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**Another Other
Redefining Feminism on Al-Jazeera**

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Another Other
Redefining Feminism on Al-Jazeera

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Abstract

Another Other Redefining Feminism on Al-Jazeera

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Women and women's issues receive a great deal of attention on Al-Jazeera English, increasing the visibility of feminist ideologies in the transnational media and promoting a space for new and greater feminist discourse. This thesis seeks to discover how and why Al-Jazeera undertakes such promotion and what links it possesses to the larger sociopolitical climate of the Middle East as a whole. In pursuit of these goals, the study examines the journalistic content, unconscious style, and linguistic structures used in articles about women on the Al-Jazeera English website to conclude that this attention is primarily supportive of feminist ideologies, though more so with regards to women from areas that fall outside of the regions dominated by the hegemonic Anglo-American media establishment. In circumstances of revolution and change, Al-Jazeera invokes women to highlight their active agency and demonstrate their social power. Where such change is not possible, articles employ more reserved and passive techniques to convey the stagnancy of the situation. When this stagnant situation occurs in the United States or Europe, however, Al-Jazeera journalists express much less sympathy than when similar situations occur in less developed countries. Women from these less developed areas are

also highlighted more often in positions of power and influence. Based on this evidence, the study concludes that Al-Jazeera's attention to women plays a role in a larger movement to develop an ideological culture base without roots in the United States or Europe. By building a feminism tied to local women, Al-Jazeera is providing an alternative to the widespread and diametrically opposed systems of cultural imperialism and stalwart traditionalism. By proving that feminist ideologies can consist of Arab, African, or Indian ideas as much as American or European ones, Al-Jazeera paves the way for discrete ideological development in regions suffering from the aftershocks of cultural appropriation and imperialism.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Gender Insurgency	
Prevalent Visibility and Female Agency	11
Chapter 2: Localized Stagnation	
Selective Support for the Socially Entrenched	35
Chapter 3: The Imperialist Specter	
Building a Personal Feminism to Escape Colonial Rule	61
Conclusion	81
Bibliography	84

Introduction

One would find it difficult today to turn on Al-Jazeera English without encountering a story about women and their rights. Since its inception, the network has stood as a self-proclaimed bastion of social progressivism, espousing the importance of people as much as news, and women serve as the lightning rod at the head of that bastion. In an effort to advance a classic non-imperialist program for social change, Al-Jazeera consistently promotes women's rights and well-being from a markedly non-Western center. In doing so, they manage to both define their own model of feminism and challenge existing perceptions of non-Western identity.

Before beginning, it is important to note the problematic nature of the term Western, as well as to identify where this problem came from and what it means for the argumentation of this thesis.¹ 'The West,' as opposed to the East, is often used in the literature to refer to the industrialized nations of Europe and the United States. The word usually carries strong implications of orientalism and imperialism as applied to 'the East': more or less anywhere not in the United States or Europe, but especially the developing countries of Asia and the Middle East. Usage of the East and the West, however, has extended beyond geopolitical application to include neo-imperialistic connotations as well. As a result, both the East and the West have become uncertain, nebulous terms, laden with post-colonial baggage. The dialogic nature of the terms often pits one against

¹ Due to this problematic nature, usage of the terms East and West will be limited to those areas where the implied dialogic conflict is relevant to the argument. Where 'the West' and especially the Western media is being discussed more generally, this study will prefer the term Anglo-American as a more precise adjective identifying Al-Jazeera's major transnational competitors, primarily from England and the United States.

the other in such a way that the West is always assumed in direct conflict with the other of the East and vice versa. When Al-Jazeera was born in the East then, it could not be to the West anything but a new type of other; this was an identity the network seemed eager to embrace.

The Al-Jazeera news network, founded in 1996 by a generous endowment from Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani of Qatar, emerged as the first transnational satellite news television channel in the Middle East. From its first iteration as Al-Jazeera International in 2003, the English language version of Al-Jazeera was clear about its aims. The original website at english.aljazeera.net, the precursor to english.aljezeera.com, openly claimed the channel's goal:

“to give voice to untold stories, promote debate, and challenge established perceptions” and to “set the new agenda bridging cultures and providing a unique grassroots perspective from under-reported regions around the world to a potential global audience of over one billion English speakers.”²

In case there was any doubt about their meaning by “under-reported regions,” they further endeavored to “balanc[e] the current typical information flow by reporting from the developing world back to the West and from the southern to the northern hemisphere.”³ These statements no longer exist on the website, but their record shows that Al-Jazeera has historically not only recognized, but directly challenged the journalistic East-West dichotomy that persists today, in journalism as much as anywhere else.

² Tine Ustad Figenschou, “Content: The Message of AJE’s News,” in *Al Jazeera English: Global News in a Changing World*, ed. Philip Seib (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.), 41.

³ Figenschou, 41.

Women, and especially women in the Arab world from which Al-Jazeera hails, present a clear example of this dichotomy. As Salam Al-Mahadin points out, portrayals of Arab women differ starkly between Arab media sources and those found in the West.⁴ While a number of Arab satellite channels broadcast image after image of scantily clad girls performing suggestive dances in a seemingly endless sequence of music videos, the West prefers to air footage of heavily veiled women, often wearing the full facial coverings of the *burqa* or the *niqab*. Both sets of women are Arab, both choose to appear in their respective portrayals, and yet both inundate their finite mediums as if the other is somehow an exception to the rule. The disparity presents a confusing dilemma. Which portrayal is the truth?

The answer is neither, but nor is either portrayal a lie. They instead represent what Al-Mahadin calls a “strategic moulding.”⁵ The East-West dichotomy has, over the years, become inextricably gendered. A woman is not just a woman, but an entire nation; not in the limited sense of a single country with well-defined borders, but in the service of a united people. The portrayal of a woman, then, can say as much about geopolitics and conflict as it can about the woman herself. Often it can even say more.

When women appear, therefore, in a space coded for the discussion of geopolitics and conflict, analysis of their portrayal plays an important part in understanding the complete context of events. Few spaces fit that definition better than the transnational news media. Careful consideration of a network’s treatment of women can help reveal

⁴ Salam Al-Mahadin, “Arab Feminist Media Studies: Towards a poetics of diversity,” *Feminist Media Studies* 11:1 (2011): 7.

⁵ Al-Mahadin, 7-11.

that networks underlying trends and biases, as well as inform its position in the web of journalistic transnational, and thus transcultural, intertextuality. No network stands so perfectly poised for such an examination as Al-Jazeera.

After its founding in 1996, Al-Jazeera was quick to gain regional popularity. With its staunch dedication to impartiality and its unapologetic treatment of every worthy news story, regardless of sensitivity or participants, the Arabic channel quickly gained credibility and acclaim. Post September 11, 2001, this acclaim even surpassed regional borders to garner the attention of viewers in other regions, including the United States and Europe. The leading powers of transnational news were surprised to find a foreign competitor able to participate in international journalism on a level similar the hegemonic Anglo-American establishment. Nevertheless, while the Arab network's performance may have been on par with its competitors, it failed to satisfactorily mimic the norms found in those competitors editorial policies.⁶

In keeping with its tendency to air even the most inflammatory material, Al-Jazeera broadcast video messages from wanted Al-Qaeda front man Osama Bin Laden. This editorial decision angered critics in the United States who in turn labeled the channel and its journalists as terrorist sympathizers. Al-Jazeera, on the other hand, claimed to be preserving the type of journalistic integrity originally championed by the United States and Europe. Such stark discord only highlights how news networks can agree on a standard of professionalism without agreeing on how that professionalism should be

⁶ Hugh Miles, *Al-Jazeera: The Inside Story of the Arab News Channel that is Challenging the West* (New York: Grove Press, 2005).

applied.

Despite a nominal dedication to impartial reporting across a myriad of media outlets, transnational or otherwise, no news source can present a complete lack of bias. Editors may try to limit obvious slant, but the preconceived feelings and assumptions of a journalist always remain. On Al-Jazeera, irrespective of language or channel, this unavoidable bias has often appeared in coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or the United States' lengthy wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.⁷ Their attitudes in both cases mirror popular Arab opinion, reinforcing the identity of Al-Jazeera not only as an Arabic news outlet, but also as an Arab one. In situations where popular opinion varies more widely, however, the network's attitudes become more elusive.

When it comes to the touchy subject of feminism and women's rights, for instance, Al-Jazeera English leads the charge in calling attention to a range of feminist ideologies that code neither as Arab nor non-Arab. The network's feminist expressions, rather, are precisely that: feminist. This study will take a closer look at Al-Jazeera English's specific treatment of the feminine. What does the network say about women and their stories? How does it say it? What messages do these stories convey to Al-Jazeera English audiences and how do they fit into the larger international narrative? In the end, it will become clear that while in support of feminist ideologies, Al-Jazeera's editorial stance is born as much from anti-imperialist sentiment as a dedication to improving the lives of women.

In order to answer these questions, the project will engage Al-Jazeera

⁷ Tal Samuel-Azran, *Al-Jazeera and US War Coverage* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010).

publications. On account of the extreme breadth of source material and the international nature of the relevant feminist discourse, this study limits the main argument to discussion of Al-Jazeera English. The English language service is the organization's primary mode of communication with audiences outside the Arab world, thus also making it the primary source of discursive influence with those same audiences. In chapter three the paper will include evidence from the Al-Jazeera Arabic service to highlight the differences between the organization's local and international editorial policy. One should assume, however, that any reference to Al-Jazeera that does not identify the individual language addresses the English service.

The primary evidence used in this examination comprises articles published on Al-Jazeera English's website during or after the year 2011. This time constraint ensures the continued applicability of findings to the present day. The only exception to this constraint is a 2009 article in chapter three about Afghan women, included for its particular relevance to the subject at hand. Like many modern news articles, few pieces of evidence contain bylines. The study therefore assumes that all articles published outside of the opinions section represent the editorial views of the Al-Jazeera English brand as a whole. Any opinion articles mentioned in the study are used for emphasis only and identified as such.

Audiences familiar with the Al-Jazeera model may question the use of the website as opposed to the television broadcast. Al-Jazeera did get its start as a satellite television channel, and that channel does draw more viewers than the website. The English section of the network, however, started more or less as a translation of the Arabic website. Even

as it evolved, the official English language website launched in 2003 predated the English satellite channel by three years.⁸ Internationally, the internet reaches far more people than a television channel that is not, in many places, readily available. These points, in combination with the difficulty of accessing past Al-Jazeera broadcasts, make text the more appropriate research medium.

Even those videos posted on the Al-Jazeera English website constitute too small a sample from which to draw any reliable conclusions. Presumably due to their large file sizes, the Al-Jazeera website does not host videos for long. Video reports, after an indeterminate length of time, are removed from the website and a screen shot is used to mark its place. A textual summary, however, always accompanies these reports and remains after the video's removal. For the sake of consistency, this study will engage this more constant textual evidence, even in cases where the videos remain available.

Finally, one must also clarify that this study examines Al-Jazeera in virtual isolation. As with every media outlet, the network possesses a unique style that distinguishes it from other transnational news organizations. This style, however, is only taken into account insofar as it relates to the portrayal of women. Comparisons to other news agencies are made on a limited, story by story basis, and only to other transnational outlets. No assumptions are being made about regional news outlets, which were excluded entirely from the project for their lack of international focus. The phenomena explored herein may not be unique to Al-Jazeera, but they are certainly unique on a

⁸ Tine Ustad Figenschou, "Content: The Message of AJE's News," in *Al Jazeera English: Global News in a Changing World*, ed. Philip Seib (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.), 41.

transnational scale. A wider comparison of Al-Jazeera's reporting vis-à-vis its competitors, inside the region and out, would make an interesting addition to the field.⁹ Such in depth, cross-network analysis, however, exceeds the scope of this study.

Articles will be engaged with three main components in mind: content, style, and language. Content, in this case, means the particular subject matter of the various publications. The subjects Al-Jazeera reports on, as well as who their sources are and how they are utilized, will be of prime importance here. They will often be analyzed in journalistic terms of hard and soft news. 'Hard news' is that news which usually appears on transnational news networks: reports on current events and recent developments. Stories of change and transition are more likely to appear in this realm. 'Soft news,' on the other hand, is used to describe those reports that resemble human interest pieces. It is characterized by talk shows, biographical stories, and other publications not associated with new circumstances and reports. These types of news have been explicitly gendered in the scholarship. Hard news is considered the masculine of the pair while soft news is considered feminine.

Style will focus on how the network treats the reported subjects, paying particular attention to the voice of the articles and the connotations of certain words. This style is relevant not for any perceived intentional bias, but rather based on Freudian concepts of the unconscious. The analysis will operate under the assumption that the tone of an article directly reflects the opinions of its author whether that author is trying to express an

⁹ For one such study see: Leon Barkho, "News from the BBC, CNN, and Al-Jazeera: How the Three Broadcasters Cover the Middle East," (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2010).

opinion or not. The publication of the article, in turn, will be considered implicit endorsement by the approving editor and thus confirmation of compliance with the Al-Jazeera editorial policy.

Language will examine word choice, in particular with regards to the tense and voice of verbs. The use of active present tense verbs can portray agency and impetus, whereas verbal linguistic passivity usually indicates disability and stagnation. Analysis of this activity and passivity, especially in headlines, will make important contributions to building the larger argument of the thesis as a whole.

Using these methods, the first chapter of this thesis will demonstrate that women are often portrayed on Al-Jazeera's international English service as strong, powerful agents, and are given attention even in circumstances in which that attention does not directly relate to the events at hand. Such treatment increases the visibility of women and thus their impact on society as a whole, but is also often limited to stories of revolution and upheaval. In this way, Al-Jazeera journalists employ the historical otherness of women to better illustrate broad trends of change while including that other in a vision for the future.

Chapter two will examine situations in which engagement with this revolutionary feminine spirit is not the case. Where Al-Jazeera encounters women in stagnant, unfortunate circumstances, the network editorially sympathizes with them. Nevertheless, a disparity arises between treatment of these circumstances in America and Europe, as opposed to the developing countries of Asia, Africa, and South America. Whereas editors engage the developing world with hope and encouragement, the West receives far more

cursory compassion. Al-Jazeera's feminism focuses firmly on those areas of the globe so often overlooked by the Anglo-American news media, and in doing so makes strides towards redefining those areas – not as the beholden patrons of imperialist 'idealism,' but rather as individual societies capable of and entitled to their own social development.

The final chapter deconstructs the various aspects of this redefinition. The analysis pays particular attention to Al-Jazeera's presence on the world stage and its unique identity vis-à-vis other major international news outlets. Feminist rhetoric on Al-Jazeera mirrors feminist rhetoric in the rest of the region, wherein the lingering specter of imperialism creates a need to distance oneself from the oppressive aspects of tradition without embracing an ideology that colonized peoples have coded as imperialist. In focusing on those redefined areas in chapter two, Al-Jazeera also synthesizes a new feminism that one can definitively code as non-imperialist, thereby proving that the colonized are just as capable of valuing human rights and equality as their colonizing counterparts. By the end of this thesis, readers will better understand not only how Al-Jazeera expands the visibility of feminist ideologies, but why it does so in a manner unique to the current environment of transnational media.

