

Social Engineering: Transnational Broadcasting and Its Impact on Peace in the Middle East

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At the beginning of the 21st century, shifts in global economics and the communications revolution have initiated a new collective experience in dialogue, bringing the hope of a better level of mutual knowledge and understanding. Cyberspace technologies now being introduced have brought the global community into a state of rapid mutation. These changes will undoubtedly alter the way humanity interacts and communicates in the future. As a result of these new developments in information and communication technology, the world is facing an unprecedented fusion and opening of cultures and economies that will impact cross cultural dialogues and relationships as well as stimulate development in cultural, social, economic, and educational arenas.

Mainstream media in the region -- and the governments that control them -- have steadfastly tried to maintain the appearance of continuity, hanging on to old formulas, even after years of momentous change that have catapulted the rest of the world into the information age. The Arab world has been largely insensible to the implications of this change, but it has not been immune to all its manifestations (Amin, 1996). However, the recent changes throughout the Middle East in the last 20 years compel us to try to envision the possible transformational effects of these changes on different fields and the resulting impact on the media. These possibilities include changes in areas such as electoral politics, democracy, professional associations, civil society, human rights, pluralism, accountability, privatization and others. Already some leaders

and governments throughout the region are showing signs of steady liberalization, modernization, and democratization (Amin, 2000).

The Middle East is a diverse region that has been a challenge to generalization. Ranging from southwestern Asia to northeastern Africa, today the term Middle East refers to the area extending from Egypt in the west to Iran in the east, including Israel and Turkey. A broader, more cultural definition might also include the Muslim countries of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Sudan and the Asian countries Afghanistan and Pakistan. The "Arab World" is a concept frequently discussed in the Middle East region. Arabs appear to share a common language, culture, religion and geography, but there are many social differences and diverse political ideologies. There are numerous formal communication activities that articulate the Arab World. These include events such as conferences among religious and civil organizations across Arab countries, political communication among leaders, and participation of individuals in associations offering Arab news services, tourism councils, and cultural exchanges (Danowski, 2000). In politics, there have been many attempts to create a bloc of Arab countries, speaking with one voice and acting in concert for the benefit of the region as a whole. In reality, these alignments, both legal and ideological, have been difficult to achieve, with national concerns and interests superceding regional alliances.

Globalization forces in general and transnationalization movements in particular illustrate the new model for media economies, which depend on the following processes: privatization of culture; deregulation; and mergers across industries and nations for global penetration and commercialization. These global forces now challenge Middle East societies. Countries in the Middle East have begun to sense the dangers of global communication as well as the opportunities. Critics have stated that these media messages hurled from space bring social complications, engender cultural disputes and erode their identity as coherent cultural and religious groups.

The mass media need to be considered in terms of the economic conditions, cultural environments, and political realities of the societies they serve in the region. Since the introduction of mass media in the Middle East more than a century ago, the media have been

dealt with as a Western phenomenon. The media and political regimes enjoy a very close relationship in most of the countries in the region. Since the time these countries gained their independence, most have used the mass media as a device to promote nationalism or Islamic universalism (Kamalipour and Mowlana, 1994). In most cases, a powerful executive branch exercises a strong control of the state, including the media, and freedom of expression is repeatedly curtailed. The media have traditionally been seen as a propaganda tool, whereby many voices would confuse and divide rather than create consensus.

Media in the Middle East in general are tightly regulated by a combination of structural arrangements, whereby governments monopolize the press and broadcasting, and legal controls, with all but the bravest deterred from reporting freely on sensitive domestic issues or deviating from official foreign policy when reporting on international affairs (Rugh, 1989). The political power systems in the Middle East utilize the broadcast media as a tool promoting public mobilization. They have, therefore, a strong interest in keeping them out of hostile hands (Amin and Boyd 1993).

