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**ARAB SATELLITE BROADCASTING, IDENTITY
AND ARAB YOUTH**

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Submitted in requirement for the degree of PhD

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ACRONYMS

ABC	Arab Business Council
ADEW	Association for the Development and Enhancement of Women
AHDR	Arab Human Development Report
AL	Arab League
ALO	Arab Labour Organization
ALESCO	Arab League Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
ANN	Arab News Network
ANND	Arab NGO Network for Development
APF	Arab Population Forum
ARABSAT	Arab Satellite Communication Organisation
ART	Arab Radio and Television
ASB	Arab Satellite Broadcasting
ASBU	Arab States Broadcasting Union
AUC	American University Cairo
CAMRI	Communication and Media Research Institute
CNN	Cable News Network
ESC	Egypt Space Channel
ECSSR	Emirates Centre for Strategic Studies and Research
GCC	Gulf Co-operation Council
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
ILO	International Labour Organization
LBC	Lebanese Broadcasters Corporation
MBC	Middle East Broadcasting Centre
MEBJ	Middle East Broadcasters Journal
ME	Middle East
MTV	Music Television
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
WEF	World Economic Forum
WMF	Women and Memory Forum

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DECLARATION

I grant powers of discretion to the University Librarian to allow this thesis to be copied in whole or in part without further reference to me. This permission covers only single copies made for study purposes, subject to normal conditions of acknowledgement.

This thesis challenges a major theme found in Arab public discourse on youth, that the latter's consumption of television is passive in nature. Much discussion on Arab youth presupposes that the consequences of television for culture and identity are straight forward; that young people are merely passively absorbing materials that are offered. Contesting comments in Arab discourse on youth that to date have relied on unsystematic observation, this study adopts qualitative and quantitative research methods to produce more rigorous empirical data based on close contact with youths.

The research recognises that youth (broadly between the ages of 16 and 27) constitutes the largest segment of society in the Arab world but equally, they experience particular disadvantages because of their position in a markedly patriarchal and traditional system. Despite forming such an important percentage of the population, Arab youths complain of low participation or representation in Arab public life, and few writings on Arab youth in Arabic offer insight into their lives, realities and aspirations.

The thesis examines the relationship between media consumption and cultural identity, the theoretical framework of which is informed by the topics of concern that were most commonly raised in interviews, and which were ultimately focused on evaluating the satellite programming in relation to their own and others' youth identity. In doing so, the thesis aims to clarify the actual viewing patterns and reception amongst a broad sample of Arab youth. The fieldwork and its methodology, which was undertaken between 2004 and 2006 in Egypt, Jordan, Palestine and the United Arab Emirates, represents one of the few studies within Arab youth that employs direct empirical evidence. The results expose actual youth opinions and concerns regarding satellite programming, how it caters for them, which programmes are the more successful for their needs, and how they perceive its impact on their culture and identity.

The thesis also pays attention to the rather dichromatic discourses on the effects of globalization, and Westernization on Arab youth and nationalism, as these are the primary themes adopted by both critical and positive commentators. This research, however, demonstrates that the verbal warnings issued with regards to youth identity are, in actual fact, rarely founded in reality. For example, it is not conditional that the consumption of entertainment on satellite broadcasting reduces national or religious identity amongst Arab youth. Eating at McDonald's, wearing jeans, or consuming Western-style TV programmes, does not necessarily make Arab youth any more pro-Western or Americanized nor less Arab or less nationalist.

1.1 What is this thesis about?

This thesis aims to challenge a major theme found in Arab public discourse; that youth consumption of television is passive in nature, and that young people are merely absorbing materials that are offered. To prove this, the present study adopts qualitative and quantitative research methods to produce more rigorous empirical data based on close contact with Arab youths and as such, contests the comments made on youth in Arab (public) discourse which to date have relied on unsystematic observation.

The thesis aims to examine the relationship between youth media consumption and cultural identity, particularly in exploring notions of youth identity construction in relation to satellite television consumption. In doing so, it examines the lived relationship between Arab satellite broadcasting and Arab youth culture and identity; investigating the way young people derive meaning out of media offering, and what role the media plays in the way they construct their identity.

The following objectives provide the basis for this study:

- Exploring the Arabic discourse on the effects of globalization and Westernization on youth and the role played by the media, especially satellite broadcasting;
- Clarifying the actual viewing patterns and reception amongst youth;
- Exposing actual youth opinions and concerns regarding satellite programming, how it caters for them and their needs and which programmes are most successful in this regard, as well as how they perceive its impact on their culture and identity;
- Examining the extent to which satellite television offers Arab youth a voice and forum in which to express their social and political concerns or alternatively offering them an avenue of escapism;
- Exploring the extent to which youth identify with the entertainment programmes on Arab satellite television with which they are commonly associated with and their discursive acceptance or disapproval of them;
- Exploring satellite television's formative role for youth culture given television's current position as prime focus in debates of wider society concerns such as nation, identity, and religion.

The impact on youth in this thesis is restricted to analyses within the parameters of youth identity and culture discourse which are understood as inextricably connected. The use of 'discourse' in this thesis refers to arguments, comments, and opinions expressed in Arab public debates whether published in books, newspapers, magazines or TV shows. I have made use of the following definition:

The conscious use of a group of ideas, concepts, and perceptions (concerning a given subject) aiming at constructing and promoting particular social norms, as well as justifying them. Discourse analysis is also associated with studying the origins of cultural and social stereotyping of a particular group in society (WMF, 2000).

The effects of pan-Arab broadcasting in shaping a collective or individual youth identity are explored within adult and youth discourses whether social, cultural, political, religious, gendered, national or ethnic in nature. Inevitably, a treatment of the theoretical (spoken or written commentaries in private or public) is compared to the actuality of youth discourses and behaviour. The thesis hypothesises that any discrepancy between the two discourses is caused by the desire of youth to discursively conform. In my view this instances the 'social desirability effect', highlighted in Sapsford (1999), whereby "a statement can reflect a belief or opinion which is firmly and genuinely held and still have no connection to everyday behaviour" (p.104).

Meanwhile, the Arabic public discourse is filled with warnings about youth, their consumption of television and their future prospects, and it offers little insight into their lives, realities and even their dreams. For example: What does it mean to be an Arab youth in a global (for some) and technological world? What part do the media, television and specifically Arab satellite channels play in the lives, culture and identity of Arab youth? How much do we know about youth media habits and preferences? How much do we know about their views of the issues affecting their lives?

If we are to understand the ‘effects’ of satellite television on Arab youth, it is essential to ground the research in empirical data: about their lives and realities, dreams and difficulties, and in their responses to satellite programming and their attitudes and perceptions of the ‘West’. This thesis aims to fill the gap in the literature about Arab youth by providing an insight into the lives, realities and dreams of a cross-section of Arab youth, their current situation and future prospects as may be seen by them.

1.2 Why this study?

The case for exploring the cultural significance of television is particularly acute at present because of changes in the patterns of global communications including a significant rise in transnational television (Barker, 1999: 3). The state of research on Arab Satellite Broadcasting [ASB] has greatly improved since Abdel Rahman (1998: 2) noted “the lack of up-to-date statistics and research on the impact of satellite TV on Egyptian viewers”. Earlier detailed research by Boyd (1993) has been built upon by more recent studies (such as Sakr, 2001; Hafez, 2001; El-Nawawy and Iskandar, 2002; Lynch, 2006) and, although academics in the West have focused in particular on the political impact of Arab satellite television media content there have been few detailed studies dealing with the social and cultural changes on youth and society as a result of satellite broadcasting. Notable exceptions are Meijer (2000), Sabry (2003) and Sakr (2004, 2007). This study, therefore, arose from a recognition of the lack of detailed information on Arab youth and the relationship between their media consumption and cultural identity.

In the developing world including the Arab region, youth ‘is a stage of life that has only recently begun to receive focused attention’ (Lloyd, 2005: 1), if only because of their high demographic rate and therefore political importance. BBC Generation Next

website reports that ‘the number of young people in the world has never been higher’ with ‘almost nine out of ten living in the developing world’ or, of the 1.5 billion aged between 12 and 24, 1.3 billion live in developing countries (*Generation Next*, 2007). Recent documents produced by the World Bank attest to its concern with youth and development, signalling the large population potential for either vast economic growth or alternatively ‘disillusionment and social tensions’ (*World Development Report*, 2007: 1). The publication *Youth in post-conflict settings* (2005) highlights the challenges facing youth in developing countries that are ‘costly to themselves and to society at large’, such as low quality education, lack of marketable skills, high rates of unemployment, crime, early pregnancy, social exclusion, and the highest rates of new HIV/AIDS infections. This was published in response to increasing client demand for policy advice on how to ‘tap the enormous potential of youth’ (*Youth in post-conflict settings*, 2005: 1).

The UN defines youth as 15-24 year olds but 15-18 year olds are also included in the legal definition of children according to legal treaties (*ibid.* p.2). However, the definition of youth cannot be understood as a cross-cultural constant, and may vary for a number of reasons, such as in a conflict zone (Sierra Leone refers to youth as between 15-35 years, to encompass the ‘lost youth’ during the wars) or other more subtle deviances from previous sociological patterns and their effects on society, such as later marital age and the disempowering effect on youth of prolonged unemployment (see Chapter five). These factors serve to raise the upper boundary of what would normally be considered the boundary between adulthood and youth (which is often blurred anyway).

1.3 Youth as a category

Use and meanings of the terms 'young people' and 'youth' vary around the world, depending on political, economic and socio-cultural context. Also, sociologists and psychologists have had different opinions in determining the characteristics of this stage and its length, but it is generally agreed to be the stage where the most significant changes in youth's interests, social behaviour and tendency to freedom and individuality occur (Al-Askary, 2001). Besley (2002: 1) considers the category of youth in definition between the 'normal' adult self and the child, and describes their characteristics such as a rational, responsible, free, conscious, choosing, autonomous being, 'self' or 'subject'.

This study, therefore, defines the age of youth not as a cross-cultural constant fixed age boundary but conceptually as the period between the ages of childhood and adulthood, based on Arab society's understanding and definition of youth, as is socially understood. For this study, the age group between 16 and 27 years old has been selected as they are considered to be the age group that constitute youth in Arab society.

1.4 Why Arab Youth?

Youth is a very important segment of Arab society as they constitute over 40% of the population (Al-Ghaffar, 2005)¹. Moreover, they live under certain political, economic and social conditions that make the transition from childhood to adulthood more complicated. In his book: *Beyond the Arab disease: new perspectives in politics and culture* (2006), Riyad Nourallah draws a very bleak picture of the current condition of the Arab world. He writes:

¹ For those aged between 10-25 year old.

Surveying the state of the Arab world today, one is tempted to come to the conclusion that all is rotten there... the Arab Human Development Report [UNDP 2002] and another one in the following year depicts a cheerless landscape of some of the lowest (at times the lowest) rates of national growth, public health, human development, literacy, women's empowerment, and civil liberties in the developing world during the mid and late 1990s (Nourallah, 2006: 1).

And although there is an abundance of Western-language literature - from newspaper articles to novels, to empirical studies - which try to detect and describe the world of youth today (Biskup and Pfister, 1999: 201), there is a dearth on Arab youth in particular.

Research methodologies on children and the media have been a prominent feature of media studies for many decades and new methodological approaches continue to be tested (cf. Rapporteur, 2006). In contrast, most of the studies on Arab youth consulted for the purpose of this thesis - in particular those in Arabic - were found to lack the empirical and qualitative research methodologies of English language studies. There are noticeable exceptions published in English such as Yamani (2000) and Meijer (2000), and this thesis aims to build upon the fresh perspective of studying Arab youth by employing cross-disciplinary and cultural methodologies. Rami Khouri² (2005) accuses Arab society of dealing with youth in a superficial and slightly condescending manner, 'offering the occasional sports club and scout troop, a usually under-funded and dysfunctional government ministry or organization for youth issues, and...an occasional speech by a high-ranking official stressing that youths are the promise of the future' (Khouri, 2005).

The UN population figures for the Arab World show that between 46-55% of the population are under 18 compared to between 17-25% in most of Europe and North

America (BBC 6 January 2007). The region is, however, currently unable to accommodate the high youth population and so suffers from the highest youth unemployment rates in the developing world. For example, *World Development Report 2007* finds that in Egypt, Qatar and Syria, youth make up more than 60 % of the unemployed and although the study considered the Arab World's demographic trend to be a 'window of opportunity', it warned against the danger posed by the high rate of youth unemployment (higher than any other developing country) and the inadequate insertion of the youth into the market force which would be unsettling in its effects for the future of the region:

If these challenges are not met more urgently than is currently the trend in many countries, they could further contribute to an unstable environment. If the gap between young people's education, energy, and hopes and the limited number of opportunities that actually exist for them becomes wider, these young people are likely to become increasingly frustrated and disenfranchised (p.1)

This study, which considers youth to be between the ages of 16 and 27, approaches this segment of Arab society using qualitative and quantitative research methods in an attempt to redress previous research methodologies which have tended to rely on observational comments rather than empirical data based on close contact with youths (Al-Ghadhmi 2004). Although much of the youth discourses reveal a close affinity to adult Arab discursive trends which focus on topics such as the potential of satellite broadcasting to alienate young people from their original culture due to exposure to the Western 'cultural invasion', little scholarship has examined the lived relationship between Arab satellite broadcasting and Arab youth culture and identity. The empirical evidence provided by this study reveals a disparity between the *perceived*

2 Rami Khouri is the Director of the Institute of Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut as well as editor-at-large of the Beirut-based Daily Star newspaper, published throughout the Middle East with the International Herald Tribune. He is an internationally syndicated political columnist and author.

effect of satellite on Arab youth and the *actual* effect as revealed in the qualitative research findings.

The thesis also emphasizes discourses of the effects of nationalism, globalization, and Westernization on Arab youth, as these are the primary themes adopted by both critical and positive commentators. The research explores and demonstrates the extent to which satellite discourses mirror their viewers' actual experiences, and finds that dichromatic views (i.e. very 'black and white' in perception) of a perceived threat to Arab identity that are often vocalised in Arab social discourses, do not find straightforward expression in the substantive lives of Arab youth. For example, this thesis argues in Chapter nine that it is not conditional to associate the consumption of entertainment on satellite broadcasting (which is the argument in public discourse) with feelings of nationalism amongst Arab youth. When young Arabs consume Western and Westernized Arab media, eat McDonald's, and dress in jeans, this does not necessarily make them Westernized or Americanized. Nor does it make them un-Arab or un-nationalist.

The adoption of certain behavioural aspects linked with the consumption of the so-called 'Western-style' media, foods and clothes is not in itself enough to make Arab youth 'Western', for these young Arabs are largely the same people you find in the streets demonstrating for Palestine, against the war in Iraq, American foreign policies and globalization (Al-Ghadhmi, 2004).³ (See Chapter nine)

³ This was also witnessed by the researcher

Yet, Arab youths find themselves at the centre of this debate as Sulaiman Al-Askary, editor of Al-Arabi Magazine⁴ explains: ‘globalization introduces new patterns of lifestyles, be it food, drink, dress or cultural habits. It needs to target the young generation in particular as they are the ones capable of swiftly responding and adjusting to any new concepts that are unfamiliar to them, especially if introduced in a alluring way and in technological methods that can affect them’ (Al Askary, 2001: 1).

1.5 Why Satellite Broadcasting?

This thesis focuses exclusively on Arab visual broadcasting principally because print media in its traditional form (magazines and newspapers excluding the internet) does not figure as importantly in a majority of Arab youth media consumption. This may be for several reasons:

- Magazines and newspapers are expensive⁵ and there is a general apathy throughout Arab society to read or encourage youngsters to read⁶;
- The high rate of illiteracy in the Arab region (Amin, 2004), which according to statistics posted on the website of the Arab League’s Population and Immigration Policies Administration, stands at 38.7%,⁷ ensures that the visual and oral media such as television play a particularly significant role in Arab society;
- Less effort is required to consume the visual media as the TV is often switched on as background noise in a familial or social setting;

4 Al-Arabi is a cultural magazine for Arabic readers worldwide. It was founded in 1958 by the Kuwaiti Ministry of Information. Sulaiman Al-Askary is editor-in-chief of “Al-Arabi” (1999 - till now). He is also the Secretary General of the (Kuwaiti) National Council for Culture, Arts and Literature. He has an MA degree in Islamic Arab history from Egypt and a Ph.D in Gulf and Arab Peninsula history from the United Kingdom.

5 The monthly youth magazine al-Shabāb [Youth] costs LE5 and the daily al-Ahram newspaper LE2. In context, an average foul or falafel sandwich costs about LE 0.25

6 Interview with Rawan Damen who at the time of interview was teaching mass media and communications at Petra University, Amman Jordan, 5 April 2005.

7 Population and Immigration Policies Administration. [n.d.] Arab League [online] available from <http://www.poplas.org/cairo%20declaration.htm> [accessed 22 November 2004]

- Amongst young audiences, satellite broadcasting is more popular than state-run television for it has provided viewers with richer information and entertainment, increased their social awareness and allowed them to develop finer critical abilities (Masumudi, 1998).

Once the prerogative of the rich, the satellite dish is now ubiquitous throughout rural and urban areas in most Arab countries. Most families have access to one and the price has decreased from LE30, 000 in the late 1980s when it was first introduced (Abdel Rahman, 1998: 1) to circa LE1,000 presently. This is the price of the dish and the decoder, a one-off payment with no additional subscription fees.

The private clubs that characterize much of the upper and middle class entertainment and leisure spaces in Egypt, Jordan and the Gulf region such as the exclusive and prestigious *Nadi Sporting* in Alexandria and *Gezira Club* in Cairo, require substantial financial input.⁸ The Arab satellite programming for most Egyptians is therefore not only a cheaper and thus more accessible source of entertainment but also a chance to see the kinds of lives, clothes, and entertainment usually the exclusive domain of the wealthy and connected as it broadcasts 'live' the pop-star's concert at the *nadi* [club], at the private holiday village (such as *Miami* on the Mediterranean North Coast, Egypt) or at the weddings of the rich.

Non-Arabic language channels such as CNNI, Euronews, MTV, and BBC World are also available to Arab viewers, but are generally less popular amongst Arab viewers mainly due to language and cultural barriers [cf. Morley and Robins, 1995] and because the new 24-hour Arab news channels such as Al-Jazeera are able to provide a quality alternative..

⁸ Joining fee at Gezira sports club is LE 120,000 [12,000 English pounds] and then a yearly subscription of LE 250 [25 English pounds] for pensioners and young people.

It is the Arab satellite broadcasting rather than Western or other foreign channels, which has frequently been held responsible for the Arab social ills or other social manifestations, such as encouraging the Arab masses onto the streets to demonstrate (Sakr, 2001), corrupting the youth (Juma' and Al-Shawāf, 2005), causing divorce rates to soar (Al-Jazeera, 2005)⁹, causing inter-Arab splits and divisions, normalizing relations with the Hebrew state [Israel] (Ghadbian, 2001), encouraging anti-Semitism, and being a mouth-piece for Al-Qaeda (MEMRI, 2006).¹⁰

Satellite technology also represents a facet of modernity and therefore figures at a deeper level in discussions pertaining to the Arab present and future identity. As a technology closely associated to modernity and modern life in its current global order, it has become a target figure in the 'crisis of culture' which certain commentators associate with the 'structural economic and...political hegemony of the Arab world by the Western world (Abu-Rabi', 2004: xvi). Abu-Rabi' names the intellectual struggle after the encounter between the 19th century 'capitalist West' and the Arab world; "Arab Third-Worldism" represented by current thinkers such as the Egyptian economist, Galal Amin¹¹. He describes the movement as one of "intellectual resistance...to betray the cultural Western designs on the Arab world, and...stress an autonomous and modern Arab culture" (2004: 13). The mass media, politics, and economics are all accused of being under the design of American economic and cultural hegemony in the Third World and thus the indigenous mass media have 'fallen under the influence of American ideas that promote leisure,

9 Hayfā' Wabhī wa ukhwātuhā sabab al-talāq wa al-mukhadarāt. [Hayfa' Wahbi and her sisters are the reasons of divorce and drugs] Al-Jazeera.net 15 April 2005 [online] available from <http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/BF8BE1F0-48D5-4F01-ACFB-358CE14FA25E.htm> [accessed 15 April 2005]

10 The Middle East Media Research Institute, Antisemitism Documentation Project, Special Dispatch Series - No. 1161, May 10, 2006

11 Galal Amin is a professor of economics at the American University in Cairo. He is the author of *Whatever Happened to the Egyptians?* (published in Arabic in 1998 and in English in 2000 AUC Press) and *Whatever Else Happened to the Egyptians?* (AUC Press, 2004). His latest book is: *The Illusion of Progress in the Arab World: A Critique of Western Misconstructions* (AUC 2006)

consumerism, and amorality' (*ibid*). Karin Werner notes in her field notes to researching media use amongst young Islamist women that the difference between 'Islamic' and the 'Western culture' are perceived in moral terms as good and bad or in hierarchical terms as superior and inferior (2001: 201).

The indigenous mass media in this case is the Arab satellite broadcasting, and as such is commonly associated with the 'crisis of values',¹² as modernization and the importation of technology (see Boyd, 1993 and others on history of Arab Satellite importation by Saudi Arabia and Qatar) did not entail modernism. Abu-Rabi' describes the loss of correspondence between social change and values as a result of the 'huge gap between modernization and modernism.' The resulting implantation of 'imported new values in the Arab psyche' did not 'live with their true personalities' (2004: 154). Many of the discourses in Arab society concerning youth and ASB revolve around the above concerns: 'how does this particular format and programming fit-in with our identity and our society?'

Yet many people, even some experts, expect much out of satellite broadcasting in Arab countries. They look to it to solve society's most deeply ingrained problems (Hourani, 2004). They expect it to contribute to Arab unity, increase the margin of freedom of expression, spread Arab culture, promote democratization¹³, to give a voice to the voiceless, and even to help end the occupation of Palestine and Iraq. Of course, objectives like these are likely to be met primarily by civil and public organizations, but it is also reasonable to expect satellite broadcasting to facilitate the mission of bringing about change by acting as a catalyst, making the public better informed, opening space for free debate and, yes, giving a voice to the voiceless,

¹² See Galal Amin (2000) and extensive literature on youth and crisis of culture [Radwan, N al-Shabāb al-misri al-mu'asir wa azmat al-qiyam 125 Cairo: al-Hay'ah al-Misriyyah al-'Ammah li'l Kitab, 1997]

especially women and youth. That in turn raises the question of whether the voices of young Arabs have ever been heard in public arenas in Arab countries. If not, maybe it is too much to ask of satellite channels that they should push Arab societies and governments towards changing the habits of generations in inauspicious conditions.

1.5.1 Why satellite television and youth in particular?

There is, of course, the obvious yet telling point that the young are the coming generation, so what they learn now will bear upon the future. There is also the fact that the young, especially males, have come to the fore in terms of public action. It is they who took to the streets during the Palestinian *intifada* [2000 to date], they who suffer the consequences of military crackdowns, they who mobilize for change. How satellite television speaks to and about them is of manifest importance. However, the special significance of the relationship between Arab satellite broadcasting and Arab youth lies in two other factors. First, Arab youth spend many hours a day watching television, most of it beamed by satellite. This is because Arab youth have plenty of free time either because they are jobless or still at school. Sakr (2001: 193) argues that the leisure time available to unemployed school-leavers and university graduates with satellite access has to be taken into account. Moreover, due to Arab society cultural norms, youth do not go out, and are much more home-based, especially the girls (boys can be in and out all the time). Further, research shows that Arab youth tends to be less resistant to messages received via satellite channels than they are to messages coming from state television, school or from the family (Karam, 2004).

Sakr (2001) notes that Arab youth's personal and collective experiences of satellite television "will be an important factor in the future of the medium in the Arab world,

if only because of the extraordinarily high proportion of under 18s in the population across the region” (p.193).

Young people in the Arab world spend a high proportion of their free time [outside school or work obligations] watching Arab satellite broadcasts. The findings of this research amongst 16-27 year olds in Egypt, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates and Palestine show that 97% of young people watch television and that many of them spend several hours a day watching it. Over half of the 200 respondents to my questionnaire said they watched television for up to three hours a day during a typical school or work day; 17% said they watched four to six hours a day; 7% said they watched television for more than six hours a day. Fewer than one quarter (24%) said they watched television for less than one hour a day. (See Chapter six)

Young people spend much more time watching television during the summer vacation, especially in the case of females who are less likely to spend much time outdoors. Among respondents to my questionnaire, 62% said they watch television for up to six hours during the summer vacation or if they are not working or studying. Another 28.9% said they watch for up to three hours. Only 7.4% said they watched for less than one hour a day and 1.7% said they hardly watched any television during the summer vacation (see chapter six). The most popular viewing programmes for youth are entertainment, and Arab satellite channels offer the widest range on demand. They consist mainly of music, film and drama of a kind that does not at first sight appear effectively to address young people’s concerns and aspirations, such as employment, education, marriage and issues about sexuality. What are the implications, therefore, for their culture and identity?

The following two chapters establish the conceptual framework that informs the remainder of the thesis, highlighting the themes of concern to both adults and youth with regards to satellite, and in particular: Americanization, Westernization, the ‘cultural invasion’, and the repercussions on identity.

Chapter four describes the research methodology and fieldwork approaches, and the main body of fieldwork is then contextualised in chapter five which debates the current conditions of Arab youth as are portrayed in media, scholarly writings, and in the fieldwork findings. Issues that were revealed as being of import to youth, such as unemployment and emigration receive special attention. The chapter ends with an exploration of Arab youths’ perceptions of their future.

The remaining chapters present the research findings. Chapter six examines the offerings of Arab satellite television, and how Arab youth regard the programmes on offer. In doing so, it investigated the current trends in Arab TV youth programming, in response to a prevailing sentiment that young Arabs believe they are under and even misrepresented in and by the media.

Chapter seven introduces the notion of ‘breathing space’ as articulated by my informants who clearly expressed that they use television and mainly entertainment provided by Arab satellite television to fulfill an escapist need, albeit temporarily, from their daily burdens and pressures of the status quo.

Chapters eight investigates further the reasons why satellite proves so popular amongst youth with special concentration on those admired or controversial programmes specifically mentioned in the interview focus groups, such as reality TV and the music channels. Chapter nine reveals how youth perceive the effect of the satellite programming on their self and collective Arab *hawwiyyah* [identity] and

culture. Providing an ethnography of discourse, both chapters challenge the argument found in Arab public discourse on youth, that the latter's consumption of television is influencing their culture and identity.

2.1 Introduction

This thesis is concerned with studying the complex relationship between satellite broadcasting, youth and identity. Satellite television is widely seen in the Arab world as a vehicle for cultural imperialism (Ayish, 2002) with particularly important impacts on [youth] culture and identity. Abdel Fatah Al-Fawi¹⁴ (2001), for example, argues that globalizing American popular culture is spreading across the Arab World, thereby 'dominating people's choice of lifestyle'. The media, especially satellite broadcasting has largely been blamed for facilitating the spread of such 'alien' culture. Said Harib¹⁵ (2000) , for instance, has argued that the media are central in bringing their globalized culture to the Arab world: 'When talking about the impact of globalization on the Arab world, we talk about the impact of global media on Arab social values; as one TV programme is much more influential than a thousand speeches, ceremonies or articles' (p.11).

This thesis situates itself within three main areas of research: media audiences, globalization, and [youth] cultural studies. These three fields will provide the frameworks of analysis for the research results and will form the main theoretical basis of the empirical data.

¹⁴ Islamic author who has written much on the effects of the 'cultural image' (al-sûrah al-thaqâfiyyah). Recent publications include al-'awlamah wa el-hiwâr al-hadari [Globalization and the dialogue of civilizations] 2000, al-'awlamah wa mawqif al-Islâm fi-hâ [Globalization and Islam] 1999, published under the auspices of the University of Cairo, 4th International Conference on Islam in Globalization.

¹⁵ Said Harib is Deputy Chancellor and lecturer at Emirates University. He is the author of al-Thaqafah wa al-'awlamah [Culture and Globalization], Dâr Al-Kitâb Al-Jamî'î, 2000. And Thaqafah al-ta'lim wa ta'lim al-thaqafah [The culture of education and the education of culture], Al-Mujam'a al-thaqafi, Abu Dhabi 2001

2.2 Audiences in Media and Cultural Studies

It is important to see television as a site of contestation and not the simple injection of ideology into audiences, because as Barker (1999) argues, while representations construct subject positions it does not follow that viewers will take up that which is offered. Rather reception studies have stressed the negotiations that occur between subjects and texts. Consequently, no consideration of the relationship between global television and the constitution of cultural identities would be complete without exploring evidence provided by audience research (p.109).

However, audience research is problematic as no research method has yet been able to capture fully the experience and effect of media consumption, but rather only certain aspects. Despite the ongoing development since the early 20th century of different audience research methods, theories and approaches, there is still none that is able to provide clear evidence of direct media influence or to measure precisely the outcome of the interaction process between the media and audiences.