Chapter 1: Gender Insurgency

Prevalent Visibility and Female Insurgency

Before analyzing why Al-Jazeera deal with women as a discrete demographic group, it is first imperative to identify how it deals that discrete demographic. Al-Jazeera's editorial stance on women has never been difficult to decipher. From its inception, the network has stood as something of a beacon of expression, taking on many of the controversial issues that other media outlets avoided with head-on perseverance and unflinching resolve. As early as 1998, the network angered Jordan by airing a talk show in which a guest who suggested the very existence of the desert nation was a Zionist plot.¹⁰ Other broadcasts freely discussed polygamy, political corruption, and the viability of social progress in Islam.¹¹ While popular Anglo-American news media outlets rarely take a blatantly hostile approach to women's issues, some feminists have complained that their agendas are largely ignored.¹² This complaint holds far less weight with Al-Jazeera, where women's issues are not only addressed, but often given precedence and focus. A large portion of Al-Jazeera's coverage of women and women's issues is presented in a manner that maximizes the visibility of female agency, thereby promoting feminist ideologies and ultimately fostering a space for feminist discourse.

¹⁰ Hugh Miles, *Al-Jazeera: The Inside Story of the Arab News Channel that is Challenging the West* (New York: Grove Press, 2005), 45.

¹¹ Miles, *Al-Jazeera*, 46.

¹² See for example: Tanya Gold, "I blame the media for ignoring feminism in favour of makeup," *The Guardian*, October 28, 2011, accessed March 20, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/oct/28/tanya-gold-media-ignores-feminism>; Kate Weisshaar, "Feminist media's journey to popularize the movement without losing political edge," *The Clayman Institute for Gender Research*, July 18, 2012, accessed March 20, 2014, <http://gender.stanford.edu/news/2012/feminist-medias-journey-popularize-movement-without-losing-political-edge>.

Even before the launch of Al-Jazeera English in 2006, people were noticing the more proportionate representation of women on Al-Jazeera's original, Arabic language network. Naomi Sakr, on the heels of the 2002 Arab Human Development Report decrying the lack of female participation in Arab public life, analyzed the effect of women's programming on Al-Jazeera Arabic.¹³ The initial point here is that a category of programming that can be defined as 'for women' in fact existed on an Arab news network at the time. Rather than being defined by its audience, however, Sakr considered women's programming to be those shows that gave women public voice. In addition to the obvious inclusion of *Li n-nissā' FaqaT (For Women Only)*, a weekly women's talk show, women and women's issues also made appearances on shows such as *'Ūlā Hurūb Al-Qarn (First Wars of the Century)*, *Bilā Hudūd (Without Borders)*, Sheikh Youssef Al-Qaradawi's *Al-Sharī'a wal-Ḥayāt (Islamic Law and Life)*, and the ever popular *Al-Ittijāh Al-Mu'ākis (The Opposite Direction)*. Sakr eventually concluded that Al-Jazeera was expanding women's discursive space, not only by presenting various women's opinions, but also by providing a platform from which those women could gain exposure and experience expressing those opinions.

Such explicit inclusion of women and women's issues continues on Al-Jazeera Arabic today and has extended into the practices of its English language network. The Al-Jazeera English website is overflowing with articles detailing women's struggles and achievements all over the world. Many of the channel's programs regularly feature

¹³ Naomi Sakr, "Women, Development and Al Jazeera: A Balance Sheet," in *The Al Jazeera Phenomenon: Critical Perspectives on the New Arab Media*, ed. Mohamed Zayani (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2005), 127-49.

women's issues. *The Stream* covered the internet frenzy following events such as the jailing of a Norwegian rape victim in Dubai, an eleven-year-old Yemeni girl's speech against child marriage, and a third wave feminist campaign on Twitter last July and August.¹⁴ Episodes of *101 East* chronicled the stigmatization of widowhood in India and the slavery of young Nepalese girls.¹⁵ The *Birthrights* program, seeking to educate people on maternal health issues and their impact on the developing world, has evolved into a full campaign, including alongside its episodes analytical articles and an interactive website. Considering that these editorials and programming come from a network founded by a family vocal about women's rights, however, perhaps their feminist leanings are to be expected.

Upon its launch in 1996, Al-Jazeera's backer, the Qatari Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, intended to launch an independent news network of international caliber that would bring Qatar to the forefront of the global media. Despite numerous claims to the contrary, Sheikh Hamad and the network itself have always insisted that Al-Jazeera is under no editorial obligation to the regime. Even without questioning the official relationship between the two entities, however, one cannot deny the potential influence of the state's position on women. Qatar has long been a leading example of

¹⁴ "Norwegian woman jailed in Dubai after reporting rape," *Al-Jazeera*, July 20, 2013, accessed October 4, 2013, <http://stream.aljazeera.com/story/201307200035-0022922>;

¹⁴ "Yemeni girl's speech against child marriage goes viral," *Al-Jazeera*, July 23, 2013, accessed October 4, 2013, <http://stream.aljazeera.com/story/201307232138-0022928>;

¹⁴ "Feminists on Twitter say #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen," *Al-Jazeera*, August 12, 2013, accessed October 4, 2013, <http://stream.aljazeera.com/story/201308122356-0022973>.

¹⁵ "A Widow's Penance," *Al-Jazeera*, September 20, 2013, accessed October 4, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/101east/2013/09/201391773152163100.html>;

¹⁵ "Nepal's slave girls," *Al-Jazeera*, September 28, 2013, accessed October 4, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/101east/2013/09/20139249536331927.html>.

women's rights in the Middle East. Accepting that Qatar is a monarchy, it is still interesting to note that women were enfranchised at the same time as men in 1999.¹⁶ That same year, Qatar was also the first member of the Gulf Cooperation Council in which women stood for municipal election, and voter turnout for women was higher than for men.¹⁷ Women in Qatar are active participants in civic life. They make up a significant part of the workforce in both the public and private sectors and have outnumbered men in academics for decades.¹⁸ Nevertheless, it is not only Qatari women in the aggregate making a difference.

Without contest, the most politically engaged woman in Qatar is the Emir's second wife, Sheikha Moza bint Nasser Al-Misned. Sheikha Moza chairs a number of important organizations, including the Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development, the Sidra Medical and Research Center for women and children's health, and the Arab Democracy Foundation, among others.¹⁹ She also serves as a UNESCO Special Envoy for Basic and Higher Education, an advocate for the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, and an Ambassador to the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations.²⁰ The strides Sheikha Moza has made for women in Qatar make her one of the most recognizable faces in the country, and as a prime example of female agency, her prominence in Qatari public life provides a more limited opportunity to

¹⁶ Miles, *Al-Jazeera*, 19.

¹⁷ Miles, *Al-Jazeera*, 19.

¹⁸ "Our Students," Qatar University, accessed November 30, 2013, <http://www.qu.edu.qa/theuniversity/students.php>.

¹⁹ "Roles," Office of Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, accessed November 30, 2013, <http://www.mozabintnasser.qa/en/Pages/MozabintNasser/RolesandPositions.aspx>.

²⁰ "Roles."

promote the discursive expansion Sakr found in Al-Jazeera's women's programming.

It is not, however, women's prominence on Al-Jazeera that reveals the network's editorial stance so much as the ways in which they are prominent. While the continuous support for women's rights and related social justice is to be expected, a great deal of this support is phrased in terms of agency. Everything from Al-Jazeera's headlines vis-à-vis the content of its articles to the quotes chosen to exemplify various points reflect, intentionally or not, an effort to express female agency. This effort is especially evident with regards to women from the so-called 'developing world.' Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia feature prominently, and with much more frequency than other regions. This extra intention, in turn, indicates a preoccupation with something deeper than generalized women's issues. Later chapters will address that preoccupation more directly. For now, the focus will remain on a more thorough analysis of female agency in Al-Jazeera articles.

As a network claiming balanced and unbiased reporting, there is no definitive way to prove the intentions of Al-Jazeera's myriad women's pieces. That being said, even before delving into the details of its publications, it is clear that the organization is at least aware of the social impact feminist visibility can have on a wider viewing audience. Echoing Naomi Sakr's conclusions about discursive expansion as a result of exposure, Al-Jazeera released an article during the 2011 Arab Spring applauding Tunisia's post-revolutionary move towards gender-parity.²¹ Following the toppling of President Zine Al-

²¹ "Tunisian gender-parity 'revolution' hailed," *Al-Jazeera*, April 21, 2011, accessed October 4, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2011/04/2011421161714335465.html>.

Abidine Ben Ali, interim authorities ruled that all political parties would be required to offer up equal numbers of men and women as candidates for the democratically elected constituent assembly that would draft the nation's new constitution. While the majority of the article is composed of facts and quotes, it is the writer's single, intertextual subheading that belies an assumed importance of exposure: "visible presence."²²

The section following the subheading gives several statistics on Tunisian women's participation in public life, favorably comparing their civic involvement to that of other women in the region, before veering away from the topic as news articles are wont to do. These statistics, in demonstrating women's access to Tunisian public social life, support the use of the word 'presence.' The description of that presence as 'visible,' however, proves more interesting. As histories of stratification have shown, including separation based on gender, race and religion, presence in society does not necessarily equate to visibility. Reporting on the words of the Tunisian women's affairs minister, Lilia Laabidi, the article even admits that "cultural obstacles to women's integration remained."²³ Yet the fact that this presence is visible implies that people must see it, and in seeing it engage, at least passively, with feminist ideologies.

Based on this understanding of passive reception as ideological engagement, even Al-Jazeera's least provocative reports take on greater significance. As a transnational, 24-hour satellite network, broadcasting to more than 220 million households in over 100 countries and viewed on YouTube by more people than any other news channel, Al-

²² "Tunisian gender-parity."

²³ "Tunisian gender-parity."

Jazeera possesses considerable influence.²⁴ An uncontroversial slideshow of sixteen of India's most influential women, entitled "Role Models: Women of substance," becomes, in this context, a positive demonstration of female agency.²⁵ Whether or not people were aware that ICICI Bank CEO Chanda Kochhar is listed as one of the most Powerful Women in Business in Fortune Magazine, or that civil rights activist and journalist Teesta Setalvad has been fighting for the victims of communal riots in the Gujarat for more than a decade, the publication of their stories necessarily expands the visibility of capable, civically involved women and their ideas. In making those stories more visible, Al-Jazeera has increased their presence, as well as the idea that they deserve that presence.

When the same principle is applied to a more controversial piece, on the other hand, unavoidable influences, such as journalistic bias, also begin to have a greater effect on that presence. A recent episode of *Witness*, a biographical documentary program, chronicled the difficulties of a divorced single mother working as a wedding videographer in Morocco.²⁶ The filmmaker's commentary, posted online, was prefaced by a short summary of the episode that unapologetically backed the film's viewpoint: that the social environment of Moroccan society limits women's rights by dissuading them from self-sufficiency. The language of the piece posits female liberation, independence, and a household income earned primarily by a woman as unequivocally positive, in direct

²⁴ "Facts and Figures," Al-Jazeera, last modified February 23, <http://www.aljazeera.com/aboutus/2010/11/20101110131438787482.html>.

²⁵ "Role Models: Women of substance," *Al-Jazeera*, September 30, 2013, accessed November 25, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/inpictures/2013/09/role-models-women-substance-2013925204143934173.html>.

²⁶ "Casablanca Camerawoman," *Al-Jazeera*, November 14, 2013, accessed November 25, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/witness/2013/11/casablanca-camerawoman-2013111181236771611.html>.

opposition to the societal norms the film is seeking to challenge. This stance is, of course, completely within the network's rights, and in many ways commendable. More important, however, is the fact that by challenging prevalent opinions such as the importance of marriage and patriarchy in the home, "Casablanca Camerawoman" is expanding ideological space further than what one finds with less opinionated pieces, making not just women's issues, but attitudes about those issues more visible.

This phenomena of this expansion holds true even for opinions expressed in less explicit and obvious terms than those in "Casablanca Camerawoman." The same article on Tunisian gender-parity that gave us the term "visible presence," for instance, subtly ranks the importance of women's issues as equal to the very foundations of government. In describing the new constituent assembly's duties, the article states that it "will be charged with drawing up a post-Ben Ali constitution and hear submissions on issues involving women."²⁷ While it is likely that these issues involving women were related to the constitution, or at the very least were not the only submissions being heard, their lone mention in syntactic juxtaposition with the constitution affords them tremendous importance, equating the future of the country's entire legal framework with allowing women to be heard. It is a resonant point, if not conspicuous one, and only one of many examples of Al-Jazeera's use of language to indirectly support the feminist agenda.

Perhaps the most common form of this linguistic support is that found in myriad headlines. Throughout the data compiled for this study, articles with feminist leanings tended to follow headlines with strong active verbs. Considering that many readers and

²⁷ "Tunisian gender-parity."

writers alike stylistically prefer active verbs, little can be concluded from their usage alone. Some headlines, like “Swedes don hijab to support Muslim women,” may not, on their own, appear to be especially feminist.²⁸ Use of an active verb does not have to convey anything other than the suitability of that verb to express an intended, though not necessarily specified, meaning. Other headlines, however, sometimes betray a greater preoccupation with female agency.

A June 2013 headline about the American military read, “US woman soldiers win combat recognition,” raising all sorts of implications about the military command structure with regards to gender.²⁹ First, the word ‘win’ brings to mind innate competition. Comprising half of a semantic pair, one cannot win unless someone or something else loses. This loss could be as simple as the value of a carnival prize, sacrificed by the establishment when won by a patron. It could also be as drastic as the loss of human life, personal freedom, or national sovereignty in the case of wars and violence. Considering the martial topics dealt with in the report, the latter certainly seems more relevant. Regardless of whether or not ‘win’ in this context evokes violence, however, it clearly indicates a struggle in which women are not only actively participating, but have now triumphed. ‘Win,’ then, becomes a beacon of female agency nestled into a single title line of text.

Furthermore, the conjunctionary use of ‘recognition’ serves to extol this agency

²⁸ “Swedes don hijab to support Muslim women,” *Al-Jazeera*, August 20, 2013, accessed October 13, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/europe/2013/08/201382010224534566.html>.

²⁹ “US woman soldiers win combat recognition,” *Al-Jazeera*, June 19, 2013, accessed November 20, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/video/americas/2013/06/201361983153457711.html>.

still further. While ‘winning recognition’ is a standard and easily recognizable phrase, the plethora of other verbs that often accompany ‘recognition’ make ‘win’ an especially odd choice here. In light of the competitive connotation of ‘win,’ it could have been easily replaced with ‘earn’ or ‘receive.’ Though ‘receive’ would have receptivized the women, conferring the role of actor on whomever bestowed the recognition, ‘earn’ would have preserved agency insofar as it still describes the recognition as a product of the women’s efforts. At the opposite end of the spectrum, the object ‘recognition’ could also have been passively verbalized to read ‘US women soldiers recognized in combat,’ as if that recognition were a gift. With the various options laid out in this manner, it follows that ‘win’ was not chosen for lack of a better word, but rather because it was the best word to convey the editorial opinion. Word choice, however, is not the only way that Al-Jazeera headlines draw attention to female agency.

At times, Al-Jazeera publishes news pieces under titles that suggest far more women’s involvement than the following articles contain. When Syrian security forces began to crack down on anti-government protests during the Arab Spring in 2011, Al-Jazeera released an article about a raid on the town of Baida in which a reported 200 men had been arrested.³⁰ The article was titled “Syrian women protest over mass arrests.” There were indeed women from Baida protesting the arrests of their friends, families and neighbors, but in the article numbering a respectable twenty lines, they were mentioned in only three: the first, second, and fourth lines respectively. Even Baida itself does not

³⁰ “Syrian women protest over mass arrests,” *Al-Jazeera*, April 13, 2011, accessed October 4, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/04/201141313548714539.html>.

feature prominently in the remainder of the article. Instead, attention is given to evidence of increasingly oppressive tactics used by the Syrian regime to discourage a revolution like that which happened in Egypt. As hindsight has shown, Al-Jazeera had every right to be nervous. It was not long after that the country descended into full on civil war. Nevertheless, that justification does not explain why women were employed to headline the story.