Because of the high rate of illiteracy in the Middle East, broadcast media have been very popular and more influential than other forms of media; for this reason, most audiences in the Middle East rely on radio and television for information (Boyd 1998). Although the primary function of broadcast media in many countries in the region is to convey news and information of general interest, interpreting and commenting on events as well as providing opinion and perspectives, the media is also used as a tool to reinforce social norms, cultural identity and cultural awareness through the dissemination of information. Promoting Arab culture, Arab unity and Arabism were the main aims for many of the electronic media systems of the region after the wars with Israel (Rugh 1989, Labib 2002). This is one main reason why radio and television broadcasting in these countries were centralized, and to a large extent, absolute monopolies under direct government supervision. Other reasons include preservation of national unity, protection of national security and centralization in government and administration.

On the other hand, Israeli media is considered more dynamic media. Although they face many restrictions, electronic media in general and television broadcasting in particular are powerful media. Since its start in 1967, Israel Television has been the state's principal and most

influential medium, however, Radio and television news is entirely a government-sponsored affair.

The Middle East is witnessing a wave that is transforming broadcasting from a monopolistic system in which few diverse voices are heard to a diverse platform where freedom of speech is a requirement (Amin, 2002). Transnational broadcasting has the ability to circumvent severe censorship laws, marking the end of the censorial culture. It is becoming clear that the more the Arab media continues to present heavily controlled news and entertainment, the more likely Arab audiences are seeking better content from transnational media that are more free than their local systems. (Sakr, 1999).

Transnational broadcasting began to evolve in the 1980s, with the introduction of multi-channel delivery environments that reaped the benefits of the lowered costs of launching communications satellites. Furthermore, miniaturization enabled individuals with small dishes and signal decoders to pick up signals directly from satellites (Boyd, 2000). With the introduction of direct broadcast satellites (DBS), broadcasters could reach worldwide audiences directly, without interference from government censors.

The Middle East has at least five competing digital television platforms battling for audience loyalty: ART/1st Net, Nile Package, Orbit, Star Select, and Gulf DTH/Showtime (Forrester, 1999). Al Jazeera, CNN, Fox News, BBC, ANN, Al Arabia, and Nile News are a sample of the competing transnational television news programs now available in the Middle East. A few years ago, transnational television services posed little threat to the monopoly state-run national television. Although they were introduced to the region when the Gulf war started at the beginning of the nineties, their fast development and pan-Arab impact is by far greater than national television in any of the Middle Eastern countries (Amin, 1997). For example, the coverage of the second Intifada since October 2000 has attracted perhaps the largest audience for uncensored coverage in the history of Arab broadcasting (Labib, 2001). Television viewers from Rabat in Morocco to Riyadh in Saudi Arabia share the news experience from their living rooms or coffee shops. The Palestinian uprising was made available to the world through the many correspondents working for Arab and non Arab transnational broadcast services, causing Israeli officials to conclude that the "media war" wasn't going their way (Salama, 2001).

Furthermore, transnational broadcast services were responsible for the creation of a strong pan-Arab public opinion, when millions of people demonstrated in the streets of Arab capitals in support of the Palestinians Intifada. The strong coverage of the event from transnational broadcast media such as Al Jazeera and other Arabic language channels created a regional pan-Arab movement out of what started as a local protest in Jerusalem (Schneider, 2000).

Transnational media are forums of free public discourse and can set agendas of public debates on national, regional and international issues ranging from political democratization, to intellectual freedom, to understanding about peace in the Middle East. Not only does transnational broadcasting affect all walks of public life in the Middle East, but it also affects the individual citizen in his different roles in a wide variety of ways. The medium can take on certain important functions in the Middle East society. These include its role as a forum for the exchange of thoughts and ideas between citizens or the different social groups of a democratic community; its function as an integrating influence upon children and young people; its importance as a platform and agent for all kinds of cultural forms and expressions; its function to advance understanding, speed recognition and enhance development, and finally, and perhaps most importantly, its function to promote peace, as only in peace can the enormous potential of the Middle East be realized.