The complexity of the process involved in media consumption makes it the more difficult to methodologically measure the effect of media. Neither large scale surveys nor detailed experiments replicate or reflect that actual experience of viewing and reading (Street, 2001: 93). It is also very difficult to separate the influence of media from all other social and psychological factors involved in the construction of identity and formation of personality. It is my view that inadequacies inherent in audience studies analyses are due to the fact that media stimuli routinely interact with other social stimuli. Disentangling these multiple influences is extremely difficult and as a result clear evidence of direct media influence is difficult to obtain (Croteau and Hoynes, 2000: 242), still less to quantify. Exclusive audience research methods therefore are difficult to formulate so that recent audience research theories have focused on specific aspects of the process of media consumption. For example, while early media studies research looked at what the media does to people, thus emphasizing media power over audience, Uses and Gratifications researchers sought in the 1960s to substitute the idea of what measurable 'effects' the media have on the audience with an analysis of the ways in which people use media (Stevenson, 2002: 76). In the 1970s, cultural studies theorists like Stuart Hall and David Morley took it further, exploring audience ability to negotiate the consumption of media texts and messages; thus emphasizing audience activity.

By employing qualitative techniques, this thesis is moving away from inherently inadequate approaches which measure and quantify media effects in an attempt to disentangle different media influences, towards an ethnography of discourse of attitudes and opinions as well as perceptions of media audiences. Popular media texts such as entertainment programming (soap operas, movies, music, news programmes, etc) were initially looked to by cultural studies researchers [cf. Ang, 1985, 1991; Hobson, 1982; Morley, 1980] as sites in which ideological discourses around class, gender, race and power were produced, organized and negotiated throughout the 1980s and early 1990s (Tincknell and Raghuram, 2002: 200). In doing so, the cultural studies theorists sought to emphasize the agency involved in the sense-making processes that audiences bring to their understanding of textual meaning, arguing that audiences are active agents, not passive subjects, in their consumption and enjoyment of popular texts, and that the process of understanding was one of negotiation rather than imposition (*ibid.*).

The question of audience agency should be treated with care as it carries with it numerous conceptual and methodological problems. Tincknell and Raghuram (2002: 200) argue that audiences are transitory and contingent groupings, which makes it difficult to determine and identify, and may pose problems for research. It is difficult, therefore, to grasp the activity of actual viewers, as there is unavoidably a degree of discursive reconstruction implied in the process of meaning making (the production of meaning).

Akin to that of cultural studies, particularly, the Uses and Gratifications' theory and Stuart Hall's [1980] encoding/decoding model, this study treats audiences as active agents, not passive subjects, in their enjoyment of popular texts, and that the process of understanding and making sense of media texts is one of negotiation rather than imposition (Tincknell and Raghuram, 2002: 200). Arab youth, the subject of this research, seem to find satisfaction of a need in Arab satellite broadcasting and to find gratification. My informants demonstrated that they make their own interpretation meaning of media texts, and view the media, and Western elements, their governments and their elders with a critical and discerning eye. They have shown awareness that they were using the satellite to fulfill a need.

Chapter seven argues, based on empirical data, that Arab youth use satellite to meet a need, identified and conceived in this thesis as a 'breathing space' and is developed and theorized in the context of the reality and status quo of Arab youth (see Chapter seven).

2.2.1 Audience Research

It is not my aim to summarize this vast history of audience research here (as it has been done many times before (cf. Ang, 1991; Seiter, 1991; Dickinson *et al.*, 1998), but I will focus on the theories shared by my research, namely active audience theories.

Early media effects research was criticised for placing too much power on the part of the media thus rendering audiences as passive and easily manipulated. Subsequent approaches, however, insisted that the power rested with the audience who could make of texts what they will (Ang, 1990). In this way the Uses and Gratifications theorists shifted power into the hands of a highly active and selective audience, denuding the media of influence. In the 1970s, the cultural studies researchers led by Stuart Hall and later David Morley, balanced theory by taking from both approaches. In his encoding/decoding model, Hall (1980) took from the effects theorists the

notion that the media have the power to set the agendas and to define issues; and from the uses and gratifications perspective, he incorporated the notion of the active audiences making meaning from the signs and symbols which the media provide (Morley, 1991: 17).

Hall's starting point is that the meaning of media texts is not something fixed or inherit within the text. Rather media texts acquire meaning only at the moment of reception, that is, when they are read, viewed, or listened to (Ang, 1990: 160). The encoding/decoding model suggests that the emphasis on viewers' interpretation of media texts 'promises to dispel the lingering behaviorism which has dogged mass media research for so long, especially in its approach to content' (Street, 2001: 94).

In his landmark *Encoding and Decoding in Television Discourse* essay, Hall (1973) argues that there is a basic distinction between the social process that encodes and decodes media texts. Cultural forms, he argues, can be said to be encoded through a specific historical mix of institutional relations, professional norms and technical equipment. The decoding strategies employed by the audience are similarly dependent upon social structural relations, political and cultural dispositions, and access to the relevant technology.

Hall identifies three forms of audience decoding strategy: dominant [preferred], negotiated and oppositional. In the first, the audience tend to go along with the message; in the second, the audience tend to be critical but understanding and go along with the message; in the third, the audience tend to resist the message. Viewers whose social situation, particularly their class, aligned them comfortably with the dominant ideology would produce dominant readings of a text; that is they would accept its preferred meanings and their close fit with the dominant ideology (Fisk,

1987: 64). Other viewers, whose social situation placed them in opposition to the dominant ideology, would oppose its meanings in the text and would produce oppositional readings. The majority of viewers, however, are probably situated not in positions of conformity or opposition to the dominant ideology, but in ones that conform to it in some ways, but not others; they accept the dominant ideology in general, but modify or reflect it to meet needs of their specific situation. These viewers would, Hall argues, produce negotiated readings of the text.

Hall's work was followed by David Morley's influential work, *Nationwide* (1980), which confirmed both a variety of reading and a clustering around key decoding positions (Barker, 1999: 113). More recent and contemporary audience research attempts to point towards a dual concern with the power of audiences to interpret media and with the subtler influences of media (Croteau and Hoynes, 2000: 242). These approaches have been criticised for subtracting the individual from his domestic context of family life. Hence, the 'media in everyday life' approach led by David Morley was introduced emphasizing the necessity to understand how mass media fits into the context of everyday life. Morley's work on how media texts are interpreted in light of the domestic context in which much media consumption occurs has been influential (Ang, 1990; Croteau and Hoynes, 2000).

The diversity of media outlets and products and the spread of cable and satellite technology make it difficult even for researchers to locate a specific audience. While once media audience researchers may have been criticised for subtracting the individual from the specificity of his or her social context, there remains the problem of treating audiences as socially uniform, which is hardly the case.

In response, a new trend within academic research in the 1980s led by David Morley attempted to emphasize the necessity to understand how mass media fit into the context of everyday life. Morley's more recent work (2001) has been concerned with the transformation in ideas of home, place, belonging and identity in the context of the transnational patterns of communication and mobility which increasingly characterize our contemporary, destabilized and deterritorialized world. According to Morley (2001) we will not understand the significance of the media that are still consumed within the home without a better understanding of the home itself, not simply as a backdrop to media consumption but as a context which is constitutive of the meaning of many media-related practices (p.426).

While cultural studies have established that audiences are neither passive in their reception of media texts nor homogeneous in their constitution, the question of how and where they are defined remains (Tincknell and Raghuram, 2002). A media audience is a group of viewers who can be geographically dispersed and can consist of many different kinds of people who do not know each other, but are symbolically connected by their shared interest in and exposure to a media product. This can have a bearing on making it harder to measure the impact of media on an audience, since media consumption is both a personal as well as a collective experience.

The concept of the 'audience', therefore, is problematic. According to Hoijer (1998: 170), personal experiences are those that are unique to the individual. No two individual's experiences are completely the same, not even if they have grown up in the same family. Collective experiences, however, are those which are shared amongst people who can be physically united in one location, like in family and friends situations or geographically dispersed, but virtually connected through subjection to the same media product.

Moreover, if we take any audience of one media product, we may find differences for example in their age, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and education. Therefore, approaches to audience research have tended to oscillate between removing the individual from his/her environment and examining the individual within a family context (such as David Morley, 1991, 2001; Ann Gray, 1992).

While this thesis has a cross-territorial focus and thus is broad in geographical scope (Egypt, Jordan, United Arab Emirates and Palestine), it is unified by its target age (16-27 year old) but notes variables in the audience subjects such as; gender, economic situation, rural-urban living, degree of liberalism/conservatism, and practicing or non-practicing of religion. (See Chapter four, Methodology).

This comes against a general tendency within Arab public discourses to blame the media for social ills. The concerns of sociologists and other commentators about impact on youth (especially violence) are well-documented in scholarship (Gunter, 1994; Lowery and DeFleur, 1995 in English, and in Arabic, Juma' and Al-Shawāf, 2005). Moreover, the trend and development in audience research emphasizing the agency involved in the sense-making processes on the part of the viewers might not

preclude the existence of scholars who still believe that audiences are passive. Gunn and Brummett (2004) observe:

Although media effects researchers have long since discredited the view that media outfits exercise a magical, propagandistic power over audiences (Cawelti, 1985; Lowery and DeFleur, 1995; Bryant and Zillman, 1994) and although few scholars would openly subscribe to the view that popular audiences are “passive consumers” (MacDonald, 1957, p.60), we suspect that the study of popular communication continues to provoke concern for some scholars because of a lurking suspicion that popular audiences are as stupid and tasteless as the texts they consume (Gunn and Brummett, 2004: 706).

Belief in a loss of viewer agency has provoked through the ages varying degrees of what Stan Cohen (1972) referred to as ‘moral panic’ - a concern which was felt by the wider society towards a perceived threat on a segment or society as a whole. Buckingham (1998) observes that concern about the negative impact of the media on young people has a very long history, and cites the Greek philosopher Plato as proposing to ban dramatic poets from his ideal republic 200 years ago ‘for fear that their stories about the immoral antics of the gods would influence impressionable young minds’. In a similar vein today, young viewers are seen to be inherently vulnerable to television which has the ‘...irresistible ability to ‘brainwash’ and ‘narcotize’ them, drawing them away from other, more worthwhile activities and influences’ (*ibid.* p133). He points to the dominant assumptions in public debates that children’s relationship with television is a ‘fundamentally negative and damaging element in their lives’ (1998: 132).

Such suspicion undoubtedly exists in the Arab world, where the public discourse is filled with warnings that Arab youth’s consumption of television is passive and that it will affect their culture and identity. However, contrary to the assumption - in line with the media effects theory also known as ‘the hypodermic syringe model’ - that young viewers are passive audiences who are vulnerable to the powerful messages of

the media, my research data suggests that Arab audiences are not passive or overtly active. Indeed, the starting point of this thesis is the conviction that audience research should be based on viewers' actual response to and interpretation of what is offered. My thesis is seeking – with other scholars like David Morley – to acknowledge the active audience, as well as recognizing external social factors such as family, friends, gender and age.

2.3 Cultural Globalization and Cultural Imperialism

It was not initially the intention of this thesis to dwell on the theory of 'cultural imperialism' as it has been well studied, heavily criticized and as a result is nowadays less fashionable (Tomlinson, 1999: 79). However, since cultural imperialism has featured importantly in my informants' discourses, as well as in Arabic public discourse since many Arab scholars feel that cultural imperialism accompanies globalization, it seems appropriate to include it in the discussion.

Moreover, the cultural imperialism argument is central to Arab literature debate on the impact of the consumption of satellite broadcasting [by Arab youth] on [their] cultural identity, thus assuming that there is a direct relationship between satellite media consumption and identity. This assumption has been expressed in political, cultural and academic circles in many Arab countries. Werner (2001) noted that: 'the Islamist discourse about the media revolves around the topic of Western imperialism, which in the Islamist view combines economical exploitation with political suppression' (p.205). Early assertions of this relationship were centred on discussions of imported media products that threatened to erode authentic Arab culture and identity.

The central proposition of the cultural imperialism thesis is the domination of one culture by another. Cultural imperialism is usually understood in terms of the imposition of one national culture upon another with the media as central to this process, bearing foreign cultural meanings which penetrate and dominate the cultures of subordinate nations (Barker, 1999: 37). One dominant strand of the cultural imperialism argument stresses that the global reach of capitalist consumerism, for which global television is the vehicle par excellence. This perspective highlights a loss of cultural diversity and the growth of 'sameness' attaching a negative evaluation to the media process.

Many Arab scholars argue in a similar vein to their Western colleagues (e.g. Schiller, 1979; Herman and McChesney, 1997) in the cultural imperialism school and treat globalization as an expression of cultural imperialism. However, while the cultural imperialism thesis contains an element of truth and provides insight into the distribution of global cultural power, it also harbours conceptual confusion, empirical misconceptions and political-ideological ambiguity (Tomlinson, 1997: 119). Nonetheless, Arabic literature continues to limit globalization to the notion of cultural imperialism. This take on globalization ignores that fact that it is complicated and often perplexing process not just in terms of the increasingly dense web of interconnections that it establishes at all manner of levels, but in terms of the complexities and uncertainties of the cultural politics it poses [Tomlinson, 1997; Schiller, 1979; Herman and McChesney, 1997]. Moreover, Arab scholars often portray cultural imperialism as an attack solely targeting Arab culture and Islamic society (Al-Askary 2001; Jum'a and Shawaf, 2005). The notion of cultural imperialism has been shared in different parts of the world. Historically, there have been debates on the threat of cultural influence from America over Europe, the north

over the south, the West over the rest of the world, the centre over the periphery, etc (Tomlinson, 1999: 80). There is a history - dating from the early decades of this century - of perceptions of the malign effects of American cultural exports to Europe. A speech made by the Archbishop of Toledo to a Spanish clerical conference in 1946 described the problem as:

How to tackle woman's growing demoralization – caused largely by American customs introduced by the cinematograph, making the young woman independent, breaking up the family, disabling and discrediting the future consort and moth with exotic practices that make her less womanly and destabilize the home (quoted in Tomlinson, 1997: 123)

The quotation also resonates with the discourses used today by Arab scholars in their description of the impact of Western and American media products on Arab society and culture.

When discussing globalization, Arab scholars can be broadly divided into two groups. The first group refers to globalization as a form of and vehicle for cultural imperialism (Amin G., 2000; Taweela, 2002). The second group refers to globalization as a synonymous to modernization, especially when referring to Arabs' failure to develop and modernize. While many Arab scholars fall in this category using globalization as synonymous with modernization, especially when referring to Arabs' failure to develop and modernize, few are enthusiastic about the possibility for Arabs to join the 'age of globalization' without having to lose their distinctive culture and identity. A few take a different perspective. For example, Arab scholar Said Harib (2000) argues:

Joining the global age does not mean giving up our religious, cultural and social components, on the contrary, we as Arabs and Moslems have to add to globalization rather than just copy it (2000: 16).

However, most Arab scholars fall into the first category and for them globalization - synonymous to cultural imperialism - has been constructed as a kind of 'evil'

threatening Arab identity. These scholars are concerned that their culture and social norms will be destroyed by globalization; represented as Westernization and more specifically sometimes, as Americanization. Abaza (2001) for example, notes that Arabs are concerned that their culture and social norms will be destroyed by the type of individualism they associate with Westernization and which they perceive to be gaining ground amongst the youth population. Werner's (2001) research among mainly young Islamist women found that Western imperialism was most often linked with the values transmitted by the media. Of great concern to them was the threat that the media filled the 'minds of Muslim people with consumer goods and media products' (p.205). She continues:

The women described satellite dishes, which are becoming more and more widespread in Egyptian upper- and middle-class contexts, as the most powerful instrument of Western cultural imperialism. When we strolled through Cairo the women frequently pointed at the dishes and predicted that their owners would 'all go to hell for sure' (p.212).

Abaza (2001) notes that Arabic literature on globalization is largely influenced by Marxist and dependency theorists. She provides an example from Galal Amin's book, *Matha hadatha lil-masriyyin?* [Whatever Happened to Egyptians?], which won the State Prize in 1998, in which Amin endeavors to explain recent changes since the *infatah* (open door policy and economic liberalization in the 1970s) that led to Egypt's shift in loyalty from the Soviet Union to the Western capitalist system. Amin worries about social climbing, the spread of decadent culture (*al-fan al-habit*), and decaying moral and social norms. Abaza notes that in this Amin joins other Arab scholars and religious preachers' condemnation of youth (2001: 114).

While agreeing with Amin's alarming predictions concerning decadent culture, and the spread of individualism and Americanization, Abaza (2001) distrusts the notion

that fashion and other symbols of Westernization are a recent phenomenon as it ignores the fact that Western fashions were prevalent more than a century ago in Egypt:

His condemnatory tone is disturbing in that it entails a nostalgic vision of the past as beautiful and ordered versus the present as decadent and invaded by social climbers' (p.116).

Amin is not alone in condemning the Western cultural invasion (*ghazw thaqafi*): many Arab commentators describe it either in insidious terms (such as a Western conspiracy) or as the predilection of Arabs to imitate all things Western. For example, the images of women in the Arab music video clips are considered to have a pernicious effect on the morals of individuals and the wider society (See chapters 9 and 10). More than just a sexy woman dancing and singing, Elmessiri remarks that video clips 'provide the public with a role model, promoting a particular lifestyle that typifies a worldview in turn, one whose starting point is individual pleasure at any price' (2005: 3). Islamist scholar Abdel Fatah Al-Fawi notes in an article published in Al-Ahram daily in 2004 that American popular culture is spreading across the Arab World, dominating people's choice of lifestyle: 'American music, television, and cinema are spread all over our Arab world. Moreover, the American style of dressing, fast food and other consumer products have spread across the Arab World especially amongst the youth' (Al-Fawi, 2001).

The threat of 'Americanization' is by no means exclusively an Arab concern; it is present in many European countries (Servan-Schriber, 1968; Tunstall, 1977, 1994). However, as Street (2001) notes, not all European countries are equally vulnerable, nor do they share equally the perception of the 'danger' (p.120). France has long felt

threatened by 'Le Défi Américain'. For instance, during GATT¹⁶ talks (1993), France justified its opposition to free trade in film and television on cultural grounds. As a French film director expressed it:

Cinema is ... a vehicle for a way of life, a language, customs, and questions ... A country ... can't entrust the imagination of its entire population to a foreign culture.... We have to protect our own identity (Morris, 2002: 279).

The European Broadcasting Union asserted in 1993 that too much imported television would threaten Europe's cultural identity and would injure the new central and eastern European democracies 'for which broadcasting plays a decisive role in the affirmation of their new identity' (Morris, 2002). A more recent study by Aslama and Pantti (2007) also expresses fears of the loss of national identity within European countries. In their research on the impact of reality television on national identity in Finland, Aslama and Pantti note that there have long been fears in Finland as everywhere in Western Europe about loss of national identity brought about by threat from American mass culture:

Such fears that position especially children and adolescents as victims of the American culture industry were repeatedly expressed, for instance, in Finnish art and cultural policy statements from the 1960s to the 1980s (Pantti 2000). On the other hand, some 60 percent of Finnish nationwide television output is of domestic origin, and the share of Finnish productions has been steadily growing in the 1990s and early 2000s (p.51).

Whether the invasion of Arab culture is accurate becomes irrelevant as the criticism of the foreign (Western/American) serves well as a symbol or scapegoat for disgruntled parties who are not concerned as to its accuracy. Many cultural discourses that are critical of the West, upon deeper investigation, actually blame insider Arab elements: such as the Arab video-clip producers (admittedly often Western-trained)

¹⁶ The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) was originally created by the Bretton Woods Conference as part of a larger plan for economic recovery after World War II. GATT's main purpose was to reduce barriers to international trade.

and the rise of the petrol-dollar in the Gulf States which encouraged the flourishing of prostitution (Abu-Rabi', 2004: 154). The emigration of Egyptian and Arab youth to these Gulf States on the one hand 'exacerbated problems of consumerism, individualism, and conservatism'; 'capitalist' values so often linked to the West, and on the other hand 'many returned with conservative and backward ideas' (p.154).

The aim of this section, has neither been to attack nor to defend the cultural imperialism thesis, but more to unpack it's dynamics including the associated ideas of 'Americanisation', 'Westernization', and 'cultural homogenisation' in order to challenge a major theme in Arab public discourses that Arab satellite television is a form of Western cultural imperialism that solely targets Arab culture and Islamic society, especially the youth segment. This contention I argue, while it contains an element of truth about the distribution through the media of global and especially Western culture, remains flawed mainly because it is not supported by substantial empirical audience research. It is my contention that the closest we can get to measuring media impact is through empirically-based audience research, in addition to analysing media texts and other general observations. In the case of Arab youth, I argue that we even need to contextualize their use and consumption of media texts, particularly gaining an understanding of their own interpretations of media texts in a process that gives them a voice. This is very essential if we are to examine the relationship between media consumption and dynamics of youth identity and notions of cultural imperialism.

2.4 Satellite Television and the Globalization debate

Television can be said to be global in its circulation of similar *narrative forms* around the world; soap opera, news, sports, quiz shows, and music videos can be found in most countries (Barker, 1999: 54).

The proliferation of international communications in the 1980s - mainly satellite communications technology - has made media global, and has thus taken the debate on the effect of globalization on national cultures to a new level. Global media outlets have been argued to act as culture-levellers, blurring traditional social relations and corroding both the old local identities and traditional notions of national identity by blending them into one communication system (Grixti, 2006: 106).

Chalaby (2005) argues that the literature on satellite television has never disentangled itself completely from the nation-centric perspective that it adopted more than three decades ago. He contends that this is rooted in the cultural imperialism thesis of the 1970s:

Exponents of this school had formed strong opinions about direct broadcast satellites even before they had been launched. They believed that satellites were the instruments of 'marauding' multinational corporations, constituting a 'threat' to the 'integrity of national cultures' and a 'challenge' to 'national sovereignty' (Nordenstreng and Schiller, 1979, *passim*; see also Mattelart, 1979). Similar fears were echoed in satellite broadcasting conferences organized under the aegis of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), where delegates from the developing world approached most issues (such as the right of 'prior consent' before a third party was allowed to broadcast via satellite onto their territory) from the perspective of the national interest (Chalaby, 2005: 156).

When discussing the impact of satellite broadcasting and global media, Arab scholars (cf. Abu Osb'a, 2004; Elmessiri, 2005) have tended to focus on the assumption that it alienates Arab audiences from their original culture, thus ignoring the potential of satellite broadcasting to create a common Arab culture and a sense of a shared future and destiny. Negative discourses surrounding satellite broadcasting reveal the deeper

spectrum of social fears concerning Arab society: the future, the past, change 'for the bad', globalization, Westernization, nationalism, Arabism: in other words, the identity and culture of individuals and of their nation.

Globalization is always present in any debate on the impact of entertainment programmes on Arab satellite television on Arab culture. Critics of entertainment programmes on Arab satellite television link them to globalization arguing that they embody a consumerism detached from all ethical, societal, and national affiliations. Waheed Taweela (2002) criticises the entertainment programmes on Arab satellite television, both for producing a consumerist culture and for their destabilizing effects on youth identity: 'The form and content of their programmes are dedicated to consumption trends. They are bound to create unstable personalities, especially among the youth be it in their outward appearance or their manner of speech' (2002: 6). Taweela contends that most entertainment programmes are 'a mere imitation of the western media without taking into consideration the social and cultural aspects of our societies' (*ibid.*). Prominent Egyptian Islamist scholar, Abdel-Wahab M Elmessiri (2005) argues that Arab video clip songs on Arab satellite television are 'a symptom of globalization - of a world homogenised, broken down to basic economic units amenable to the laws of supply and demand. Within these units, the individual is materially driven, with no particular traits, no sense of belonging, no historical memory.' Elmessiri notes that Arab video clips often have Indian, American or European settings: 'the girls are often blond, or dressed in foreign fashion. However, as Buckingham (1998) observes, 'genuine, often deep-seated anxieties about what are perceived as undesirable moral or social changes lead to a search for a single causal explanation. Blaming television may thus serve to deflect attention away from other

possible causes – causes which may well be ‘closer to home’ or simply much too complicated to understand (p.133).

Moreover, Arab discourses on globalization indicate the struggle between modernism, new technology and identity. Abu-Rabi’ (2004: 161) refers to the discontent that many Islamists feel with regards to the failure of the nation-state to ‘stem the tide of the “intellectual and cultural invasion” [*ghazw thaqafi wa fikri*] following independence from foreign control. He notes, furthermore, that they consider this the ‘most dangerous manifestation of colonialism after independence’ (p.161).

This is also noted in Curran and Park (2000):

Far from promoting self-sufficiency, the ‘modernization’ of developing countries merely fosters dependency within an exploitative system of global economic relations. It promotes American capitalist values and interests, and erodes local culture in a process of global homogenization (2000: 5).

However, what critics consider less frequently when it comes to satellite broadcasting is its potential for positive change and opportunities to make young people aware of social issues that affect them and to educate them about their rights and responsibilities (Geary *et al.*, 2005). Is Arab satellite viewing amongst the young ‘giving people access to information and ideas that those in authority in national societies have sought to suppress’? (Curran and Park, 2000: 7) Moreover, the sheer quantity of westernized Arab media need not signal a swamping of the national cultural tastes and a threat to national cultural identity. The media imperialism and the ‘one way flow of communication and influence from the West’ (cf. Nordenstreng and Schiller, 1993; Schiller, 1976) is challenged by the thesis that global flows are more likely ‘multi-directional’ (Robertson, 1992). The simple image of Western dominion propounded by Arab commentators, while it serves an ideological purpose, can fail to

acknowledge the complexity of the interaction between not only the West but many other sources (Sreberbny-Mohammadi, 1996) for “globalization today is only partly Westernization” (Giddens, 1999: 31) and the effects of globalization are felt ‘as much in Western countries as elsewhere’.

Curran and Park (2000) further explore the new process of globalization which they write: ‘selects elements of neatly partitioned national cultures, and remixes them in new ways for an international consumer culture’ (p.8). So how has satellite for Arab viewers - both as international and hybridized Arab broadcasting programming (i.e. not exclusively State-based) - produced and is producing a remixed Arab culture for youth? These are questions that will be explored in this study through youth testimonies, and involve a number of factors, such as region, gender, class, background, religion, and viewing patterns.

2.5 Arab Youth Identity and Culture

The construction of an identity is formed largely through a person’s or people’s allegiance to a common culture (Parekh, 1997: 167) or at least to certain aspects of it. National identity is understood here in terms of the experience of belonging to a community through symbols and rituals (Aslama and Panitti, 2007: 52). When defining the use of the word ‘culture’ it is understood for the purposes of this thesis to be integral to notions of identity and refers to ‘the entire or total way of life of people, including a shared social heritage, visions of social reality, value orientations, beliefs, customs, norms, traditions, skills, and the like’ (Barakat, 1993: 41). Parekh (1997) defines culture as ‘the body of beliefs and practices governing the conduct of the relevant area, be it a specific activity, an aspect of human experience, an organization or human life as a whole’ (p.165).

In referring to the Arab world, Barakat (1993) highlights the importance of a common language (Arabic), and religion (Islam) in creating a 'common culture' and therefore 'next to language, a single, shared culture has often been cited as the most basic element in Arab national identity' (Barakat 1993: 41). Identity as a political concept is very important for Arabs and is closely linked to the notion of *al-qawmiyyah al-'arabiyyah* that is pan-Arabism or Arab nationalism. For the purpose of this research, the term 'Arab' will be unpacked in light of its rhetorical use by my informants, and the value judgment that it reflects. When asked about where they felt their identity lay, all the informants (apart from the one Christian participant) talked about being 'Arab' as opposed to being Egyptian, Palestinian, Jordanian, Emirati, etc. Their Arab identity was felt to be enhanced by common religion, language, geographical unity and social ties which were perceived by the youth participants as cultural unifying factors. The term 'Arab' to my participants reflected a sense of national as well as pan-Arab identity: 'It is a feeling of a monolithic Arab entity that is enhanced by the strong religious, linguistic, social and economic ties uniting most Arabs. It is the perception of a shared attitude towards life, language and history (Badolato, 2004: 13).

On the other hand, the term 'Western' has been frequently used by my informants to refer to television programming that they felt were not in accordance with Arab culture, especially those that are not produced by or for the Arab society. It was clear during the course of this research that my informants used the term 'Western' to refer to any attempt or perceived attack on 'Arabness', in particular Arab unity, culture, or religion. The 'West' is commonly posited in antithesis to Arab interests within the informant's rhetorics. However, it is a term which in itself is problematic to define outside of its rhetorical context, particularly as it is often used in public discourse as

an ‘umbrella’ word – to cover any enemy, whether from outside or inside. Informants reveal their interpretation of the word when used in comparative value judgments.

Halim Barakat (1993: 32) describes ‘identity’ as the sharing of essential elements that define the character and orientation of people and affirm their common needs, interests, and goals with reference to joint action. At the same time it recognizes the importance of differences. For example, Yamani (2000), whose study on Arab youth focused on Saudi Arabia, posits that Islam is the main frame of reference for the personal and collective identity for the majority of Arab [Muslims]. It provides a powerful cohesive effect and gives a further spiritual sense of commonality within the Arab world (Yamani, 2000: 115; Badolato, 2004). Muslims account for over 90% of the population of all Arab countries except in Lebanon where Muslims are about half of the population.

