of the Gaza Strip. According to the BBC, Hamas has engaged in the Palestinian political process since 2005, becoming the first Islamist group in the Arab world to gain power democratically. One salient issue about Hamas is its principal commitment to the destruction of Israel.

⁴**The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO):** Established in 1964, it stands as the embodiment of the Palestinian national movement. It is an umbrella organization comprised of numerous factions of the resistance movement, political parties, popular organizations, and independent personalities and figures from all sectors of Palestinian life. In 1974 the PLO was recognized by the Arab Summit as the “sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people” and since then it has represented Palestine at the United Nations and other fora. As articulated by the Permanent Observer Mission of the State of Palestine in the UN, Retrieved March 5, 2016, at: <http://palestineun.org/about-palestine/palestine-liberation-organization/>

Council (PLC).⁵ Fatah (34% of the PLC according to a poll in 2006) was always more powerful than the Palestinian Authority's (PA) government,⁶ with its flagrant monopolization of the leadership, taking fateful decisions in the peace process and international fora (Hajjar, 2014). After the split occurred in 2007, the same role applied to its main opponent Hamas in the Gaza Strip, who gained 56% of the PLC in a 2006 poll (Miller, 2013), where the party dominates the government and sovereign institutions, especially media platforms.

The increasing competition between regional powers involved key state apparatus, with special reliance on their sponsored/financed news media, principally transnational satellite TV (TSTV) channels. To produce a clear view of the nature of TSTV news media involvement in Palestinian domestic politics, examining its coverage from a local media professional and insider's perspective is highly significant. The judgments of news broadcasts as expressed by prominent insiders, who are referred to by both regional and local media outlets, are relevant to this book. The insiders' works and points of view are also covered in some detail by other media networks, being directly reflected in their content, affecting both the policies of rival parties and public opinion.

In examining the intricate connections among media, politics, and society, within the Palestinian split, it becomes imperative to grasp the historical backdrop of Palestinian politics. This backdrop is intricately woven with a multifaceted array of events and challenges that have profoundly influenced the course of the Palestinian people and their political ethos. However, the modern political landscape began to take shape after World War I during the British mandate on Palestine. This period marked the

⁵**The Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC)** was established as the Palestinian parliament within the Palestinian Authority which combines both parliamentary and presidential systems of democracy. The PLC is responsible for enacting laws, and it “has two main responsibilities: drafting laws and overseeing the performance of the executive branch. [...] The PLC was vested with a mandate of a transitional five-year period starting on May 1994, as part of the Oslo process.” Retrieved May 23, 2019 at: The Jerusalem Media and Communications Centre (JMCC). “Palestinian Political System.” (2009). <http://www.jmcc.org/fastfactspag.aspx?tname=12>.

⁶**The Palestinian Authority (PA)** “was established under the framework of the Oslo Accords signed by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). The PA is intended to represent the Palestinian residents of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip during an interim period as a temporary arrangement leading to “Permanent Status”.” Retrieved May 23, 2019 at: REUT Institute; “Palestinian Authority.” (2019). <http://reut-institute.org/en/Publication.aspx?PublicationId=563>.

beginning of tensions between the recently settled Jewish and local Palestinian populations, over the national aspirations and rights to the land. These tensions were further intensified by the creation of Israel in 1948, which led to the forced displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, an event marked by Palestinians as *Al Nakba*, or “catastrophe.” Against the backdrop of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the subsequent decades witnessed the emergence of several Palestinian political factions, each with distinct ideologies and approaches to addressing their national struggle (Asali, 2005). In 1964, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) formed and became a central player advocating for the Palestinian struggle for self-determination (Hamid, 1975).

After decades of Jordanian and Egyptian rule of the West Bank and Gaza Strip respectively, the Six-Day War in 1967 and the subsequent Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip added new dimensions to the political landscape (Khalidi, 1997), fueling resistance movements and shaping the contours of Palestinian political identity. After the first Palestinian Intifada (1987–1993), there came the Oslo Accords in the 1990s aimed at achieving a two-state solution. However, their implementation faced significant challenges, contributing to ongoing tensions and shaping the course of contemporary Palestinian politics on both Israeli and internal fronts. The second Palestinian Intifada (2000–2005) instigated a new international attempt to retrieve Oslo, tensions escalated between the two major Palestinian political factions, Fatah and Hamas, in the aftermath of the 2006 legislative elections bringing Hamas to rule, leading to violent clashes in the Gaza Strip in 2007 (Viken, 2008). The struggle escalated dramatically and culminated in the Palestinian split; the political and territorial division, resulting in Hamas taking control of Gaza Strip, while Fatah dominated in the West Bank (Kifner & Myre, 2006). The split created two separate administrations with distinct governing structures, exacerbating the challenges of achieving national unity and hindering concerted efforts toward a comprehensive resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Repeatedly, several reconciliation attempts have been held with regional mediations, but the split remains a significant factor influencing Palestinian politics and complicating the pursuit of a unified Palestinian voice in diplomatic and peace negotiations with their Israeli, powerful Western-backed Israeli opponent.

THE ROOTS OF THE PALESTINIAN SPLIT

It can be said that the current Palestinian division stems in its origins from the pivotal event of the PLO exile from Lebanon in 1982. On the one hand, this stirred the dormant opposition inside the organization generating several schisms, while on the other hand, it boosted the role of the Islamic movement as a political contender for the PLO—with the primary player being Fatah (Khalidi, 2006, pp. 168–169). On the ground, the rift became tangible in Palestinian political culture during the first Intifada, sparked in 1987. For the first time, Hamas established its armed wing to trigger resistance against Israel, rising as a powerful political party with a religious identity. While all other Palestinian parties associated with the PLO coordinated their activities under the “Unified National Leadership” of the Intifada, Hamas acted in parallel and each faction employed its media outlets. Arab state-run media reported the Intifada events on a limited basis to avoid public outrage in their—subjugated—countries (Ayish, 2001).

External Interventions

Viewed from an international perspective, the uprising brought attention to the need for a lasting resolution. Matar notes that this period marked a shift in regional power, redirecting global focus to the Palestinians who were previously overshadowed by the strategic concerns of some Arab regimes and the violence from Israel (Matar, 2018, p. 4). The global attention subsequently materialized in the form of the Oslo Accords and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (PA) (Shlaim, 2005). This significant development added a new regional and geopolitical dimension to the existing domestic rift. The Arab world witnessed a semi-regional division over this matter, forming two camps: the “Rejection Camp,” led by Syria, supporting the resistance track of Hamas, and the “Normalization Camp,” led by certain Arab states that signed settlements with Israel, endorsing the Oslo track (Pipes, 1996). This regional divide manifested in the Palestinian political landscape, with the emergence of an anti-Oslo front, primarily led by Hamas, in contrast to the Fatah-led pro-Oslo front (Perthes, 2004, p. 270). Concurrently, Arab TV media aligned along similar lines, actively engaging in both Palestinian media and politics. State-run official media in each Arab camp promoted the policies of their respective Palestinian allies.