Today, the transnational multi-channel broadcasting environment created by the satellite television channels offers a new horizon of excellent programming that targets a wide variety of audiences in the region. Transnational broadcasting currently provides educational, entertainment, and cultural and artistic services. It has also begun to play a part in enhancing the information flow as a comprehensive program provider. In addition, it reaches a good part of the region and does away with the isolation of deserted and rural areas. Because of the multi-channel environment it creates, it invites people to take the opportunity for fair and equitable access to local and global resources and offers facilities for conventional and advanced channels of communication; to receive opinions, information and ideas; to receive a range of cultural products designed for a wide variety of tastes and interests; and to have easy access to facts about the world.

This ease of access has created a lot of potential roles for non-governmental, syndicated, civil and partisan organizations. Now is the time for such institutions to realize the magnitude of the medium and concentrate on forming a solid ground for a regional society. Signals from different countries in the world, in Arabic, Hebrew and other languages, can be pulled in throughout the region, carrying content that is completely different in terms of freedom and diversity from what is offered on the national services.

Transnational broadcast media are also having an impact on the presentation of news. The accelerating pace of transnational news networks in the region turning to 24-hour news formats removes the barriers of time and space between broadcasters and information consumers. It also obviates attempts by governments to control and manipulate information for its own purposes. Audiences are often dependent, directly or indirectly, on transnational media for their information because their own national media lack resources to access information and often present a simplified coverage of conflict that is not perceived by the public as being credible and reliable (Amin, 2002). Another critical factor is the abundance of international broadcasting in Arabic; most Arab media were traditionally focused on domestic audiences, who were subjected to a daily diet of protocol news, state directed programming, and in many cases direct propaganda (Kradi, 2002). Transnational broadcasts, in contrast, include a wide mix of the above as well as free-ranging and often provocative debates and talk shows, controversial interviews, and news coverage meeting international standards in Arabic and from an Arab perspective. Transnational broadcast news coverage about the Middle East conflict has a tremendous appeal to Arab audiences, since unlike print, it favors movements over stillness, simplification over complexity, specificity over abstraction and the present over the past or the future (Amin, 2002). National news networks are usually state-controlled and selective in the news they present, lacking the visual content that involves graphics, illustrations, still photos, maps, charts and video clips that are available on the transnational news networks (Labib 2001). Pictures are extremely suggestive. Audiences in the Middle East generally give more credence to what is shown and presented on transnational media, since they have the benefit of visual information as well as a reputation for relative objectivity, which does not exist in the national media. The transfer of news values and presentation from global networks such as

Cable News Network (CNN) and the British Broadcasting Corporation's World Service (BBC) to transnational broadcast media in the region is affecting broadcasting values throughout the region. Transnational Arab television news covering the Middle East conflict utilizes international standards in terms of quality programs and presentation through Arab news networks such as the Arab News Network (ANN), Al Jazeera, and Nile News and the new channel from MBC, Al Arabia.

Because the global nature of satellites limits governments' ability to control domestic usage of these technologies, some governments in the Middle East have begun taking tentative steps to deregulate their broadcasting policies and liberalize their content. Many governments have found themselves unable to cover the cost of infrastructure, and have chosen to let private investors enter the market. Some societies regard pluralism a matter of public interest, but this has not been a prevalent view in the Middle East. It is important to remember that since broadcasting and media services in the Arab World are state-run activities, the misuse of these technologies during times of conflict may result in a form of communication warfare (Gher, 2000). Governments are concerned that communication warfare in the Middle East could polarize societies, provoke conflict, create misperceptions and mistaken ideas about others, and cultivate fear and mistrust, making people vulnerable and dependent. (Hamelink, 1999). In addition, officials of the media institutions, because they are still largely inspired by old media models, do not know how to handle the tension that is created by transnational broadcasting between the dynamic openness of the new media and the protective isolation of the old and still govern the current media environments.