The loss of Arab identity is perhaps the Arabs’ greatest fear. A look at Arab history shows that it has been dominated by warfare, domestic upheaval and struggles against invasions from outside the Arab world:

The legacy of this history is a basic, almost visceral mistrust of any outside group, or more specifically, any Western state whose true ultimate intentions cannot readily be determined, but which they feel will most likely be bad for the Arabs (Badolato, 2004: 5).

However, the conception of a solid identity is always hard to maintain, in particular as it is related to meaning (Hall, 1997: 208) and even more so because of today’s multi-cultural exchanges. Identity perhaps, as Parekh (1997) notes, is never entirely coherent ‘since a culture evolves over time, is a precipitate of diverse influences, and has no co-ordinating authority (p.166).

The current generation of Arab youth is arguably more exposed to other cultures than any previous generation (Meijer, 2000). The evolution of communications satellite in the Arab World has permitted a large proportion of young Arabs to access certain aspects of 'Other' [culture not perceived to be their own - not identified with - not necessarily non-Arab] or 'Western' cultures to an unprecedented scale. Perhaps part of the polemic surrounding satellite is the way in which it exposes alternative cultures or cultural practices to the greater public or masses. Are they the cause of 'internal heterogeneity' (Parekh, 1997: 167) and if so, how are these 'subcultures' dealt with or coped with in Arab cultural discourses and action? This section explores the questions of youth identity through the medium of positive and negative discourses arising as a result of 'outside or foreign' influences. The result of this interaction is that Arab youth are made to rethink their own culture and identity in light of new information. The outcome can be to question their identity or to reaffirm its separateness from the 'other'. Young people are at the centre of these discussions as the group expected to carry forward inherited notions of Arab identity while leading the nation into the globalized future (Ibrahim and Wassef, 2000: 161).

The concern is highlighted more by Islamic writers. For example, Juma' and Al-Shawāf (2005: 192) argue that the negative western social values coming through the media distort Arab youth's identity [*masakh shakhsiyyat al-shabāb*]. Juma' and Al-Shawāf quote Abu Hassan Al-Nadawy (n. d.) who highlighted the problems of youth, including "they lack some sort of message in which to believe in, which motivates them and towards which they will strive". 'The youth today find themselves born into a materialistic life which is full of prohibited temptations that disregard the *akhlaq* [morals] (2005: 192). The writers suggest that the solution lies in good Islamic role models as played by elders in the community as well as a sound religious upbringing.

In the rapid process of globalization, the popularity of satellite TV entertainment (largely music videos, reality shows, and TV soap) amongst Arab youth has given rise to critiques of its impact on their culture and identity. Young Arabs have recently been described as being 'Westernized'. Arab youth are portrayed as 'vulnerable' to Western cultural influences. The popularity of Western-derived music, television shows, video games, movies, and other types of leisure activities among youth in the Arab region are framed in terms of an 'imported agenda' and 'cultural imperialism' that 'corrupts' the youth, and ultimately, distances them from the so-called 'original' culture of their society (Amin, 2000; Juma' and Al-Shawāf, 2005).

Juma' and Al-Shawāf argue that TV has encouraged the mixing of sexes which leads to imitations, leading to the destruction of the youth segment of society. According to these writers, there is a fever of imitation amongst the youth which takes them over and makes them believe that things coming from the West are good things and that their own traditions are barbaric and do not fit into this modern civilization. The writers contend that it is in the nature of youth to love to imitate what they hear and what they see, 'which is why we see more attacks on women, theft, and other crimes' (2005: 235). The writers claim that this is because the youth do not know enough about their own history.

According to Juma' and Al-Shawāf, it is the spread of TV and the huge number of satellite channels that beam their 'bewitchment' around the clock, attracting youth to the false (*batil*) and especially the (*fann al-jins*) soft pornography, which is the most dangerous for youth life and may cause problems in their psyche which are unfixable (2005: 233).

The role played by television in the transformation of youth identity has been explored by Gillespie (1995) in her study focused on the Punjabi teenagers in Southall, London. Gillespie stresses the “much-needed empirical evidence to theoretical debates about the nature, scale and pace of cultural change today.” She notes that adolescence is a crucial period and interstitial point in their lives when questions of identity are subject to particularly intense negotiation:

Young people are both formed and transformed by their location in history and politics, language and culture. Both through their material and cultural consumption and production, they are also constructing new forms of identity, shaped by but at the same time reshaping the images and meanings circulated in the media and in the market (Gillespie, 1995: 2).

This thesis proposes to challenge the idea that globalization of the type often accused of satellite television is creating a homogenized Arab ‘westernized’ or ‘globalized’ youth identity, an idea which is apparently propounded by both the youth themselves as well as adult Arab commentators. It explores rather, the theories of post-globalization whereby “local transformation is as much a part of globalization” (Giddens, 1990: 64). Or whereby globalization and capitalism are “challenged by expressions of collective identity - on behalf of cultural singularity” (Castells, 2004: 3).

The empirical research data garnered from my fieldwork demonstrates a trend in satellite and youth relations closer to that which may be called ‘glocalization’ rather than the ‘globalization’ often mentioned in Arab discourse. Robertson (1995) adopts the concept of *glocalization*, to express the global production of the local and the localization of the global. The question here, however, is how much ‘Westernization’ is implied in this process. Grixiti (2006: 508) demonstrates in his study of Maltese youth and global media, that the ‘local and the global have become deeply

intertwined, paradoxically reinforcing as they symbiotically transform each other' (cf. Robertson, 1992; Appadurai, 1996; Kraidy, 1999; Morley, 2000). Just as by the 1980s, the cultural imperialist discourse began to be perceived as inadequate "in terms of the reality which the theory purports to explain" (Sinclair *et al.*, 1996: 7) so does this thesis argue against the "assumption of Western domination" (*ibid.* p.9) and a sweeping application of the 'globalization' theory as a threat to 'indigenous culture and identity' which is so often expressed in the Arab youth and adult discourses. However, as Hamid Naficy argues in *The making of exile cultures: Iranian television in Los Angeles*, while the so-called agents of Westernization are localized, domesticated, and indigenized: 'They (the audience) think with American cultural products but they do not think American; the local response to an international media (or the transborder satellite) is idiosyncratic' (1993: 2).

2.5.1 Youth Culture: between the local and the global

The influence of local and global culture on youth depends to a large degree on the culture into which Western values and products are injected (Geary *et al.*, 2005: 6). For example, in many parts of Asia, Geary *et al.* argue that global media have contributed to broadening the worldview and deepening the understanding of young people about such global issues as women's rights and environmental concerns. Even so, with many Asian families emphasizing a strong bond with children, Asian teenagers are less likely to question the authority of their parents (2005: 6).

According to Geary *et al.* while Western media clearly contributes in a major way to shaping a global youth culture, this youth culture might be characterized more as a part of a young person's identity development, which does not necessarily extinguish one's involvement in aspects of local culture:

Not all youth are part of this global youth culture; its members are found where there is access to global media, which means primarily urban areas. But the number of youth in urban areas continues to grow, and thus so do the commonalities across borders. At the same time, access to media in rural areas continues to grow, taking many global themes beyond urban centres (2005: 8).

However, access to global culture through television, does not necessarily entail automatic subscription to global culture on the part of the youth. Barker (1999) for example, notes that watching television is part of a set of socially and culturally informed activities, a significant aspect of which is concerned with discursive *meaning*: ‘Television audiences are active creators, they do not simply accept uncritically textual meanings but bring previously acquired cultural competences to bear on them’ (p.110).

Moreover, local culture plays a strong role in shaping the identity of youth. A study of 600 adolescents aged between 14 to 19 in Singapore concluded that youth develop their own culture as part of establishing independence from their parents, “the old adage of ‘think globally, but act locally’ is equally applicable when it comes to teen fashion and purchases” (Geary *et al.*, 2005: 10). Both local and global cultures are important to youth, with some youth asserting that they are seeking a balance between global and local cultures. The impact of global media appears to vary depending on the culture into which Western values and products are injected, the media outlets available to various groups of youth, and other factors. The Haatso Youth Club in Ghana submitted a proposed policy recommendation to the Oxfam International Youth Parliament that read in part:

We are driven by enormous pressure into a very consumerist lifestyle, stimulated by transnational corporations as well as commercial mass media. In contrast, we witness at the same time the stark poverty widespread in our region and the world. We see our own cultures giving way to a consumerist monoculture. There is an urgent need to revisit, appreciate, and participate in the evolution of our own cultures, which are community-oriented, non-materialistic, eco-friendly, and holistic in their worldview. We need to develop the

Arab youth are seeking an identity in an increasingly globalized world without losing their distinctive Arab identity or becoming westernized. Yamani (2000) argues that youth suffer a sense of incoherence and dislocation: "The new generation has grown up in a complex, confusing and rapidly changing world" (p.50). They have to operate in a globalized economy, but want the certainties of a localized culture (p.51); they are torn between trying to keep up with modernization and global culture on the one hand and being seen as 'Western' on the other hand (Meijer, 2000). In other words, and as described by a report published online, they seek modernism without 'Westoxification'. They want to indulge in behaviour that displays self-confidence, which might make them an approved role model with their peers. Largely they are steering the change they aspire to in a moderate and non-rebellious way.¹⁷

In the words of a young Saudi female, 'it is about striking the right balance between Islam and a modern way of life.' Another Saudi male said 'We want the kind of freedoms that the Americans enjoy i.e. freedom of speech, democracy and progress, but rooted in Islamic values.'¹⁸ Researching Saudi youth Mai Yamani (2000) notes that the dress they wear and the food they eat represents the complexity and tension of the situation. Yamani explains that Western fashions inspired by satellite television and the US-dominated global culture compete with Saudi culture and national dress. The music available to them through various channels is officially banned by the *'ulama* [religious elite] (p.9)

¹⁷ Aligning brands with emerging Arab youth values, a report from Saudi Arabia. AMEINFO 20 April 2005 [online] Available from <http://www.ameinfo.com/58185.html> [accessed 15 June 2005]

¹⁸ *ibid.*

Discourses in the state media in most Arab countries address youth as a group in need of guidance and saving from deviation, using a didactic tone to address youth, instructing them to keep away from deviant behavior, such as drug use, openness about sexuality, or mixing between the sexes in adolescence, and instead mobilize their energy for the good of their country (Ibrahim and Wassef, 2000: 162). Abaza (2001) argues that this strong discourse goes with an increasingly strict morality pertaining to public conduct and is related to the growing Islamization of the society that has been taking place since the 1970s. The press is on a witch-hunt, infantilizing women and youth, who are thought to be easily perverted and therefore have to be constantly watched (Abaza 2001: 102).

2.5.2 Arab Culture and Identity: negotiating between tradition and modernity

Modernization has often seen itself linked in Arab discourse with ‘Westernization’ and the dominant colonial power and therefore as something to be rejected, and yet equally, as something to be aspired to. Yamani (2000) notes that there is a deep and widespread unease that modernity may well entail more than just the acquisition of technology: ‘For many modernity brings Western values that threaten Saudi traditions’ (p.8). A deeper investigation of motivations behind anti-Westernization comments, reveal that it is not Westernization nor modernisation *per se* which are deemed problematic, but the form or extent to which they are adopted. For example, in its equation with modernization, certain traits associated with ‘Westernization’ such as medical and technological advances are deemed good to adopt. One of the youth interviewed from Abu Dhabi highlighted that Arabs should be selectively influenced by the West, and its many ‘good things’.¹⁹ On the other hand, receptability to or adoption of other influences - and in particular those affecting culture - are more

¹⁹ Focus group interview (3), United Arab Emirates January 2005

sensitively viewed [see Chapter Nine] and the same interviewee criticized the adoption of “rubbish Western TV-formats” (*ibid.* ft.17) Although technology and culture are bound to each other, it is the latter in which struggles are more publicly enacted.

For in a process akin to reverse-Orientalism and thus named ‘occidentalism’ (Buruma and Margalit, 2005) is the construction of an Arab discourse of the ‘other’, one which sees the struggle between globalization and modernism and Arab identity-building within the context of a perceived strong Western influence enacted within the culture sector. Danielson, referring to the 1920s, but equally applicable today, describes the space created by entertainment where ‘solutions to the dilemma of the usefulness of European culture were tried out, adopted modified, and abandoned – quite literally acted out – with participants from all strata of society (1999: 119).

The Occident represents both the object of fright and admiration in Arab discourse: Burke (2006) reported that a recent poll in Egypt asked where people would most like to live and which country they most hated: “The answer to both questions was, predictably, [the United States of] America.” Yet colonisation - whether territorial or otherwise - is often countered by affirming and contrasting the Self with the Other; particularly within the spheres of culture. The conflict of Westernization and self-identity characterises most of the Arab discourse on Arab ‘pop’ culture. Arab responses to ‘threatening’ Westernizing influences have varied between caricaturisation or gross distortion of the feared element, and written discourses whereby the West is seen to embody the worst of a nation’s fears. Commenting on Arab music videos, Abdel-Wahab Elmessiri says that audiences should just look towards the West (and MTV) to see what happens if the video clip is left uncontrolled:

“vulgarity and alienation...the flesh parade” and human beings being systematically turned into “human protein” (2005: 6).

Is the threat of Westernization which predominates Arab discourses greatly over-estimated, as is believed by Freund (2003)? He points out, for example, that Arabic music videos feature very little apparent ‘American’ influence; there's a far more powerful Latin influence on the music, and even a notable non-Western influence especially from Bollywood.²⁰ Some of the most controversial clips are characterized by a strong ‘Arab’ or ‘Egyptian’ iconography such as the belly-dance and the costume. For example, in her video clip *Eba'Abelny*, controversial Egyptian sexy female singer Ruby appears in a neo-Pharaonic two-piece costume. As she sings she slides a very large snake around her neck and moves her body in provocative ways while the camera focuses a great deal on her gyrating pelvic area.²¹ She presents herself as a highly erotic figure; a crystallisation of men's desires, there for their pleasure and visual enjoyment.²² In *Enta Aref Leh* [You Know Why], by the same Artistic Director, Sherif Sabri, she is portrayed walking down a street (filmed on location in the Netherlands) in a pink two-piece belly dance costume.

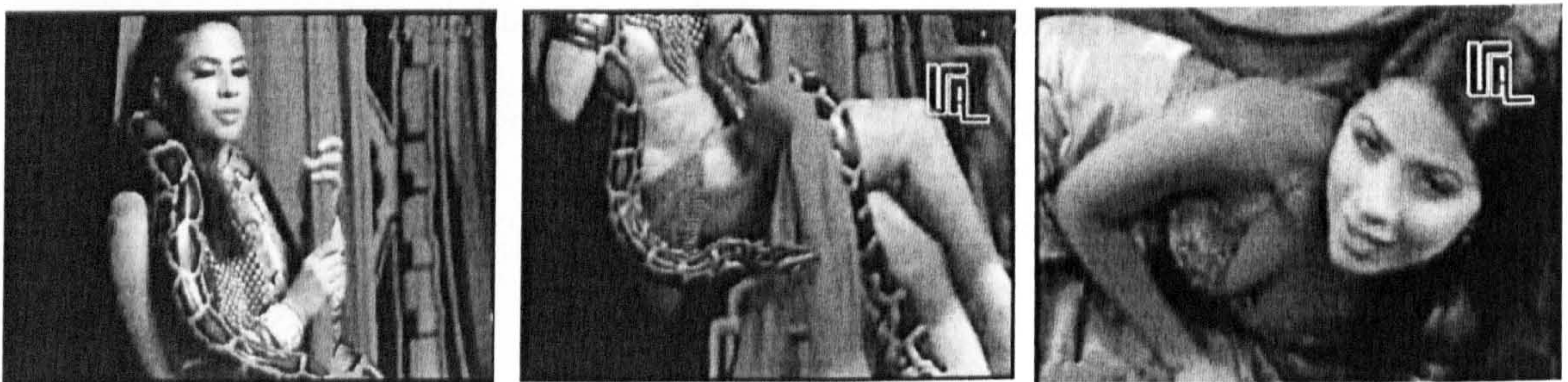


Figure 1: Ruby in her video clip *Eba'Abelny*

It is not the degree to which external iconography actually reflects the West that are of concern to Arab audiences but it is the underlying message for Arab society and its

20 See Hisham Abbas video clip for Habibi Dah, Nari Nareyn (hit in 2000) set in India with Indian performer Jayashree. For references to media globalization from an Indian perspective see Sundaram 2005:55.

21 Ruby, www.youtube.com/watch?v=mg5kkGr0bbQ [accessed 15 August 2006]

effects as a tool for social change - for the bad! For as is demonstrated by Afsaruddin (1999) referring to the 1920s but equally applicable today:

Much of the technology that enabled these women to move into the public eye was foreign. The personae that they developed to occupy the space were usually not. They did not simply mimic the Greta Garbos that were picture in newspapers and magazines of the 1920s...they are at once the agents of cultural production and participants in it (p.138).

2.6 The construction of Arab youth identity

For a very long time the state has been influential in the construction of young people's identity through mass media and the education system of which the youth are the primary consumers. Moreover, television is found by Hind and Wassef (2000: 162) to play an especially important role in countries such as Egypt because of the high rate of illiteracy, which according to statistics on the Arab League's Population and Immigration Policies Administration website stands at 38.7%.²³ More recent data obtained from UNESCO on world youth illiteracy rates by region and sex show that after South and West Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, the Arab states have the highest illiteracy (UNESCO 2006)²⁴. While poor literacy levels surely ensure greater popularity for the visual media, it does not necessarily mean that television exerts any greater influence over its illiterate than over its literate audience.

The point of reference for the construction of self-identity for many youths is based around three principal frameworks: the family, the street, and the state, according to Meijer (2000: 2). The family remains the traditional centre of social life in the Arab world, although over the past generation, the wider family (second cousins etc.), is

²² See Virolle, M., 1995. *Women in Rai Music [La Chanson Rai]* (Translated by Rachid Aadnani and Michael Toler). Paris: Kathala.

²³ Website accessed on 22/11/2004 at (<http://www.poplas.org/cairo%20declaration.htm>)

losing its previous significance in preference to the nuclear family. This is due to changing social factors, such as emigration to other urban centres for work purposes.²⁵ Yamani (2000: 92), however, notes that the family unit remains the centre of the new generation's world – and basis of identity for all youth, both male and female, continues to be familial. The family still fulfils the task of primary socialisation and transmission of basic values and norms, as well as providing security and economic protection. The state provides sources of identity via secondary socialization channels such as education and state-controlled media. The 'street' represents important spheres of action or influence that fall outside the family and the state (Meijer, 2000: 2), where youth may encounter such influences as Islamist organizations, peer groups and even political movements.

However, Meijer neglects to specify the role and influence of the new media, namely satellite broadcasting and the internet, both of which this research will prove to have a significant role in the lives of young Arabs. At the time of the research and writing for Meijer's edited collection, the new media may have not yet occupied such a central role in the lives of youth as it does today. Since the publication of Meijer's book, the internet penetration rate and the popularity of satellite broadcasting has steadily risen in the majority of Arab countries. Most of the entertainment programmes quoted by youth in this thesis started after the year 2000. This explains why neither the internet nor satellite broadcasting are given the attention within Meijer's edition they would deserve in a more recent publication.

24 UNESCO Institute of Statistics, World Youth Literacy Rates, (2006). [online] available from at http://www.uis.unesco.org/ev.php?ID=5020_201&ID2=DO_TOPIC [[accessed on 19 January 2007]

25 This has been witnessed within the family of my Egyptian research assistant who recounts that throughout the 80s and 90s, male members of the family moved from Alexandria with their new families to Cairo for better job prospects, two emigrated - one returned, and the other has stayed and successfully integrated. The family often comment on the break-down of the close family structure which they experienced during the 70s, whereby they all lived within walking distance of each other.

By examining the role of satellite television in the construction of youth identity, this research will modify and develop Meijer's model to include other significant factors to the construction of youth identity. Meijer's model as it stands encompasses neither the internet, which increasingly has a role, nor the transnational satellite phenomena, (the focus of this research). Chapter nine highlights some of the main features of representation that concern Arab youth and examines the significance of this representation in terms of its influence on youth construction of their social visions as well as whether youth engagement with satellite television and associated public discussions engenders changes in identity.

2.7 Conclusion

Empirical audience research hardly exists in the Arab world and the studies that exist are largely the work of students or market driven based on survey research (Ayish 2002; Sabry 2003). The fear expressed in Arab public debates of a campaign of cultural imperialism that is targeting Arab society, especially the youth through the media thus 'Westernizing' or 'Americanizing them', is hardly based on empirical audience research, but depends mainly on observations and distribution of Western media programmes on Arab television. It is clear that Arab scholars have a strong perception that youth consumption of television is passive in nature, making them vulnerable to forces of cultural imperialism. However, it is my contention that youth are active audiences and that there is an over stated fear of cultural imperialism within Arab society. By conducting an ethnography of youth discourses, I endeavour to examine the relationship between media consumption and dynamics of youth identity and notions of cultural imperialism as well as examining the extent to which cultural

imperialism as advocated by Arab scholars is valid and related to Arab youth. My aim is to give youth a voice, to listen to their opinions on these issues.

I also aim at highlighting the importance of local and empirical work that listens to youth, to contextualize their status, views, and feelings as expressed by those interviewed for this research.

3.1 Introduction

Since television's inception in the Arab world in the mid 1950s and in the 1960s there have been rising expectations about harnessing the medium to promote Arab-Islamic culture, and terrestrial state television has in particular tried to promote cultural revival and heritage (Ayish, 2002: 1). Nevertheless, as Ayish notes: 'in its 50-year experience, the Arab world's television contribution to cultural enrichment and revival has been far less than impressive: "For quite a long time, human and technical resource shortages seemed to have inhibited an appropriate representation of cultural values and practices on television" (*ibid.*).

The advent of satellite broadcasting in the mid 1990s in the Arab region has intensified debates on broadcasting and culture, in particular because of the growing volume of imported and adopted programme formats that emanate primarily from Western visual cultural modes (*ibid.*) such as singing contest shows (*Super Star*; *Star Academy*) and TV reality shows (*Big Brother*; *Al-Wady*) which have greatly dominated the programming scene on Arab satellite television in the last five years. These have caused a stir in the Arab world which will be discussed in depth in chapters eight and nine.

This chapter aims to provide a brief overview of Arab satellite broadcasting developments in the Arab region with analysis of the impact of the new media on Arab audiences who for a long time had access only to terrestrial and state owned and controlled television channels.

3.2 History of satellite broadcasting in the Arab World: 1969-2007

Over the past decade and half, the number of Arab Satellite channels has increased from a handful of channels in the beginning to almost 300 channels broadcasting a wide variety of genres.¹ Satellite broadcasting came first to the region on 12 December 1990, when the Egyptian Satellite Channel started transmission. However, the idea of using an Arab satellite for communications, education and development was first discussed in the Tunisian city of Benzert where Arab ministers of Information and Culture were meeting in 1967. The ministers adopted a resolution to use satellite technology in support of Arab information systems and modernization of mass media and communications in the Arab countries (Khalil, 1983).

Khalil notes that the resolution, however, was not stimulated by the great need of communications and development, but rather as a political decision taken in a political climate. This was taken just after the Arab defeat in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war as a result of which Israel occupied the Palestinian territories of Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem (1983: 291).

The Arab Satellite Communication Organization (Arabsat) was established nine years after the 1967 Arab Ministers decision to use satellite communications network for the purpose of cultural and communication exchange between Arab countries. The Arabsat agreement was signed on 14 April 1976, in the general security council of the Arab League in Cairo. Arabsat was established by the member states of the Arab League with a broader goal; to serve the needs of telecommunication, information, culture and education sectors (Negrine, 1997). It was given a mandate to design,

¹ Number of regional broadcasting TV channels to double in next 5 years, 20 Sep 2005 [online] available from http://business.maktoob.com/News-20050920040452-Number_of_regional_broadcasting_TV_channels_to_double_in_next_5_years.aspx [accessed 12 November 2006]

configure and operate a satellite system, as well as to define and deliver a portfolio of satellite-based, public and private telecommunications services to the Arab States, in accordance with the International Standards (Arabsat, 2004).



Figure 2: Logo: The Arab Satellite Communication Organization

However, Arab satellite only became a reality in 1985, and by 1987 only 7 of the 22 Arab countries signatory to the Arabsat agreement had ground facilities capable of using the system. This reason was chiefly financial as many Arab countries found it difficult to find sufficient hard currency to employ the mainly western companies in constructing down-and-up linking facilities to use Arabsat (Boyd, 1993).

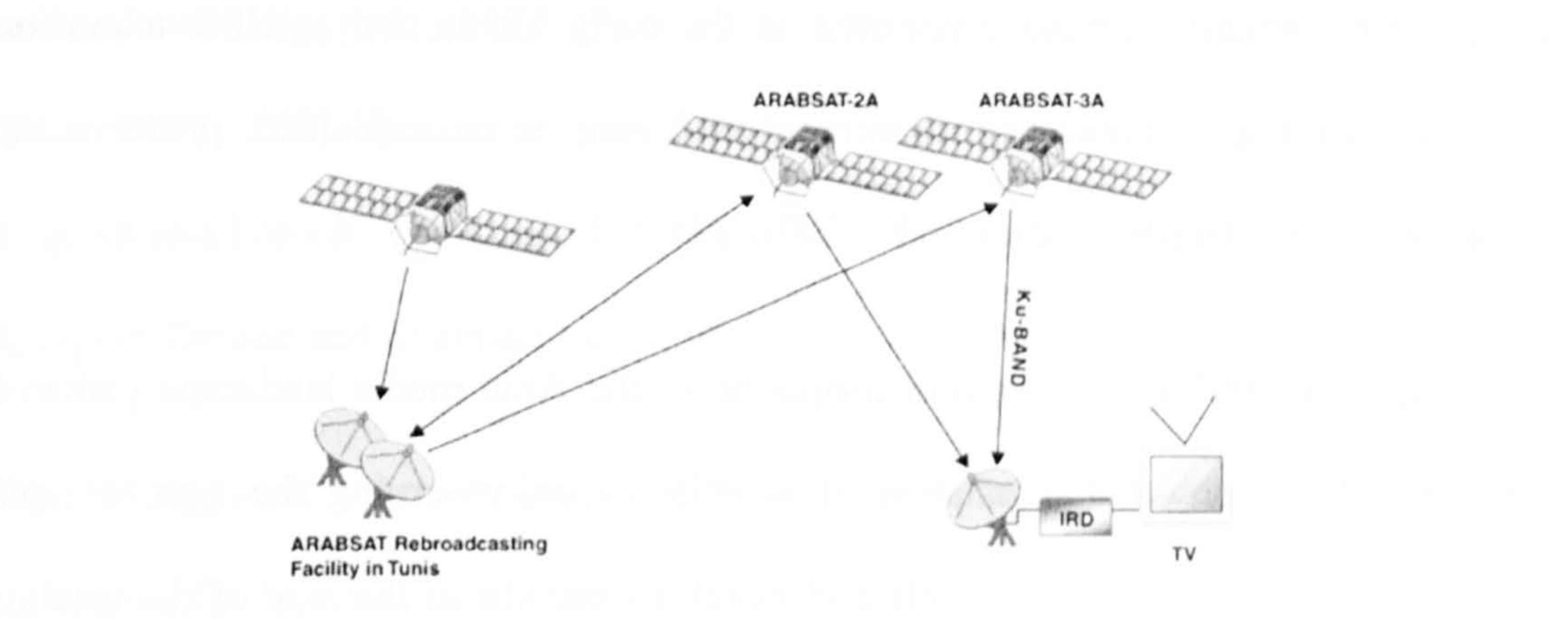


Figure 3: Direct-To-Home TV Broadcasting.

3.3 Arab Satellite Channels

The Arab world joined the technological revolution in the mid 1970s when preparation started for the creation of a pan-Arab satellite network, eventually to be called the Arab Satellite Organization (Arabsat). The first Arab communications

satellite was launched in 1985 (Abdulla, 2005: 151). The Egyptian Radio and Television Union (ERTU), a very influential and active organization, began planning the Arab first satellite channel which was to be called the 'Egypt Space Channel' (ESC) in November 1989 and it began broadcasting in December 1990 in the aftermath of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait (Chalaby, 2005; Abdulla, 2005; Al-Helwani, 2002). [For pre-1993 exposé of Arab electronic media see Douglas A. Boyd, 1993).

The Egyptian Space Channel was originally set up to counteract Iraqi propaganda aimed at Egyptian soldiers posted in the Gulf (Sakr, 2001). However, Al-Helwani (2002) notes that one of the main objectives behind the launch of ESC was to introduce Arab culture to the rest of the world and to provide an Arab alternative acting to preserve Arab culture and identity (*ibid.* p.92). Safwat al-Sharif, former Egyptian information minister believed in the early 1990s that satellite television could be used to promote the country abroad and, as he explained, preserve 'an "Arab-Islamic" identity' within (Sakr, 2001: 33).

Following the 1991 Gulf war, transformation of the Arab media landscape gathered pace, involving physical expansion of satellite capacity serving the area, a rapid increase in the number of channels and matching growth in the size of the satellite audience (Sakr, 2001:11). Founded by two rich and well-connected Saudi entrepreneurs - Sheikh Saleh Kamel and Sheikh Walid Bin Ibrahim al Ibrahim - the Middle East Broadcasting Centre (MBC) was launched in London in September 1991 (*ibid.* p.12). Emirates Dubai Television (EDTV) began its satellite channel a year later in October 1992. It started out on Arabsat, but soon arranged for the signal to be carried by Eutelsat, Galaxy and Intelsat satellites, so that, by 1995, its programmes even reached South America (*ibid.*).