More recently, a similar curiosity appeared in a piece about proposed reforms in Turkey.³¹ To be certain, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's announcement that new rights would be extended to minorities in the country, including women, Christians and Kurds, was a political breakthrough. At first glance then, the article's title, "Kurds and women top Turkish PM reform plans," is not surprising. A closer look at the article, however, reveals that the women's issue therein, the lifting of the ban on headscarves in public institutions, received only a fraction more attention than the protesting women in Baida had. What's more, other transnational news outlets did not seem to agree that the lifting of the ban deserved even that much.

Though the British Broadcasting Corporation and the New York Times both published reports on Erdogan's reform proposals, neither network seemed to think that considerations outside of the shifting relationship between the Turkish government and the Kurds deserved more than a passing mention. The BBC's article, "Turkey's Erdogan

³¹ "Kurds and women top Turkish PM reform plans," *Al-Jazeera*, October 1, 2013, accessed October 4, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/europe/2013/09/kurds-women-top-turkish-pm-reform-plans-201393095032209408.html>.

announces Kurdish reforms,” says most of it in the title alone.³² In their opinion the reforms are Kurdish. Any additional proposals were merely incidental. The lifting of the headscarf ban is mentioned in the main subheading and twice more in a brisk overview of the reforms, but the vast majority of the article is spent, as the title would suggest, elucidating Erdogan’s plan for the Kurds. The New York Times article is even more tightly focused.³³ “Turkish Premier Announces Proposals Aimed at Kurds,” makes no indication that anyone other than the Kurds was discussed until a few disjointed paragraphs at the very end of the article. The headscarf ban is addressed, along with concessions to Christians and the ignored demands of the Alevis, but it is clear that these topics are considered secondary. These transnational news sources’ lack of concern for the relevant women’s issue only serves to further separate and define Al-Jazeera’s distinct editorial flavor.

There are, of course, more differences between Al-Jazeera and its other transnational competitors than a mere view on women and women’s issues. The headscarf ban, for instance, is related as much to religion as it is to gender. The singular example of the varying reports on Turkish reform, therefore, could be as easily explained by Al-Jazeera’s regional affiliation with Islam as by a perceived preoccupation with promoting women’s issues. The recurrent focus on gender in headlines, however, regardless of explicit relevance, suggests that there is an ongoing connection between

³² “Turkey’s Erdogan announces Kurdish reforms,” *British Broadcasting Corporation*, September 30, 2013, accessed October 4, 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-24330722>.

³³ “Turkish Premier Announces Proposals Aimed at Kurds,” *New York Times*, September 20, 2013, accessed October 4, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/01/world/europe/turkish-premier-announces-proposals-aimed-at-kurds.html?_r=0.

gender and editorial policy. In order to explain this connection, a closer look at the relevance of journalistic headlines is necessary.

A 2003 study by Daniel Dor in the *Journal of Pragmatics* concluded that headlines are chosen not for their relevance, but for their ability to trigger a collective set of associations and assumptions shared by a media outlet and its audience.³⁴ Though previous scholarship has suggested that headlines, in light of consumers' tendency to scan titles rather than reading complete pieces, are meant to attract readers to the full content of the articles they announce, Dor proposes that their actual function is to attract only those readers for whom the story is relevant.³⁵ In terms of Al-Jazeera, this suggests that the wealth of consideration given to women in headlines is a result of some deeper association triggered by their mention. A brief glimpse back through the examples presented thus far supports this suggestion.

Up until now, this paper's examination of headlines on Al-Jazeera has included three distinct articles: "US woman soldiers win combat recognition," "Syrian women protest over mass arrests," and "Kurds and women top Turkish PM reform plans." The shared female agency they semantically ascribe to their subjects has already been demonstrated, but they possess at least one other important similarity as well; each of these stories is reporting a fundamental change to the state of affairs. In "US woman soldiers" female service members are being newly recognized for their contributions, in "Syrian women protest" the Syrian people are mounting a resistance against an ever more

³⁴ Daniel Dor, "On newspaper headlines as relevance optimizers," *Journal of Pragmatics* 35:5 (2003): 697-698.

³⁵ Dor, "On newspaper headlines," 718.

oppressive regime, and in “Turkish PM reform plans” several controversial policies are being completely overhauled. Neither are these the only women’s headlines to top stories of transition.

“Mexico woman candidate rallies support,” discusses the only female candidate in the 2012 Mexican presidential election. A groundbreaking politician in her own right, Josefina Vasquez Mota “took the country by surprise when she beat two male rivals for the party’s nomination.”³⁶ “Hindu woman loses Malaysia case,” is titled for a woman denied a stay of divorce in Malaysia’s highest court. The article, however, has more to do with sharia courts and the controversial encroachment of Islamic family law on minority rights in the country.³⁷ These are only a few of the many examples, but they point to a larger trend in the network as a whole.

When women’s issues are invoked in Al-Jazeera headlines, it is often in relation to protest, reform, and revolution. In other words, for the Al-Jazeera readers and writers at least, women represent change, and they are not the only ones. Valentine M. Moghadam’s analysis of the role of gender in revolution concluded that the participation of women proves a crucial factor in the legitimation and success of any major social upheaval.³⁸ A revolution, in simplified terms, consists of bringing outsiders in, making the periphery the core. Women serve as prime candidates for this role, no matter how temporarily. Despite making up half the world’s population, as an historically

³⁶ “Mexico woman candidate rallies support,” *Al-Jazeera*, June 27, 2012, accessed October 24, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/video/americas/2012/06/2012626174748816705.html>.

³⁷ “Hindu woman loses Malaysia case,” *Al-Jazeera*, December 28, 2007, accessed October 24, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia-pacific/20071228184717735672.html>.

³⁸ Valentine M. Moghadam, *Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003), 79-112.

marginalized group they are immediately associated with being outside of the dominant establishment. This is especially true in the context of the Middle East where, as mentioned previously, women are often far less visible in public life. For readers outside of the Middle East, as most of the Al-Jazeera English audience is, frequent exposure to stereotypes of Arab sexism and misogyny make this regional particularity even more significant. Visible women, and moreover visible, active women with their own agency, are unexpected enough that they embody a revolution of their own. In this way, headlines involving women are optimally relevant for reports on all manner of subversive activity. Of course, women can also be relevant to subversive activities all on their own.

One particular story in the summer of 2011 brings together all of the elements of Al-Jazeera's support for women discussed thus far. On 22 May of that year, female activist and Saudi national Manal Al-Sharif was detained for driving in defiance of the Saudi Arabian ban on women operating motor vehicles. Manal was part of an online social media based movement called Women2Drive that was campaigning for the repeal of the ban. Though there is no official Saudi law forbidding women from driving, the country does require that all drivers carry a local license. The systematic refusal to issue these licenses to women, and resultant classification of all female driving as illegal, has turned the ban into a de facto law regardless. Manal's detainment came after she posted a video of herself driving while explaining the impracticalities and dangers of the ban. Her protest made headlines across the world. Those on Al-Jazeera, spanning a number of articles over the course of several weeks, were particularly poignant.

The first breaking news about Manal's arrest, a video report by Al-Jazeera

correspondent Anu Nathan, demonstrates the same promotion of female agency seen thus far.³⁹ The full report, entitled “Saudi woman campaigns for right to drive,” was removed from Al-Jazeera’s website, presumably to conserve space. A summary of the report, however, remains. Though the summary mentions that Manal is “part of an online campaign group determined to get women in the driving seat more,” the subheading and bulk of the text suggest that the real focus of the report is the arrest.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, the passive action of being arrested evokes no agency whatsoever. The use of the verb ‘campaign,’ therefore, was probably a result of the same forces that produced active verbs in the various headlines mentioned above.

The more detailed follow-up article to the video did not continue this trend of headlines in the active voice, but its editorial content more than made up for the momentary absence of semantic female agency.⁴¹ The article, “Saudi woman detained for driving,” begins with precisely that information: “A woman in Saudi Arabia was detained.”⁴² Rather than continuing with the common grammatical construction ‘detained for + gerund,’ the following prepositional phrase begins with ‘after,’ allowing the addition of a sentence including two active verbal phrases: “she launched a campaign... and posted a video.”⁴³ After another two lines of exposition, the entire remainder of the article, excluding two sentences in the last line clarifying the adverse effects of the

³⁹ “Saudi woman campaigns for right to drive,” *Al-Jazeera*, May 22, 2011, accessed October 7, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/video/middleeast/2011/05/201152252517876892.html>.

⁴⁰ “Saudi woman campaigns.”

⁴¹ “Saudi woman detained for driving,” *Al-Jazeera*, May 22, 2011, accessed October 7, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/05/201152253018241827.html>.

⁴² “Saudi woman detained.”

⁴³ “Saudi woman detained.”

driving ban, is composed of either active sentences of which Manal and her fellow campaigners are the subjects or their direct quotes. In other words, headline aside, the article displays a compelling amount of agency on the part of the women involved.

As the story developed over the next few days, an interesting phenomenon occurred in the semantics of one headline. Rather than Manal or her compatriots being presented actively, the antagonist, embodied by the Saudi government, was placed in a passive role. “Saudi Arabia pressed to free woman driver,” read the headline.⁴⁴ The caption on the article’s main photo was equally passive, explaining that “King Abdullah has been urged to free Manal as-Sherif.”⁴⁵ This revocation of the government’s agency serves to cast Manal’s achievements in an even more robust light. Though the government can and did take action against her, the language disessentializes that action, indicating that the power is still in her hands.

Though Manal was eventually released ten days after her initial incarceration, the issue of the Saudi driving ban continued to receive attention from the press for weeks to come. Prior to the media frenzy following Manal’s arrest, Women2Drive had already been planning a demonstration on 17 June in which women in Saudi Arabia with international driver’s licenses were encouraged to take to the streets in their cars. What is interesting about Al-Jazeera’s coverage of the demonstration is that it produced two very

⁴⁴ “Saudi Arabia pressed to free woman driver,” *Al-Jazeera*, May 24, 2011, accessed October 7, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/05/2011524204758681709.html>.

⁴⁵ “Saudi Arabia pressed.”

similar articles, the second published exactly one hour and nine minutes after the first.⁴⁶

A comparison of the two articles reveals meaningful information about Al-Jazeera's editing process.

Cursory examination of the two articles suggests that the second was published as a result of new data that enhanced the accuracy of the report. With the exception of two redacted lines, the entirety of the first article is reproduced verbatim in the second. Both of the deleted lines were reporting second hand information about women's activity in the protest. One even admitted that many reports were unconfirmed. That the lines were replaced by several first-hand accounts then, one from a woman who had participated in the demonstration and two from men who had ridden along with their wives, is unsurprising. What deserves more attention is the other, seemingly minor changes without the same obvious motivations.

The first and most obvious unexplained edit is a change in the headline. The original headline, "Saudi women launch bid to defy driving ban," became one hour later, "Saudi women defy ban to take driver's seat." The subheadings also changed to mirror these new headlines, from "Activists in the kingdom say action will keep going until a royal decree allowing women to drive is issued," to "Several women drive around in kingdom in open defiance of rule that prohibits them from driving." In light of the added detail in the text of the latter article, one could argue that the edited title merely reflects

⁴⁶ "Saudi women launch bid to defy driving ban," *Al-Jazeera*, June 17, 2011, accessed October 7, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/video/middleeast/2011/06/20116178101478564.html>;

⁴⁶ "Saudi women defy ban to take driver's seat," *Al-Jazeera*, June 17, 2011, accessed October 7, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/video/middleeast/2011/06/201161713200141723.html>.

the confirmed nature of what was originally an unconfirmed report. The first article was presenting a call to protest while the second was verifying that the protest had indeed come to pass. Based on what this study has shown with regards to other Al-Jazeera headlines, however, it is no stretch to infer that the significance of the change is deeper than that.

While both headlines employ the active verb ‘defy,’ they do so in very different ways. The first article’s women “launch[ing] a bid to defy,” suggests an attempt without any real success. Given that Al-Jazeera seems not to have confirmed any success at the time of publication, perhaps ‘launch’ was as close to an active verb of agency as they could accurately come. Nevertheless, even after confirmation of the executed demonstration, the article itself did not change drastically. The original title would have sufficed, but the fact that it was changed to a syntactic structure more indicative of triumph, defying rather than simply seeking to defy, indicates a desire to portray the women in question in the most successful light possible.

The other unexplained edit is primarily a reorganization of parts of the first article, wherein previously published lines are moved into a new subsection of the article. Though none of the content was lost, this new section replaces a section from the original article titled “Online campaign.” The new section, by contrast, is called “Mutiny against male-only rules.” The selection of this title, taken from a line also published in the original article, says much about what Al-Jazeera is trying to convey. Its addition adds nothing in terms of information or structures. The reasonable conclusion, therefore, is that its function is fundamentally tonal. Though the words themselves are not new, their

extraction from the main text and elevation to the status of heading elevates the article's portrayal of the demonstration from an inspired protest to an out and out rebellion. This blatant escalation only further substantiates Al-Jazeera's attempt to expand feminist visibility beyond the boundaries reached by basic media coverage. On the other hand, even the most basic coverage often makes significant contributions.

Following her arrest, Manal Al-Sharif's sudden notoriety catapulted her and her cause to the world stage, making them visible, and thus inducing ideological expansion. The fact that most transnational news networks sided with her over the Saudi government only increased that effect. An opinion article on the affair highlighted the effect that transnational media had on the situation when compared with local outlets.

The local press coverage of these developments was alarming, as they conveyed an apologetic image of Manal crying in despair at the women's correctional facility, asking for forgiveness for her unlawful act, and admitting to being helped and influenced by women from abroad. This mockery could not be further from the truth.⁴⁷

While the local reports, despite their bias, still provide visibility, the presence of an opposing viewpoint on the transnational networks does immeasurably more to promote discourse, thanks not as much to the broader dissemination as the plurality of views. This critique of the Saudi press on Al-Jazeera may have remained confined to an opinion article, but previously analyzed coverage of the events suggests in no uncertain terms that editorial opinion agreed. It is unfortunate then that Al-Jazeera's push for ideological expansion is sometimes taken so far that it loses sight of accuracy.

⁴⁷ Hala Al-Dosari, "Saudi women drivers take the wheel on June 17," *Al-Jazeera*, June 16, 2011, accessed October 7, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/06/201161694746333674.html>.

In the context of the Manal Al-Sharif story, exaggerated descriptions of the extent to which local women reacted were misleading, if not patently false. Following her arrest, the network reported an “outpouring of support from other Saudi women, who posted video clips showing themselves behind the wheel.”⁴⁸ Later in the same article, that outpouring is revealed to contain only two confirmed cases of women posting driving videos online: a young woman named Ruba in Riyadh and an unnamed teenager in Jeddah. By calling such an unimpressive number an outpouring, Al-Jazeera undermines its own credibility, calling into question what other claims it has exaggerated without exposing its own deceptiveness.