The most important events that have influenced the development of mass media in the Middle East have been the Islamic revolution in Iran; the collapse of the Soviet Union; the Gulf War; and the decades-long Arab-Israeli conflict (Mawlana 2002, Rugh 2003, Amin, 2002). Media has long played an important role in political discourse in the Middle East, especially in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Since the start of the conflict between the Arabs and Israelis around the turn of the 20th century, the mass media began mirroring the conflict. In 1948, the area that both Arab and Israeli claimed was known internationally as Palestine, and this conflict was marked by heavy reporting and analysis in both in print media and radio

(Ragab, 2002). But following the war of 1948-49, the land was divided into three parts: the state of Israel, the West Bank (of the Jordan River) and the Gaza Strip, and Arab media in the Middle East and Islamic media in particular dealt heavily with the conflict, telling the story from their governments' perspectives.

In May 1967, when Egyptian troops entered the Sinai Peninsula bordering Israel, Egyptian president Gamal Abdel-Nasser, an Arab leader who utilized the media to serve his political goals, mobilized the Egyptian public through print and broadcast services and asked the UN observer forces stationed between Israel and Egypt to evacuate their positions, preparing the country for war. At that time radio *Sout Al Arab* (Voice of the Arabs) was the main transnational service influencing the Arab world and was empowered by the transistor revolution that made the service available even to mobile societies (Labib 2002). In 1967, Israel preemptively attacked Egypt and Syria, destroying their air forces. Jordan joined in, but consequently was attacked by Israel as well. The Egyptian, Syrian and Jordanian armies were defeated, and Israel captured the West Bank from Jordan, the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt, and the Golan Heights from Syria. All this occurred within a very short period of time, but the Voice of the Arabs continued for days after the war promising victory, an unsuccessful strategy that cost the radio service its credibility afterwards (Boyd 1998).

The power of the “free” transnational broadcast media attracting and influencing hundreds of millions in the Middle East was clearly documented during the second Intifada (Ragab 2002). Visual information that was presented through transnational broadcast services provided a wealth of information that in many cases circumvented long oral messages in the news and had a great impact on Middle Eastern viewers. The media started to focus heavily on the Arab-Israeli conflict with the start of the first *Intifada*. In December 1987, the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza started a mass uprising against the Israeli occupation. The second Intifada is widely regarded as beginning in the last year of the millennium. The *Intifada* has involved hundreds of thousands of people, many with no previous resistance experience, including children, teenagers and women. For the first few years, it included many forms of civil disobedience, including massive demonstrations and general strikes, later evolving to include both small and large acts of violence, from rock-throwing children to suicide bombings. The

active periods of the first and the second *Intifada* were overwhelmingly the focus of all the Arab and transnational media, causing the Israelis to block media coverage. Since then, both Israel and the Arab countries have traded accusations of biased coverage by the transnational media.

Israel on the other hand started an Arabic-language satellite channel beamed to the the Middle East with programmes to explain the government position. The main goal of the station is to try to gain regional public opinion inflamed against the Jewish state by a Palestinian uprising. Many Israeli media experts believe Israel is lagging behind in what they defined as a "Cold War"-style propaganda war being waged on state-owned Arab satellite television.

Half a century of Arab-Israeli conflict has cost the Middle East region six major wars and the loss of thousands of lives, leaving both Israelis and Arabs frustrated and angry, and creating rage and hostility that escalated tension in the region and complicated geopolitical alliances around the world. Some have lost hope, but many still believe that peace will finally prevail in this region. Yet almost quarter of a century after the Camp David accords that established hope for peace in the Middle East, a comprehensive peace is still a dream, and Arab Israeli relations are at a peak in terms of conflict and disagreement. Israel and Arab countries that have formed peace agreements with Israel continue to honor the provisions of their treaties; however, suspicions about the future of peace are growing daily. These suspicions were projected and enhanced by the transnational broadcast media that have developed in the countries in the region during the last ten years (Gowida, 2002).