The Arab World has four competing digital television platforms: ART/1st Net, Orbit, Star Select, and Gulf DTH/Showtime (Amin, 2000). In 1993, Sheikh Saleh Kamel withdrew his partnership in MBC and set up Arab Radio and Television (ART), which was to be developed into a pay-TV venture (Sakr, 2001). ART developed from a single free-to-air analogue Direct-to-Home channel to a full service of many popular channels. In addition to transmission to the Middle East on Arabsat 3A and Nilesat 101, the company also broadcast to Europe, North America, South America, Asia, and Australia (Amin, 2000).

Orbit, another Arabic pay TV service, owned by Al-Mawarid Group of Saudi Arabia, came on the market in May 1994 (Sakr, 2001) and includes both Arab and Western programming (Amin, 2000).

In May 1994, Egypt launched its second satellite channel, Nile TV International (Al-Shal, 2002: 180). It commenced experimental broadcasting in October 1993 in English and French. The main objective of this network was to promote the image of Egypt in Europe and to attract tourism (Amin, 2000).

In 1998 Egypt launched its own satellite called NileSat 101 which provides services in various fields, especially in education, media and culture. NileSat 101 started with 10 specialized channels: Nile Drama, Nile News, Nile Sports, Nile Culture, Nile Kids, Nile Variety, Nile Education, Nile Higher Education, Nile Science, and Nile Information (Al-Helwani, 2002: 98; Abdulla, 2005: 152). In 2000, Egypt launched its second satellite, NileSat 102, worth 140 million US dollars (Al-Helwani, 2002: 122).

The Egyptian satellites carry 77 channels of which 48 are Egyptian channels. The others are Arab and international channels. The Arab channels include: Arab News

Network (ANN), Palestine Satellite Channel, MBC, Oman, Bahrain, Kuwait, Andalus, Libya, Iraq, NBN, Ajman, Al-Jazeera, Dubai, Dubai Sports, Dubai Drama, Dubai Economics. The international channels include: TV5, Nile TV, Tourist channel, Advertising Channel (Al-Helwani, 2002: 124).

The latest entrant to the Middle East satellite communications sector and the first totally privately owned Arab satellite communications company, Noorsat came to existence in 2005. Headquartered in Manama, the capital of Bahrain, Noorsat was created by Arab investors from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf region. The platform can provide transponder capacity from five satellite locations including the two Middle East hot spots at 26 degrees East co-located with ArabSat, and 7 degrees West co-located with NileSat.² Noorsat offers a whole spectrum of high quality voice, video, data and Internet satellite communication solutions across the Middle East, North Africa and Europe.³

² Noorsat communications platform starts operations. 15 Aug 2005. [online] available from http://business.maktoob.com/News-20050815120231-Noorsat_communications_platform_starts_operations.aspx [accessed 12 November 2006]

³ Number of regional broadcasting TV channels to double in next 5 years, 20 Sep 2005 [online] available from http://business.maktoob.com/News-20050920040452-Number_of_regional_broadcasting_TV_channels_to_double_in_next_5_years.aspx [accessed 12 November 2006]

Figure 4: Arabsat TV Channels List



Source: <http://arabsat.com/ArabSat/English/AboutUS/> [accessed 23 December 2006]

Arab satellite channels essentially cover the whole Arab region and even much of Europe. A more limited number of these channels also reach the United States, Australia, Africa, Latin America and parts of Asia where they target Arab diasporic communities. While most of the programmes of Arab satellite channels are broadcast via Arabsat, the remaining programmes are broadcast via: Intelsat 703, Eutelsat hot bird 2, Intelsat II F3, Orion Echostar, Panamsat Pas 4-2-3 and Nilesat 705 (ASBU, 2004).

The bulk of Arab satellite channels emit their programmes wholly in Arabic: some of them, however, also emit part of their programmes in French, English or Spanish. In terms of programming, Arab satellite channels can be divided into two categories: specialized channels, such as movie, music and sports exclusive channels and multi-purpose or collective channels, which offer a variety of programming. There are 58 multi-purpose Arab satellite channels broadcasting a variety of programmes. There are also about 50 channels specializing in such areas as children, sports, news, drama/cinema, music, documentaries, education/culture, and religion.

In terms of ownership and operation, Arab satellite channels are divided into State owned and run channels and private channels. Chalaby (2005) notes that many of Arab satellite channels originate from authoritarian regimes and they proliferate in the Middle East, where virtually all governments have launched satellite channels since the Gulf War in 1991. The remaining channels vary between commercial channels and privately owned channels with connections to governments and businesses. The number of private channels has been increasing over the last few years. The Middle East Broadcasters Journal (2006) quotes a survey published in mid-2005 which shows that since the end of 2003 there has been a 120% rise in privately-owned channels in

the Arab World compared to a 21% rise in government-owned channels. According to the study, 57% of satellite channels in the Arab World are privately-owned compared to 36% of non government-owned satellite channels at the end of 2003 (MEBJ, 2006: 4).

3.4 Arab Audiences and Arab Satellite Broadcasting

‘Arab satellite channels opened new worlds for Arab viewers’.

(Abu Osb'a, 2004: 259)

It can be argued that Arab viewers are the main beneficiaries of the satellite revolution in the Arab world. The technology has permeated most Arab homes to have access to satellite broadcasting, and as Boyd suggests, it is ideally suited for a culture that looks to the family for its entertainment needs (Boyd, 1993: 53). Juma' and Al-Shawāf (2005) in bemoaning the cultural invasion of youth through satellite, highlight that the popularity and thus increase in satellite was as a result of its cheapness and its ability to reach many areas and countries (p.330).

Satellite broadcasting has abolished distance, linked remote territories into new viewing communities and acted as the ‘Trojan horse’ of media liberalization (Sinclair *et al.*, 1996: 2). Hence, one of the major consequences of the proliferation of ASB channels is that Arab audiences gained access to many types of channels. The number of free-to-air Arab satellite channels now exceeds 200 (MEBJ, 2006: 4). Since June 2005, 45 new satellite TV channels have begun broadcasting on ArabSat and Nilesat. This represents a growth of 29% in 4 months and an annualized growth rate of 87% (*ibid.*). Right until early 1990s Arab audiences had little choice in what kind of programmes they could watch on local or national TV since governments have had full control over terrestrial television and there was little access to regional or international media (Sakr, 2001). For the first time in the history of Arab media, Arab

audiences across the Arab world follow and take part in, on a daily basis, open social, cultural and political debates and news coverage moving at unprecedented pace and presented in incomparable depth. Sakr (2001) notes that the Arab world entered a new phase in 1996, marked by the arrival LBC and FUTURE TV from Lebanon Al-Jazeera television from Qatar. The three broke the mould, but in different ways:

The Lebanese entrance instantly changed the dominance enjoyed until then by Egyptian and Saudi satellite channels. Flamboyant gameshows, general informality and attractive female presenters were noted as hallmarks of the two Lebanese channels LBC and Future TV. The other new comer of 1996, Al-Jazeera Satellite Channel from Doha in Qatar... astonished viewers with uncensored political coverage quite different from any Arabic language television programming previously seen. (Sakr, 2001: 13)

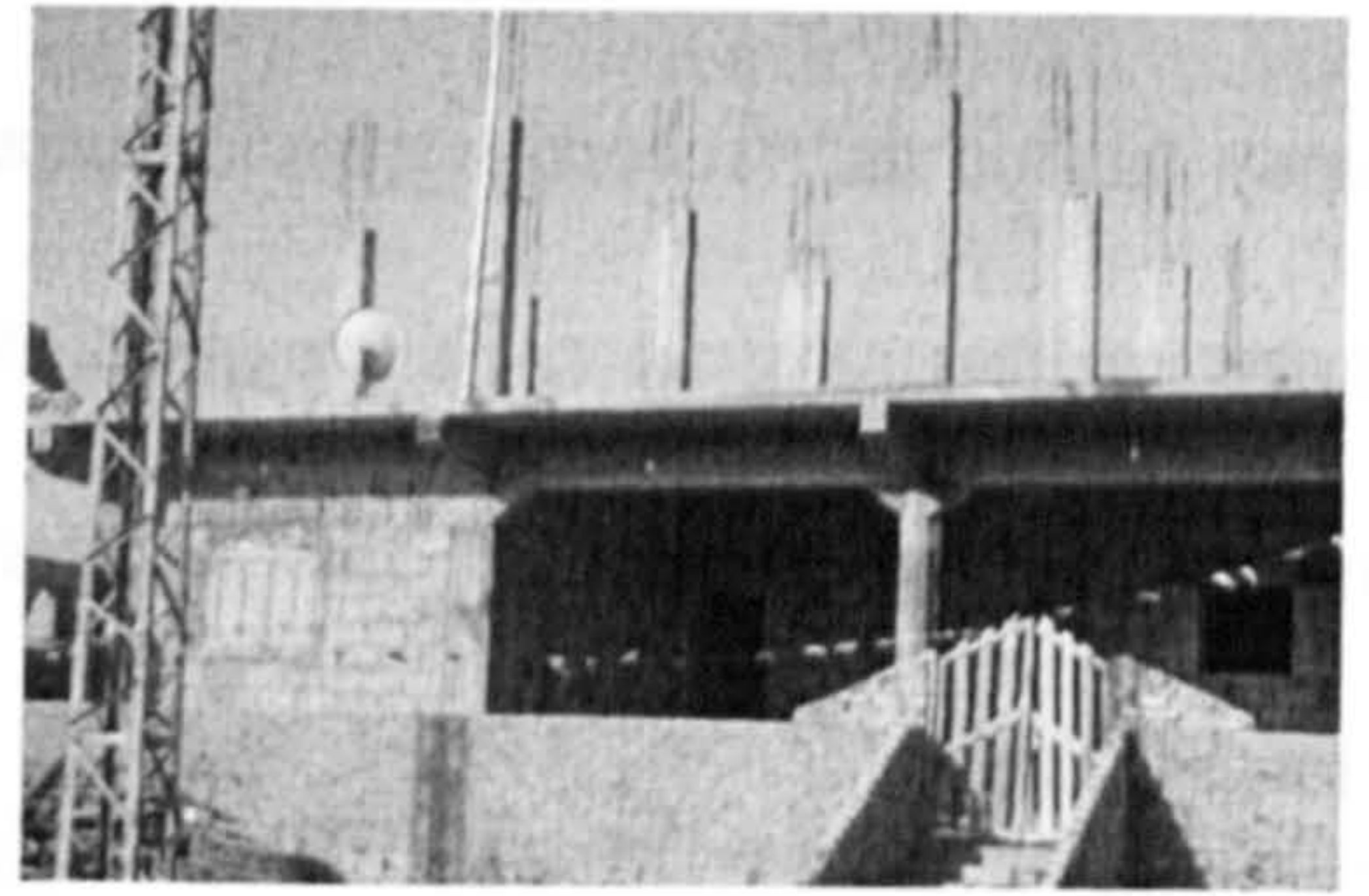
The Al-Jazeera Satellite Channel stunned Arab governments and audiences by showing free political debates, including interactive debates with live phone-ins, which formed a new forum of freedom of expression in the region. This has made the channel very popular amongst audiences in the region (Amin 2000). According to the Middle East Broadcasters Journal 67% is Al Jazeera's daily reach in the Arab world followed by Al-Arabiya, 44.2%, CNBC, 10.4%, CNN International, 4.6%, and BBC World with 3.7% (MEBJ, 2006: 5).

Moreover, with the advent of satellite technology in the Arab world, audiences became able to choose from a wide variety of foreign channels. Nonetheless, Arab viewers with access to hundreds of foreign channels still prefer to watch Arab satellite channels. Arab viewers with satellite dishes tend to prefer Arab channels due to the factor of common language and culture (Taweela, 2002; Abu Osb'a, 2004; see also Morley and Robins, 1995).

Figure 5: Their popularity is in evidence if one just looks at an Arab skyline.



The ubiquitous satellite dish is a view familiar throughout Egypt, urban and rural.(Giza, Cairo 2005. Photo by author).



An essential accessory: the satellite dish is fitted before the house is even completed. (House in outskirts of Ismailiya, Egypt 2005. Photo by author).

Arab families seem keen on obtaining a satellite dish and a decoder to have free access to satellite broadcasting. The number of Egyptians with access to satellite television has risen from 10% in the 1990 to over 70% (Karam, 2005: 975). Access to satellite is certainly much cheaper than it was a few years ago, and poor people seem to be willing to sacrifice food to buy satellite dishes (*ibid.*). Writing in 1993, Boyd mentions a case study in which ‘given a choice between a refrigerator and a television set, many lower-income people select the television set.’⁴ Satellite dishes can be seen everywhere in most Arab countries; on rooftops in slums and rich suburbs, in rural and urban areas, in villages and towns, owned by rich and poor alike.

Even when the cost of the satellite dishes is relatively low, the poorer population in Egypt have developed a new system called *jami'a* (co-op) in order to obtain access to satellite broadcasting. The *jami'a* is an inherited habit that is considered a sort of social liability or a compulsory saving, as each individual in a work group whether consisting of relatives or neighbours, commits to paying a monthly sum of money, which is gathered by somebody whom everybody trusts, and who is responsible for

4 (Rugh interview 1980) in Boyd 1993: 54

handing out this amount periodically to the members of the group or the co-op, with everyone of them ending up with a large sum of money that can fulfil his needs or repay his debts. According to Egyptian Magazine *Hurriyah al-Missriyah*, half of those participating in such a system over the past two years invested their co-op money in buying satellite dishes, after it became a fashion among all groups and classes.

The world has become a small village, and everybody wants to know what's happening in every spot of this village, and no better way to achieve that than satellite channels or the Internet, but the latter needs special skills and proficiency in the English language, but watching satellite channels needs no skill or mind work, and that's why everybody resorts to it (Al-Watan Voice, 2004).⁵

Even viewers with no access to satellite television are enjoying the improvements and changes introduced by state television in order to try to live up to the challenge and even threat posed by Arab satellite channels.

The report *TV Broadcasters in the Middle East Face Significant Challenges* (2004) describes the 'policy of segmentation' in order to maximise viewership which involves the launching of specialized channels targeted at specific audience groups. The report highlights for example, the launch of Al-Arabiya 24-hour news channel in 2003 by Saudi-owned MBC in competition with the Qatar-based Al-Jazeera. Al-Jazeera in turn launched Al-Jazeera Sports, Al-Jazeera Live, Al-Jazeera Kids [all launched in 2005], Al-Jazeera Documentaries (2006) and most recently, Al-Jazeera International (in English 2007). The 24-hour music channels; Rotana, Melody, and Mazzika each expanded into three music channels and one movie channel.⁶ These last changes demonstrate that the popularity with the viewing public and thus competition between these channels has in practice translated into better choice for the viewers as

⁵ Dish-Mania: Five Million Satellite Dishes in Egypt, 2004. Donia Al Watan 26 September 2004 [online] available from <http://www.alwatanvoice.com/articles.php?go=articles&id=10236> [accessed 5 March 2005]

⁶ These music channels are owned by, and carry the name of Arab music and recording companies.

was demonstrated by a recent study *TV Broadcasters in the Middle East Face Significant Challenges* (2004), which concluded that: 'Competition...will likely generate quality programming and more innovative offerings on TV and other media platforms...Consequently niche viewers are likely to be more adequately served through segmented media offerings'.⁷

Yet, despite these innovations, the most widely watched Arab television programmes remained relatively homogenous. Abu Osb'a (2004) notes that the huge number of Arab satellite channels does not necessarily mean more choice for the viewer. 'If the channels are different in name or ownership, their content is still more or less similar and this content is largely entertainment' (2004: 250). However:

Despite the fact that UNESCO statistic and other population studies indicate that more than 40 percent of the population of the GCC states [Gulf Cooperation Council countries] is under the ages of 15, children's programmes on the region's channels were few and did not account for more than 5 percent of total transmission time. Worse, most of these programmes were imported from the West and are mostly cartoons and animation (ECSS 1998)⁸

Taweela (2002: 6) argues that Arab satellite channels 'minimize the value of work and activate dreams of instant and effortless wealth in the overwhelming quantity of superficial game shows on almost every channel.' This was corroborated by a review of media output included in the *Arab Human Development Report* 2003, which found that light entertainment was the most common offering, and described it as predominantly 'superficial, repetitive in content, and promot[ing] values that encourage consumerism and a reduction of work' (UNDP, 2003: 61). Abdellatif Aloofy (1998) also notes that: 'Entertainment was the most dominant category of programme offered by Gulf satellite channels. This was to be expected, since

⁷ *TV Broadcasters in the Middle East Face Significant Challenges*, 2004. Booz Allen Hamilton Publications [online] available from www.boozallen.com [cited 12 March 2005]

⁸ *The information revolution and the Arab world: its impact on state and society*, 1998 Abu Dhabi: The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research.

previous audience studies indicated that entertainment programmes were by far the most popular among Gulf viewers (p.71).

Among the proliferation of satellite channels are those specializing in culture (such as Nile Culture and Tanweer from Egypt), religion (notably the Saudi funded Iqra and Al-Majd), education and so on.⁹ Yet these channels are not popular among Arab audiences in general, and least of all with youth. My research among people in the 16-27 age group show that they strongly preferred movie channels like MBC2 and Rotana Cinema, music channels like Rotana, Mazzika, Al Nojoom and Melody, entertainment-oriented channels like LBC and Future TV and 24-hour news channels like Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya. During my focus group interviews with young Egyptians, I asked participants if they watched specialized Egyptian channels like Nile Culture and others; they all replied in the negative. Karim (17) described these channels as ‘a complete

failure’. ‘They have failed and it is because of finances’, said Maher (19), adding:

‘These channels are state owned and it is just like the case of state schools as opposed to private schools, where the standard of the staff, teaching and the curriculum are much higher [in the private sector]’.¹⁰

The United Nations Development Program report on Arab Human Development (2003) concludes that Arab television at large is not a vibrant force for knowledge or culture. The report points to the deficiencies within the Arab media such as lack of planning, lack of information, documents and research and a high degree of

⁹ Egypt has a package of specialized satellite channels on its Nile 1 and Nile 2 satellites including: Nile Information Channel (1992), Nile Drama Channel (1995), Nile News Channel (1998), Nile Culture Channel (1998), Nile Sport Channel (1998), Nile Family and Kids Channel (1998), Nile Variety Channel (1998), Manara Scientific Research Channel (1998), Higher Education Channel (1998), Tanweer Channel (2001). Egypt has also seven educational channels including Maho Ommya Channel (Illiteracy Eradication), Primary School Channel, Preparatory School Channel, Secondary School Channel, Vocational Channel, Languages Channel and The Knowledge Channel.

¹⁰ Focus group interview with Egyptian Youth (2), August 2004

centralization impair the organization, relevance and flexibility of media services. 'In-depth awareness of audience habits and preferences with respect to information, especially outside the capital and major cities, is also lacking' (p.61).

4.1 Introduction

In December 2006, I was invited by the University of Westminster's Communication and Media Research Institute (CAMRI) to take part in a one-day workshop on 'Researching Arab Media, Culture and Society: Confronting Methodological Challenges' with 35 participants from 16 different institutions in five countries.. The invitation stated that Arab media and culture remain heavily under-researched, even though world events demonstrate how urgent it is to rectify this situation: 'yet research into Arab media and culture is also highly problematic, often for reasons of methodology.'¹¹ The invitation letter referred to Clark (2006), a recent study published in the July 2006 issue of PS: Political Science and Politics, which highlighted in considerable detail the practical and ethical pitfalls of conducting interviews and surveys in the Arab region.

The methodology of this research undertaken during the fieldwork stages provides an important base for this thesis, which advances that although the growth in Arab satellite channels since early 1990s and their impact - in particular in the political sphere - has been documented in numerous books and articles (cf. Sakr, 2001, 2007; Hafez, 2001; Ayish, 2002; El-Nawawy and Iskandar, 2002; Lynch, 2006) the direct empirical data concerning Arab youth which this research provides has not as yet been undertaken in any major depth.

¹¹ Invitation letter to attend 'workshop on researching Arab media' at the University of Westminster's Communication and Media Research Institute (CAMRI) sent by Tarik Sabry, 14th October 2006.

This thesis, therefore, relies on direct qualitative empirical evidence (reception study) to draw conclusions that result from the processes of observation and primary source interviews with television audience. Although this is a qualitative audience research, it is not to be assigned to the category known as 'ethnography' because of the absence of long term participant observation associated with 'ethnographic research'. Nonetheless, it falls within what Fisk (1987: 63) calls the ethnography of discourse as I use viewers' verbalizations of their responses to television. Moreover, my position as a fluent bilingual Arab/English speaker and young himself, living both in the Arab world and in Europe, has been utilized to offer first-hand 'insider' accounts as well as proving a useful aid to establish bonds with informants.

This chapter introduces the methods employed, their strengths, their short-comings, and other issues.

4.2. Techniques

This research employs an audience-based approach to studying the Arab media and society and utilizes both qualitative and quantitative research methods in order to examine the impact of entertainment-oriented Arab satellite on the culture and identity of one segment of Arab society: the youth. The appropriate research methods to achieve this are focus group interviews and a survey to be conducted in the researched Arab countries. Though some authors see focus groups as a more cost-effective and efficient way to collect data than individual interviews, others argue that, as with any other research method, a great deal of time and effort needs to go into focus group planning, implementation, and data analysis if it is to be done successfully (Reed and Payton, 1997, Winslow *et al.*, 2002).

Winslow *et al.* (2002) note that focus groups provide rich insights into informants' needs and problems and enables the researcher, if he listens and is aware of the 'right' questions to ask, to learn what is meaningful and important for that group. The stimulus of group discussion provides insights, ideas, and data. The focus group interview approach to collecting qualitative data is based on the assumption that people are an important source of information about themselves and the issues that affect their lives and that they can articulate their own thoughts and feelings (Winslow *et al.* 2002: 565). The focus group can also aid in collecting data from members of groups who are generally hard to reach, such as the disadvantaged or disenfranchised (Kitzinger and Barbour, 1999). Though this applies to Arab youth as a whole, this research has additionally gathered information from poorer background youth [for example the Manshiet Nasser group, an illegal settlement in Cairo] who would not have been available through official channels, nor in the universities.

For maximum results, I decided to use the snowballing technique in choosing participants for the group interviews. Within the social sciences, "snowball sampling," broadly defined as a technique for finding research subjects by which one subject gives the researcher the name of another subject, who in turn provides the name of a third, and so on (Atkinson and Flint, 2001 quoted in Clark, 2006), is a non-probability sampling strategy used to locate subjects with certain attributes or characteristics necessary in a study of a particular population (Berg, 2004: 36). The group members will often be of similar social status, or even of the same gender. These are important factors in creating a comfortable and safe environment, especially when research is being conducted that may touch on sensitive topics, (for example politics are not discussed with unknown people in the Arab world). But because my research allowed the fellow participants to be chosen meant they were

known by each other and they were able to relax more (if not fully) than had they been unknown to each other, so that in most cases, my informants knew each other. This was aimed at delivering an environment of trust (see below section on conducting research in difficult circumstances) where participants feel comfortable and at ease to talk about the issues involved, especially that the issue was of interest to them, though as one of the participants in a focus group in a UAE focus group noted towards the end of a session; ‘we never really think about these issues’.

The negative side to the ‘snowballing’ technique in the context of this research is that participants were probably less likely to share intimate personal experiences. To give an extreme example, it is very unlikely that one of the participants would admit that s/he watches porn on TV or seeks sexual pleasure from television, because it is culturally inappropriate in Arab society to admit so. However, given the nature of this research and the type of questions the interviews covered, this approach proved worthwhile to adopt: most notably, because this technique allowed me to build rapport and trust and overcome my interviewees’ suspicions.

4.3 Geographical scope

For the purpose of this study, the term Arab world is used to refer to the Arab region, which is understood to encompass in breadth the areas stretching between the Levant, Arabia, Egypt, and descending to Iraq and Yemen and which incorporates most Arab countries except North Africa, Somalia and Mauritania.

The fieldwork interviews which were held in Jordan, Palestine, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates among informants aged 16 to 27 also included young nationals from other countries, thereby increasing scope and number of responses, and I thus have

additional contributions from youth in Syria, Kuwait, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Iraq, Sudan, and Yemen. (For a brief introduction of each country see Appendix 2)

The research has excluded the North African countries from Libya to Morocco for reasons of time, finance, and linguistic constraints. Moreover, Arabs youth viewers of Arab satellite television but living in the diaspora (outside the Arab world) are not considered in this thesis.

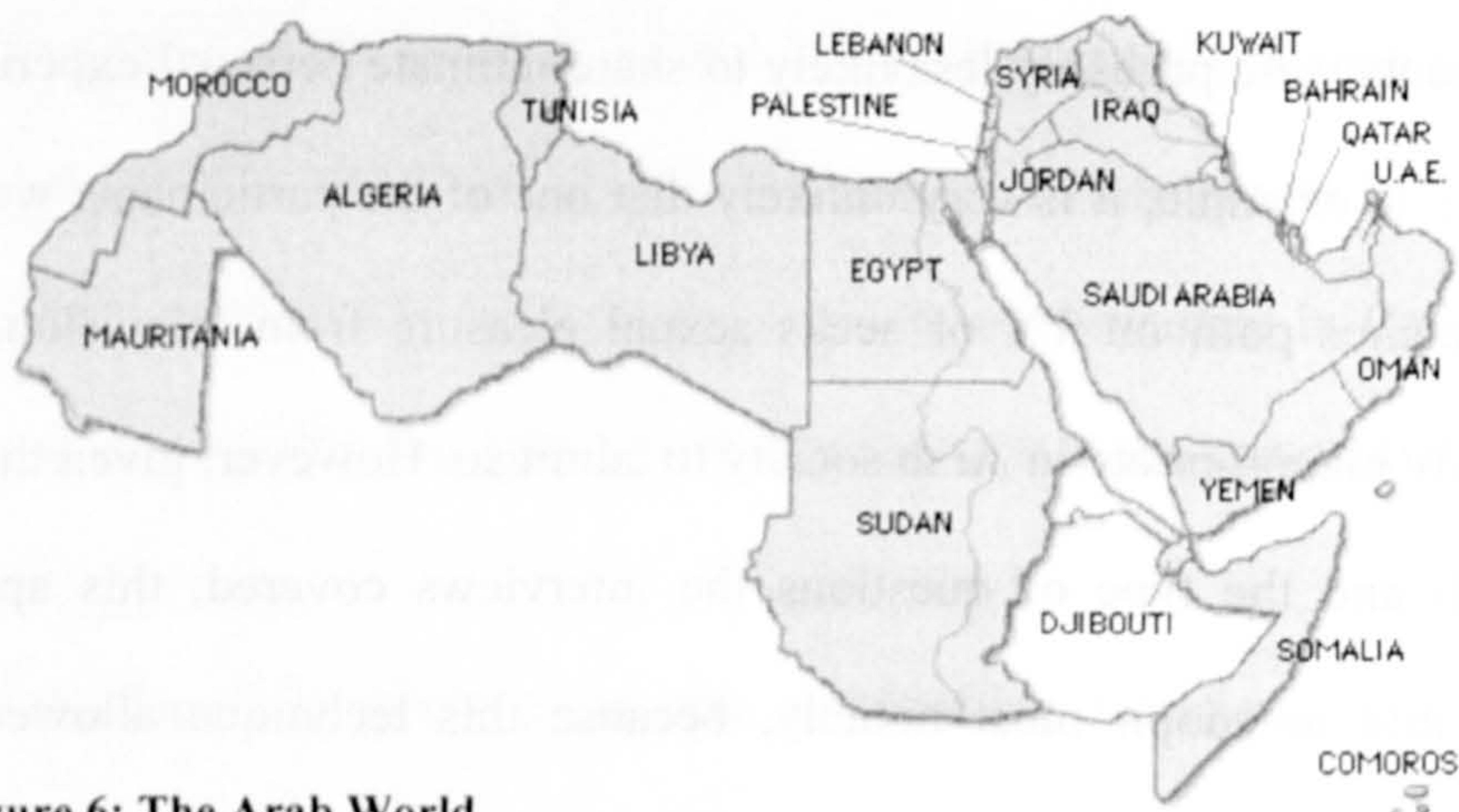


Figure 6: The Arab World
*Source: Arab Satellite Communication
Organization website (Arabsat.com)*

4.4 Research scope

In addition to researching youth audiences, the following sources provided background material for discussion; Arab satellite media sources, Arab and non-Arab discourse as researched via electronic and print media, and publications.

4.5. Research Methods

4.5.1. Focus groups

Group interviews, as a method of data collection, have their positive and negative aspects and produce different and complementing results to quantitative methods. Focus groups are a qualitative data collection method - that is to say the researcher collects qualitative data from focused discussions as opposed to the surveys, which are quantitative.