Such misleading exaggeration is disappointing, especially considering how little it adds to the report. Other evidence in the article, such as the more than 12,000 supporters on Manal’s Facebook page ‘Teach me how to drive so I can protect myself,’ suggests that she did in fact enjoy wide support.⁴⁹ Those supporters were enough to lead to the page’s deletion, as well as the deactivation of the driving campaign’s Twitter feed, before the article was even published. Furthermore, based on a similar page created two days before the article’s publication, the number was likely accurate. Though the page’s creator has posted nothing since June 2011, today it is just shy of 19,000 likes and supporters have remained active.⁵⁰ Constructing evidence to prove that people backed Manal then was not only dishonest, but completely unnecessary.

⁴⁸ “Saudi Arabia pressed.”

⁴⁹ “Saudi Arabia pressed.”

⁵⁰ “Support #Women2Drive,” *Facebook*, accessed December 3, 2013, <https://www.facebook.com/Women2Drive>.

Of course inaccuracy is not always inherently deceptive. In Al-Jazeera's case, sometimes their enthusiasm seems merely to outweigh the pertinent information. In the summer of 2012, the network published a report on the occasion of a Chinese rocket launch inaugurating a mission to test, monitor and maintain China's first independent space station.⁵¹ If successful, the station would historically become the third of its kind, preceded only by the United States and Russia. Al-Jazeera does relate this information, even calling the venture China's "most ambitious space mission yet," but only so far into the article and in such vague language that its importance is all but lost.⁵² Instead, the bulk of the article is concerned with one of the three astronauts assigned to the mission: China's first female space traveler.

It seems, on the surface, that this discrepancy could be an accidental overextension of using women in headlines to attract readers. China's first independent space station, after all, is nothing if not revolutionary. Nevertheless, if that is the case, Al-Jazeera overlooks important developments in favor of sensationalizing women's participation in those developments. Such a practice posits a clear challenge for the network and its promotion of women's social justice and equality. There is nothing innately objectionable about an editorial policy that favors women and women's issues, whether purposely or even without reason. An editorial policy that does not at least feign a concern for facts, however, damages its credibility and is unlikely to retain a trusting audience for long.

⁵¹ "China sends its first woman into space," *Al-Jazeera*, June 16, 2012, accessed October 24, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia-pacific/2012/06/2012616104437633910.html>.

⁵² "China sends its first."

Despite these minor missteps, the Al-Jazeera record illustrated in this chapter is predominantly credible. Editorial policy clearly has a predilection for stories about and in favor of women's agency and rights, but only rarely sensationalizes beyond the point of believability. To some extent, this may be rooted in the foundations of the network, both politically and geographically. More likely, publications about women serve a purpose by resonating uniquely with Al-Jazeera readership. A global history of patriarchy and misogyny has made the strong, independent woman a symbol of upheaval, especially when already juxtaposed with scenes of transition. In this way, that woman can be used to highlight the gravity of change, be it legal, social, or political. Protests become more subversive, reforms become more prodigious, and the expected becomes unexpected. What this escalation might provide for English readers is beyond the scope of this paper; it could be anything from entertainment to empathy.

Regardless of the motivations, covering women's stories at this length makes them visible in a manner with far reaching consequences. The very act of engaging these topics expands the visibility of and engagement with the ideologies, but doing so on the international stage serves to expand it beyond that which could be achieved by most other methods. Publication at a transnational level in turn makes the engagement itself transnational, broadening the ideological expansion materially as well as intellectually. By pushing the ideological boundaries of female agency, Al-Jazeera is making major contributions to the feminist discourse of Al-Jazeera English audiences. It is unfortunate then that not all stories can contribute in the quite the same way. The next chapter will examine stories lacking a significant expression of female agency and how that

influences the way Al-Jazeera operates in other ideological areas.

Chapter 2: Localized Stagnation

Selective Support for the Socially Entrenched

The previous chapter showed that Al-Jazeera tends to showcase female agency, especially in headlines and stories of upheaval and change. Not all stories on Al-Jazeera, however, employ this agency, perhaps because not all stories on Al-Jazeera are about change. In keeping with what scholars of journalism have often termed a feminization of the news, stories in transnational media outlets have shifted over the past few decades to include more soft stories.⁵³ Nominal equation of these reports with women aside, much of Al-Jazeera's soft news, like its hard examined in the last chapter, also has to do with women; these soft stories, however, share little to none of the same agency found in their hard counterparts.

The following examples will show that when Al-Jazeera reports on women in stagnant, often unfortunate situations that are unlikely to change, it does so by highlighting the passivity of its subjects. Sometimes, these reports take the shape of simple exposition, increasing the visibility of the issues without indicating that they are likely to develop beyond the current state of affairs. Other times, women are telling their own stories, suggesting a desire for agency even in the face of circumstances they lack the ability to change. These passive indicators are also mirrored in hard news about similarly difficult topics, whether through passive headlines or avoidance of discussing women altogether. Towards the end of the chapter, a comparison of several of these hard

⁵³ Liesbet van Zoonen, "One of the Girls?: The changing gender of journalism," in *News, Gender and Power*, ed. Cynthia Carter, Gill Branston, and Stuart Allan (London: Routledge, 1998), 33-46.

news techniques will reveal that they are not chosen arbitrarily. The methods for their choosing will then be discussed in the next section.

One can most easily see the perpetuation of female oriented soft news on Al-Jazeera in its myriad features and in depth programs. Programming, as opposed to more traditional event based reporting, has flourished on Al-Jazeera since its inception. In an effort to reach a wider, international audience that may not find the Al-Jazeera broadcast or live stream easily accessible, however, many of these programs are summarized in text and published on Al-Jazeera's English language website. A significant portion of these articles, though not necessarily affirmative or encouraging, feature women from across the world, exploring their triumphs and, more often, tribulations.

On the triumph end of the spectrum, in May of 2013, an Africa focused program *South 2 North* examined the influence of rising female leadership on the future of the continent.⁵⁴ The episode did not report on the new election or appointment of women to positions of power, but rather concentrated on those women already holding such positions, including President Joyce Banda of Malawi and political activist Dr. Mamphela Ramphele of South Africa. It also touched on the disproportionate lack of women in government across the globe, using the dearth of female governors in the United States as its non-African example. We will return later to the deeper implications of this comparison and others like it. For now, it is most important to note that Al-Jazeera casts these African women as trailblazers in an ongoing fight against global injustice, not

⁵⁴ "Africa's women of power," *Al-Jazeera*, May 18, 2013, accessed November 15, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/south2north/2013/05/20135171428575590.html>.

just discrimination in their own backyards.

This is not to say that *South 2 North* only acknowledges the contributions of African women. On the contrary, in 2012 the program interviewed the first female head of the International Monetary Fund, former French finance minister Christine Lagarde, to demonstrate how women are making headway in heretofore male dominated spheres.⁵⁵ Though the program does continue into the South African consecration of female Anglican bishops against the ruling of the Church of England, the primary directive of the article is again the state of women in leadership roles, not their recent development.

Nevertheless, in the context of the network as a whole these encouraging exposés on feminine agency are a rarity. The more frequent reports focus is on the suffering of a particular population subset. The Asian affairs program *101 East*, for instance, investigated the plight of widows in India in a piece entitled “A Widow’s Penance.”⁵⁶ Widowhood in India carries a heavy stigma, perpetuated by the traditional belief that a woman’s fate is entwined with that of her husband. This belief was the impetus behind widows throwing themselves on their husbands’ funeral pyres before the practice was banned by the British in 1829.⁵⁷ Though widows are no longer expected to commit suicide, they are still viewed as a burden, and many of them end up living in poverty with little respect from the society around them.

Shortly after running the special on Indian widows, *101 East* also featured a piece

⁵⁵ “Leading in a man’s world,” *Al-Jazeera*, December 22, 2012, accessed December 10, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/south2north/2012/12/2012122281324126717.html>.

⁵⁶ “A Widow’s Penance,” *Al-Jazeera*, September 20, 2013, accessed October 4, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/101east/2013/09/201391773152163100.html>.

⁵⁷ “Widow’s Penance.”

on kamlaris, Nepalese slave girls from the indigenous Tharu community.⁵⁸ These girls are usually traded by their families for the right to farm a plot of land and often abused and mistreated by their owners. Slavery is a common topic on Al-Jazeera. The network has even gone so far as to dedicate an exclusive program to the subject, *Slavery - A 21st Century Phenomenon*, that has also covered women's issues through the lens of sex slavery.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, as the examined articles point out, slavery, female or otherwise, is not a new phenomenon. Al-Jazeera's choice to address such issues, therefore, presents an editorial statement about their relevance in the lives of its audience. Some issues, however, are addressed more frequently than others

The most visible soft news topic concerning women on Al-Jazeera English is easily maternal health. Though many programs publish stories related to childbirth, such as Subina Shrestha's in depth piece for *Witness* on birth in Nepal, most of this attention is due to the channel's *Birthrights* series.⁶⁰ For more than three years, *Birthrights* has been producing exposes in all manner of media, including text, video, and interactive presentation, aimed to inform audiences about the universally relevant topic of maternal health. Rather than being framed as purely informative, however, the series expresses clearly expository goals for its publications. The description on the Al-Jazeera *Birthrights* webpage reads as follows.

⁵⁸ "Nepal's slave girls," *Al-Jazeera*, September 28, 2013, accessed October 4, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/101east/2013/09/20139249536331927.html>.

⁵⁹ For example: Toos Heemskerk-Schep, "Trapped by fear: The journey into sex slavery," *Al-Jazeera*, October 11, 2011, accessed October 14, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/slavery21stcenturyevil/2011/10/201110973326518170.html>.

⁶⁰ Subina Shrestha, "Birth in Nepal," *Al-Jazeera*, July 18, 2012, accessed November 25, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/witness/2010/05/20105372154435803.html>.

Maternal health is about more than just mothers and babies. Across the globe the very business of delivering life into the world is determined by power, politics and, all too frequently, poverty. From rural Vietnam to urban America, Al Jazeera's *Birthrights* series examines the *challenges* surrounding childbirth.⁶¹ (Emphasis mine.)

That series producers have not only chosen to draw attention to politics and power dynamics related to childbirth, but also to define the entire series in terms of challenges, poses important implications for Al-Jazeera's editorial policy.

The word 'challenge' brings to mind the dialogic nature of feminist discourse. By structuring the discussion in terms of challenge, the series is creating a clear and conflicted division, namely between those birthing children (i.e. women) and those who oppose them, be they unsympathetic law makers, uninformed health care providers, or simply misogynists. The editorial content of *Birthrights* upholds this interpretation, yet the reports treat development of the conflict far less than its identification. Empowered stories such as Nick Thorpe's account of a Hungarian midwife campaigning for naturalization of the birth process are published, but in far lesser quantities than those that focus on the difficulties that mothers and midwives face.⁶²

On *Birthrights* in particular, emotionally charged stories of women's hardships abound. In 2011 the series featured a film by Nick Ahlmark and Nicole Precel observing the dangerous conditions of childbirth in rural Vietnam where the maternal mortality rate

⁶¹ "Birthrights," Al-Jazeera, accessed December 9, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/birthrights/>.

⁶² Nick Thorpe, "The battle over birth," *Al-Jazeera*, March 28, 2011, accessed December 9, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/birthrights/2011/02/201122214012285918.html>.

is ten times that in the cities.⁶³ One month before there was the story of a South Sudanese father who could not afford to bury his unmarried daughter after she died during childbirth.⁶⁴ In an especially personal style, the entire article is a quote from the man, identified only as “Aliaza.” This style, however, is not unique to Aliaza’s tale.

An entire section of the *Birthrights* series, published in March of 2011 and entitled “In My View,” presents first-hand accounts of experiences with childbirth, most of them tragic.⁶⁵ Though the act of giving these women a forum to express themselves contributes significantly to their discursive agency, the pictures painted by the articles tend to portray them as helpless, beholden to an establishment that has not provided them with the necessary tools to carry out safe, successful births. It is not clear whether the articles were dictated specifically by their subjects or selected from longer interview transcripts, thus one cannot be certain whether the subjects themselves or Al-Jazeera’s editorial staff decided on the content of the articles. All of the articles, however, include a link to charity websites, usually the Save the Children Foundation, suggesting that “In My View” may have been a philanthropic endeavor.

All of this suggests that “In My View” is an attempt to allow women to demonstrate their own situation while also implying that they cannot improve it on their own. This inability is a direct example of stagnancy in the state of affairs. Al-Jazeera’s coverage of perpetual hardship, while neither slandering women nor rejecting their rights,

⁶³ “The Mountain Midwives of Vietnam,” *Al-Jazeera*, April 26, 2011, accessed December 9, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/birthrights/2011/04/201142663927915842.html>.

⁶⁴ “Aliaza: ‘My daughter died giving birth’,” *Al-Jazeera*, March 22, 2011, accessed December 9, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/birthrights/2011/03/2011320102150852510.html>.

⁶⁵ “Birthrights.”

gives no indication that they possess the necessary agency to change their situation. This is not to say that the network's editorial stance does not support this change. The somber tone of the entire *Birthrights* series puts Al-Jazeera firmly in favor of improving maternal health care around the world. The focus on the current state of affairs instead of attempts to overturn it, rather, indicates that the editorial mind does not expect change to come through direct action before awareness of and discourse around the issue have significantly increased.

Al-Jazeera programming aside, the network's traditional hard news publications also support this conclusion of a predilection for discourse. Often times, stories and headlines report on reactions to events and therefore the discourse surrounding them as much as the events themselves. After a series of sexual assaults in New Delhi in 2012, the channel produced a report on the "outcry" against them.⁶⁶ The accompanying article addressed the fact that campaigns had been launched as much if not more so than their goals or how they planned to achieve them. In a similar article later that year documenting a New Delhi gathering of protesters after the death of a gang-rape victim, the protesters were described not as protesting, but rather mourning.⁶⁷ By reporting in this manner, Al-Jazeera attributes further voice to the already discursive action of public protest.

⁶⁶ "Outcry in India over rape attacks," *Al-Jazeera*, May 5, 2012, accessed October 7, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia/2012/05/201255154924954590.html>.

⁶⁷ "India mourns death of gang-rape victim," *Al-Jazeera*, December 30, 2012, accessed November 25, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia/2012/12/2012122973834570942.html>.

Large groups, of course, are not the only capable participants in discourse, feminist or otherwise, and Al-Jazeera has similarly acknowledged this by reporting on individual speech acts as well. When the channel covered the story of a Palestinian woman imprisoned by her father for more than nine years, the report was framed to relay not her abuse, but rather her telling of it.⁶⁸ This portrayal mirrors the active language used to express feminine agency discussed in the previous chapter. The act of speaking carries its own agency. Nevertheless, as far as the article mentions, the woman in question is making no overt attempts to alter her state of being. The report deals with her time in captivity, not the ordeal of her escape, nor her activities thereafter. From this focus, it seems that Al-Jazeera is implying the woman's experiences produce an ideological effect rather than a material one.

An article describing a Mexican telenovela's adaptation of one woman's story of abuse related the program's ideological message more than its own; Al-Jazeera's editorial decision to run it, however, still makes it an interesting piece of evidence.⁶⁹ To celebrate its thirteenth anniversary, popular Mexican telenovela *What Women Don't Say* sought out an abused woman who had benefited from the show's call for universal women's rights and positive social change. The existence of such a program inherently expands the space for feminist speech. The fact that it also wants to involve its audience in production of that speech, as well as its reception, suggests that it would like to expand that space still

⁶⁸ "Imprisoned West Bank woman tells of abuse," *Al-Jazeera*, June 27, 2012, accessed November 25, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/video/middleeast/2012/01/2012127175512122169.html>.