Some media experts had hopes that the introduction of transnational broadcast media in the region would help to establish peace or at least have a positive impact on the Middle East peace process. Media experts in the Middle East have also argued that the broadcasting of violent images has a negative impact on the ability of their governments to work for peace. The public's access to a continuous barrage of disturbing images and uncensored news, particularly in regard to the *Intifada* and more recently the Iraq war, have raised the emotional stakes of public discourse. National news, to a large extent, still involves official lines, biased information and censored reports that contribute to the "information warfare" in the region. It is critical now that researchers in the field of transnational broadcasting examine the performance of these

services and their relation to political power and to ask questions about the applicability of media content.

Since their introduction, transnational broadcast services in the Middle East have fought for greater market share. This usually means that they look for issues that appeal to their audience and are different from what is currently available from their national services (Amin, 2000). In this sense, their target broadcast audiences are not individual national audiences but the general Arab audience. The Middle East conflict was, and still remains, the most attractive item in news broadcasts because of its relative importance to many viewers in the region. Coverage of the recent Palestinian-Israeli violence and the war in Iraq is demonstrating the power of the transnational media to cut out the government middleman by reaching viewers directly in their households. Before, news about the conflict came to the Middle East through the state broadcast media with the official line, suppressed or exaggerated depending on whether a particular government supported peace with Israel and its relationship with that country. This time, Arab TV viewers are getting the picture, to a large extent, uncensored, direct from the scene, and sometimes taking to the streets in protest at what they see (Ragab, 2002).

Both Western and Arab governments are seemingly at a loss as to how to deal with incendiary broadcasts, such as the broadcasting of messages purported to be from Osama Bin Laden or Saddam Hussein and the images of war, including video of US prisoners of war and war casualties from both sides. The content of transnational media broadcasts has become the topic of diplomatic rows, and the willingness of governments to attempt to control these broadcasts has been elevated from accusations of censorship to support for diplomatic alliances and even patriotism. Journalists and their transnational media organizations reporting on the various conflicts in the region have been detained, accused of supporting terrorism, fired upon, accused of willful bias, and, most recently, imprisoned. Governments not only in the Arab region but also around the world have begun to recognize the power of transnational media to impact foreign relations, set public policy, and form public opinion, and they are still finding their way in the murky region between supporting freedom and wanting to control content.

Transnational broadcasting is seen now by many to have the potential to act as a social engineer in the Middle East, including facilitating domestic understanding of regional conflict;

providing new neutral perspectives to the general and target audiences; linking the region together and also with the rest of the world; increasing government awareness of other governments' performance in the region and shaping government effectiveness; promoting human rights; advancing formal and informal education; broadcasting news and information about the region and the people and finally familiarizing the region with other cultures, values, traditions and religions, all aspects that work to enhance the culture for peace (Amin 2000). However, with respect to coverage of the *Intifada*, transnational broadcasting in the region did not effectively clarify the different standpoints of Arabs and Israelis. It did not recognize the gravity of the situation until demonstrations extended everywhere, broadcasting and replaying negative images and using value-laden language to heighten regional passions. This did not enhance the culture of peace but rather magnified the march to war and significantly elevated the level of emotion in public discourse.

On the positive side, transnational broadcasting paved the way for more a collective aspect of Arab identity. Cable News Network (CNN) helped introduce the region to the concepts of freedom of expression and freedom of the press during its coverage of the Gulf War. The Gulf crisis marked a turning point not only in establishing the genre of 24-hour satellite television news but also in bringing to light Middle Eastern viewers' dissatisfaction with terrestrial television news coverage. New Arabic transnational television services such as MBC, Al-Jazeera, Nile News and the Arab News network have been trying to imitate program formats from CNN (Sakr 2001). These new networks, particularly Orbit Networks, MBC and Al-Jazeera, have brought these values home to the Middle East. With this in mind, whatever is defined as the journalism culture in the Middle East is now challenged. Many journalists as well as people living in the Middle East now have access to international television networks without any kind of control, censorship, or government approval of content (Amin 2000).