Krueger (1994: 6) defines a focus group interview as a carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment. The discussion is comfortable and often enjoyable for participants as they share their ideas and perceptions. The group interaction provides data and insights that would not be accessible without the dynamics that occur within the group. For the purposes of this thesis, a focus group is defined as “naturally occurring or researcher selected group convened for the purpose of discussing a specific research topic” (Kitzinger and Barbour, 1999). In the Emirates I was having coffee with two young men, and a couple of their friends came over to greet them and joined us. A few moments later, they agreed to take part in a focus group interview since I was ready. The same happened in Egypt.

Although there is considerable discussion in the literature on the use of focus groups with English-speaking populations in developed countries, there is little on their use in non-English-speaking communities or in developing countries. Winslow *et al.* (2002) note that although used extensively with Western populations, focus groups have been used only in a limited way in cross-cultural research. While in the West, the population is familiar with the format and expectations, focus groups are a new

phenomenon in the Arab World and the population is not familiar with this approach. As researchers and the Arab world become more familiar with this data collection technique, it is expected that some rich qualitative studies will occur (Winslow *et al.*, 2002: 574).

Having conducted a series of focus groups with women of childbearing age in the United Arab Emirates, Winslow *et al.* (2002) outlined recommendations with the appropriate cultural modifications for using this data collection tool in Arab society. They describe major considerations that might be relevant to other parts of the Arab world include timing, location, topic, group composition, culture, religion, and selection of a facilitator and translator. Winslow *et al.* (2002) conclude that more attention needs to be paid to the development of culturally appropriate research methods. 'Researchers cannot automatically assume that data collection techniques used successfully with Western populations are transferable across cultures'.

The advantage here is that I myself is Arab, therefore, aware of the cultural and political sensitivities of Arab society including gender issues. Moreover, the fact that I am young myself meant that I had wider access to the researched community.

Interaction among group members stimulated thoughts and relevant recall of ideas, feelings, and experiences (Winslow *et al.* 2002:574). Having conducted focus groups for this research, it is clear that the advantage of a group interview as opposed to individual interviews is that it allows participants time to remember, reflect, and think about their experiences while others are talking. What participants say may prompt further discussions as others agree or disagree with them and add examples from their own experiences. Equally, this same environment may prove a disadvantage to some

who may feel shy to express their own opinion in the face of a majority opposing opinion. A group environment may also prove threatening by the presence of members of the opposite sex, or of a different social class. This has been avoided by setting up groups where participants are familiar to each and come from the same social background.

4.5.2 Survey

The quantitative aspect of my research was a questionnaire, the main aim of which was to provide in statistical form, an insight into what percentage of the selected sample of Arab youth - for example - watch TV, for how long and what programmes they like to watch. The questionnaire, as a method of data collection, is advantageous in that it is fairly economical in time and cost. As noted by Sapsford (1999: 109), the survey saves researcher's time and allows for much larger samples to be collected.

The questionnaire revealed:

- How much time youth spend watching TV?
- How popular is ASB among young Arabs?
- Which type of ASB content is most attractive to young Arabs?
- Which of the ASB The survey also provided channels are most watched by young Arabs?

The questionnaire also provided helpful and insightful information into the current conditions and future prospects of Arab youth demonstrating:

- How many of the youth survey felt satisfied with their lives?
- What are their perceptions of the future?
- How many of the youth entertained the idea of emigrating to another country? Why? And where to?

A semi-structured questionnaire was distributed by hand to be self-completed to a total of 200 Arab youths ranging from 16 to 27 years old and currently living in the Arab world. However, in order to pre-empt a low return of questionnaires, most of the questionnaires were completed in my presence. Moreover, the focus group

interviews gave me the chance to cross check the data provided by the questionnaire and vice versa. Clark (2006) notes that the greatest frustration facing researchers is the reluctance of people to complete the surveys and /or give purposefully misleading answers - or those in line with official rhetoric (2006: 419). She reports that this makes it difficult for researchers to assess the frankness of their responses and question the degree to which the fear of answering survey questions honestly may have invalidated the results. This was inevitably experienced by me, in particular as my research was conducted in largely non-democratic and politically sensitive countries. There were also times when I was aware that the interviewees were probably telling me what I wanted to hear or what they did not want to disclose in front of their friends or fellow interviewees or because of fear of the authorities.

Sapsford (1999) highlights the notion of the 'attitude data' whereby answers conform to the 'social desirability effect' or the 'saying what is expected of you':

Part of the meaning systems attitude, belief, opinion statements, partake of the nature of such systems, and one property of such systems is a tendency to autonomy or closure (Sapsford, 1999: 104).

Sapsford continues, that a statement 'can reflect a belief or opinion which is firmly and genuinely held and still have not connection to everyday behaviour' because they tend to form themselves 'into rhetorics or ideologies':

...they may be a purely verbal/conceptual form of behaviour; holding the belief is not predictive of what one will *do* in a given circumstance but only of what one will *say* (p.104).

The analysis of both the questionnaire and the focus groups shows some contradictions in youth responses. For example, while the majority of youth in the focus groups said they did not like to watch the news, describing it as dull, repetitive

and all about killing (see Chapter six), about 20% of the respondents to the questionnaire said that news programmes were their favorite. On the other hand, while only 12% of the respondents to the questionnaire cited religious programming as their favorite, many of the participants in the focus group discussions commended them as the best that Arab TV can offer to the youth.

4.5.3 Ethnography

As beneficial as the official focus group interviews and survey were the unofficial data-gathering ethnographic opportunities offered through general socializing within informal gatherings with my respondents. The leisure time I spent with my respondents – such as walking down the streets with them and noting their comments – was equally as valuable as the official data-collecting methods. They took me to the beach, the cinema, and coffee shops where I observed, for example in the UAE, the use of a little TV screen to watch/choose a satellite channel in each of the separate compartments.

Through such ethnographical methods, I was able to cross-examine the information shared by the informants in the discussions and in the survey. For example, in the coffee shops in the Emirates, where music was the channel of preference in the private compartments as it provided the background noise, I observed arguments as they broke out amongst the youth as to which channel was to be watched. I often heard comments such as “this is rubbish” and “who has the remote control?”.

The fact that I was close in age to my informants was a great asset as it made it possible for us to socialize as equals. I would not have been able to build the same degree of trust and even friendship with my interviewees had I been older or of the generation of their parents. Moreover, the fact that I was a young Arab studying in the

United Kingdom was also interesting to them as many wished to study abroad (see Chapter five section 5.6 Youth and Immigration).

4.6 The Pilot Study

The main research fieldwork was preceded by a pilot study which I undertook while participating in an international conference in Switzerland in August 2004. A group of young, middle class, male and female, Egyptian Muslims and Christians aged between 17 and 22 were assisting at the conference and agreed to test my questionnaire and conduct interviews. 17 people responded to the questionnaire and 11 participated in the focus group interviews which were separated into two groups of five and six participants, one of which consisted of a female only group. The interviews, recorded in Arabic, took over an hour and a half each. I later transcribed and translated them for evaluation.

Conducting these interviews was a very good learning experience as it was the first time I had conducted a focus group interview and it took a while in the first group interview before I managed to get the discussion going. I also realized in the female group that two of the females were dominating the conversation and had opposing views and other participants had to be prompted to take part in the discussion. Most of the questions had to be rephrased for the real research as they had proved unclear to the pilot participants. Issues raised in these initial discussions also led me to add new questions to the questionnaire, including a section on life satisfaction and feelings of what the future might hold and whether the respondent entertained the idea of leaving home, why and where to.

4.7 Setting Up Fieldwork And Negotiating Access: Challenges

Conducting research in the Arab world is difficult and comes under the category of conducting research in difficult circumstances. There is on the one hand a plethora of state censorship, bureaucracy and harassment, and on the other hand informants' suspicions of the research and the researcher, and thereof, lack of willingness to be frank and fully participate in the discussions. Clark (2006: 419) notes that for ethnographic research in particular, researchers need to overcome interviewees' suspicion and to build rapport and trust. There is a common misconception, at least amongst the public, in the Arab world that research which is about data collection is a form of intelligence-gathering work and if you are not a national from the country, then you could be working for a foreign country. On the other hand, researchers must negotiate the state censorship apparatus, bureaucracy, and harassment.

In her recent study on research methods amongst researchers who have conducted research in Arab countries, Janine A. Clark (2006) notes that the experiences of scholars researching in the Arab world are:

especially germane for discussions on qualitative methods, as researchers must contend with political authoritarianism and violence, anti-Americanism, and presumably deep cultural differences related to religion and, as a result, gender (p.417).

Clark's study revealed that the greatest challenges to conducting qualitative research in Arab countries are those related to the authoritarian political conditions prevalent in most of the countries of the region. 27% of the respondents to Clark (2006: 418) study stated that once having obtained access to interviewees there is a 'looming smell' most acutely manifesting itself in a pervasive 'culture of suspicion' as evidenced by interviewees' mistrust and nervousness in speaking frankly to

researchers for fear of political repercussions. 'Given these challenges, how scholars undertake field work in the region, the qualitative methods they use, and how they overcome the obstacles they encounter are of interest and value to political scientists in general' (Clark, 2006: 417).

I embarked on this research with the previous knowledge of the problems that I will face while conducting it. I was aware of the need to find a way to deal with or avoid harassment by the authorities; to negotiate cultural and in particular gender boundaries; and to provide a non-threatening environment for my informants. Therefore, the planning and execution of this research was greatly informed by my experiences as an Arab, growing up in Palestine, and the academic and social network which I have built over my adult life. The positive points of 'knowing the social and political system' included being able to by-pass state censorship and unnecessary bureaucracy through my own contacts. The sheer volume of bureaucracy alone, ignoring the state censorship issue, meant that I would have had to wait for a very long time before getting permission to conduct the research. The process usually involves security clearance and as such, is not easily granted, especially as the nature of my research would have been deemed sensitive by the authorities.

Using snowball technique starting from my own social network of friends and contacts including academic contacts, I managed to avoid asking the authorities for permission to conduct my research in schools and universities. As a result of avoidance of the state and official apparatus, I was able to gain the trust of my informants who felt that this research was independent from state control. Moreover, had I applied to the authorities for such permission they would certainly have taken away the strength of the voices of the youth expressed in this thesis. My informants

would have been less likely to engage in an honest conversation and discussion with me and amongst themselves, thus making it hard to get their authentic voice.

Being young myself (30 years) was a great asset because it made a huge difference to the way I located and contacted my interviewees as well as conducted the interviews. I do not think that I would have been able to build the same degree of trust and even friendship in some cases with my interviewees had I been older or of the generation of their parents.

4.7.1 Gender

I also had to negotiate cultural and in particular gender boundaries in relation to the question of reaching female participants. Though my identity as a young Arab was a source of cooperation and trust with my interviewees, my gender as a male hindered my outreach capacity and so I was not able to engage as many female interviewees as I had been hoping. It was necessary, therefore, to hire a local female research assistant to facilitate communication with those females that lived beyond the metropolis and who would not be willing to talk to me directly.

Social concepts of honour and shame mean that most women would not agree to meet and converse with men who were not family members (Yamani, 2000: 152). In Clark's study, most female researchers found that being female was helpful when studying issues related specifically to women, gender, and or when requiring interviews with women. As most Arab countries are socially segregated according to sex, men are largely barred from women's realms. Indeed, one male respondent (the only one to refer to gender) noted his difficulties in obtaining interviews with women (Clark, 2006).

Therefore, it was appropriate for me to seek the assistance of (and in some instances hire) Arab females to act as my research assistants to set up focus groups and to distribute the questionnaire. In Egypt, Jordan and Palestine, I was greatly assisted by females who varied in their positions from school and university teachers to students and women activists. In this way, I was also able to establish a degree of trust when conducting the interviews. The next section will expand more on this issue by reflecting on how I went about dealing with this issue.

4.8 Doing the research

With the aim of exploring the Arab youth's understanding of their own consumption of TV, I conducted 12 focus group interviews (totalling 86 participants in mixed and non-mixed gender and numbering on average seven participants in each group) with young Arabs in the researched countries. Care was taken to choose equal numbers from both sexes, as well as informants from a mixture of socio-economic groups, such as the 10 young people from the poorer and illegal Cairene neighbourhood of Manshiet Nasser.¹² Participants were randomly selected with the aid of my own Arab contacts as well as by asking youth who are willing to participate to bring along their friends. Proceedings were recorded with the aid of a digital MP3 recorder which is small in size and placed in the centre of the table and payment was offered to the young people from the poorer Cairene neighbourhood of Manshiet Nasser in Cairo where each participant was paid LE10 (approx. GBP 1) for their travel.

All interviews except one were conducted in Arabic. The focus group with students from the Arab League University in Cairo wanted to speak in English. The students

¹² Manshiet Nasser is situated on the rocky slopes of the Mugattam range of hills which form the eastern physical boundary to the city of Cairo. It occupies a space of 1.5 square kilometres predominantly for residential use (Belgin et al 1994)

who come from an upper class socio-economic background were fluent in English and complained that they had to pay their fees in US dollars.

Despite the fact that I was conducting research in difficult circumstances, as explained in the previous section, I endeavoured to provide my informants with a permissive and non-threatening environment by allowing informants to choose the interview venue such as a university room, homes, offices, and for the most part the street coffee shops.

I started off in the United Arab Emirates. My plan was to visit various high schools and conduct my research amongst third secondary school students. However, I was faced with the need for permission from the government and bureaucracy involved. With the help of an influential friend, I had organised a meeting with the under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education and Youth in the capital Abu Dhabi. He agreed to circulate the questionnaire amongst the students, but asked me to remove the final page of the questionnaire. This included questions that may have been deemed politically sensitive such as emigration, and life satisfaction as well as background information such as age, city, and number of TV sets at home. Though I was not given an explanation as to why this is or may be sensitive, my own understanding of the situation is that the authorities fear any expression, especially, on the part of youth to leave their home countries.

Faced with this problem, I decided that schools were no longer an option and turned my attention to universities which were more open to me. However, I was stuck again with permissions to conduct research in universities, especially female colleges. University campuses are segregated by sex in the United Arab Emirates I was asked to send by fax my questionnaire and cover letter to the Student's Affairs Department

at Ajman University. I sent the papers on Jan 15 2005, but my request was rejected, mainly because of the questions related to music contest programmes and reality shows, thus the University refused to circulate the questionnaire around male or female students. In fact, universities and schools would have been the only public place / space in which I could have approached females (using a contact).

Moreover, it was almost impossible to approach Emirati women in the street, as strict segregation between the sexes is enforced and they only appear fully veiled in public. By this time, the schools and universities had closed. Under these circumstances, I relied on the 'snowball' technique. I was chatting about my situation with Mostafa, the young 19 year old brother-in-law of the friend I was staying with, and he became the key to all my subsequent interviews. He invited all of his friends and their friends. He even tried getting women but this proved difficult. I finally conducted 3 focus groups, held in the offices and in the coffee shops.

We also socialised much during my stay in the Emirates. They took me to the beach, the cinema, and coffee shops where I observed the use of a little TV screen to watch/choose satellite channel in each of the separate compartments. Music was the channel of preference as it provided the background noise but sometimes arguments would break out as to which channel was to be watched. I often heard "this is rubbish" "who has control of the remote control"...etc

The only female Iman, 22 year old, was secretary in the office which had offered me their space for research use. A Palestinian refugee from Lebanon, but brought up in the Emirates she agreed to be interviewed but not recorded. The interview lasted for 35 minutes.

While still in the Emirates, I was waiting for a delayed visa from the Egyptian Embassy in London, but my application which was supported by a letter from the Dean of the School of Social Sciences at City University was refused with no given reason. All Palestinian males aged 16-45 need a visa for Egypt, but it is only available through Egyptian State Security clearance, the '*amn al-dawlah*'. Instead of continuing straight to Egypt, I returned to London where by stroke of luck, a friend of mine in Palestine working in the Ministry of Interior, co-ordinated with Egyptian State Security and obtained for me the necessary clearance to enter the country as a visitor.

I have many friends in Egypt, and hired an Egyptian female research assistant, who was able to introduce me to students at the Cairo University. I also socialised with girls and boys in coffee shops¹³, interviewed them there, and visited 3 universities. This time I relied exclusively on my contacts and conducted the interviews and questionnaires privately, without asking for official permission. I was thus allowed to explore the questions freely.

Although this research is not overtly political, it did raise a cautious reluctance by strangers to share their feelings. 'Walls have ears' is a very common saying amongst Arabs, and people will avoid discussing anything political, especially to strangers, because of awareness of the *mukhabarat* (internal security).

This 'culture of suspicion' as described by Clark (2006) is usually a big challenge facing Western scholars researching in Arab countries and it exacerbated by the international political climate. Researchers cite anti-Westernism, usually in the form of anti-Americanism and the general suspicion and distrust of U.S. policies and perceived agendas as impeding their efforts to undertake field research. Researchers

¹³ Coffee shops have screens show generally music, one informant explained their prevalence on the deals make between satellite channels and coffee shops.

noted the common perception that American researchers in general may be connected with the CIA or other intelligence agencies (Clark, 2006: 418).

Therefore being an Arab myself and by setting up groups of informants who knew each other made a huge difference and allowed informants to feel at ease and talk freely. Moreover, the number and sex of participants was largely determined by the group themselves, as was the venue, except with the poor neighbourhood of Manshiet Nasser, an illegal settlement called in Arabic '*ashwa'iyyah*' (simply means the slum). I paid LE100 (approx. GBP10) to rent the venue and the snacks as were required by the common Arab courtesy customs.

I met with Dr. Inas who teaches at the College of Management and Technology, Arab Academy for Science and Technology and Maritime Transport, Dokki - Cairo, Egypt. Dr. Inas set up a group interview for me with her students, most of whom come from the upper class.

From Egypt, I went to Jordan. I didn't require a visa as I had a visa for the UK, but the permitted stay runs out after 2 weeks. I was told to go to Central Intelligence in Amman, and they renewed it but not without thoroughly grilling me on every aspect of my life at home and abroad. As far as the authorities were concerned, I was visiting my family in Jordan and there was no mention of my research. In Amman, I conducted two focus group interviews with students at Petra University where my access was facilitated by a teacher who taught there and with whom I had previous contact. The groups included students from Iraq, Kuwait, Palestine, and Syrian. Jordan is home to many Palestinians (over 50% of the population) and with two waves of Iraqi refugees in 1990 and since 2003, Jordan became home to many Iraqis.

In Palestine, I visited my home town of Gaza¹⁴ where I conducted two focus group interviews with males and females as well as distributed the questionnaire amongst the 16- 27 age group.

My role was to establish trust and rapport with the informants and direct the discussion. Though at the beginning participants provided brief answers to the questions, they were gradually and generally confident and enthusiastically entered into debates with their colleagues. The fact that the groups were homogenous in age, culture, and social background, as well as know each other seem to generate more interaction and simultaneous discussion.

4.8.1 Focus group interview questions

I was aware that some, if not most, of the respondents and participants may not have ever participated or encountered this type of questioning. They may have neither questioned their consumption of satellite television, nor articulated feelings. With this in mind, the preliminary questionnaire provided them with the initial structured responses in order to articulate possibly unfamiliar thoughts and understand my expectations.

Cultural theorist Theodor Adorno (1991) notes that ‘by exposing the socio-psychological implications and mechanisms of TV...the public at large may be sensitized to the nefarious effect of some of these mechanisms’ (p.136). This research has been unable to pursue the impact of my research method on participants, either by their articulating and developing opinions that were previously unexpressed, or by hearing the fellow participants’ opinions.

¹⁴ I could not visit the West Bank because of Israel’s restrictions on the movement of Palestinians between Gaza and the West Bank.

The focus group interview questions covered a wide range of issues; from what participants watch, why, with whom, and for how long, to what they thought of certain TV programming such as news and entertainment.

Building on the experience of the pilot interviews, the focus group interviews were semi-structured. The interviews were divided in four parts. The first part had fixed starting questions; aimed at breaking the ice and to warm up the participants and at the same time get an insight into their background – where they come from (city/town), how many TV sets they have, do they have access to satellite, how much time they spend watching TV in any given day, what they watch mostly, etc. The second part was an open investigation of general patterns of television viewing. It was mainly concerned with the viewing context and the position of television in the participants' lives. The third part had detailed questions on their views on a list of specific programmes [music video clips and reality shows] to get specific responses: which of these do the respondents approve, what do they like/dislike about them; leaving space for the fourth part, which is concerned with the participants' own comments, responses, and discussions.

The discussions usually start when participants start talking about what they watch and why. I used a list of specific questions to prompt discussion in the groups. These questions included:

- Do you feel that youth are fairly represented in TV programming?
- Are there TV programmes that tackle youth problems and issues?
- Do you think TV helps young people solve or deal with their problems be it emotional, social, economic or political
- Do you think that TV entertainment has a negative impact on youth, on their lifestyles, their dress code, their music tastes, their behaviour and their attitudes?
- Have you thought of immigrating to another country and why (or why not)?

The focus groups were recorded digitally with the consent of the participants. As the interviews were conducted in Arabic, the task of not only transcribing but also translating them was considerable. However with a grant from the School of Social Sciences, City University, I was able to employ a bilingual research assistant to help both transcribe and translate some of the interviews. Initially I translated into English those parts relevant for this thesis. Later in the writing up, I revisited and translated additional parts of the Arabic transcript.

4.9 Ethics and confidentiality

Safe-guarding the confidentiality of my informants' was a priority as was assuring them of their anonymity. Although the fact that most participants were personal contacts of sorts allayed their fears to a certain extent, the main challenge was to overcome my informants' suspicions that what they shared in the group discussions could reach the *mukhabarat* (internal security). And although the research topic is not overtly political, it was still deemed potentially politically sensitive by many of my informants who were consequently cautious to share their real feelings and opinions, and contribute frankly in the discussions. Responding to their concerns, I was keen to introduce myself and the purpose of my research to informants, explaining the need to record the meeting but guaranteeing maximum confidentiality, and assuring that data would only be used by me and for the purposes of this research. I informed them that they were not obliged to supply their full or even real name, choosing perhaps a pseudonym. Regardless of their willingness to use their real names, this thesis has in the interest of consistency and thorough confidentiality, preferred to replace all names.

4.10 Presentation of data in thesis

The questionnaire data were entered into SPSS, a software that provides statistical analysis and diagrams. The tables and statistics included in this thesis were based on SPSS analysis.

Although NVIVO software was originally to be used for the qualitative interview analysis of the focus groups, I have instead manually transcribed, translated, analysed and selected the quotes as they appear in the thesis. The annual NVIVO training sessions – organized by the department of sociology - took place when I was still away doing fieldwork, and by the time of next year sessions I had already started manually transcribing and analysing data for the book chapter I was writing.

As all of the empirical research was carried out in Arabic, as well as much of the research readings, there inevitably came the question as to how best to translate and transliterate Arabic texts. Translations were by me, and proved fairly straightforward. The transliteration of the Arabic text into English, however, was more problematic to keep consistent. It was finally decided to transliterate how best the words sounded loosely based on the Library of Congress Arabic transliteration system.

4.11 Limitation to the Generalization

The responses obtained and analysed here do not constitute a probability sample of Arab youth large enough to permit valid generalizations about the entire universe of young Arabs. The aim of the questionnaire (200 in total) was, within the limitations imposed by time and finances, to obtain quantitative responses from purposive samples of Arab youth.

Eight six young Arab viewers in total were interviewed (see table [1]), as this is a both an ample and still a manageable size for qualitative research. While representativeness is not an objective in qualitative research, when making a generalization about Arab youth it is important to aim for a fair representation of variation within the Arab population. Therefore, I endeavoured to make my sample as representative as possible; thus, covering a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds as well as geographical spread, covering most of the Arab region.

Table [1] Breakdown of Focus Group Interviews

Country	Gender	Number of participants
United Arab Emirates	Male	7
	Male	5
	Male	4
Egypt	Female	6
	Male	5
	Mixed	6
	Mixed	10
	Mixed	9
Jordan	Mixed	12
	Female	10
Palestine	Male	6
	Female	6
Total interviewees		86

Nonetheless, I acknowledge the limitation to the generalization of Arab youth. It is not my intention here to use the research findings in order to portray Arab youth as homogenous, but to provide an indication of the status, views, and feelings of the majority of Arab youth as expressed by those interviewed for this research.

ARAB YOUTH: CURRENT CONDITIONS AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

5.1 Introduction

'Our youth are wandering in life without finding anyone to hear them. They are surrounded by orders and lists of forbidden things from all directions' (Bibars, 2004).

Concern is growing in the Arab world over the current conditions and future of Arab youth which is being marginalized and alienated by economic and social changes and seduced by external values such as western pop culture. Arab youth is a very important segment of Arab society as they constitute a majority of the population due to falling infant mortality and high fertility, making them proportionally the largest in Arab history. The unemployment rate is

the highest among youth reaching 60% in a region that has 20% unemployment¹⁵.

Future prospects for contemporary Arab youth seem bleak and a general sense of malaise is growing among the young while their chances for social, economic and political integration seem to be declining (Meijer, 2000: 1).

This discourse on Arab youth is not novel and did not start with the advent of satellite broadcasting (cf. Hijazi, 1978; Hazen and Mughisuddin, 1975; Mansur, 1985; Ayish, 1987). Mansur (1985) accused media entertainment of infiltrating Arab homes, distancing youth from their religion, and destroying families who will be prey to lusts and immoralities, and distanced from religion:

We have allowed the media, especially that which is distanced from religion, to invade our homes, and settle in front of our eyes without any resistance. We even helped bring it from all over the world under the pretext of innocent entertainment; however, to our children it is nothing but lessons of deviation and distancing from Islam (p.11).

¹⁵ Middle East News Agency. '20% increase in unemployment in Arab region', 11 July, 2005 (Available online from <http://www.menareport.com/ar/business/231310> [accessed 5 August 2005]).

On the general conditions of youth in the 1970s, Hazen and Mughisuddin argued that Arab youth are excluded from the system. They described Arab students, who have been for long the vehicle of ideological movements and the backbone of revolutionary rhetoric in the Arab world, as facing political emasculation: “the immobility of Arab students most of them over educated and unemployed in a static economy that cannot absorb them in either the military or in the social field, is due to the fact that they have been excluded from the system” (1975: 74). The authors went on to say that all that the Arab student youth can hope for today is to find a secure job that will repay the heavy investment he has made in pursuit of an education that his country’s economy is barely capable of using or absorbing. The writers posited that the resulting options for the young person are either to become part of the system, or to accept his/her fate in typical Arab resignation (p.74).

The current discourse on Arab youth is very similar to that found during the 1970s and 1980s. However, what is emphasized in the current discourse is the potential of these conditions to drive Arab youth away from their original culture and identity towards a more global and specifically western identity.

This chapter introduces Arab youth and its current social position and circumstances. It then examines an increasingly problematic generation gap in society where seniority based on age is deeply entrenched and young people are rarely asked for their opinions, even in matters that directly affect them (Yamani, 2000). The chapter then provides an analysis of the two main issues affecting youth lives: unemployment and emigration. Unemployment rates are highest amongst Arab youth and job availability is youth’s top concern. Not surprisingly, many of them want to emigrate in search of better conditions and opportunities. Based on the findings of this research these last two sections report on the survey and views solicited from the youth in this

research to highlight their attitudes towards the elder generation and appreciate their rationales for wanting to emigrate.

5.2 Arab youth: an introduction

Arab youth is a majority in the population of Arab countries: statistics from these densely populated countries indicate that they represent at least one third of the population, while in Arab countries with a relatively high standard of living, this percentage increases sometimes to one half, due to low child mortality rate and increased health care service and food quality (Al-Askary, 2001). However, the rise in the standard of living is one equally matched by the rise in crime and ‘psychological problems which have increased in contemporary societies’ (Juma’ and Al-Shawāf, 2005: 189-190). For the authors of ‘Youth: the problems and the solutions’, Juma’ and Al-Shawāf (2005), the youth crisis is particularly important as they are the ‘backbone of the nation and they will be the future leaders.’ The corruption of youth will lead to the ‘paralysis and collapse of the *ummah*’ [nation] (p.190).

According to the *Arab Human Development Report* 2004, children under 15 years old accounted for 25-29% of the total population in Bahrain, Kuwait, Lebanon, Qatar, Tunisia and the UAE, rising to 37-39% in Jordan, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Sudan, and 46-48% in Palestine and Yemen. In Morocco, Algeria and Egypt the proportions were 31%, 32% and 34% respectively (UNDP, 2004: 238). Al-Ghaffar (2005) puts the percentage of those aged between 10-25 years old at 40% of Arab society. For the 16-27 age group considered in this thesis, precise statistics are hard to obtain, but it is known that rates of unemployment are highest among this age group. As shown later in this chapter, the overall unemployment rate in the Arab world

reached 20% in 2003, of which 60% was among the youth.¹⁶ In view of their minimal social, political, and economic participation, it is hardly surprising that many reports indicate a growing sense of alienation felt by the Arab youth, while their social, economic and political chances appear to be declining (Meijer, 2000). They are highly marginalized and, although everybody talks about them and readily gives them advice, no one appears willing or able to allow them a 'voice'.