⁶⁹ "Vicky's story," *Al-Jazeera*, November 24, 2013, accessed November 25, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/soapbox-mexico/2013/11/vicky-story-2013111810633595107.html>.

further. Considering the rarity of pop-culture pieces on Al-Jazeera, it stands to reason that this expressive desire provides the main impetus behind the report. The network is, to use the internet slang, ‘signal boosting’ a program that reflects its own editorial aims.

Despite this editorial predilection for female expression in soft news, stories regarding women’s issues sometimes appear in hard news as well. The 2012 Jimmy Savile scandal is a prime example. Once a much loved television personality with the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Jimmy Savile’s memory was tarnished after his death when the press got hold of allegations of persistent sexual assault stretching back more than fifty years. The BBC was accused of attempting to cover up these allegations when they cancelled the broadcast of an investigative piece on the charges. The scandal that followed took the transnational press by storm. Al-Jazeera was no exception.

Though Savile’s attacks included people of both genders, authorities concluded that 82% of his alleged victims had been female.⁷⁰ Considering this sizable majority, as well as the gendered nature of his crimes, the story falls easily into the category of women’s issues. This gendered perspective, on the other hand, is often overwhelmed by Savile’s celebrity. As in stories mentioned above, coverage of the incident became preoccupied with reactions rather than events. In this case, however, instead of drawing attention to women’s struggles, those struggles were swept under the rug in favor of a sensationalized debate over media ethics.

⁷⁰ “UK police report 50 years of Savile sex abuse,” *Al-Jazeera*, January 11, 2013, accessed October 4, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/europe/2013/01/2013111102225627530.html>.

In the handful of stories published about Jimmy Savile and the BBC after the scandal broke, attention is paid almost exclusively to reactions of the press and public. One story focuses on the BBC's denial of its alleged cover-up.⁷¹ Another takes a more in-depth look at the fallout at the network, as well as the likelihood that the cover-up had, in fact, been carried out.⁷² Even coverage of the arrest of former pop-star Gary Glitter in connection with the case devotes more space to what it all meant for the BBC than what Glitter was alleged to have done.⁷³ In all fairness, details of the investigation may not have been available to the press at the time of publication, but that does not explain the noticeable absence of the victims in each successive piece.

When the police did release an extensive report on the case, Al-Jazeera publications became more specific, but little more humanizing to the victims. The article released on the occasion of the report discussed the language and the statistics therein, but it failed to address the victims with more than the most basic attention necessary for a summary. By far the most personal line of the article explains that, "Victims ranged from a 10-year-old boy sexually assaulted after he asked for an autograph to children groped when they attended a popular music show."⁷⁴ Compared to the detailed and emotional stories discussed in this study thus far, the difference is marked, and highlighted further when the article returns less than halfway through to actions taken by the UK's National

⁷¹ "BBC denies cover-up of Jimmy Savile scandal," *Al-Jazeera*, October 12, 2012, accessed October 7, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/video/europe/2012/10/201210126195131132.html>.

⁷² "Sex abuse scandal rocks BBC," *Al-Jazeera*, October 24, 2012, accessed October 7, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/video/europe/2012/10/20121023213527144304.html>.

⁷³ "Gary Glitter arrested in Savile-BBC scandal," *Al-Jazeera*, October 28, 2012, accessed October 7, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/europe/2012/10/20121028134847273478.html>.

⁷⁴ "UK police report."

Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), undeserved honors bestowed upon Savile, and of course another mention of the BBC cover-up. The report's victims are not mentioned again.

This slanted coverage presents new and interesting implications about Al-Jazeera's editorial stance on women. The reason, perhaps, is best summed up in an opinion article about the scandal, wherein author Dan Hind describes Jimmy Savile's prolific abuse as "both deeply shocking and somehow unsurprising."⁷⁵ It is shocking because of the nature of the crime, but unsurprising, because abuse, no matter how horrible, is accepted as part of today's societal fabric. Steps may be taken to prevent it, but humans will never live in a society free from sexual crime. This resignation to the perpetuation of abuse becomes still clearer when seen in the context of a similarly heinous and yet somehow less shocking story.

The Jimmy Savile scandal was particularly gruesome for the involvement of children. Long before that story broke, however, and long after it faded from the spotlight, Al-Jazeera was covering another tale of sexual abuse in what some might call a far less vulnerable institution: the US military. As early as 2011, stories began to emerge about what one journalist termed the rape 'epidemic' in the US armed forces.⁷⁶ These stories were often more personal than those covering Savile; an early feature on the issue employed first-hand accounts from female military personnel, giving the piece a human

⁷⁵ Dan Hind, "What does Jimmy Savile mean?" *Al-Jazeera*, October 17, 2012, accessed October 7, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2012/10/201210178285200580.html>.

⁷⁶ Sarah Lazare, "Military sexual assault and rape 'epidemic'," *Al-Jazeera*, October 20, 2011, accessed October 4, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/09/2011916112412992221.html>.

touch.⁷⁷ Just like the Savile case though, the numerous sexual assaults that ultimately led to the story took a back seat to the establishment and its reactions.

Even in that early feature, the humanized victims served as mere supplements to the story's overall thesis: the US military was not handling cases of sexual abuse well.⁷⁸ Supporting evidence of this thesis included myriad statistics, criticism of the Department of Defense (DoD) for failing to adequately address the problem, and strict censure of the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office (SPARO) it created in 2005 to regulate and prevent policies related to sexual misconduct throughout all branches of the DoD. Whereas prior to SPARO victims were unlikely to report sexual crimes for fear of rampant disbelief and victim blaming, the new office enacted confidential reporting, thereby boosting the number of recorded violations. The restricted nature of these reports, however, also allowed them to be swept under the rug by top brass. Investigations were cursory, and because these crimes fall under military jurisdiction, legal action was almost unheard of. Perhaps the article's attention to this oversight explains why the author chose to fill it out with examples of overlooked cases. Future articles were not near so attentive.

Most of Al-Jazeera's coverage of the sexual abuse in the US military stretching into 2012 and 2013 focused almost exclusively on the procedural aspects of the abuse. In a stark echo of the Savile article, "Sex abuse scandal rocks BBC," the network released the story of corrupt military training instructors at Lackland Air Force Base under the

⁷⁷ Lazare, "Military sexual assault."

⁷⁸ Lazare, "Military sexual assault."

headline, “Sex abuse scandal rocks US air base.”⁷⁹ As the title might suggest in both situations, the story is less about the scandal than its effects. The course of the next year brought reports on turbulent Senate hearings and military crime statistics, but no in depth looks at the experience of a woman in the armed forces, difficult or otherwise, ever appeared.⁸⁰ There may be many reasons for this absence, but one in particular stands out as relevant to this study.

A blog entry about the Lackland affair called “Abuse raises questions about the US military,” puts this sentiment in even sharper focus.⁸¹ An analytical entry on Al-Jazeera’s Americas blog, the piece’s content deals primarily with the military’s sudden friendliness towards the press and eagerness to improve its public reputation. Nevertheless, near the end of the article journalist Rosalind Jordan digresses for a short moment of intimacy.

After spending a few hours with these young women, all of a generation not known for its rectitude, I was convinced that if sexual harassment and abuse are to be driven out of the military, it will be largely because these young women demand it.⁸²

It is the first time direct interaction with female service members is mentioned. It is also the first time that the feminine agency treated in the first chapter makes an overt appearance in a story of abuse, giving voice to the non-verbalized importance of feminist

⁷⁹ “Sex abuse scandal rocks US air base,” *Al-Jazeera*, July 17, 2012, accessed October 4, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/video/americas/2012/07/201271705149374215.html>.

⁸⁰ “Panel criticises US military on sex assault,” *Al-Jazeera*, March 14, 2013, accessed October 4, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/americas/2013/03/2013313235039358576.html>;

⁸⁰ “Sex crimes soar in US military,” *Al-Jazeera*, May 8, 2013, accessed October 4, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/americas/2013/05/2013580411869197.html>.

⁸¹ Rosalind Jordan, “Abuse raises questions about US military,” *Al-Jazeera*, July 19, 2012, accessed October 4, 2013, <http://blogs.aljazeera.com/blog/americas/abuse-raises-questions-about-us-military>.

⁸² Jordan, “Abuse raises questions.”

ideologies in Al-Jazeera's editorial policy. The potency of this evidence, however, has as much to do with where it appears as what it says.

Blogs such as this one stand in a gray zone of editorial authority. Unlike typical news stories, they include bylines, analysis, and often a more personal touch. At the same time, they are free of the customary disclaimer that accompanies each and every opinion piece: "The views expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect Al Jazeera's editorial policy."⁸³ The absence of this single sentence then implies, to some degree, a reflection of that same policy. Furthermore, by publishing it as a blog, the editors are exposing that policy to greater scrutiny and uncontrolled discourse in the form of readers' comments.

Despite this exposure, the discussion section on Jordan's article remained short, comprising only sixteen comments when first accessed for this project. Some provided additional detail on the story, others fulfilled the inflammatory nonsense quota so popular in internet commentary, but the majority of the actual discussion centered around the photograph Al-Jazeera chose to publish at the article's head.

The picture shows a professional male athlete signing autographs for two smiling women in US Army uniforms at the front of a line of their fellow soldiers. Admittedly, the image has little to do with sexual assault in the military. The excited exuberance of the women vis-à-vis the serious expressions of the men in the shot do augment the gender division, portraying the women as frivolous and energetic as opposed to their stoic male counterparts. While this portrayal could have serious implications on both sides of

⁸³ "Opinion," Al-Jazeera, accessed December 15, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/>.

feminist dialogism, expressing either that women are self-assured and capable or inattentive and vulnerable, visual representation is beyond the scope of this study. The picture did, however, trigger readers' textual contributions which provide information about the article's reception.

Following a comment lampooning Al-Jazeera for the irrelevance of the photograph and placing it at a military post in Afghanistan, rather than Lackland Air Force base where the abuse in question occurred, discussion turned to the ubiquity of abuse in the US military.⁸⁴ Commenter Albany CA agreed that it was unclear why the picture was used, but reminded readers that "the problem extends to all military bases and locations," before going on to lament the extent of the abuse as well as the indifference of the public.⁸⁵ His comment was followed by an anonymous responder complementing his use of the word 'attack' to describe actions taken against women in the armed forces and reiterating the traditional prevalence of indifference.⁸⁶

These statements indicate impassioned, visceral responses regardless of the detached tone of the piece. More tellingly, despite Jordan's nod to female soldiers as the only ones capable of changing their situation, the readership seems more aligned with the broader Al-Jazeera stance observed thus far: In the face of widespread indifference, the status quo in the US military is unlikely to change. The comments section of a second blog post addressing the issue more broadly makes the prevalence of this opinion even more clear.

⁸⁴ Edward Ramras, pseud., July 19, 2012 (8:41 p.m.), comment on Jordan, "Abuse raises questions."

⁸⁵ Albany CA, July 20, 2012 (9:14 a.m.), comment on Jordan, "Abuse raises questions."

⁸⁶ Anon, July 20, 2012 (4:55 p.m.), comment on Jordan, "Abuse raises questions."

Several months after Rosalind Jordan's piece on the Lackland scandal, Camille Elhassani published a blog entry about the persistence of sexual assault in the US armed forces, particularly in military academies.⁸⁷ The content of the article diverged little from those already discussed in this paper. Data was generally treated in the aggregate and no specific cases of assault were cited. The article's audience, however, was much more active than that of the previous blog. They posted more than three times as many responses, many of them lengthy analytical essays themselves. Most disagreements concerned whether or not women should even be allowed to serve in combat positions, and debate often became heated, but it is what the commenters agreed upon that proves more important to this study.

Whether arguing that the stresses of war corrupt the morals of men or that stagnant conceptions of gender result in the unfair treatment of women, all of the commenters seemed to agree on one thing: nothing was about to change. Perhaps Arthur Cook summed it up best when he wrote, "To change this, the culture must change. Do not hold your breath."⁸⁸ It is unclear whether the paradigm endures because women lack the necessary agency, or if women lack the necessary agency because of the paradigm, but the implied link is unmistakable. No matter the emotional content of *Al-Jazeera* articles, whether they fall into the category of hard or soft news, the absence of feminine proactivity and action indicates an enduring condition with little chance of change. This

⁸⁷ Camille Elhassani, "Sexual assault at the US military academies," *Al-Jazeera*, December 21, 2012, accessed October 4, 2013, <http://blogs.aljazeera.com/blog/americas/sexual-assault-us-military-academies>.

⁸⁸ Arthur Cook, pseud., January 8, 2013 (9:44 p.m.), comment on Elhassani, "Sexual assault."

orientation persists even in the language of many of the articles, just as it did with transformative stories in chapter one.

Whereas the active language of the articles in the last chapter demonstrated the agency of women and its correlation to revolution and transition, the articles dealt with here portray the stagnancy of women's condition through the application of more passive language. Drawing on the previously discussed importance of headlines, titles such as "Civil war leaves Sri Lankan women vulnerable," stand out as particularly relevant.⁸⁹ At first glance, women in this headline serve the obvious grammatical function of direct object, casting them in an inherently passive role. The headline itself, however, is not passive. While the present tense and active voice of 'leaves' might, therefore, suggest that the story is reporting on current developments in Sri Lanka, this is not in fact that case. Instead, the story is expressing the lack of change that women have seen since the cessation of the war in 2009. As one line states, "The peace that came with the end of the civil war has brought little discernible improvement to their lives."⁹⁰ The article describes them passively because they are stuck in a situation despite the progression of events around them.

Another prime example of this linguistic passivity comes from an article on women's suffrage in Saudi Arabia.⁹¹ In September of 2011, King Abdullah granted women the right to vote and run for municipal office. This development may sound

⁸⁹ "Civil war leaves Sri Lankan women vulnerable," *Al-Jazeera*, August 20, 2011, accessed November 18, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia/2011/08/201182054057477427.html>.

⁹⁰ "Civil war leaves Sri Lankan women vulnerable."

⁹¹ "Saudi women given voting rights," *Al-Jazeera*, September 25, 2011, accessed October 7, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/09/2011925124652136164.html>.

revolutionary, and yet Al-Jazeera's report tells a different story. Both the passive headline, "Saudi women given voting rights," and the content of the article, imply that suffrage will do little to alter women's position in Saudi society. A section of the text draws uncontextualized attention to the many remaining restrictions placed on women in the kingdom, pointing out that they "are not allowed to drive," and that they "are barred from travelling, working or having medical operations without the permission of a male relative" despite a long history of activism.⁹² Though these are both fact, the lack of framing or mention of the Saudi female condition as a whole implies that the right to vote may be a fluke, and that the larger women's rights movement is unlikely to achieve major victories in the near future. In the context of the research thus far then, the passive language of the headline conforms to expectations.