Governments have not yet thrown in the towel, however. While some of the new transnational services have not lived up to the promise of providing reliable and unbiased coverage, they are still educating governments and their audiences about the benefits and challenges of an uncensored press. Restrictions on the freedom of the national press and on the flow of news must be counted among the bitter harvests of the Middle East conflict. Coverage

of activities of many of the peace movements and groups of people in the Middle East was limited if reported at all. The media scene has been particularly discouraging until now, as some of the most popular transnational broadcast services were often biased and failed to present well-rounded views in their coverage of the conflict in the Middle East. In this overheated environment of hate and revenge, unsympathetic public opinion was enhanced and boosted. The overwhelming majority of transnational media in the region have reported on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict through the Palestinian lens. They have presented the conventional wisdom, the dominant interpretation, or the story line. Any presentation that does not take the Palestinian side is colored with many accusations and labeled biased, yet in many cases, these services invited Israelis to comment and explain. Surprisingly, some people called for Arab public opinion to remain hostage to traditional national one-sided views, to turn away from transnational media sources. These voices are frustrated by the transnational media raising issues and presenting views that are uncomfortable, both to a public used to hearing affirmations of what they already believe and to governments used to controlling news broadcasts.

Transnational broadcasting is providing the region with an unprecedented opportunity to share the thoughts and worries of the people in the region without fear. Transnational media are providing the world with a tremendous chance for developing the foundation of peace, an unprecedented forum for the exchange of views. Arab television stations are having secularists debating Islamists, Iraqis debating Kuwaitis and Israelis debating Palestinians. Although the Arab public never before had a chance to watch an Israeli leader speaking in Arabic, they recently watched a number of Israeli political leaders debating in Arabic on an Arab satellite television network during the Israeli election. Arabs can watch the AlSharq AlAwsat (Middle East) network broadcast in Arabic by the Israeli government, watch the new Hebrew service that is being broadcast by Nile TV International, an Egyptian transnational broadcasting channel, and listen to Sawa (Together), the new Arabic-language radio station broadcast to the region by the US government.

By bypassing government gatekeepers, transnational broadcast services have the opportunity to free themselves from the political agenda of Middle East governments and broadcast well rounded news reports that includes Israeli views on the conflict (Gohar, 2002).

Orbit network was among the first transnational broadcast media to introduce Israeli officials to the Arab viewers (Schleifer, 2002). The Middle East Broadcasting Center (MBC) was first to have news coming from AlAqsa mosque in their main news bulletin and interviewed many Arab and Israelis (Gohar, 2002). *Al-Jazeera* network, which is based in Qatar, took full advantage of freedom of expression and direct delivery to Arab viewers, airing outspoken commentary that has angered several Arab governments. Jordan closed down *Al-Jazeera's* office recently. Kuwait temporarily shut the network's offices there after it broadcast a caller's insult of its leader. Egypt threatened similar reprisals when one of its commentators accused it of not doing enough to support the Palestinians. The station is funded by the Qatari government but is editorially independent. Most recently, media experts have stated that the Saudi recall of its ambassador to Qatar was the result of *Al-Jazeera's* broadcast of criticism of the Saudi royal family's role in the peace process. *Al-Jazeera* delivered another striking example of the Middle East's new journalism: it broadcast interviews with former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and his Palestinian adversaries.

Various scientists Middle Eastern politicals have indicated that media performance is tied to the political culture. They describe the term "political culture" as the values, norms, beliefs, sentiments and understanding of how power and authority operate within a particular political system. Generally it sets unrecorded ground rules as to how the political process is to be performed. It is understood that a particular political culture grows as a result of historical development and that it contributes to the reproduction of the system or the processes that supports such a culture (Amin, 2001). The majority of discussions on domestic political culture go back to the features of traditional heritage, religion, and political history of the region. Authoritarian press systems in the region started to realize that media wars in the Middle East has could polarize societies, provoke conflict, create misperceptions and mistaken ideas about the others and cultivate fear and mistrust, making people vulnerable and dependent. Stereotypical portrayals misrepresent all of us and stigmatize those who are the most vulnerable. Conflict situations in the Middle East raise in the most intense way many questions on professional standards and ethics -- objectivity, accuracy, independence, the need for the understanding of the subject, and public duty. Many journalists in the region have little

professional training to help them deal with these issues. In many countries in the Middle East low standards pertain throughout the media for various historic and systematic reasons, and in conflict situations the pressures to ignore professional standards are intense (Ragab 2002). Responsible freedom is a concept that must be a reference for the many media outlets that still carry messages that encourage violence and provoke fury, dividing people and creating clashes and public disorder in the region. New independent transnational broadcast systems, built on a culture of professional broadcasting ethics, are needed to maintain the national differences of multiple voices.