The first forum for Arab youth, held in Sanaa (Yemen) in August 1999, called for youth problems to be tackled - such as unemployment, poverty, violence, and sexually transmitted diseases - in a way that does not contradict Islamic legislation (*Arabic News*, 4/8/1999).¹⁷ But five years later, these problems, far from being dealt with, appear yet stronger such that the Arab Population Forum which met in Beirut (19-21 November 2004) identified the same problems and challenges facing Arab youth: rising poverty, unemployment and under-employment; decreasing quality of education and skill development; worsening housing conditions; decreasing community support which can lead to emotional distress, violence and abuse; increasing risks of exposure to diseases and infections, particularly sexually-transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS; the incidence of violence based on gender; and issues relating to fertility, unwanted pregnancies and early marriages.¹⁸

5.2.1 Youth and politics

Arab youth lack proper structures for organizing activism, volunteerism, youth programmes, and networking opportunities. According to the Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND), a regional network aiming at strengthening the role and

¹⁶ Middle East News Agency. '20% increase in unemployment in Arab region', 11 July, 2005 (Available in Arabic online at <http://www.menareport.com/ar/business/231310>).

¹⁷ Forum for Arab youths demands support from Arab media for the Palestinian cause, *Arabicnews.com* 4/8/1999 [online] available from <http://www.arabicnews.com/ansub/Daily/Day/990804/1999080442.html> [accessed 7 August 2004]

activities of the Arab social movement, Arab youth suffers from the unavailability of resources and opportunities for them to express their perspectives on policies and programmes that are affecting their current and future lives. Most Arab countries have still not ratified the 15 major international legal instruments adopted by intergovernmental bodies of the United Nations system relating to the human rights of youth. In fact most Arab countries have ratified less than seven of the conventions, including Egypt, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Syria, Yemen, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Sudan.¹⁹

Anxiety about this state of affairs is growing among concerned specialists. Munoz (2000) warns that Arab youth live on 'the periphery of the established social order, which means that their capacity both for integration and for involvement with traditional parties and unions is weakened'. Galal Amin also makes mention of Egyptian political commentators' concern that 'people's sense of loyalty and of belonging to the homeland has weakened' (2000: 8) Munoz argues that Arab youth are dissatisfied with their lives. They barely identify, if at all, with the political thinking and behaviour of their elders and feel let down and marginalized by society (Munoz, 2000: 23).

Iman Bibars, who founded the Association for the Development and Enhancement of Women (ADEW) in 1987, expressed those worries in an article in Egypt's leading daily *Al-Ahram* in 2004. Having run three workshops with young Egyptian adults from all backgrounds through the ADEW, Bibars said she was concerned about the status of Egyptian youth and about their potential for political and social

18 Arab Population Forum, Beirut, 19-21 November 2004 [online] available from <http://www.apf.org.jo/description.html> [accessed 12 March 2005]

19 Proposal on Mainstreaming Youths Issues in the MDG's regional Campaign, Arab NGO Network for Development [online] available from <http://www.annd.org/Youth%20In%20Arab%20World/Documents/Proposal%20The%20Role%20of%20Arab%20Youth%20in%20the%20MDGs%20campaign%20Eng.pdf> [accessed 25 May 2005]

participation. In particular, she found that most lacked any substantial understanding of basic concepts such as human rights and did not know about civil society institutions or their role in the society. Many did not even know about different political institutions in Egypt such as political parties, the People's Assembly and *Shura* Council, or have any idea of their legislative roles or the nature and purpose of the Constitution. In other words they did not know about the channels available for political and social participation. Bibars warned:

The youth are Egypt's real wealth. The current attention paid nowadays to their development is not enough. In order not to find this 'wealth' torn between extremism and blind imitation of the West, they need to find the legitimate channels that allow them to participate in public life. And I do not mean only political participation, but also social. The youth need to know the society with all its frames, be it the different political institutions and parties or civil society institutions and the role of each in development (Bibars, 2004).

Bibars believes that the older generation got caught up in struggles over development and national problems and forgot to prepare the next generation to play its part. 'We forgot to provide them with the right channels for participation', she said, concluding that:

Our youth are lost in the midst of this life. No one wants to listen to them. They are surrounded from all directions by orders and prohibitions. They have no clear channels to express themselves and how they feel. They feel excluded from decision-making and dialogue. Information channels are also limited for them. All they understand from the term 'human rights' is their economic and social right; that is their right to work and eat (Bibars, 2004).

Bibars notes that there is a great need to teach and educate 'our youth politically, because youth in general and [political] party youth in particular, lack the necessary skills, such as communication, negotiation and decision-making' (2004).

A survey of the Arab public discourse on youth portrays a very bleak picture of the current conditions and future prospects of Arab youth. The present generation of Arab youth is often depicted in public discourse as 'lost', 'in need of guidance', and

‘alienated’. Suleiman Al-Askary, the editor of *Al-Arabi Magazine*, described the situation of Arab youth as ‘very grim’ (Al-Askary, 2001: 1). Al-Askary argues that Arab youth are distant from society as a result of a deliberate policy to keep the youth away from political and social activities. He notes that “today's youth have become distant from taking part in the issues of society, as well as political and social activities. This is a result of a long period of slavery that has been practiced against youth and isolating them from public life, especially the political one, whether in schools, universities, popular organizations and limited democracies” (*ibid.*) He offers this further analysis:

The youth of the Arab world are still subjugated to educational and social systems unfit for the age they live in, and do not rise up to the requirements of their daily life. Educational curricula still belong to the era before the information age and sweeping globalization, and we are still cautious about the ideas and aspirations of youth, and still laying out obstacles to ease down their desires and besiege their ambitions (*ibid.* p.1)

Al-Askary concludes that ‘Arab youth are living a true crisis of alienation as a result of having to face bureaucratic systems and undemocratic regimes that do not only keep them away, but limit their role to total subjugation and commitment to their laws’ (*ibid.* p.3).

5.3 Youth as pawns of the media and the culture debate

Taking the blame for many of society's social ills, the media and its supposed great influence on the wider society and in particular youth, is often the subject of both Arab adult and youth. Juma' and Al-Shawāf (2005) for example believe that ‘TV has the power to build and equally destroy youth’ (p.348) and that the media (or the ‘enemies of Islam’) invade the minds and thoughts of the youth and ‘influence youth beliefs, morals, values, and principles, implanting a fake culture and Western civilization... The media contributes to this fascination with the West amongst youth’ (p.329 and p.331). The proliferation of images that show ‘prohibited temptations’

(usually referring to women dancing and showing their bodies as well as the mixing of sexes), and that 'disregard the *akhlaq*' (good morals) (p.190) is blamed on TV and in particular satellite: 'there is a psychological struggle in youth between the original values [*al-qiyam al-asalah*] that come from school and society and the cheap values [*al-qiyam al-habitah*] that come from TV. These are the importers of negative foreign 'western' social values that distort and transform the youth identity' [*masakh shakhsiyyah al-shabāb*] (p.192). Galal Amin (2000) summarizes similar emotions expressed by Egyptian sociologists: 'In both the city and the village, there is an increasing Westernization of social life and accompanied by a growing respect for whatever is foreign and a disdain for everything local' (*ibid.* p.8).

The potentially positive force of media has been 'misused' and has instead been especially harmful to youth (because the 'youth love to imitate') but also to society as a whole; 'this is why we see more attacks on women and theft' (Jum'a and Shawaf, 2005: 235). The nefarious results of TV in the authors' opinions are many-fold but those of a sexual nature are the most elaborated on, such that: 'Satellite television has done more damage in five years than terrestrial television has in 30 years' (*ibid.* p.329). Jum'a and al-Shawaf also quote an unreferenced study which reports that "in every 5 minutes of youth TV-watching, they witness a scene of a sexual nature" and the encouragement of the mixing of the sexes as witnessed on TV has led to the 'destruction of the youth segment of society' (p.235). They claim that 20% of youth have been attracted to the 'false' [*batil*] as a result of the bewitching satellite which 'transmits around the clock in particular pornography' [*fann al-jins*] (p.235). It is this last which they claim is 'most dangerous for youth life and may cause unfixable problems in their psyche.'

Clearly, the public discourse on Arab youth is full of concern for the youth as future leaders and citizens, and shows a grim picture of their realities (see Meijer, 2000; Al-Askary 2001; Jum'a and al-Shawaf, 2005). However, how far from the reality of the experience of Arab youth is this portrayal in the public discourse? To what extent does it accurately portray / reflect their reality, and their dreams and aspirations? What does it actually mean (in contrast to that which public discourse dictates) to be a young Arab in a rapidly changing world?

Young Arabs in this respect reflect the wider confusions and contradictions of Arab society as a whole. They engage deeply with the Internet and satellite television to inhabit a single world in which Osama bin Laden, Janet Jackson, Hayfa Wahbeh (female singer), Hosni Mubarak, local tribal leaders, and Microsoft, seem to coexist with apparent ease. Such a changed world surely needs more relevant youth policies than boy scouts and football fields (Khoury, 2005).

As detailed in the next chapter [6] the single most consistent and widespread message coming from the Arab youth interviewed for this research has been that of wanting opportunities to talk about their feelings and problems, aspirations and dreams. They strongly feel underrepresented in the public sphere and want to be taken seriously by their elders. Hesa (19 f.) a Saudi student in Cairo, told me that “young people do not have a voice here. It simply does not count. They (the elder generation) do not take us seriously.”²⁰

In her study of Saudi youth, Mai Yamani (2000) notes that while the new generation (born 1973 - 1984) have more opportunities than previous generations, they also have more fears. Yamani explains that they are still expected to follow their parent's

²⁰ Focus Group Interview (3) Cairo, Egypt, March 2005

‘traditions’ and to listen to their instructions, but exposure to the wider world poses an increasing challenge to their father’s authority.

5.4 The Generation Gap

Seniority based on age is deeply entrenched in Arab society and young people are rarely asked for their opinions, even in matters that directly affect them. As the next chapter details, this situation has hardly been altered by the emergence of diverse Arab satellite channels. Arab youth have not yet found a voice in this new public sphere. By way of contrast, however, satellite television appears to offer the young an alternative lifestyle, one that is largely in contradiction with traditional values and parents’ attitudes. Geary *et al.* (2005) note that youth are a favored target for global media because they are at the cutting edge of innovation in technology and ideas:

They have less experience with the old way of doing things - that is, less to unlearn - and change is easier for them. They are quicker than their parents in learning to use new products such as computers and mobile phones with text messaging. This difference in the comfort level with new technology creates a gap between parents and children and leads to exposure to different kinds of content, which creates greater gaps (2005).

Lester Thurow (1998) comments that ‘through television and computer, the young can directly see alternative lifestyles that have not been experienced by their elders in the past...Modern culture is what sells and not what is transmitted from the past.’ The increased consumption of entertainment on satellite channels, the Internet, and the various technological advances on the part of the young have widened the gap between parents and children. The rapid changes in youth lifestyles, attitudes and behaviour have made the cultural and social gap even bigger between what is old and what is new.

For many parents, the changes in youth attitudes and lifestyles are readily perceived to be imitative of the West, things picked up from satellite television and the Internet. This includes language, cloths, music, etc. Juma’ and Al-Shawāf mention that this

‘fever of imitation’ [*humma al taqlid*] is as a result of the youth not knowing their history, and consequently they ‘believe that things coming from the West...are good things and that their own traditions are backward and do not fit into this modern civilization’ (p.233).

Although the youth expressions exposed by this study rarely contradict those expressed by adult commentators, many young men and women, view their parents' attempts to control, advise, or guide them as an attempt to limit their freedoms. Marwan (18 m.) suggested that the elder generation does not have faith in the judgment of the younger generation, even they are sceptical towards youth judgements: ‘They do not think that we have the conceptual skills to understand the problems we face. They do not trust us to know better. I think their attitude is: ‘we know everything but you can’t yet know as much as we do.’²¹ Marwan added that while it may be true that some of the youth make mistakes, but this does not mean that all of them do, and it does not justify the attitudes of the elder generation.²²

Many of the young contend that their parents do not listen to them. They believe that their parent’s experience is not compatible with the world they live in. Mona (18 f.) said in a focus group interview in Egypt that ‘the parents tell us about their experience, things they have done in their time, but the problem is that these experiences are not compatible with our time.’²³ Laila (18 f.) agreed and added that Arab youth live in a world that is different from the one their parents experienced. ‘Lots of the things they tell us were good for their generation and time, but difficult to apply on us. We grew up in a different world, the media is different, the wars are

21 Focus Group Interview (3) Cairo, Egypt, March 2005

22 *ibid.*

23 Focus Group Interview (1) Ismailia, Egypt, February 2005

different, and we feel that we've inherited a huge responsibility to rebuild our world.'²⁴

Shady (22 m.) thought that the elder generation keeps stressing their experience which he argued was somewhat irrelevant. 'They always talk about their experience. We can not deny their experience, of course, but still we have our own experience. Why? Because we are a different generation living in a different time and the society is different from the society they experienced.'²⁵

The young also complain that their parents do not listen to them. Mona (18 f.) said 'when we want to express our opinion, even if it was wrong they should at least hear us out and then correct us. When they talk, we listen to them though not all that they say is always correct.'²⁶

The elder generation can also dominate occasions designed to provide the young with opportunities to talk about their feelings and problems. In their study of Egyptian youth Barbara Ibrahim and Hind Wassef commented: 'Whenever dialogue is opened with young people, the occasion is seized upon by adults as a didactic opportunity to convey messages about right and wrong' (2000: 163). An experience of my own is illustrative: While I was in Egypt conducting fieldwork, in 2005 I was invited to chair a conference session titled 'The future in the eyes of arab youth' in Egypt. Yet despite the title of the session, none of the three speakers - two university lecturers and a retired Egyptian ambassador - were young themselves. Furthermore, I was only invited to participate as a substitute for an elderly speaker who had cancelled at the

24 *ibid.*

25 *ibid.*

26 *ibid.*

last minute. When I voiced concern to the organizers as to why the speakers were all middle-aged when the session was purported to highlight the youth perspective, I was told that this was an opportunity for the youth to listen and to learn from the experiences of the elderly. I was not satisfied with the answer, and so after the speakers, I opened the floor for the young to comment, ask questions, share their feelings about the future, and to communicate any messages to the elder generation. I also asked their elders in the audience to keep their comments and questions until the youth had finished.

For the dozen or so young people present it was like a door being opened. They all had something to say. Though critical, they had clear and powerful messages to the elderly: 'enough advice and guidance... try to listen to us ... we live in a different world and we want to share the responsibility, build our future'.

Laila (18 f.), a student at the American University of Cairo, complained to the audience that Arab youth 'look up to you seeking hope and support, but all we get is advice.' She continued, addressing the elder generation:

You give us too much advice. You ask us to do this and not to do that. I know that we have a responsibility and it is huge, but you also have a responsibility. You have a responsibility in showing us that you are standing up to what you say rather than just say it to us. You have to be a model force to us. It is very important... As we listen to you now with an open heart, you should also listen to us with an open heart. Most of the time one of us attempts to talk, we are silenced. Every one wants to correct us no one is willing to listen to us whether what we say is right or wrong.²⁷

Abeer (19 f.) said that many young people feel that they are lost, many feel indifferent to what is happening around them. She added: 'Yes we do have a responsibility, but we are still growing up. We are still small, but you are the ones who are supposed to help us to become better people. If we are not good enough,

²⁷ Author conference notes, 21 February 2005 Ismailia, Egypt

don't look at us and blame us, blame yourselves, maybe there is something you have missed to give to us.'

Heba (18 f.) said: 'we have a huge potential, but all doors are locked. Who locked them and why? We have to think about these locked doors, and we have to seek the help of the elderly and use their wisdom.' She continued:

We have a lot of history, but when we want to look at the future we almost see nothing. Personally I want my history and I want everything around me, but when I look at the future I feel so worried, horrified. I feel that there is no future. When I think about going to university and say to myself that I should study hard so that I can get a good job so that the future can be better and then I look around and see that our future looks really bleak. It looks very disastrous... You have to help us, give us hope and I swear to God that we will try and will do our best.²⁸

Maher (19 m.) also talked of locked doors. 'We have the will to do something for the future, but frankly all doors are locked in our face. Look at Ahmed Zewail²⁹. He only succeeded outside (in the United States of America) and no-one in Egypt benefited from him. People always put you off when you talk about your dreams, going to university. If you say you are going to do engineering for example, they'd say: oh what will you do with that? You will achieve nothing.'³⁰

Fadwa (19 f.) said that the elder generation has only one way of communicating with the young and that is lecturing and preaching. She said: 'They should find another way other than preaching and lecturing. As a young woman I do not like to be lectured on morals for example. They should try to find another way to reach us instead of direct guidance. I feel bored when I'm being lectured. We do not need lectures; we need new ways of communication.'³¹ Fadwa felt that adults should also look into themselves and not only blame the young. 'When the elderly criticize the

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ahmed H. Zewail (1946 -) won in 1999 the Nobel Prize in Chemistry for his studies of the transition states of chemical reactions using femtosecond spectroscopy. (http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/chemistry/laureates/1999/)

³⁰ Author conference notes, 21 February 2005 Ismailia, Egypt

youth and say that the youth are deviant they should also consider the fact that they were deviant themselves when they were young. It was not our generation who created drugs or first used drugs.’³²

These views were corroborated in the focus group discussions I had with the youths. In Cairo, for example, Marwan (18 m.) demanded that the elder generation give the chance to the new generation to take their responsibility. He gave the following example: ‘The problem is that people go onto a position and you never see a replacement to them. I do not say they are bad, but there has to be a replacement. Life has to go on, and it is not because they have become old, but because they need to give a chance to the next generation as they have been given the chance. That’s life giving and taking.’

Some participants used examples with their parents to show how critical and unhappy they are with their parents’ generation. Lutfi (24 m.) in Jordan said in criticism of the elder generation’s attitudes towards Arab war defeats: ‘What really bugs me is the way they talk about those defeats (1948/1967 Arab-Israeli wars). For example, take my father who witnessed the 1967 war and see how he talks about it. He talks about it with pride as if we were not defeated. I do not think that I can imagine myself proudly telling my son in the future about the fall of Baghdad, for example’.³³

In Egypt, Maher complained about his father’s attitude toward reading: ‘I was in the car with my father and I asked him to stop so that I could buy a magazine. He

³¹ *ibid.*

³² *ibid.*

³³ Focus Group Interview (1) Amman, Jordan, March 2005.

dismissed the idea and said, 'what will you read in it? You will end up throwing it away and will be of no good to you'.³⁴

Arab youths are very critical of certain aspects of their elders. They feel that they are treated as kids, are not given responsibility to shoulder, and at the same time are not listened to, discouraged and misunderstood. Feeling that they live on 'the periphery of the established social order... They barely identify, if at all, with the political thinking and behaviour of their elders and feel let down and marginalized by society' (Munoz, 2000: 23).

Evidently, satellite TV, the internet, and mobile phones have connected Arab youth to a world their parents never knew, such that the gulf between Arab youth and the elder generations appears to be progressively widening, particularly as youth are realizing as a result of exposure to new technologies that what they are told by parents and the wider elder generation is not just impractical to apply but may also be irrelevant to their lives. This is more the case when families attempt to intervene in the decisions of the youth when it comes to education, marriage, and choice of jobs.

5.5 Youth and Unemployment

The problem of youth unemployment is probably the most important issue which a majority of Arab youth have to face. The number of university students graduating each year far exceeds the job market.³⁵ The solution in Egypt (in the late 1950s and following the implementation of the Nasser education policy for some years) was to guarantee each university graduate a job in the government. The result is the situation, still today, of having a number of staff for one person's job resulting in the

³⁴ Author conference notes, 21 February 2005 Ismailia, Egypt

³⁵ Proposal on Mainstreaming Youths Issues in the MDG's regional Campaign, Arab NGO Network for Development website <http://www.annd.org/Youth%20In%20Arab%20World/Documents/Proposal%20The%20Role%20of%20Arab%20Youth%20in%20the%20MDGs%20campai gn%20Eng.pdf>

highly bureaucratic system in place (See Boyd, 1993:43). Very low salaries discourage extent entry into this system,³⁶ and most people rely on contacts to obtain jobs. Galal Amin (2000) describes an accentuation of the unemployment problem in the second half of the 1980s, 'reaching, according to some estimates, 20% of the labour force...and considerably higher rates among university and intermediate college graduates' (p.37). The high unemployment rate therefore negates the above statement in practice, such that theoretically, an education could aid social mobility, but in practice it is unlikely that this should happen. Universities are still elite and employment is largely reliant on personal contacts and not necessarily on personal merit. A recent study by Ghada F. Barsoum entitled 'the employment crisis of female graduates in Egypt: an ethnographic account' (Cairo Papers, Vol. 25, No. 3) argues that the labour market favours graduates who speak foreign languages and 'have the style and disposition of the elite,'³⁷ which puts female graduates without these qualifications at a disadvantage. Amin notes the 'feeling of disappointment in a large section of the population that had pinned great hopes on their own and their children's educational achievements as a channel for social advancement' (2000: 37).

In the focus group discussions, unemployment was singled out as the main problem facing Arab youth. Munjid (27 m.) said that unemployment and money were 'the biggest problem facing youth'.³⁸ The results of a 2002 UNDP poll conducted among 15-20 year olds in 22 Arab countries indicated clearly that job availability was the most common concern of youth (UNDP, 2002: 30). A recent study in Jordan (Al-Ghaffar, 2005) found that 73% of the 259 unemployed youth surveyed, said that they

³⁶ Boyd quotes the entry salary in 1980 for a graduate in a government job, is LE30 gross per month (p.43). Today a young person's salary is approximately between LE50 per month for a trainee doctor, LE200 for a lawyer starting out, and LE300 for a shop assistant (Sara Carr email correspondence 9 January 2007).

³⁷ <http://aucpress.com/c-15-journals.aspx?pagenum=3> [accessed 13 December 2006]

were not optimistic about finding a job. The majority (78.6%) were also unmarried, which is hardly surprising as it is practically a prerequisite in Arab society for a man to have an income before getting married.

And while the Arab youth unemployment rate varies between the Arab countries, it ranks among the highest rates in the world and is still rising in many of the Arab countries. The average for the Arab states is nearly 25%, according to UN data, and reaches 40% in some countries (Khouri, 2005). According to a 2004 report by the Arab League's Arab Economic Unity Council, the overall unemployment rate in the Arab world reached 20% in 2003, of which 60% was among the youth. The report described the situation as a 'time bomb', especially since the number of unemployed in the Arab world is increasing by 3% per year.³⁹

The Arab Business Council (ABC) of the World Economic Forum urged - in a statement issued at the close of its second annual meeting in Bahrain - Arab governments to "make the fate of the 180 million young people in the Arab region their top priority".⁴⁰ The statement read:

"The most urgent issue of reform of education systems to provide young people with the skills required by modern economies", the ABC stressed. "If equipped with these skills, young people can be the driving force of an Arab economic resurgence that will create jobs to sustain growth in the future generations" (*ibid.*).

Youth, who constitute the main new entrants to the labour market, are also most susceptible to be its victim. The lack in the number of jobs results in high competitiveness between candidates, and naturally creates a weak bargaining position for those candidates without the appropriate skills. They may turn to alternative

38 Focus Group Interview (1) Amman, Jordan, March 2005.

39 Middle East News Agency Report. 20% increase in unemployment in Arab region. 11 July, 2005. Middle East News Agency [online] available from <http://www.menareport.com/ar/business/231310> [accessed 11 May 2006].

employment sectors, such as self-employment and informal work, or alternatively remain unemployed (*Youth Employment in the ESCWA Region*, 2002).⁴¹

Over the past 20 years the distorted demand for labour has led many students to opt for educational attainments that secure administrative jobs, while a large number of skilled graduates were forced into low-productive jobs or to migrate to other countries where they could market their skills [see *Arab migration in a globalized world: Regional Conference on Arab Migration in a Globalized World*, 2004].

Youth unemployment, therefore, is mostly concentrated among the educated as a result of the inability of economies of the countries in the region to create new job opportunities sufficient to accommodate the annual increase in the labour force which is mostly composed of youth entering the labour market for the first time. It is also due to lack of consistency between the outcomes of the educational system and the needs and requirements of the labour market in terms of various specializations and skills (*Youth Employment in the ESCWA Region*, 2002).⁴²

The Arab public discourse is filled with warnings of the impact of unemployment on the future generations. Unemployment is often cited as a common reason as to why young Arabs are depressed and pessimistic about the future. The implications of unemployment for the youth result in social exclusion⁴³ which include inability to marry, extended dependence on family, and delay in the progress towards adulthood. Recent International Labour Organization (ILO) data found that 89% of the worlds

40 The ABC is an initiative of the World Economic Forum and is composed of 80 top Arab business leaders who are committed to the mission of enhancing the competitiveness of the Arab World". (www.menareport.com)

41 Youth Employment in the ESCWA Region. 2002. Paper prepared by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) for the Youth Employment Summit Alexandria, Egypt, September 7– 11, 2002. [online] available from [Http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/poverty/papers/youth_unescwa.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/poverty/papers/youth_unescwa.pdf) [accessed 12 August 2006]

42 ESCWA is the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. See Youth Employment in the ESCWA Region (2002) for full reference.

youth were living in developing economies in 2005, and that while the youth labour force growth in the Middle East and North Africa represents one of the most concentrated, it also has one of the lowest labour force participation rate [of 40%] (p.9).

The exclusion of young people from a productive role in the adult world of work could result in a series of secondary effects, including youth demoralization, and possibly as a consequence, the undermining of social cohesion leading to social problems such as crime, drug abuse, vandalism, religious extremism and general alienation in the vicious circle of poverty.

The effects of the type of demoralization described above is particularly noticeable with regards to the Arab male, as they are expected to be the bread-winners, providing for their families, and thus it is their responsibility to worry about and find jobs. Satisfactory employment plays an essential role in the transition of youth to adulthood, and in particular of male youth, as it permits financial independence and the increased ability to be able to marry. The lack of suitable jobs in the Arab world has pushed many youth to either talk about or actually try and emigrate. Some are able to do so legally; others tend their chances illegally. Either way, the *Arab Human Development Report, 2003* reported that 'roughly 25% of 300,000 first degree graduates from Arab universities in 1995/96 emigrated' (UNDP, 2003: 144) and in 2004, it was reported that 1,482 illegal Egyptian immigrants aged between 22 and 35 were deported from European countries in eight months (between September 2003 and April 2004).⁴⁴

43 Global employment trends for youth, International Labour Organization, October 2006, ILO p.7

44 Unemployment leads Egyptian youth to suicide and crime, Al-Arabiya TV website, 16/5/2004 available in Arabic at <http://www.alarabiya.net/Articles/2004/05/16/3472.htm>

24.2% of the respondents to my questionnaire said that they wanted to leave their home countries in order to search for jobs. Of this percentage, 18.9% of the male respondents to my questionnaire said they thought of leaving their country to seek better jobs while only 5.3% of the females offered the same reasons.

More disturbing, perhaps, is the link cited by some newspapers between unemployment and the increasing incidents of youth suicide. Precise figures are hard to come by, but according to a news article by Al-Arabiya news television channel website, a classified Egyptian study found that the majority of Egyptian youth who committed suicide have been pushed mainly by unemployment which causes depression as they feel that they are a burden on their families who have brought them up and educated them and supported them till the age of 40 in some cases but without work, marriage, or hope for a good future.⁴⁵ According to the article, Egyptian newspapers have published letters that some youth left behind explaining why they committed suicide indicating that life was difficult for them without finding jobs. In 2003 the Egyptian Police received 3000 notices of suicide, the majority of which were from people under 40 years old, mostly unemployed, and mostly from those who failed to marry the person they love because of the lack of social and economic ability, afforded to those employed.⁴⁶

Nonetheless, a way out that many of the youth seem to contemplate is immigration to another country. Nourallah (2006: 1) notes that unemployment and a general paucity of opportunities have been drawing tens of thousands of Arab youths to seek legal and illegal immigration.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

5.6 Youth and emigration

Young people have dreams that they would like to see come true and they will do anything to see them come true, including emigrate to a foreign country. The idea of emigration is made more attractive and reinforced by other immigrants and expatriates who recount stories of success, and the media messages, especially movies and Arab TV soaps, that suggest that making money is much easier in the West. For example, a recent Egyptian movie *Abu Al-Arabi* (2006) starring Hani Ramzi and directed by Mohsen Ahmed show the protagonist, a failed young Egyptian man who cannot marry the one he loves because he is poor, emigrating [through human smuggling] to Greece where he immediately meets the most beautiful girl with whom he has various adventures, eventually returning home with a large amount of money (unspecified in the film from where he obtains it, but through contacts with the Greek father who is a car dealer) that transforms him into a very respectable businessman.

The difficult conditions in which the Arab youth live are pushing many of them to seek a better future in a different country. Al-Askary (2001) argues that Arab youth are being pushed to look for new communities that can give them a chance to fulfil their ambitions, aspirations, and dreams. Al-Askary warns that those youth who do not manage to emigrate and “remain ‘imprisoned’ in their countries turn into explosive tools, politically or socially, so that part of them drifts towards crime, alcohol and drug addiction, which is a significant percentage in some Arab states, while the other part was attracted by the forces of extremism and turned into tools of destruction for their communities and countries” (Al-Askary, 2001).

In my questionnaire, I asked young people whether they wanted to emigrate and, if so, why. In total, 69% of the respondents said they had entertained the idea of leaving

their home countries. As Table [2] shows, when asked why they would want to leave, 24.2% cited jobs, 26.5 % gave educational reasons and 9.1% said there were social reasons behind their desire to emigrate.