A more extended case of immobile feminine conditions in the news arose from the El Salvador abortion controversy throughout May of 2013. The story of Beatriz, a young Salvadorian mother of one, incited mass protests when the country's Supreme Court denied her an abortion that would save her life even though doctors had already deemed the fetus unviable. Abortion laws in El Salvador are strict, but international human rights groups decried the preferencing of fetal rights in a case where such preference could lead to two deaths instead of the inevitable one. As alteration of the laws themselves was not on the table, coverage remained confined to individual narratives and nobody expected women's options to change anytime soon. The passive language in headlines such as "Dying woman denied abortion in El Salvador," and "Salvadorian

⁹² "Saudi women given voting rights."

woman allowed to end pregnancy,” should, therefore, surprise no one.⁹³ The presentation of the stories beneath those headlines, however, may prove more remarkable when compared to other stories of abortion.

Beatriz’s ordeal fell only six months after a similar incident in Ireland where an Indian woman in the midst of a miscarriage was denied an abortion because the fetus still possessed a faint heartbeat. Savita Halappanavar later died of septicemia as a result of the failed birth, inciting mass protests that eventually led to legislation codifying what had been the standard practice of allowing abortion in cases of maternal endangerment. This new law may have saved Savita’s life, but it satisfied neither supporters nor opponents of abortion in Ireland and changed very little about the status quo. In light of the similarities between Savita’s fate and the events occurring in El Salvador, it is no wonder that transnational news outlets began to invoke them together to spark an international abortion debate. Al-Jazeera was no exception to this phenomenon, however the network did not handle both stories in quite the same way.

Al-Jazeera, in reporting on Beatriz, acknowledged the many parallels between her situation and Savita’s experience in Ireland, yet the style of the reporting appears markedly different.⁹⁴ Headlines regarding Savita tended to avoid addressing women altogether, preferring to position the story in terms of the “Ireland abortion debate” or

⁹³ “Dying woman denied abortion in El Salvador,” *Al-Jazeera*, May 11, 2013, accessed November 15, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2013/05/2013510112715422231.html>;

⁹³ “Salvadorian woman allowed to end pregnancy,” *Al-Jazeera*, May 31, 2013, accessed November 15, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/americas/2013/05/201353163837973141.html>.

⁹⁴ “Dying woman denied abortion.”

“Ireland’s abortion controversy.”⁹⁵ This preference is reminiscent of the network’s tendency to report speech acts as news. In this case, however, it is not women speaking, but rather a whole country; and the opinions of that country seem paramount.

Articles discussing the situation in El Salvador take a heavy stance on human rights. Much attention is paid to Beatriz’s suffering, as well as the punishments meted out to women so much as suspected of abortions.⁹⁶ Most of the articles dealing with Ireland, on the other hand, come at the issue from a distinctly legal perspective. In much the same way as stories of abuse in the US military focused on statistics and criticism, the stories about abortion in Ireland focus on the details of the law, changes proposed by lawmakers, and reactions to those changes. Emotional references like those found in relation to Beatriz are rare. Mention of external censure is rarer.

A feature piece by Paul Fallon eight months after Savita’s death was the first and only publication found in the course of this research to address the social implications of Ireland’s abortion debate at all.⁹⁷ It called attention to international concerns about human rights in Ireland, including statements from the United Nations and Amnesty International, and made sure to clarify multiple times that Savita Halappanavar was not Irish. The article further underlined this last fact, also found in all but the first breaking report on the incident, with a photo of Indian women protesting outside the Irish Embassy

⁹⁵ “Ireland abortion debate,” *Al-Jazeera*, November 18, 2012, accessed December 8, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/video/europe/2012/11/20121117201349969681.html>;

⁹⁵ “Ireland’s abortion controversy,” *Al-Jazeera*, July 12, 2012, accessed December 8, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/insidestory/2013/07/20137128554415383.html>.

⁹⁶ “Dying woman denied abortion.”

⁹⁷ Paul Fallon, “Abortion reforms divide Ireland,” *Al-Jazeera*, July 22, 2013, accessed December 8, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2013/07/2013722132516692342.html>.

in New Delhi. In spite of this repeated emphasis, however, Savita's nationality never enters into the analysis. A broader look at the issue of abortion on Al-Jazeera provides insight as to why.

In the majority of articles concerning abortion in the developing world, Al-Jazeera tends to approach the issue as one of human rights. When Uruguay legalized the practice in 2012, the report framed the decision in notably favorable terms. Al-Jazeera described the new law as "groundbreaking," while repeatedly employing positively connotated buzzwords like "freedom" and "right."⁹⁸ Such major developments in the abortion issue, however, are rare. Instead, most present failed or only minorly successful challenges to a particular legal framework. In these more common articles about controversies where abortion remains illegal, statistics for life threatening unauthorized procedures are almost always provided despite their unreliable nature.⁹⁹ This dangerous resistance to the stagnancy of the issue serves as an example of how women are taking their fate into their own hands. It also goes a long way towards humanizing the issue by putting real women in real situations. When the geography of the stories shifts, however, the humanity of the issue all but disappears.

On Al-Jazeera, as well as most transnational news outlets, the abortion debate in the United States is covered more broadly than that taking place anywhere else. The legalization of abortion in the US after the landmark 1973 Supreme Court case *Roe v.*

⁹⁸ "Uruguay senate votes to legalize abortion," *Al-Jazeera*, October 18, 2013, accessed December 8, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/americas/2012/10/2012101863020567931.html>.

⁹⁹ For example: "Argentina allows abortion for rape victims," *Al-Jazeera*, March 14, 2012, accessed December 8, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/americas/2012/03/2012314135030394536.html>;

⁹⁹ "Morocco moves to block Dutch 'abortion ship'," *Al-Jazeera*, October 4, 2012, accessed December 8, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2012/10/201210415467467715.html>.

Wade has ensured that unsafe abortions and the high death rates they cause are much rarer than in countries where the practice remains illegal. Nonetheless, as American abortion advocates point out, this technical legality does not change the nature of the issue. A detailed explanation of abortion laws in the United States exceeds the scope of this paper, but the Supreme Court has ruled to allow states to restrict abortion to varying degrees and many of the resulting restrictions do not make exceptions to protect maternal health. Organizations and individuals in favor of more lenient abortion laws, therefore, often frame the American abortion debate in terms of human rights too. American women are not dying in large numbers, but the language used reminds audiences that maternal health is an issue regardless.

Supporters of abortion in the states constantly draw on issues of maternal rights and well-being to reinforce their positions, sometimes with additional emotional fuel. NARAL Pro-Choice America reminds people on its website that, “Some types of abortion bans harm women in heart-breaking circumstances.”¹⁰⁰ When Republican Senator Lindsey Graham proposed a nationwide ban on abortions after twenty weeks of pregnancy in late 2013, the National Abortion Federation published an immediate press release claiming the bill “dangerously jeopardizes the health and well-being of women in the United States who need abortion care later in pregnancy for a variety of reasons.”¹⁰¹ While similar statements would be at home on Al-Jazeera in any of its articles about

¹⁰⁰ “Bans on Abortion After 12 Weeks,” NARAL Pro-Choice America, accessed December 11, 2013, <http://www.prochoiceamerica.org/what-is-choice/abortion/abortion-bans.html>.

¹⁰¹ National Abortion Federation, “Nationwide Abortion Ban Introduced in Senate Would Hurt Women Like Christy,” *NAF Press Release* (November 7, 2013), accessed December 11, 2013, http://www.prochoice.org/news/releases/110713_20weekbanIntroducedinSenate.html.

abortion in the developing world, when dealing with America they become conspicuously absent.

Just as Al-Jazeera coverage of abuse on US military bases focused on the procedural rather than the human aspects, so does its coverage of abortion in the United States deal with the political implications more so than the women affected. Articles address the battleground status of South Dakota, as well as presidential candidate Mitt Romney's change of opinion midway through his campaign, but women are never considered in the analysis.¹⁰² Even articles that seem aimed at analysis, such as one headlined "Are Republicans redefining women's rights?" end up discussing politicians strategic maneuvers vis-à-vis their statements about women rather than women themselves.¹⁰³ Only a short blurb near the end announcing that, "Last year, 24 US states passed provisions making it more difficult for women to obtain an abortion," indicates that this discussion has any real effect on women at all.¹⁰⁴ This blasé factoid represents a pattern throughout the evidence.

When women are mentioned in Al-Jazeera's material on US abortion, it is brief, and often times fails to convey any real dilemma. An Inside Story Americas piece on "the abortion war" opens with the affirmation that "in the US a woman's ability to have an abortion has been a constitutional right for more than 40 years," incorrectly suggesting

¹⁰² "South Dakota becomes US abortion battleground," *Al-Jazeera*, May 25, 2012, accessed December 11, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/video/americas/2012/05/201252520518739693.html>;

¹⁰² "Romney's anti-abortion conversation," *Al-Jazeera*, August 29, 2012, accessed December 11, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/video/americas/2012/08/2012829174148465559.html>.

¹⁰³ "Are Republicans redefining women's rights?" *Al-Jazeera*, August 29, 2012, accessed December 11, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/insidestoryus2012/2012/08/2012829103225925202.html>.

¹⁰⁴ "Are Republicans redefining?"

that woman has an historical advantage before the article has even begun.¹⁰⁵ When Texas passed one of the most restrictive abortion laws in the nation, Al-Jazeera reported that the bill's Republican advocates were trying to "protect the health of women and babies" without acknowledging that their opponents were making the same claims under different auspices.¹⁰⁶ Instead, the Democratic opposition is cited as complaining over stealth political maneuvers and the difficulties abortion clinics would face complying with the law.¹⁰⁷ One publication that apparently did not find US abortion controversial enough to deserve its own article dedicated a section to the completely unrelated topic of student debt.¹⁰⁸ Even the Fault Lines special edition on the issue repeatedly addressed the controversy as a "so-called" war on women, conveying a sense that feminist concerns have been blown out of proportion.¹⁰⁹ Whether this is true or not, the presentation serves to trivialize abortion in the US in a way diametrically opposed to how it is treated elsewhere.

This difference in treatment might arise for a number of reasons. As mentioned above, the loss of female life is nowhere near as drastic in the US as it is elsewhere. Perhaps Al-Jazeera's compassion only extends to those whose lives are threatened. Alternatively, abortion is more of a hot button issue in the States than any of the

¹⁰⁵ "America's abortion war," *Al-Jazeera*, March 30, 2013, accessed December 11, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/insidestoryamericas/2013/03/201333061313214606.html>.

¹⁰⁶ "Texas passes abortion restriction bill," *Al-Jazeera*, July 13, 2013, accessed December 11, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/americas/2013/07/201371373435786703.html>.

¹⁰⁷ "Texas passes abortion."

¹⁰⁸ "US abortion battles," *Al-Jazeera*, July 3, 2013, accessed December 11, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/insidestoryamericas/2013/07/20137395556965356.html>.

¹⁰⁹ "The abortion war," *Al-Jazeera*, August 29, 2012, accessed December 11, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/faultlines/2012/08/20128288841399701.html>.

developing world and Al-Jazeera could easily be parroting patterns pre-defined by ubiquitous American media outlets. In order to inform a logical conclusion, one must return to the case of Ireland, a developed, Western nation like the US where abortion is illegal.

The case of Savita Halappanavar was humanized on Al-Jazeera in a way that American abortion cases are not. Nevertheless, as the network was careful to point out, she was not an Irish citizen. What then, is the fate of Irish women? The fact that one can wade through a dozen articles about abortion in Ireland and still ask this question paints a gaping hole in Al-Jazeera's feminist dialogue. Reexamination of the evidence does turn up one article explaining that many Irish women travel to the United Kingdom for their abortions, but many others cannot afford the trip.¹¹⁰ The tone of the article, however, seems less to commiserate with or support them than to insist that Western women can be oppressed too. The next chapter will discuss this issue further.

Though the nature of the news, and perhaps humanity, precludes a constant portrayal of powerful, effectual, revolutionary women on Al-Jazeera, this has not stopped the network from promoting feminist ideologies in other ways. The mere inclusion of women's stories as news creates a space for ideological expansion that would not otherwise occur. These stories are not often optimistic about the future of women's rights and well-being, but it is precisely that unlikelihood of change that guide's the editorial

¹¹⁰ "Money woes limit Irish abortion options," *Al-Jazeera*, November 3, 2012, accessed December 15, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/video/europe/2012/11/201211312153530375.html>.

policy towards less radical coverage. At times, the coverage even shifts to the other end of the spectrum to elicit support for the vulnerable.

In those situations where women's stories involve developing events rather than continuous states, Al-Jazeera often casts those women in passive roles that show their inability to singlehandedly alter the situation. Based on the chapter one's conclusion that the network holds women not only capable of but a sign post for change, it follows that such framing is meant to garner audience sympathy and perhaps incite opinion, if not participation. Nevertheless, this emotional appeal is not detectable in all articles that fit the passive female bill.

In some cases, Al-Jazeera publishes articles with passive women that fail to meaningfully address those women at all. These articles tend to focus on the procedural and political aspects of the reported events, but they have more than that in common. When Al-Jazeera covers women's news from a less than feminist perspective, that issue usually hails from the United States and Europe. As the next chapter will show, this discrepancy is just one manifestation of an age old, highly controversial power dynamic closely linked to both gender and cultural identity.

Chapter 3: The Imperialist Specter

Building a Personal Feminism to Escape Colonial Rule

This project has thus far argued that Al-Jazeera, while promoting some feminist ideologies, does not equally promote all feminist ideologies. Though journalists employ evocative reporting styles in coverage about women in most of the world, these styles shift to exclude all but the most cut and dry facts when dealing with Europe and the United States. No evidence exists to suggest that the network is aware of this iniquity. On the contrary, publications seem, as a whole, dedicated to global development and human rights for all. Nevertheless, having discovered the disparity, it is only prudent to explore that disparity's origins and implications.

News media has long flourished on the tradition of discussing the other vis-à-vis accepted cultural identity norms. In Anglo-American transnational news, this other has often taken the form of women, children, or minorities, otherized against the traditional identity of the platonic human being: the Judeo-Christian white adult male. Al-Jazeera on the other hand, an other in its own right, need not manufacture this juxtaposition in the same way. Through a complex amalgamation of Arab identity, socially progressive values, and transnational news culture, the network is able to embrace its otherness, and in so doing maintain total dominion over its ideas and values. The following chapter will examine the intersection of these factors and how it has led to another iteration of the type of feminism sweeping the Middle East today.

In order to understand Al-Jazeera's interaction with the wider world and global feminist ideologies, one must first understand its place on the world stage. At Al-

Jazeera's founding in 2001, the original Arabic language television channel was meant to be a fresh voice in the Arabic news media. Arab journalism existed largely in the hands of the Arab states. Governments had as much say in what was published or broadcast as even the most senior editors. Though the government loan of Qatari Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani cast doubt upon Al-Jazeera's editorial independence, the organization always maintained that they were no more beholden to Sheikh Hamad than the BBC was to Her Majesty the Queen. They would be the first truly free transnational Arab press.

Whether one agrees with this claim or not, Al-Jazeera's unapologetic editorial policy made quick enemies of many Arab regimes. Saudi Arabia was a particularly harsh adversary, threatening companies to destroy the channel's advertising revenue when senior management refused to reconcile its editorial policy with the official Saudi line. Nevertheless, the channel survived thanks to the Qatari government's continued subsidization, and before long was being hailed by its counterparts in the West as a welcome step forward for the Arab press. At least part of this acclaim probably had much to do with Al-Jazeera's resemblance to said counterparts.