In today's world, whoever can effectively use transnational media to communicate their messages can have an immense impact on world opinion. No longer are we talking about city newspapers and national networks. Today, images and stories can be transmitted to hundred of millions of viewers in the blink of an eye. Those organizations and governments who refuse to acknowledge the ascendancy of this technology in forming world opinion and affecting national and international policy stand to lose a great deal. The shortcomings of the national media have led those who can afford it to obtain access to foreign satellite television, but such access is still only for a small minority representing mainly decision makers and elite from the different fields.

The challenge for the region at this point in time is to recapture its drive by examining the structure of the mass media and its relation with the state as well as rethinking the role of media in general and transnational media, in particular a global society (Amin, 1996). Transnational broadcasting reintroduced and strengthened the concept of Arabism to the Middle East after a decline of some decades (Alterman, 1998). Satellite broadcasting through the transnational multi-channel environment has brought the people of the region together, deepened the dialogue between nations, crystallized the thoughts of social classes, strengthened the traditions and customs in the region, established the interactivity between its organizations, blessed its values and formed a unified public opinion toward the new challenges of the millennium (Amin, 2000).

Although many people of the Middle East started to refrain from their national and traditional media systems that constructed and maintained a national identity, the region is hampered by the economic and political realities of central authorities and leadership that are unwilling to change. However, it is equally important for transnational broadcasting in the region

to find a language and pictures suited to enhance tolerance, reconciliation and understanding in the midst of the overflow of information about violence. They can broadcast news about crises but it is equally important for transnational broadcast media to insist on dialogue and compromise to provide a well- rounded approach to preserve an open and unbiased exchange among the two parties. Governments are finding it increasingly difficult to block the flow of information. Transnational broadcasting is now challenging the local/traditional broadcasting and government in the Middle East not only by providing access to its own transnational media, but also by posting official documents, judicial proceedings, parliamentary actions and legal notices bypassing interpretation or alteration and potential misunderstanding or misrepresentation by news media by going directly to the public. As a consequent democratic model transplantable around the world, governments would be held accountable by the news media, and the news media would be accountable to a public operating in a market-oriented, transparent society (Powell, 1997).

Transnational broadcasting in the Middle East has had an impact on expanding public access, strengthening international understanding, and encouraging a free flow and a wider and better balanced dissemination of information. Nevertheless, at present, the Middle East conflict continues to involve whole societies in the region, while with increasing wealth and developments in the industry, more information, of different perspectives, reaches deeper into the Middle East communities and individuals.

Middle Eastern society is slow to change, and the media reflect of the political, cultural and social backgrounds of the people of Middle East. This is perhaps why the first generation of transnational broadcast media did not fully utilize its power to be a key player in the peace process. Only time will reveal if the second generation of transnational broadcast services to and within the Middle East will have a better impact on peace in the region. A better understanding between peoples and between cultures will result in building a better understanding between the Arabs and the Israelis. Propaganda has less power when there is access to alternative sources of information. It is now the new millennium, the time for peace and the time for freedom and democracy, prosperity and opportunities. Media organizations and institutions in many parts of the Middle East are just beginning to understand the great possibilities that lie in the future.

Transnational broadcast media are a crucial determining factor in how we perceive other continents and peoples. Now, that we can see the passion, the pride, and the heartbreak of “the other,”

Transnational broadcast the media have the potential to foster movement towards peace, democracy, tolerance, and awareness the shared experience of humanity.

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