Clearly, many Arab youth are not satisfied with the conditions and future prospects in their home countries and want to leave. However, this high percentage of youth wanting to emigrate should be treated with caution. It is essential to emphasis that the question put forward in the questionnaire was asking the youth whether they ever entertained the idea of emigrating. This means that the 69% does not mean that these young Arabs are actively seeking to leave home, but for one reason or another they have thought about it and may still like to do it. (See section 5.7 for further discussion on youths’ life satisfaction and their future perspectives).

Table [2]: *Young people's reasons for wanting to emigrate*

Reason	Male %	Female %	Total %
Political	4.5	1.5	6.1
Economic	18.9	5.3	24.2
Educational	10.6	15.9	26.%
Social	3.0	6.1	9.1
Exploring	3.8	9.8	13.6
Freedom	5.3	4.5	9.8
More than one of above ^a	2.3	6.8	9.1
Other reason	1.5	0.0	1.5

^a This was not included in the list, but some respondents ticked more one option.

As table [2] shows, the top three reasons why Arab youth would want to leave their countries are education, finding jobs, and freedom. The first two are linked in the sense that better education provides better jobs. However, the high percentage of Arab females wanting to migrate for educational reasons can be read in two ways.

Firstly, Arab women are less privileged compared to Arab men when it comes to education and job opportunities. Arab families tend to give priority to males rather than females when it comes to education be it at home or abroad as they believe that the man stands a better chance of getting a job afterwards. Also because in Arab society the male is expected to continue to support his family i.e. his father, mother, and siblings after his own marriage, whereas the female will be supporting her husband if at all, financially, after her own marriage. Secondly, female respondents may have been aware when responding to the question 'why they want to emigrate' that education is less controversial compared to all other options, even though the questionnaire was anonymous.

The third concern is freedom (word undefined in questionnaire). They are demanding more freedoms and regard their elders' attempts to guide them as attempts to reduce or inhibit their freedoms. Freedom as discussed in the group sessions was interpreted in two different ways: political freedom as in one's ability to speak and express him or her self freely, or social freedom as in one's ability to be individual and make choices without a greater interference from family.

In contrast to my expectations, far fewer respondents chose 'politics' as a reason why they would want to leave their home countries. This is either because of the direct indication that the respondent is not happy with the current regime in his/her country. Nonetheless, more men (4.5%) than women (1.5%) expressed political reasons behind their thinking of leaving their home country. This can be attributed to the fact that Arab society is still by and large a traditional patriarchal society where males dominate the public sphere and are thus at the forefront of politics and political change (UNDP, 2005). The same applies for economic reasons. Males in Arab

society are expected to be the bread winners and provide for their families (as mentioned above in the context of unemployment), and thus it is their responsibility to worry about and find jobs. 18.9% of the male respondents said they thought of leaving their country for economic reasons while only 5.3% pf the females had the same reasons.

Arab women seem to have more social problems than men. By social we refer to problems within the family or the wider social context including neighbours and the street. There is more pressure on females than males in the case of arranged marriage, dress code and public appearance. Yet, Arab females seem more eager to explore the world and migrate to other countries than males.

5.6.1 Where to emigrate

The questionnaire respondents were asked about the destination they'd like to pursue if they wanted to emigrate. There was a clear difference between male and females in their choice of a preferred destination.

Table [3] *where to go: youth emigration destinations*

Country	Males	Females	Total
Europe	20.9	14.9	35.8
United States	12.7	6.7	19.4
Arab	11.2	17.9	29.1
Other*	6.0	9.7	15.7

*Other countries included Australia, Canada and Malaysia

For Arab males, Europe is clearly their favourite destination with 21% wanting to emigrate to Europe. The United States came second while other Arab countries came last. During the discussions I had with Arab youth, it was mentioned by many participants that the United States is no longer a favourite destination for them as they hear much about the ill-treatment of Arabs who live or emigrated to the United States.

Nonetheless, the United States remains a preferred place for Arab male youth to go to in comparison to other Arab countries as a destination.

However, when it comes to Arab females, other Arab countries and mainly the rich Gulf is their preferred destination with 18%. This can be explained in young women's desire to avoid social pressure by living in a non-Arab and non-Islamic society, which would be less of a problem for males. (For full gender comparison on the findings of this research see Appendix 1).

5.7 Life satisfaction and the future

In the light of the social issues described above, affecting the Arab world and Arab youth, it is no wonder that the older generation fear for the future of Arab society and culture. However, less focus is given to listening to the youth themselves and finding out what their present life satisfaction and concerns are for their own future. In response to these concerns, this section presents the research findings for Arab youth perceptions of the future giving indications of their life satisfaction. It shows that contrary to the arguments in the Arab public discourse Arab youth are satisfied with their lives and looking forward for a better future despite their difficult circumstances.

Youth, on the one hand, is the segment in society that is generally naturally characterized by ambition, risks and hopes for a good future. On the other hand, it is also a stage in life in which fears for the future are manifested (Fornäs and Bolin 1995), for as 'Alam (2000: 321) argues, it is they who are most likely to be influenced by global, regional, and local changes.

Comments throughout this thesis bear witness to the 'explosive mixture of youth and media' (Fornäs and Bolin, 1995: 1), when anxiety and apprehension about the unknown are coupled with a culturally pessimistic diagnosis of degeneration in which

the morals of youth becomes signs of the sins and transgressions of modernity. Youth, are primary consumers of new media and genres (in this case satellite TV and its ground-breaking programme formulae), and so it is not an accident that criticism of these new media often accompanies criticism of youth culture.

5.7.1 Youth Life Satisfaction and Perceptions of the Future

It is a general trend of adult and academic discourse to portray Arab youth as ‘lost’, ‘desperate’, ‘alienated’ and dissatisfied with their lives and reality (Meijer, 2000; Al-Askary, 2001; Abu-Rabi’, 2004; Bibars, 2004). Abu-Rabi’ (2004: 154) describes great pessimism about the future caused by ‘failed economic modernization’ alongside a ‘crisis in values’. Referring to Egypt, he claims that these factors have engendered ‘social confusion’ at home, breeding religious movements as well as the emigration of educated Arabs overseas:

A wide spectrum of society feels the pressure of social change and the inadequacy of state institutions to devise appropriate solutions to social, moral, cultural, and economic problems (p. 156).

This section explores how the young feel about their own conditions, whether they are satisfied with their lives and how they feel about the future. Contrary to arguments exemplified by Al-Askary (2001) and Bibars (2004) that Arab youth are dissatisfied with their lives, only 20% of my respondents said that they were not happy with their lives. [See table 4]

Table [4]: *How satisfied are you with your life?*

	Males	Females	Total
Very satisfied	5.6	7.2	12.8
Satisfied	30.3	36.9	67.2
Not satisfied	11.3	8.7	20.0

Moreover, the questionnaire results clearly indicate that most of the youth have hope and trust in what the future might hold. When asked about how they feel the future is going to be, the majority were optimistic: 50% of the respondents said they think the future will be better, 18.2% said life will be the same in the future, while 31.8% thought the future is going to be worse. [See table (5)]

Females seem to be more pessimistic than males about the future. 18.8% of the female respondents thought the future will be worse whereas 13% of the males thought so. This can be attributed to the fact that women do not enjoy equal rights in Arab society. Specifically, unlike males, Arab women, and especially young females suffer from a noticeable impairment of personal liberty (UNDP, 2005: p10). Hence, while young males feel that they can take control of their lives at some stage, sooner or later, the females feel that at all stages they will be controlled by male-dominated society. Another reason for pessimism regarding the future is that Arab women continue to suffer more than men do from a lack of opportunities to acquire knowledge (*ibid.*) According to the Arab Human Development Report 2005 (published 2006), the Arab world has one of the highest rates of female illiteracy (as much as one half, compared to only one third among males). The report also notes that although female enrolment in university education has risen, women are still concentrated in fields such as literature, the humanities and the social sciences where they constitute the majority. These are the subjects in least demand by employers. Enrolment rates for females in fields that lead to jobs, such as engineering and science, are noticeably lower (UNDP, 2005: 7).

Table [5]: *How do you think the future will be?*

	Better	The Same	Worse
Males	25.5	8.9	13.0
Females	24.5	9.4	18.8
Total	50.0	18.2	31.8

The survey shows that many young Arabs are optimistic for the future, declaring that they feel the future will be better, whereas table [4] reveals a mere satisfaction for their present situation (rather than very satisfied).

Parallel to the questionnaire, youth predictions of and concerns about the future were raised within the focus groups discussions. Interestingly, unlike the results of the questionnaire, and though there were mixed views about the future, the overwhelming sentiment was scepticism about the future prospects of the young. In Egypt, I asked participants in one of the focus groups whether they personally felt the future was going to be better or worse. Randa (22 f.) said that the main reason why she did not get into politics was because ‘when I asked my uncle and told him that I wanted to work in politics, he told me that I will not be able to make any difference as everything is controlled by other people: “They control you”, he said.’⁴⁷ Hesa (19 f.) further commented on corruption in the work-place acting as a disincentive: ‘Everything is getting harder for young people. The competition is very hard. In the Arab World you need to know people to get a job. If you are good in something, but someone else knows the boss then you have no chance of getting the job.’ However, Ahmed (18 m.) seemed to disagree with his colleagues: ‘I do not agree. If we look at Egypt, for example, I think that the future is going to be better. Starting from the

⁴⁷ Focus Group (5) Cairo, Egypt March 2005

recent promising speech of the president.⁴⁸ Ahmed's comment was received with astonishment by his colleagues, but he tried to defend his argument by saying that: 'Well! We know that he (the President) is staying and his son may take over after him, but our country will be fine.'

Later in the conversation, Ahmed said that there are things to be done if 'our future is to be bright'. He continued: As long as we cannot talk or have an opinion, we will not achieve and also we cannot get a job without the help of someone...I will be powerless to do anything when I find someone who has not got my skills as the manager in my job place'. Salma (18 f.) commented: We live in a depression right now. I swear to God... we are young, but depressed. Ahmed, responded: 'Like I said earlier about the news. We already feel depressed and watching news of killing and all will not help, but will make us more depressed.'⁴⁹

Marwan (18 m.) said that he could not predict the future, but 'I do not think that the future is going to be better'. Others were also pessimistic about the future for various reasons. Randa (22 f.) said that the future is going to be worse: 'There is already a big conflict right now between the Arab World and the West and this is just the beginning. Young people often find themselves caught in the middle of the East-West divide. On the one hand being seen as the group targeted by the West in their attempt to control the Arab nation and on the other hand, as the 'potential threat' to the West by being involved in acts of terrorism. Rana (17 f.) blamed Arab governments for this: Our problem is that we the Arabs are not united. Arab countries keep criticising

⁴⁸ Ahmed is referring to Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's keynote speech on electoral reform on 26 February, 2005, which was broadcast live by Egyptian satellite TV. Mr Mubarak called on parliament to amend Egypt's constitution to allow direct presidential elections in which anyone can stand and all citizens can vote by secret ballot.

⁴⁹ Focus Group (5) Cairo, Egypt March 2005

each other and at the same time make single-country relations with non-Arab countries [referring to certain Arab countries allying with the US and other western countries]...Our problem is that we have reached the point of blind imitation and following without thinking. We used to be great and now we are so backward. Egypt was great and we invented the use of paper which proved to be of great use to humanity. Dina (18 f.) commented: 'Wars have caused us to be backward'.⁵⁰

In the Emirates, Saleh (18 m.) echoed this pessimism: 'If we are to think in the long term and about the future we'll feel more depressed and still won't find solutions'.⁵¹ Saleh said that he believes that religion helps young people resist the temptations and the attempts to destroy them. He said: 'Yet the youth have not been completely destroyed because the religious factor is still alive'. Hassan (18 m.) agreed adding that 'There are also Sheikhs like Amr Khaled and Tareq Alsuwaidan [religious preachers on TV] who are knowledgeable and humble. They would like to help fix the society.' (See Chapter six)

However, while Hassan remained optimistic about the role and existence of religious leaders and religious TV programming, Salah (18 m.) in Cairo felt that this was not the case: 'I am not optimistic, because we've lost the religion and it is not coming back'.⁵² Sherif responded by saying 'this is a defeatist view and that is what is making things worse'. In this focus group in Egypt, participants had different feelings about the future. Ahmed (18 m.) who has just started medical studies says he thinks his future will be fine as he will not be in an Arab country. When I asked him to explain, he said that he will aim to go to a non-Arab country (Western) where he will be

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Focus Group (2) Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates January 2005

⁵² Focus Group (3) Cairo, Egypt March 2005

economically better, and 'I'll have a better experience and people over there provide the environment for you to succeed'. Ahmed continued: 'Look at Ahmed Zoel [US based Egyptian scientists awarded Nobel Prize] who said that in our societies we do not pay enough attention to scholars and scientists and all professionals...so when I go there, I should not have a problem in becoming successful.'⁵³

This optimism about the future seems to be based on Ahmed's dreams and the image he has of the West and the United States. Similarly, Sherif (18 m.) commented: 'Well if it is about me, I'd like to be successful and encourage people around me. I'd like to go to the United States. If we look at why the Jewish Lobby dominates in the United States, it is because they are controlling the economy, so if we the Arabs did the same, and built up an Arab Lobby this would help our nation. So, I am optimistic.'⁵⁴

Ahmed wanted to explain his position: 'what I am saying is that if I travelled abroad and got well educated I will be back to benefit my country. But if I stayed here I'm sure won't progress at all.' Sherif felt the same: 'Me too. If I know that I'll be fine here in my country I would not leave and I'm not so keen on leaving in the first place. But because I know that I won't be doing well financially and won't have a good life here, then I decide to go.' The discussion continued:

Nada (18 f.): We cannot just leave our countries and lose hope, then they will do what they like.

Ahmed (18 m.): Let me tell you something. I'm not saying that I'm leaving because I've lost hope. I'm leaving because I want to be a better person. I do not have a good chance here. I'll go there, get the experience, and come back to my country. I'm not saying I've lost hope in my country, I just think I have better chances for education outside.

Nada: Before they got to where they are now in the West, all this civilization, where did they get it from? Was it not from us?

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

Salah: I think it is all because we have abandoned religion and stopped practicing Islam: that is the reason why we are not civilized and have problems.

Ahmed: I'll tell you something, all that a young man cares about is to watch [music and video clip] channels like Mazzika and to vote in Star Academy while a practicing guy would mainly be concerned with serving Islam and Muslims.

Hisham (18 m.) All that the young care about now is appearance.

Nada: The problem is that we Arabs talk a lot but do a little. We need to change ourselves before things will change for us.

Ahmed: You know what will happen to anyone who attempts to do something good...look at Amr Khaled...when people started to listen to him and change, they made him leave...

Nada: Yes but people still watch his shows till today

In Palestine, participants from Gaza had other reactions given their environment⁵⁵.

Sharaf (18 m.) said 'now, we are optimistic (referring to the Israeli pull out from the Gaza Strip). But Mohammed (18 m.) expressed concern over the situation in Gaza and what the future might hold: 'I think the internal situation in Gaza is difficult ...There are no social institutions...The situation is getting worse. When one looks at the reality from all sides, after Israel left (Gaza) there were many social problems... there is no law and order. There is no hope.' Ala (17 m.) commented by saying that 'people usually decide their future plans and shape their own future, but in our case it is more or less circumstantial. The circumstances decide for us, and shape our future. However, one must have a target in his mind; for instance to finish his education and then to find work and then to get married.' Abdelfattah (18 m.) commented 'well yes, one must have a goal but the general situation affects us and our social circumstances decide.'

Mohammed's concerns over the situation in Gaza have since materialised, as after the focus group interview, The Islamic Resistance Movement known as Hamas won

⁵⁵ The interviews in Gaza were conducted after the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza - after 38 years of illegal occupation - and just before the election of the Hamas government in the Palestinian territories, which led to a cut in international aid.

the general elections in the Palestinian territories. As a result the international community stopped aid to the Palestinian people (Karam 2006) and Gaza has been host to serious internal fighting during the first half of 2007 almost amounting to civil war. A recent study (2007) by the department of Research and Survey Studies at the Najah University in the West Bank found that about 30 % of Palestinians wanted to leave their home country because of the severity of the situation. The survey was conducted amongst people aged 18 and above living both in Gaza and the West Bank.⁵⁶

5.8 Conclusion

The views expressed in this chapter have been selected from a cross-section of young people and they clearly indicate that Arab youth are very critical of their elders and what they see as repeated military or cultural 'defeats', lack of development, and 'submission to the West'. They feel that their elders failed to join successfully the global development and modernization. They find themselves in a situation where they have to deal with the aftermath of the past of their elders, and having to cope with an increasingly globalized world without losing their Arab identity of which they are proud.

They are confident of their potential, but want their elders to give them a voice and listen to them, and give them the chance to be responsible and take charge of their lives. They suffer from what they see as lack of understanding on the part of their elders to their needs and aspirations; to the fact that they live in a different world; one that is different from that experienced by their parents' generation.

⁵⁶ Survey: 30% of Palestinians want to immigrate. Palestine Press. 26 March 2007. [online] available from <http://www.palpress.ps/arabic/index.php?maa=ReadStory&ChannelID=67810> [accessed 20 March 2007]

They worry about finding jobs and are willing to leave their home countries in search for jobs and a better life. They are not content with the current situation of their societies, especially wars, violence and lack of development; but they are not depressed nor desperate as portrayed in the public discourse. On the contrary, they seem to be optimistic about the future and the majority of them believe that it is going to be better.

6.1 Introduction

Although young Arabs represent a significant percentage of Arab TV viewers, there is evidence that a considerable portion of these viewers, particularly those that have access to satellite to compare what other channels are providing, are extremely dissatisfied with, as they see it, the lack of a forum or voice for more 'serious' concerns. These may be political, social, economic or even cultural concerns. Sara Carr, a young Egyptian lawyer who has lived in Cairo and London, observes that of those Egyptians who own a television set far more have a dish than in the UK, simply through necessity, as terrestrial programming is so dire, dull and state-controlled⁵⁷. The censored mainstream, state-run and even private satellite television appear to have turned many young Arab people towards new media - in particular, the Internet where youth forums are able to raise and discuss issues that for various reasons (such as censorship) cannot be discussed on terrestrial or satellite TV.⁵⁸

This chapter therefore examines what Arab satellite television offers youth in the region, and how young men and women regard the programmes on offer. In doing so, it investigates the current trends in Arab TV youth programming, prompted by the prevailing view of informants for this study that young Arabs believe they are underrepresented and misrepresented by the media.

⁵⁷ Email correspondence 15 December 2006

⁵⁸ See Reporters Without Borders, map showing the freedom of press situation in Middle Eastern countries, ranging from 'noticeable problems' to 'very serious situation'

6.2 Arab TV youth programming

Broadcast media have traditionally marketed modern music programmes as ‘youth programmes’ to the exclusion of other material. In any given day or week, the majority of total programmes on State-run and Arab satellite television are specifically aimed at young viewers (of an age-range around 15-35). Medhat (19 m.) noted that, in the majority of cases, if TV programmes claim to be either for or about youth it is inevitably because they include songs and musical entertainment. As for youth participation on TV, he comments that ‘young people are only asked for their opinion when the topic is music, songs and films’.⁵⁹ In addition to musical entertainment, sports are also an ‘area where young people’s views are sought and heard’ (Mona 18 f.).⁶⁰

Therefore a common perception held by informants was that young people appear on television almost exclusively in sports and entertainment programmes, and rarely on programmes discussing social, economic and political issues. Najah (19 f.) pointed out that “all political and economic programmes have only old people ... I’ve never seen a political programme that has young people commenting or discussing the issues involved”. Nadia (20 f.) added that “there is no voice for young people in politics: That is a no-go area”.⁶¹ Karim (18 m.) added: “Yes, most youth programmes are about music, films, etc. I’ve never seen a political programme hosted by young people or seeking the voice of young people”.⁶²

⁵⁹ Focus group interview (2), Egypt, August, 2004

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

⁶¹ *ibid.*

⁶² *ibid.*

In Jordan, Musa (22 m.) complained that youth are underrepresented on television programmes: 'Youth representation on television is less than 15 or 20% of what it should be'⁶³. In the same vein, Medhat (19 m.) from Cairo, stated

For example when they [Egyptian state television] want to advertise a serious programme that will discuss Egyptian politics and economics, they bring in someone who is very dull instead of bringing in someone with expertise in advertising who would attract many people to watch the programme. If, however, the programme is on music; a more charming and articulate person is more likely to be employed in order to attract many more people therefore increasing profit. They do this because they think that young people are only interested in music and dancing ... What they should do is swap the two presenters.⁶⁴

But does the problem reside with the producers and funders who do not wish to venture into new material for youth, or in the audience whose lack of interest would mean such an alternative would not be commercially viable? Karim (18 m.) insisted that the problem could be with young people themselves rather than the media. He said: 'Our problem is that we are no longer interested in good stuff. Most young people would for example rather watch *Star Academy* (a reality gameshow song contest on LBC) rather than a programme on Al-Jazeera, (the Arab news and political discussion channel)'. Shady (20 m.) suggested that: 'we escape from and try to avoid news programmes as the amount of them/their content? is enough to make us feel we are suffocating.'⁶⁵ Even though Al-Jazeera was widely acknowledged as being of a very high broadcasting standard, even better than BBC and CNN, all informants in the group admitted that they did not watch it every day, preferring music channels such as Mazzika and Melody because 'that is what we are interested in and that is who we are'.⁶⁶

63 Focus group interview (2), Jordan, March 2005

64 Focus group interview (2), Egypt, August, 2004

65 *ibid.*

66 *ibid.*

It appears that young Arabs do not watch terrestrial and satellite broadcasting or the more traditional media to help situate or solve their more ‘serious’ concerns; rather, they appear to view television programmes as an important source of entertainment. There are some notable exceptions, however, and the following section explores some of the programmes currently broadcast that deal with youth and their social reality in the context of informant testimonials.

Cognitive (information and knowledge) and affective (entertainment) reasons for watching TV were most common with youth, with females giving entertainment rather than information and knowledge marginally more frequently than males as reasons for watching TV.

Table [6] *Why do you watch TV?*

Reason	Male %	Female %
Entertainment	24	26
Information and knowledge	13	8.3
Both entertainment and information	3.6	9.4
Passing time	3.1	5.7
Escape reality	1.6	2.6
Other	1.6	1.0

Similar results were reflected in the kinds of programme watched by males and females: 13% of males watched mostly ‘news’ (only 6.8% female) whereas 11.4% females enjoyed ‘music and singing’ (only 3.1% male). Both sexes enjoyed movies: 13% of males, and 14.1% of females watched mostly movies?

Table [7] *What kind of programmes do you watch most on television?*

	Male %	Female %
News	13	6.8
Talk shows	2.0	5.2
Soaps	3.1	7.8
Music and singing	3.1	11.4
Movies	13	14.1
Sports	6.3	5.0
Religious programmes	5.2	6.8
Documentaries	1.0	1.0
Other	0.0	1.6

Fewer females were interested in the news than males. This is possibly because men are socially and economically responsible for their families,⁶⁷ and so will express more interest in the news, which covers issues that affect them such as national and regional developments. For example, my informants in Jordan pointed out that the effects of the conflicts in Iraq (1991, 2003) have resulted in waves of refugees pouring into neighbouring Jordan which in turn had social and economic repercussions for average Jordanians like themselves. Moreover, in my experience, most conversations between males inevitably include politics. They are also the principal participants in the Arab public sphere, and so will engage in political and social discussions with other men in the cafes and other social spaces. Females, on the other hand, watch more TV soaps, movies and music channels than their male counterparts. Perhaps surprisingly, women watch almost as much sport as they do talk shows, and only marginally less than men's viewing time of sports. Watching circumstances were not explored, and so this result may be because they are obliged to watch sports while the men of the family are watching it.

⁶⁷ See Barakat (2004) where he refers to 'the father is the 'lord of the family, or 'Rabb al-usrah'.

Contrary to the questionnaire results indicating high viewing figures for news, most of those same informants in the focus groups actually expressed a lack of interest in the news. They clarified that they flick to the news to get the headlines and maybe the main news and then return to entertainment. They may come back to the news at the head of the hour, but most of their viewing time is spent watching entertainment channels. (See section 6.4).

6.3 TV and Youth problems

Many of the youth interviewed felt that television neither helps them solve nor deal with the problems and concerns which they typically face. This was either because they felt that all programmes were out of touch with their reality or simply because there are no programmes to explore these issues.

To what extent those two possibilities are accurate was debated by several groups of youngsters in four Arab countries during the course of fieldwork carried out between 2004 and 2005. Table [8] below shows the results of a questionnaire given to these same groups. Respondents were asked whether they agreed with the statement that television helps young people to solve or effectively deal with their social, economic, and/or emotional problems: The majority (54%) disagreed.

However, 33.7% thought the statement was accurate including 5.7% who thought it was very accurate, indicating that some young Arabs find television useful and helpful and are able to relate television positively to their daily lives. Respondents were asked if they wished to comment on their answer. Of those who thought the statement was accurate, one 20 year-old male from the Emirates commented that 'TV has programmes and shows that cover all of the above' (Questionnaire No. 6). Another respondent from UAE wrote: 'TV series that deal with relationships help

solve young people's emotional problems' (18 m. Questionnaire No. 18). An 18 year-old female from Jordan commented: 'Young people watch TV to kill time, but there are shows that help solve young people's emotional problems' (Questionnaire No. 67). An 18 year-old female from Egypt wrote: 'Sometimes, [TV] helps to escape from problems. On the other hand it gives solutions in an indirect way' (Questionnaire No. 106).

A 22 year-old female from the Emirates thought the onus was on young people to take advantage of the assistance offered: 'when watched, social talk shows do give suggestions to young people on how to solve problems they face, but unfortunately teenage youth prefer entertainment and singing programmes' (Questionnaire No. 2).

Table (8) TV and youth problems: *How accurate would you describe the following sentence: Television helps young people in solving or dealing with their social, economic, and/or emotional problems?*

Answer	Percent
Very accurate	5.7
Accurate	28
Not accurate	53.9
Do not know	12.4

However, amongst those who thought TV did not help youth deal with their problems, a 20 year-old female from Palestine wrote: 'It depends on the individual, but most problems discussed on TV are far from the reality of young people (Questionnaire No. 30). A 21 year-old female from Jordan wrote: 'TV has very few programmes that deal with young people's problems' (Questionnaire No. 43). Another respondent from Jordan commented: 'TV increases young people's problems' (19 m. and 22 f.)⁶⁸. A 17 year-old male respondent from Egypt

68 19 m. questionnaire No. 52 and 22 f. questionnaire No. 63

commented: 'You could watch some shows that deal with young people's problems, and at the end of the day achieve nothing' (Questionnaire No. 82).

This issue was further discussed in the focus groups. In answer to the question whether there were programmes on television aiming to solve young people's problems, responses corroborated the questionnaire findings. Heba (19 f.) said that there were no channels that aimed at solving young people's problems⁶⁹ whereas Ali (27 m.), who works for Jordanian television, said that television does sometimes talk about young people's problems, but is never able to offer solutions.⁷⁰

Rita (20 f.) said that there were certain TV programmes that dealt with youth and which represent young people, but there were no channels that are exclusively about or for youth.⁷¹

Once again, whether this paucity of youth programmes was at the discretion of the television programmers themselves or whether it was due to their lack of commercial viability was raised by Ali (27 m.), who is a media student and also works at Jordanian television:

In the case of private and commercial broadcasting, the channel cares first and foremost about its profit making before worrying about problem-solving on youth issues: they care about how popular and successful a programme is. On the other hand, state television does not care: they have a budget. Jordanian TV is dying, anyway...If a show is not successful will it be repeated? Would a programme like Star Academy have continued had it not been successful? Then, did it have an influence or not?⁷²

⁶⁹ Focus group interview (1), Jordan, March, 2005

⁷⁰ *ibid.*

⁷¹ *ibid.*

⁷² *ibid.*

This sentiment was also felt by others, such as Riyad (24 m.) in Abu Dhabi who explained to fellow participants that the objective of TV channels was to make money and not to preserve traditions: “If we are to talk about channels in general we have to remember that a channel’s first aim is commercial. They care first and foremost about viewership; they want to have a large number of viewers in order to function and the last thing they are likely to think about is our tradition.”⁷³

Some participants disapproved of programmes supposedly aimed at young people and expressed a concern with regards to the corruption of morals.