While the channel may have been the first of its kind in Arabic, or indeed based in the Middle East at all, it adopted much of the structure and practices of already established transnational news outlets in Europe and the United States. Shortly after Al-Jazeera's inception, a failed partnership between the Saudi satellite television company Orbit and the BBC World service left 250 BBC-trained Arab journalists without work. Of

those 250, Al-Jazeera hired almost half.¹¹¹ To the casual observer, the channel's broadcasts have never much differed from those found anywhere else in the world. Everything from wardrobe to formatting adheres to what have become international norms. From its outset, programming like Ahmad Mansour's *Bilā Ḥudūd* and Faisal al-Qasim's *Al-Ittijāh Al-Mu'ākis* have been compared to BBC's *Hardtalk* and CNN's *Crossfire*.¹¹² In the face of the myriad similarities, perhaps some of the observed styles of coverage should be expected.

The cut and dry reporting observed in the last chapter, focused heavily on procedure and statistics, closely mirrors that found in much of the transnational news in the West. Though the end of the twentieth century saw a marked rise in soft news, this rise did little for what one researcher calls "the fetishization of facts and factuality."¹¹³ In 1989, reporters like Jonathan Yardley of *The Washington Post* decried the proliferation of "sob-story journalism."¹¹⁴ Twenty years later, only that criticism's source had changed, with audiences now complaining of over-emotional news outside the sphere of human-interest.¹¹⁵ In the fall of 2012, *Media* magazine dedicated a two page spread to the ethics of objective journalism, arguing in short that the only emotion in news media should be

¹¹¹ Hugh Miles, *Al-Jazeera: The Inside Story of the Arab News Channel that is Challenging the West* (New York: Grove Press, 2005), 38.

¹¹² Miles, 33.

¹¹³ Liesbet van Zoonen, "One of the Girls?: The changing gender of journalism," in *News, Gender and Power*, ed. Cynthia Carter, Gill Branston, and Stuart Allan (London: Routledge, 1998), 35.

¹¹⁴ Jonathan Yardley, "Sob-story journalism cheapens real people, emotions," *The Seattle Times*, August 29, 1989, accessed December 27, 2013 in NewsBank (883468).

¹¹⁵ James Shaffer, "Article about 'emotional' - issue 'poor journalism,'" *Kennebec Journal* (Augusta, ME), July 16, 2009, accessed December 27, 2013 in NewsBank (6603559).

“an emotional commitment to the best possible journalism.”¹¹⁶ Soft news is ubiquitous, but hard news still receives greater respect and thus greater scrutiny - a scrutiny freely adopted by Arab journalists as well.

In her in depth study of Arab journalists in transnational media, Noha Mellor noted the pervasive influence of Anglo-American news on her subjects.¹¹⁷ News agencies across the Middle East and North Africa remain constantly tuned in to CNN and BBC. They read the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. Most importantly, they propagate the professional values championed in hegemonic transnational journalism for generations. Accuracy and objectivity in the news command global respect, even when global stories tend to differ.

Despite the shared nature of their values, however, a major inconsistency arises over what constitutes a newsworthy story in the Arab world and the Anglo-American west. Many of Mellor’s interviews revealed a feeling that the prevalence of soft, social news in the Anglo-American media was a luxury born of a relatively conflict free society.¹¹⁸ Arab news, on the other hand, presents a primarily political arena out of regional necessity, resulting in a perceived lack of soft news in their own media outlets. Arab journalists agreed that their audiences also need “news that reflects their daily pains and problems,” but the importance of covering regional conflicts precludes its production.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Stephen J. A. Ward, “The emotional commitment to objective journalism,” *Media* 15.3 (2013): 65-66.

¹¹⁷ Noha Mellor, *Arab Journalists in Transnational Media* (New York: Hampton Press, Inc., 2011).

¹¹⁸ Mellor, *Arab Journalists*, 101.

¹¹⁹ Mellor, *Arab Journalists*, 98.

In light of this unfulfilled desire for soft news, Al-Jazeera's myriad human-interest pieces about women on *Birthrights* and elsewhere make a great deal of sense. The network has discovered an area where human-interest, while not inherently political, is still politically relevant. By covering soft news stories about women in conflicts, or at least conflict adjacent, Al-Jazeera can publish human-interest pieces without the risk of irrelevance. Rape, abortion, and abuse all make hard news stories when law enforcement and government get involved; their appearance in soft news therefore is less removed from what some perceive as more 'serious' issues. Furthermore, since opinion dictates that the Anglo-American west already has its own human-interest covered, leaving out these humanizing elements in similar stories about the United States or Europe undermines less than it equalizes. The fact that so many of these stories are about women, however, implies that there is more at work here than the filling of a gap.

Journalism as a field preoccupies itself with the issue of the other. As Mellor structures it in Habermasian terms of the public sphere, the central self is always reporting on the peripheral other.¹²⁰ As this issue was often studied from an Anglo-American perspective, the international periphery always constituted those who fell outside of the Anglo-American 'center' of Europe and the United States. In a world where an organization like Al-Jazeera can be built and broadcast from that 'periphery' though, many others can come together to create a journalistic self. Nevertheless, such unification does not divorce journalists from a local identity that cannot help but to

¹²⁰ Noha Mellor, *Modern Arab Journalism: Problems and Prospects* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 121.

subjectively inform one's views.

In this respect, the identity of Al-Jazeera and its journalists becomes of particular importance. As a company, the network employs people of many nationalities, especially in the global Al-Jazeera English section on which this study focuses. This staffing, however, does not change the channel's foundation and continued leadership at the hands of Arab journalists. Still, the question in play here is not one of race so much as one of power. While the original Arabic language channel may have had strong roots in an Arabo-Islamic identity, Al-Jazeera's English language offshoot espouses its own clear conceptions of message and identity.

Al-Jazeera's motto had always been "the opinion and the other opinion." As discussed in the introduction, it was the network's prime directive to bring the perspectives of under-reported regions in the spotlight of the world stage. When Al-Jazeera went international with the English language version, however, the resonance of such a directive became even clearer. The opinion meant the opinion of the Anglo-American center dominating transnational news. The other opinion meant just that, the opinion of the other. What complicates this message, however, is precisely how the network chooses to define that other.

To be certain, race and nationality have always played a peripheral role in transnational Anglo-American news, whether that role was filled by Asians, Africans, South Americans, or any other group that did not fit the agreed upon notion of the self. Still, the self identifies with markers of gender and age as well. Following claims of the othering and exploitation of women in Western news, John Hartley suggested that the

same argument could be applied, even more strongly, to children.¹²¹ Casting these vulnerable groups in narratives of otherness allowed the media to democratize stories about them, in effect transforming them into proxies for society and its problems. Despite its own status as an ethnic, cultural, and political other, Al-Jazeera has fallen into similar patterns where women are concerned. The message it conveys through their portrayal, however, has more to do with its own otherness than theirs.

Women and their bodies have a long history of appropriation for purposes of nationalism and identity, especially in the Arab world. Feminism, thanks to orientalist conceptions of the oppressed Arab concubine, maintains strong associations with colonialism. These associations have consequently produced what one academic calls “the counter-colonialist representation of Arab women,” wherein feminism and women’s rights are but colonial imports sent to poison traditional culture.¹²² Golley argues against this view, but agrees that the veiled, powerless victim of orientalist lore does no more for women than the misogynistic alternative. Instead, she asserts that “Arab women’s needs for positive change in their lives is neither more nor less than the need of women for positive change anywhere else in the world,” and thus indigenous Arab feminism was born out of inevitable societal evolution.¹²³ This conclusion, however, does not deny that Arab feminism still faces challenges.

Golley describes the Arab feminist struggle as two-fold: first “against the old

¹²¹ John Hartley, “Juvenation: News, girls and power,” in *News, Gender and Power*, ed. Cynthia Carter, Gill Branston, and Stuart Allan (London: Routledge, 1998), 47-70.

¹²² Nawar Al-Hassan Golley, “Is feminism relevant to Arab women?” *Third World Quarterly* 25.3 (2004), 522.

¹²³ Golley, 522.

religious, social and economic order,” but also against Anglo-American colonialism and neo-colonialism.¹²⁴ These fronts are precisely those on which Al-Jazeera has also been fighting. Whether challenging the state run journalistic establishment that once dominated the Arab news or competing with world renowned Anglo-American media giants, the network has been forging its own identity independent of existing power structures.¹²⁵ In so much as its publications increase the visibility of feminist ideologies then, they also create a new system in which a network can succeed without submitting to nor reacting against the predetermined powers that be.

Viewing Al-Jazeera’s treatment of women through this lens explains the preoccupation with women outside of demonstrated in this paper thus far; further examples, however, put these findings in even sharper relief. Though not the editorial norm, articles occasionally appear on Al-Jazeera’s website that directly address the complicated network of power dynamics that has dictated the relationship between the so-called East and West since the first forays into colonialism. These articles leave no doubt that while Al-Jazeera may not intend to challenge the Anglo-American media’s claim to feminist preeminence, it does recognize a need to object to the cross-cultural application of ‘progressive Western values.’

The most obvious attacks come in reports on Anglo-American intervention in foreign affairs. Most of this news falls into the realm of politics or the military, but the occasional women’s story makes its appearance as well. One headline unapologetically

¹²⁴ Golley, 529.

¹²⁵ While these structures do represent foils to Al-Jazeera, they do not necessarily counter its portrayals of feminism.

calls out the practice of cultural imperialism by stating that “‘Imported values’ fail Afghan women.”¹²⁶ That editors placed the term “imported values” in apostrophes already says a great deal about the article to follow. By definition, an import is a commodity, a good or service brought into a country, usually for resale. By casting values in these economic terms, the headline dubiously frames the Anglo-American presence in Afghanistan as a business venture. It equates the spread of thoughts and ideas with the promulgation of fast food chains and movie franchises, and with good reason.

Returning to the idea of dialogic thought, the masculine and the feminine, the East and the West, it is important to mention that platonic imports do not exist without their opposite, exports. These exports, in turn, call to mind production, ownership, and origin. They can be moved, and traded, but their source remains the same. In this case, Europe and the United States fulfill the role of that source, suggesting by Afghanistan’s need to import that it is incapable of fulfilling its own value needs. Excusing for a moment the offensive implications of such a statement, a cause for Al-Jazeera’s insistent, homegrown feminism begins to emerge.

While the Anglo-American news media may espouse a narrative of cultural exportation, Al-Jazeera chimes in with the epitome of “the other opinion.” One cannot trade something as crucial to human identity as values. They can spread, certainly, but only by more organic and empowered processes like adoption. The Afghanistan piece makes no excuses for the decline of the female condition under Taliban rule, but argues

¹²⁶ Tanya Goudsouzian and Fatima Rabani, “‘Imported values’ fail Afghan women,” *Al-Jazeera*, September 21, 2009, accessed November 25, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/focus/2009/09/2009915134359787866.html>.

that imposing women's rights on Afghan society, as US led 'importation' measures have done, is not going to undo that damage. On the contrary, the article suggests that installing human rights rather than allowing them to develop through grassroots movements, actually impedes social development. Thoughts and ideas are not commodities for import and export, nor can nations of the old imperial establishment monopolize them, and Al-Jazeera does not hesitate to say so.

A more recent article on women's rights in Tunisia sends a similar, if less explicit message. The report, published a few months after Tunisia's revolution ousted President Zine Abidine Ben Ali in 2011, explores the debate about women's rights in the face of a growing Islamist movement.¹²⁷ Although the leading Islamist political party, Al-Nahda, insisted it would not repeal any of the rights Tunisian women already enjoyed, some remained unconvinced. Still other women predicted an Islamist regime would bring them greater freedoms than those exercised under Ben Ali and his predecessor Habib Bourguiba. Though the article represented both sides well, one thing remained clear regardless of Islamist opinion: anything was better than colonialism.

Tunisia has long stood as a bastion of women's rights in North Africa. By Al-Jazeera's estimation, it has held the honor since independence from France in 1956. The first line of the article invokes "the push for gender equality that has been one of the hallmarks of the North African nation's *post-colonial era*" (emphasis mine).¹²⁸ This affirmation sets the tone for the rest of the article, which squarely pits feminism and

¹²⁷ Yasmine Ryan, "Tunisia: Women's rights hang in the balance," *Al-Jazeera*, August 20, 2011, accessed October 7, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/08/201181617052432756.html>.

¹²⁸ Ryan, "Tunisia: Women's rights."

colonialism against each other. It casts women's rights not only as a product of independent nation building, but a primary cause for that construction.

While discussing the history of women's rights in Tunisia, the articles states the following.

At the dawn of independence, even before President Habib Bourguiba abolished the monarchy and introduced the present constitution, the anti-colonial leader gave Tunisian women legal rights that he hoped would break the shackles of tradition.¹²⁹

In this single sentence, Al-Jazeera presents at least three major arguments about feminism and its relationship to the colonial establishment. First, Bourguiba, the granter of women's legal rights, is explicitly described as "anti-colonial." While this is, of course, true, use of the descriptor emphasizes that it was the challenger, not the colonizers, that granted these rights. Furthermore, the statement highlights the fact that Bourguiba granted said rights "even" before establishing the new government framework. Such language suggests that Bourguiba considered women's rights a more pressing matter than the post-colonial politics of his country. Whether this was true or not, vague implication of such a viewpoint underscores the idea that human rights do not belong to the colonial West. Not only that, but the final phrase of the sentence suggests that the colonizers were holding those rights back.

'Tradition' has become a term widely associated with identity, both good and bad. As various movements of all types point out, tradition can both unite a people and hold them back. The connotation of tradition, therefore, depends heavily on its context, and

¹²⁹ Ryan, "Tunisia: Women's rights."

thanks to the imagery of “shackles” in this piece, one easily concludes it is negative. The ‘tradition’ of the Tunisia article is the tradition of stagnancy, backwardness, and oppression. It is the precise brand of tradition referenced by those who suggest that culture plays a major role in the turmoil of the Middle East. It is not, however, the Arabo-Islamic tradition so often assumed when speaking of tradition and the Middle East. Rather, it is Anglo-American colonial tradition, cast off so that the colonized might exercise the right to define their own humanity.

By structuring tradition in this way, Al-Jazeera moves to reclaim values and ideas that the Anglo-American West has long since appropriated. Numerous studies have shown that media imperialism, often originating in the United States, has contributed to the spread of capitalist ideologies.¹³⁰ This subsection of cultural imperialism has also employed transnational broadcasting to advocate for democracy, feminism, and other values heretofore coded as “Western.” Since values cannot belong to a culture, however, such coding cannot withstand challenge. This fact became clear when Al-Jazeera began to challenge the hegemony of Anglo-American transnational news outlets during the US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, resulting in what the Anglo-American media referred to as an “Information War.”¹³¹ Though the ground wars have fallen out of the media spotlight, the Information War persists in the realm of social issues and ideologies. The Anglo-American news continues to assume it exports values while Al-Jazeera fights that assumption with an identity that possessed those values all along.

¹³⁰ Tal Samuel-Azran, *Al-Jazeera and US War Coverage* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 14.

¹³¹ Samuel-Azran, *Al-Jazeera and US War Coverage*, 17-21.

Another critical aspect of this identity building presents itself in the transnational medium of Al-Jazeera English as opposed to its regional Arabic counterpart. While the Al-Jazeera Arabic service is not the focus of this study, examination of its similarities and differences vis-à-vis the English language service reveals a wealth of information about how Al-Jazeera English is addressing its uniquely international audience. It is important to note here that due to the popularity of television in the Arab world, the Arabic website *aljazeera.net* was founded as a mere supplement to the television channel.¹³² As this study deals primarily with textual evidence, however, it will still draw its conclusions from articles available on *aljazeera.net*. While this study found no overt evidence of chauvinism or misogyny on Al-Jazeera's Arabic language website, neither did it find the same level of feminist discourse revealed in the English. Due to the more regional nature of the Arabic audience, the network covers women's stories taking place in the Arab World just as thoroughly in Arabic as it does English. Their tone, however, is decidedly less feminist, and when those stories cross into other societies, that feminism disappears altogether.

The ongoing Saudi Arabian women's campaign for the right to drive presents an ideal comparison for both its Arab locale and international reach. As discussed in chapter one, Al-Jazeera English spent years following the movement with numerous articles. So too did Al-Jazeera Arabic report periodically on new developments in the story. Unlike the English service, however, the Arabic reports were usually limited to a single article

¹³² Gloria Awad, "Aljazeera.net: Identity Choices and the Logic of the Media," in *The Al Jazeera Phenomenon: Critical Perspectives on New Arab Media*, ed. Mohamed Zayani (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2005), 84.

surrounding a larger event that might span days or even weeks. These articles were more detailed than their English counterparts, but their scarcity suggests that the purpose of the publications lay in main ideas rather than specific circumstances. The arrest of Manal Al-Sharif is a perfect example of this divergence.

Manal's arrest in May 2011 drew attention from around the world. Both the English and Arabic Al-Jazeera websites reported on the incident, but with marked differences. To begin with, the Arabic service provided much more detail, including Manal's profession and her social connections with the founder to the Free Saudi Liberal Network on the Internet.¹³³ It also dedicated an entire section of the article to presenting both sides of the Saudi driving debate, giving voice to supporters of the contemporary practices as well as those who want the Kingdom to grant driver's licenses to women.¹³⁴ This balance stands in contrast to the English, where the active language and inattention to supporters of the ban implied Al-Jazeera's editorial agreement with Manal. They mentioned her repeatedly in no less than four headlines, spanning her arrest, time in prison and eventual release.¹³⁵ If the Arabic service published more than one article, the others are no longer available on the website. All that remains is a single piece under an

¹³³ Yāssir Bā'āmir, "Jadal Sa'ūdī ḥawal qiyādat al-mar'a lil-sayāra," *Al-Jazīra*, May 27, 2011, accessed October 7, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.net/news/pages/788034d7-4e96-4552-942b-dbef10312db1>.

¹³⁴ Bā'āmir, "Jadal Sa'ūdī."

¹³⁵ "Saudi woman campaigns for right to drive," *Al-Jazeera*, May 22, 2011, accessed October 7, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/video/middleeast/2011/05/201152252517876892.html>;

¹³⁵ "Saudi woman detained for driving," *Al-Jazeera*, May 22, 2011, accessed October 7, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/05/201152253018241827.html>;

¹³⁵ "Saudi Arabia pressed to free woman driver," *Al-Jazeera*, May 24, 2011, accessed October 7, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/05/2011524204758681709.html>;

¹³⁵ "Saudi woman held for driving released," *Al-Jazeera*, May 31, 2011, accessed October 7, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/05/201153193746701764.html>.

impersonal title: “Saudi debate about women driving cars.”¹³⁶

Closely linked to the Manal Al-Sharif affair, Al-Jazeera English also published multiple articles chronicling a protest almost a month after the arrest in which Saudi women took to their cars despite the driving ban. The Al-Jazeera Arabic website again contains a single article about the event; this time, however, none of the news it is reporting is its own.¹³⁷ Instead, the news service has summarized, translated, and more or less republished an article from the British news agency *The Independent*.¹³⁸ Clearly, the Arabic editors consider other stories more important and deserving of their journalistic effort, one of many differences they have with their English colleagues.

This observation is not to say that Al-Jazeera’s Arabic editors ignore women’s stories altogether. In April of 2013, the service ran a story on the persistent violations of women’s rights throughout the world.¹³⁹ December of the same year saw an examination of women’s rights in Egypt, claiming studies showed that while women’s position in Egypt was the worst in the Arab world, it also exhibits the most favorable tide of change.¹⁴⁰ Though a majority of the stories revolve around Arab women, that focus is to be expected considering that the Arabic service does not define itself as international in

¹³⁶ Bā’āmir, “Jadal Sa’ūdī.”

¹³⁷ “Bil-raghm min al-ḥaẓr al-mafrūd Sa’ūdiyāt yaqudna sayārātahun dūn mahāba,” *Al-Jazīra*, June 18, 2011, accessed December 13, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.net/news/pages/60a948c3-2f7e-4350-9ed4-0f8e5c181bf3>.

¹³⁸ Lubna Hussain, “Saudi women take to the road in show of defiance,” *The Independent*, June 18, 2011, accessed December 13, 2013, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/>

¹³⁸ [saudi-women-take-to-the-road-in-show-of-defiance-2299301.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/saudi-women-take-to-the-road-in-show-of-defiance-2299301.html).

¹³⁹ “‘Intihākāt mustamarra li-huqūq an-nissa’ fil-‘ālim,” *Al-Jazīra*, April, 12, 2103, accessed December 16, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.net/humanrights/pages/487ab977-a9f6-4545-b53b-3bcf744d9f3f>.

¹⁴⁰ “Waḍa’ al-mar’a bi-Maṣr al-’aswa’ wa jazr al-qamar al-’afḍal,” *Al-Jazīra*, December 11, 2013, accessed December 16, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.net/humanrights/pages/41e91cb6-e22a-450f-85ff-29ecbde57f66>.

the same way that the English service does. How it treats these Arab women, however, resonates with this study's findings so far.

While Al-Jazeera Arabic does not hesitate to cover women's issues, that coverage rarely carries the same overt feminism found in the English. Instead, the network seems vested in implying that Arab women do not suffer greater oppression than anyone else. As the aforementioned story on women's rights in Egypt demonstrates, even acknowledgement of the abuse and harassment suffered by Egyptian women is followed with the justification that their situation is improving.¹⁴¹ An article about violence against women in Tunisia actually questions whether the violence exists at all and suggests that activists might be exaggerating.¹⁴² While neither piece advocates that women should not have rights, they also fail to back any movement beyond the existing situation. This paper cannot speak to the validity of either article, but such publications would seem highly out of place if published on Al-Jazeera English where self-evident feminism is the order of the day.

Examination of stories that appear in both English and Arabic only further confirm this divergence. In chapter one, reports on Turkish reform plans demonstrated the feminist slant of Al-Jazeera English vis-à-vis Anglo-American transnational news sources. Al-Jazeera Arabic, in this case, more closely resembles the Anglo-American media than the English language branch of its own network. Whereas Al-Jazeera English

¹⁴¹ "Waḍa' al-mar'a bi-Maṣr."

¹⁴² Khamīs Bin Barīk, "Al-'unf ḍid al-mar'a bi-Tūnis... mubālaga 'am ḥaqīqa?" *Al-Jazīra*, December 3, 2013, accessed December 16, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.net/humanrights/pages/bf53a111-4667-4120-b8ee-de4af16315e1>.

addressed the role of both the Kurds and women in Erdogan's plans, and the Western networks focused on the Kurdish aspects of the reforms, Al-Jazeera Arabic instead framed the reforms as merely applying to "minorities."¹⁴³ Though the article repeatedly mentions reforms relating to the Kurds, such as allowing schools to teach in languages other than Turkish, the Kurds themselves appear only in a brief note at the end of the article. The lifting of the ban on the hijab in government buildings is heavily treated, but it is only addressed as a religious issue, never as one of women's rights. In fact, the word woman is never mentioned. Clearly, Al-Jazeera Arabic's concerns have little to do with publicizing the struggles of either women or the Kurds.

Such stark editorial contrast with the English language service highlights the service's international audience and aims. Al-Jazeera has never in any way suggested similarities between its Arabic and English audiences. On the contrary, in its role as what Tal Samuel-Azran calls a "counter-hegemonic contra-flow," Al-Jazeera English's target audience is the same audience watching those hegemonic Anglo-American networks.¹⁴⁴ This target explains the organization's ongoing efforts to penetrate the hostile US market. It also indicates that the network's feminist message has a specific recipient in mind.

That Al-Jazeera distributes its portrayals of strong, revolutionary, non-Anglo-American women almost exclusively to its international audience suggests that its editorial message concerns itself with perception more than reality. This does not mean the stories are not true, nor that ideological expansion serves as the only impetus for

¹⁴³ "Ardūghān yu'allin 'an rizmat 'iṣlāḥāt tata'allaq bil-'aqliyāt," *Al-Jazīra*, September 30, 2013, accessed October 4, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.net/news/pages/b4f67ea5-745a-4127-8faf-f90221ce81e1>.

¹⁴⁴ Samuel-Azran, *Al-Jazeera and US War Coverage*, 13.

publication. The prevalence of reports on Indian women, for instance, probably has as much to do with India being the world's largest English-language television market as a desire to say something about those Indian women.¹⁴⁵ Nevertheless, localization in order to identify with audiences does not explain the systematic treatment of all non-Anglo-American women as symbols of agency. Regional feminist trends, on the other hand, do.

Starting at the end of the twentieth century, many new feminisms began to emerge to address the issue of what had come to be considered Eurocentric feminism. Women's rights, activists acknowledged, could not be viewed in a universal framework, but rather must be negotiated in terms of localized political, cultural and economic realities.¹⁴⁶ This realization resulted in a deluge of indigenous feminisms to challenge the perceived Eurocentricity, including but not limited to Arab feminism. Feminisms, however, are as unique as the individuals who espouse them.

Mai Al-Nakib, reporting on the "Arab Feminisms: Critical Perspectives" conference in Beirut in October 2009, identified three distinct trends in Arab feminism: Islamic, rights based, and Foucauldian.¹⁴⁷ Even across these trends, however, attendant feminists appeared heavily influenced by their locations. Those from the West relied on the academy, those from the Arab Gulf focused on structure and reform, and the non-Gulf Arabs relied on the localized history of activism.

In so far as both of the groups from the Middle East concern themselves with

¹⁴⁵ Hussein Amin, "The Nature of the Channel's Global Audience," in *Al Jazeera English: Global News in a Changing World*, ed. Philip Seib (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 30.

¹⁴⁶ Therese Saliba, "Arab Feminism at the Millenium," *Signs* 25:4 (2000): 1088.

¹⁴⁷ Mai Al-Nakib, "Disjunctive Synthesis: Deleuze and Arab Feminism," *Signs* 38:2 (2013): 459-462.

action, this division mirrors that seen on Al-Jazeera. They define feminist identity in terms of agency rather than objectification, and in so doing alter the discourse. Becky Francis identified this discursive repositioning as a primary tool of empowerment.¹⁴⁸ In discursively assuming that women are powerful, rather than claiming that power in a discourse of powerlessness, one takes control of the discourse in a way that allows for greater discursive freedom removed from the limits of preconceived associations. An identity based on action rather than definition cannot be attributed to anyone other than the agent.

Just as Al-Jazeera serves as a platform for the “other opinion” then, so does it serve as a platform for the other feminism. Anglo-American women do not merit the same editorial attention because their feminism is already defined. Rather than offering an alternative definition, however, Al-Jazeera has identified a way to allow non-Western women to build feminism anew. As the opposition to Eurocentric feminism has shown, a single, universal definition, if possible, remains a long way off. The socio-political realities of different women necessitate different feminisms, and so long as cultural, political, racial, national and all other manner of divisions persist, so too will feminist divisions.

As this chapter has shown, from its founding Al-Jazeera intended to fill a clear and present void. The Anglo-American dominated transnational media more or less ignored large swathes of the global population, allowing Al-Jazeera to enter the

¹⁴⁸ Becky Francis, “Modernist reductionism or post-structuralist relativism: can we move on? An evaluation of the arguments in relation to feminist educational research,” *Gender and Education* 11:4 (1999): 381-94.

transnational news market and challenge the existing hegemonic powers. Powerful international reactions suggest they did in fact succeed. The neglected opinions given voices on the network, however, represent more than simple opinions. Instead, they embody the voices muffled by the shadow of imperialism: a shadow Al-Jazeera realizes need not be sustained.

It makes sense then that the network has employed women, long since a symbol of nationalism and tradition, to cast off that shadow. Whether in the realm of media, activism, or any other human development, the colonizers were no more inherently capable than the colonized. Though the idea is not original in and of itself, its transnational dissemination on a platform as large as Al-Jazeera is. By crafting new international identities for non-Anglo-American women, Al-Jazeera is crafting new international identities for the non-Anglo-American world and reshaping the idea of the periphery. The dichotomy of the self and the other, after all, must begin with a definition of the self.

Conclusion

The course of this paper has sought to explain the editorial underpinnings of Al-Jazeera's treatment of women in text based, English reporting. The significant attention to women in general, paired with the stylistic support they are usually given, makes Al-Jazeera's desire to expand the circulation and visibility of feminist ideologies clear. This attention and support, however, is approached from multiple directions that reveal Al-Jazeera's preoccupation with more than the rights and well-being of women.

The first chapter showed that Al-Jazeera editors employ female action and ability both to espouse women's agency and to draw attention to the ideas of revolution and change that agency often evokes. The second chapter explored circumstances in which this agency was not the primary concern of the evidence, but rather where situations, and therefore the women in them, were stagnant. This stagnancy was reported in two distinct styles, sympathy and pragmatism. The discovery that use of these styles directly correlated with the geography of a story's subjects led to the exploration in chapter three of the lasting cultural effects of imperialism on Al-Jazeera today.

The breadth of the research tells the narrative of a groundbreaking Arab news channel entering a transnational media market dominated by the Anglo-American establishment and seeking to form its own identity. Feminism played only a small role in this endeavor, and yet the way in which Al-Jazeera editorial policy forms its own clear and consistent feminist ideology without drawing on problematic European and American trends resembles the network's activities in many other fields as well. In the

age of globalization where one can find a McDonald's in every neighborhood and a Starbucks on every street, one must remember that there are more courses of action than either adopting cultural imports or clinging to the ways of the past. Al-Jazeera English has not only identified, but fully undertaken one of these alternative courses.

Realization of this undertaking, however, opens the field to a myriad of related questions. It would be interesting to look at other controversial topics on Al-Jazeera where a division between the East and the West is often perceived. It would also be interesting to perform the same in depth analysis found in this thesis on the Al-Jazeera Arabic network, as opposed to the cursory examination the network received here to highlight the importance of Al-Jazeera's English reading, international audience. The Al-Jazeera Arabic audience is, after all, the original and still largest audience following Al-Jazeera press coverage today.

Other openings in the field present themselves via the method of comparison. As mentioned in the introduction, this project did not account for localized media in the region. Research on whether other Arab networks are perpetuating this phenomenon of ideological expansion would contribute greatly to the topic as a whole. Conversely, a deeper look at how Anglo-American transnational news networks present non-Anglo-American women, or indeed whether they present them at all, would inform the issue further.

Regardless of how Al-Jazeera's treatment of women appears vis-à-vis these other sources though, the strides it has taken to increase female visibility, expand feminist ideology, and in turn promote a localized, non-Anglo-American feminist discourse

among its English audience still stand out. Indeed, as “the opinion and the other opinion” might suggest, Al-Jazeera is proving that the orientalist, imperialist structure that cast the Middle East as the other of old is just as subject to being an other itself.

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