Farah (21 m.):

There are many young people’s programmes that are corrupting, but still very popular among the youth, but there is no one single programme that is not corrupting and attracts me. They say this programme is for young people: nonsense, I cannot see it, it is very irritating; it’s like my grandfather is talking to me...there is not even one programme that seriously debates young people’s problems; well there are some, but they approach the issue from the viewpoint of the elderly not of young people.⁷⁴

Saba (24 f.) agrees that the supposed programmes for young people are in effect for the elderly: “Youth programmes are not successful mainly because they are about the elderly more than they are about young people.” Even programmes like *Sirah wa Infatahat* are not about young people though they have aired two or three episodes on youth issues. Saba went on to say:

Even when they invite a psychiatrist to respond to young people’s problems, I sometimes wish I could be there to tell him how wrong he is. This doctor does not know anything about what’s going through a young person’s head, but is rather psychoanalysing himself.⁷⁵

73 Focus group interview (2), United Arab Emirates, January 2005

74 Focus group interview (2), Jordan, March, 2005

75 Focus group interview (2), Jordan, March, 2005

Hana (21 f.) agreed and said that there were no TV programmes that deal with the real concerns of young people.⁷⁶ In Egypt, Randa (22 f.) complained about the lack of TV shows that invite politicians and allow the public to interact with them: 'I never saw a programme where young people talk to political leaders. There was once a programme here in Egypt where students were questioning Colin Powell through a video conference link. This was the only time I actually saw young people questioning a political leader.'⁷⁷

Dina (18 f.) said that all political programmes and economic programmes on television only involve older people: 'I never saw a political programme with young people sitting talking and discussing' and Rana (17 f.) added 'because they think that we lack experience.'⁷⁸

Rana disagreed with the assumption that there were no TV shows that involve the youth: 'There are programmes with youth participation. There is a programme on Dream TV where mostly young people interview stars and actors. It's all about television, something fun, nothing serious.' Hesa (19 f.) responded by saying that young people are noticeably absent when the topic is political: 'you do not see young people on a political programme – unless they have been involved in some sort of crisis - then they'd have to interview that person'.

Randa (22 f.) felt that young people are excluded from decision-making and their opinion is rarely asked for: 'They do not consider it's worth knowing our opinion on everything that is going on.' Rana added that no single opinion was authoritative. She explained: 'They only want to take the opinion of leaders - people who can have an

⁷⁶ *ibid.*

⁷⁷ Focus group (4), Egypt, February, 2005

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

effect on society, culture or the economy. The opinion of average working class people are hardly seen or heard on television, except in surveys. An average working class person can be seen on television only if he has done something significant like murdering his wife or child.'⁷⁹

However, not all the comments on Arab television programmes made by the group participants were negative. Nidal (25 m.), a journalism student, challenged his fellow participants saying that TV programmes do help young people: 'There are many programmes that have tackled young people's problems and issues such as *Zafeen* and *Sirah wa infatahat*. They discuss issues particularly pertinent or of interest to young people such as drugs and marriage. *Zafeen* once discussed the issue of tattoos. Some people believe tattoos deform the body, others view them as a nice thing, and others have a moral issue with them and disapprove of them. Programmes on drugs are also useful for young people: What are the effects of taking drugs? What does it do to your family? Where could you end up?'

Nada (21 f.) said that a number of TV serials mirrored real, existing social issues and could therefore help to solve real-life problems. Jumana (21 f.), a Palestinian female studying in Jordan agreed that social issues were represented on TV: 'Recently they started paying attention to social problems: marriage, divorce, HIV, cancer and even smoking, in a bid to try and raise awareness with the society as a whole and to make people aware of new developments and hazards.' She added that 'even political programmes try to raise your awareness of politics through political talk shows and programmes...they offer more than just the news'.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

⁸⁰ Focus group interview (2), Jordan, March, 2005

It was argued that entertainment-type programmes have more wide-ranging benefits, so that singing contest shows such as *Super Star* and *Star Academy* should be perceived as good for young people. Nidal argued that ‘singing shows like *Super Star* and *Star Academy*...are about young people who want to aspire to something and become a singer’.⁸¹

6.4 Didacticism, monologues and news about killing

Like young people elsewhere, young Arab people need information and opportunities to talk about their feelings and problems. This, it would seem, is not offered by the media and television in particular - at least not in an effective way. There remains a need for programmes that address issues still considered largely taboo in Arab society, such as relationships between boys and girls (Ibrahim and Wassef 2000). This does not mean that these ‘sensitive’ issues get no airing at all on national television. What it does mean is that they are aired in the form of monologues, not dialogues. In their study of Egyptian young people, Barbara Ibrahim and Hind Wassef commented: ‘Whenever a conversation on such issues is started with young people, the occasion is seized upon by adults as an opportunity to teach messages about right and wrong’ (2000: 163). Amina Khairy, Cairo correspondent for the London based *Al-Hayat* daily, has made a similar point. Writing in 2003 she said young Arab people want to be addressed as adults, not as teenagers or kids. They prefer programmes to be live and not recorded and many would like programmes to host parents and teachers to enable them to listen directly to young people’s opinions, needs and complaints.⁸² Participants in my research felt the same way. Hana (19 m) complained that young people’s programmes speak about young people, but never to them. ‘There are no programmes that address the concerns of young people’, she said. ‘There

⁸¹ Focus group interview (2), Jordan, March, 2005

should be programmes that engage in dialogue with young people. We need such programmes that talk to real young people. The programmes that we see on TV have a set-up audience of young people who do not represent real young people'.⁸³

In a focus group in Jordan, Farah (20 f) pointed out that there are plenty of what she called 'corrupting' programmes for young people on television — programmes which are very popular amongst young people — but, she argued, there is 'not even one' good non-corrupting programme that attracts young people. 'There are programmes on youth issues, but they discuss youth issues from the viewpoint of older people rather than the young. They are very dull and very upsetting. I feel as if it is my grandfather who is talking to me'.⁸⁴ Maher (19 m), who has an interest in business and economics, complains that most of the time when he turns the TV on and flicks through the channels all he finds is music, dancing and films: 'I hardly ever find serious programmes and when I do, the presenter is a very old man, someone who is about to die. We need to see and hear young people. We would love to hear ideas and problem-solving from young people'. He continued:

During the period of the floating of the Egyptian currency, there was a business programme on Egyptian TV and they invited a man with 30 years of experience to offer his ideas and solutions. What I really would like to see is people like me... I want to see what they think of the situation ... I want to know if there is a group of people thinking like me or is it just stupid me.⁸⁵

This does not necessarily mean that the programme was unsatisfactory in its own terms. But it does give a clear indication of how young people are put off just by seeing older people on television giving their opinion and advice.

82 Amina Khairy, 'Egyptian teens want non-didactic programmes', Al-Hayat, 23 December 2003 [In Arabic]

83 Focus group interview (2), Jordan, March 2005

84 Focus group interview (1), Jordan, March 2005

85 Focus group interview (2), Egypt, August 2004

Thus doubts are expressed as to whether the rise of new channels has created new and lasting opportunities for dialogue among and with young people on television. Zen TV, launched in 2001 as the first Arab channel specifically for a young audience, did indeed bring up issues long avoided by other channels. It tackled taboo subjects like sex, the growing generation gap, and emotional conflicts, by means of a host of talk shows, game shows, and dubbed movies.⁸⁶ The channel, which stopped its regular programmes in 2003 and turned into a 24-hour music and video clip channel, seemed overtly western in the eyes of many young Arab people.

At the time of rewriting this thesis, a new Arab satellite channel OTV for youth was launched in January 2007 to cater particularly for youth (Fahim 2007). However, only time will tell if OTV, which was set up by Egyptian businessman Naguib Sawiris, will succeed where previous attempts at reaching the youth market such as Zen TV have failed.

Although 63.6% of the respondents to my questionnaire said they knew about the existence of Zen TV, only 26.9% said that they had ever watched it⁸⁷. A year after its switch to 24-hour music, a young observer noted online: 'It turned out that the problems and concerns of young Arab people are - from Zen's perspective - mainly to do with hairstyles, fashion, cellphone ringtones and artists' websites'.⁸⁸ Another agreed, saying that, according to Zen, the interests of young Arab people are limited to dancing, music and fashion.⁸⁹

86 Hassan Fattah, 'Zen TV reaches out to Arab youth', TBS Journal 2002 [online] available from <http://tbsjournal.com/Archives/Fall02/Zen.html> [accessed 12 January 2005]

87 Questionnaire results. See appendix II

88 Al-Shabāb al-'arabi: [Young Arab people: are they cultural targets?] n.d. [online] available from www.balagh.com/youth [accessed on 30 Sep 2004]

89 Al Mutawi, J., 2002. ZEN TV: Openness to youth or to westernization, Islam Web. [online] available from www.islamweb.net [accessed 22 March, 2002]

This is despite the fact that, as my research showed, movie and music channels are most popular among young Arab people, who watch television largely for entertainment rather than education or knowledge. As Table (97) indicates, the bulk of time the young people whose views were solicited for this study spent watching television was dedicated to watching movies or video clips on music channels. About 33.3% of the respondents to my questionnaire said that movies were their most-watched programmes on television, followed by 17.5 for singing, music and video clips and 15% for news.

Table [9]: *Favourite TV programme genres among 16-27 year olds*

Type of programming	Per cent
Movies	27.4
Singing, music and game shows	14.2
News and current affairs	19.5
Religious programmes	12.1
Talk shows	6.4
(TV drama series) Soaps	11.1
Sports	6.8
Documentaries	1.1
Other	1.6
Total	100.00

Most of the young people interviewed in the focus groups said that the 24-hour music channels are on all the time while they are at home, whether in the foreground or the background as they are doing other things. These channels, Rotana, Melody, Al-Nojoom and Mazzika, feature non-traditional dancing by assertive female singers in the latest Arab music video clips. News and current affairs ranked nowhere near as high as entertainment as a reason for watching television. Only about 20% of the respondents to my questionnaire said that news and current affairs was the

programme they watched most on television. When asked about news and current affairs, most people in the focus groups said they found the news dull and repetitive as well as depressing. Mustafa (19 m) said: 'I watch mostly entertainment. News and politics is so boring. It is not as important as it used to be and now it is very much the same. Nothing is really new and that is boring. It is also depressing as it is all about death, death and death.'⁹⁰ Saleh (18 m) pointed out that the news from day to day is more or less the same. In contrast, he said, 'there is always something new when it comes to songs. Even if one does not like the song, one still likes to see something new'.⁹¹

Young people watch the news mainly when significant events happen and follow them up only for a short period. This was predominantly the view of young people across the focus group discussions. Mohammed (20 m) pointed out that there was much interest in the news when the Palestinian intifada broke out in 2000, but this interest did not last for long. Ansar (20 m) added: 'At the beginning of the intifada one could easily get affected by seeing the images of killings in the news. One could even become depressed, but then they became commonplace and even normal'.⁹² The Palestinian intifada, the attacks of 11 September 2001 in the US, the subsequent wars on Afghanistan and Iraq, and the 2005 assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister, Rafiq Hariri, were mentioned as the biggest events that made young people watch the news.

But my respondents also said it added to a sense of depression. Sherif (19 m) from Egypt said that watching the news makes young people more depressed. 'The news is depressing and we are already depressed about everything that is going on in our

⁹⁰ Focus Group interview (2), United Arab Emirates, April 2005

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

country. It's crowded and the economic situation is bad, so we do not need to get more depressed by watching the news. We have enough of what's going on inside our country'. Sarah (21 f) said that she finds the news mostly boring, 'except for the critical parts like the assassination of Hariri ... events that change things'. Saber (19 m) complained that young people lack opportunities to comment on news and current affairs. 'The way they present the news — it's always the same. I'm not saying they should change it, but at least they should add some features that involve young people. Like just giving a chance for young people to appear on TV as well, and discuss their opinions about political ideas'.⁹³

6.5 Religious Programming: the other side of satellite broadcasting

A more recent phenomenon and one widely perceived as successful both by young and older viewers alike is that of religious programmes which were frequently cited by my informants as useful. Basma (2006) describes religious broadcasting as one the fastest growing programming segments in the Arab World: "And it appears that the battle for hearts and minds is only heating up" (p.28). Basma quotes a market research by Arab Advisors Group which concluded that "piety now shares the spotlight with pop culture as both religious and music video channels grew at a rate of 60% last year". While Islamic channels broadcast via regional satellite providers: Arabsat and Nilesat, Arabic-language Christian channels transmit over European-owned provider Hotbird (*ibid.*). Nonetheless, religious programmes in critical public discourse seem to be the forgotten facet of satellite broadcasting. Despite the existence of about 15 exclusively religious channels (see table [10] below) and tens of religious programmes on the other channels, the debate on Arab satellite broadcasting

92 *Ibid.*

93 Focus Group interview (3), Egypt, March 2005

tends to focus on entertainment programming and hardly reflects the other side of Arab satellite broadcasting, which is religious programming.

A dynamic Egyptian preacher called ‘Amr Khaled who appears mostly on Arab satellite television was mentioned by most young people whose views were solicited for this study. Khaled in his late 30s, has adopted the style of US TV evangelists and made Islamic piety look modern and fashionable. According to Roula Khalaf who interviewed him for the Financial Times Magazine (August 2005)⁹⁴ ‘people love him’: He has a smartly trimmed moustache rather than a beard and wears suits instead of the long dress usually worn by religious preachers. His language is simple and accessible, and to him personal piety is more important than politics.



Figure 7: Amr Khaled preaching. (photo. Ayman Ibrahim). *Al-Ahram Weekly*. 22-28 May 2003 Issue No. 639

Khaled tells his audience that they can be rich, fashionable, and religious all at the same time; that they can listen to music and go out and have fun while still wearing the veil (Khalaf, 2005). This attitude to religion is particularly appealing to the youth.

94 Khalaf, R. *Crescent Star*. Financial Times Magazine. August 20 /August 21 2005 Page 25

Table [10]: *Islamic Arab Religious Satellite Channels*

Channel	year	Ownership	Comments
Iqra	1998	Saudi	First Arab Islamic satellite channel (Amin 2000) and the most popular religious channel according to the website of the Arabic news channel Al-Arabiya. ⁹⁵
Al Majd 1	2002	Saudi	
Al Majd Scientific		Saudi	
Al Majd Culture		Saudi	
Al Majd Kids		Saudi	
Al Quran Al Karim		Saudi	
Al Risala	2006	Cairo	Funded by Saudi princes Al-Walid Bin Talal and general manager is popular TV preacher Tareq Alsuwaidan, broadcasting from Cairo
Al Fajr		Saudi	Owned by Sheikh Wajdi Bin Hamza Al Ghazawi, based in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.
Al Rafidayn		Iraq	Iraqi Sunni channel, broadcasting from Cairo. Prohibited from broadcasting from UAE.
Al-Huda		Saudi, based in Cairo	Islamic channel targeting non-Arabic speakers and owned by a group of Saudi businessmen.
Taiba TV	2007	Kuwait	A new channel that started broadcasting in 2007. (www.taiba.tv)
Ashariqa		UAE	Islamic oriented variety channel, broadcasting from UAE
Al Anwar		Iraq	Shiite Iraqi channel website: (http://www.alanwartv.com/)
Al Fayhaa		Iraq	Shiite Iraqi channel, launched in July 2004, Al Fayhaa is an Iraqi satellite channel with religious content and programming (Wikipedia 2006) ⁹⁶ website: http://www.alfayhaa.tv/main/ .
Al Forat		Iraq	Al Forat Sat TV, Shiite Iraqi channel. Website: http://www.alforattv.com/

Table compiled by author; not inclusive of all religious channels; indicative of volume.

⁹⁵ Competition between the religious channels over veiled female celebrities, Al Arabiya website, 11 April 2006. <http://www.alarabiya.net/Articles/2006/04/11/22764.htm>

⁹⁶ Al Fayhaa satellite TV channel, Wikipedia Arabic website accessed on 13/11/2006 (<http://ar.wikipedia.org>)

There are also several Christian Arab satellite channels broadcasting for audiences in the Arab World. These include:

Table [11]: *Christian Arab Religious Satellite Channels*

Channel	Launch year	Operating from	Comments
Tele Lumiere	1991	Lebanon	Tele Lumiere, which means ‘TV of Light’ is a Christian Channel based in Lebanon. The Channel was founded in 1991 and it’s current secretary-general is Antoine Saad. [http://www.telelumiere.com].
Sat 7 TV	1996	Cyprus	The first ever Christian (Anglican) Arab satellite channels. (http://www.sat7.com)
Al-Hayyat Channel	1996	Egypt	Most controversial Christian channel.
Aghapy Channel	2005	Egypt	Aghapy, which means ‘love’ in Coptic, is the first Coptic Orthodox TV Channel. The channel's executive director is Father Bishoy al-Antony. [http://www.aghapy.tv]
Ishtar	2005	Iraq	First Kurdish Iraqi Christian Channel broadcasting in Arabic. (http://www.ishtartv.com/)
Copts Sat	To be launched	Egypt	Second Coptic satellite channel (<i>Source: Middle East Online 1 November 2006</i>)

Religious programmes on satellite also seem to be popular amongst audiences, and that is probably why they are expanding in number. The number of religious channels have doubled over the last 5 years from a handful of channels in 2000 to over 15 in 2006. For example Al-Majd religious channel expanded from one channel in 2002 to five different religious channels in 2006. Layla Abu Darwich (2005) argues that there is a thirst for programmes of an Islamic kind among television audiences in the Arab world. Abu Darwich cites this as a reason why *Al-Majd* Satellite Broadcasting Corporation - with an initial investment of \$1 million a year - burst onto television screens in 2002 with its first offering, *Al-Majd* 1. Now there are five channels for *Al-Majd* Corporation. According to Darwich, demand from subscribers reached 100,000 in the first two years of broadcasting. In addition, the desire to diversify content away from the same 24-hour formula used on the first station grew. The result was the birth of *A- Majd Kids*, *Al-Quran Al Karim*, and *Al-Majd Scientific*, and since June *Al-Majd*

Culture. Two of these channels: *Al-Majd Kids* and *Al-Majd Culture* channels use the pay TV system (Abu Darwich, 2005: 21).

According to the Middle East Broadcasters Journal, data gathered from November 2004 to January 2005 show that 78% of satellite TV viewers in Greater Cairo dial up religious programmes, followed by news programmes at 66% (MEBJ, 2005:4). These figures did not, however, correspond to my own research findings on viewing preferences amongst audiences of young people, even though many of my informants in the qualitative interviews were very positive about religious programmes. The findings demonstrate that entertainment channels (movies or video clips on music channels) occupy the bulk of watching time, but the religious channels drew the most positive responses. While about 41.6% of the respondents to my questionnaire said that movies were the programmes they watched most on television, only about 12% cited religious programmes as their favourites. (See table 11).

The next section reflects young people's responses to religious programmes and expands on the dissonance between practice and discourse when it comes to religious programmes on Arab television.

6.6 Youth responses to religious programmes

There is an apparent gap between what they watch and what they say. Young Arab people admit to watching much entertainment although they largely speak negatively of its content. At the same time they watch few religious programmes yet they approve of their content and speak highly of them, especially those shows that appeal to them such as Amr Khaled's.

Many of my informants referred to religious programmes as the ‘main good thing that comes out of Arab TV’. Saleh (18 m.): ‘Television is generally good and bad. In our case, it is more of the bad than the good. The main good thing I believe is the religious programmes.’⁹⁷ Hassan (18 m.) said that television can be potentially good. ‘Let’s not forget that it’s only because of television that people like Amr Khaled and Tareq Alsuwaidan ⁹⁸ [TV preachers] have become known and famous.’⁹⁹

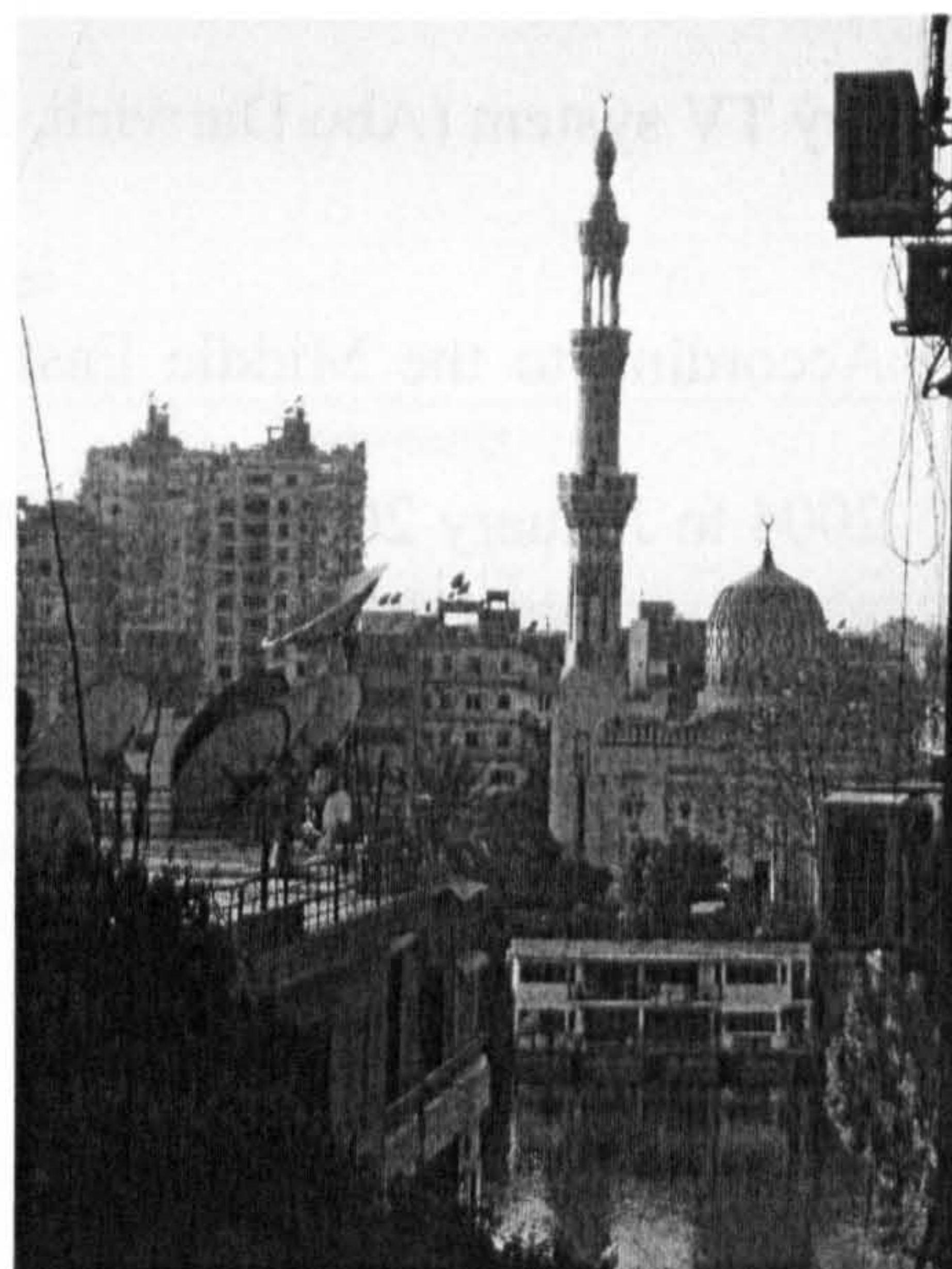


Figure 8. This photo illustrates the close physical proximity of mosque and the satellite, reflecting their virtual proximity and coexistence in youth's lives. Photo courtesy of Christoph Spreng, Zamalik, Cairo 2005.

In Egypt, when asked about good TV programmes for the youth, Nada (21 f.) referred to the TV shows of Islamic preacher Amr Khaled: ‘There are good youth programmes such as Amr Khaled’s: Even though he discusses youth issues from a religious angle, still he’s got a good way of addressing the youth and dealing with the issues.’¹⁰⁰ Nada continued: ‘Others here may agree with me that Amr Khaled’s *Ahbabi* show solves many of our problems. This show discusses issues in a good, morally acceptable and youthful way. Many youngsters have been greatly influenced by ‘Amr Khaled to the extent that some have changed their ways and now follow him’.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Saleh 18 m.) focus group interview 3, United Arab Emirates, January 2005.

⁹⁸ Tareq Alsuwaidan was described by Transnational Broadcasting Journal as a popular Islamic talk show host and motivational speaker, about his new job as general manager of the moderate Muslim TV channel Al Resalah.

⁹⁹ Focus group interview (3), United Arab Emirates, January 2005

¹⁰⁰ Focus group interview (2), Jordan, March 2005

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*

Ahmed (28 m.), in a focus group in Jordan said the Iqra' channel, a religious channel, was 'very good at addressing youth and their issues in addition to the Jordanian Channel 3 which is a youth channel.'¹⁰² In the Emirates, Sami (18 m.) said that 'there are Sheikhs like Amr Khaled and Tareq Alsuwaidan who are knowledgeable and humble. They would like to help heal the society.'¹⁰³

When I asked why these two preachers [Khaled and Alsuwaidan] in particular, the youth said that they had a good approach and know how to address them. Hassan (18m.) said, 'If a woman who is not covered comes to another Sheikh and says that she wants to become a practising woman but without covering her head, he would refuse even to speak to her.' He continued:

There is a wrong understanding of the religion. The Sheikh has to talk to her, which is what Amr Khaled and Tarq Alsuwaidan would do. They sit down with people, touch on their reality, realize how they think, and take it step by step from there.¹⁰⁴

Hassan also made the following comparison between the religious and non-religious channels:

Programming of course is dependant on whether the purpose of the channel is merely to make profits. If I'm to set up a profitable channel, what would I do? Of course I would not have Amr Khalid and Tareq Alsuwaidan on it, but would bring two sexy girls to sing because this is what would bring me more viewers and more money.¹⁰⁵

In the questionnaire, respondents were asked if there is an occasion where they thought satellite broadcasting has influenced their lives positively or negatively. Many respondents referred to religious programmes as a positive influence. An 18 year old male from the Emirates wrote: 'some religious programmes helped me changed some of my bad habits.'¹⁰⁶ A 17 year old female from Egypt wrote the

¹⁰² Focus group interview (1), Jordan, March, 2005

¹⁰³ Focus Group interview (2), United Arab Emirates, January 2005

¹⁰⁴ Focus Group interview (3), United Arab Emirates, January 2005

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Questionnaire 13, United Arab Emirates.

Sona' al hayat (Life Makers) ¹⁰⁷ Amr Khaled's famous TV s programme on Iqra channel influenced her life positively. However she did not specify in what way the Amr Khaled-presented programme influenced her life.¹⁰⁸ Another Amr Khaled show was quoted by another girl (17) from Egypt. 'Amr Khaled's *Liqat Al-Ahiba*' ['Encounter with the loved ones'] helped me positively by introducing me to the way the Prophet and his companions led their lives.'¹⁰⁹ In Jordan a 21 year old female wrote that 'Amr Khaled shows gave me hope and a purpose in life.'¹¹⁰ A 22 year old male in Jordan said that 'religious programming made me realize how trivial we've become, and how far away from religion we are'. In Palestine, a 19 year old female from Gaza wrote that 'Watching Amr Khaled's shows give me peace in my heart.'¹¹¹ A 17 year old man from Egypt wrote: 'watching an Amr Khaled show [not specified] was a turning point in my life. I was thinking about religion and after watching his show I started focusing on my religion, doing my prayers and I became a better person'¹¹². Another 18 year old female from Egypt wrote:

Once I had a great fight with my mum and we were not talking to each other for days, until I watched a show on the Iqra Channel... That episode was about relations between kids and their parents. A girl about my age told her story of having a fight with her mother who after a while passed away but before making up with her daughter. The daughter's tears were so touching and effective. She was saying if she could just turn back the time to erase all the fights and every sad moment she had ever let her mother feel, she would do: even if it cost her whole life. She said "I miss her a lot and every day that comes I love her more than the previous. I have nothing to do but pray for God to deliver her my apology and that I really need her, asking for her forgiveness, I love her". She also said "if any of you have a mother, do not let her tear drop or run down her cheek because the greatest thing in the world is a mother". So afterwards, I went to my mother and hugged her asking for forgiveness.¹¹³

¹⁰⁷ The show promotes economic development through faith. Through the show Khaled has launched a campaign against smoking and another to encourage young people to start their own business. (Roula Khalaf, Crescent Star, FTmagazine August 20 /August 21 2005 Page 25)

¹⁰⁸ Questionnaire 22, Egypt.

¹⁰⁹ Questionnaire 23, Egypt.

¹¹⁰ Questionnaire 26, Jordan.

¹¹¹ Questionnaire 149, Palestine.

¹¹² Questionnaire 82, Egypt.

¹¹³ Questionnaire 106, Egypt.

The entertainment channels sometimes carry Islamic religious programmes. For example some music channels broadcast Friday Prayer Ceremonies from major mosques or broadcast the Muslim call to prayers (*Azan*) in between their music or movie shows. This was criticized by young people as confusing and not right. Commenting on this, Saleh (18 m.) in the Emirates said:

I really do not understand. They air the call to prayers and on Friday they air live the ceremony from Mecca led by Sheikh Sudaisi and it is all nice and once the prayers are over they put a song such as Hayfa's [Hayfa Wahbi is a sexy female Lebanese Arab singer]. They play Sami Yusuf's song *Al-Mo'alem* about the prophet Mohammed [Peace Be Upon Him] followed by Nancy Ajram [a sexy female Lebanese Arab singer].¹¹⁴

Hassan (18 m.) agreed adding: 'Yes they play Sami Yusuf [religious singing] and follow it with Ruby [sexy female Egyptian Arab singer].

In Egypt, Randa (22 f.) made similar comments: 'I just want to say something about the music channels. They should not play Sami Yusuf and immediately afterwards put on a song like *El3ab El3ab*' (a controversial song by 19 year-old sexy Lebanese female singer Maria Nalbidian). Randa thought that the songs should be organized in a different way. 'You listen to Sami Yusuf and he puts you in a certain mood and all of a sudden and completely different and contradicting song is played. I find it irritating.' Ahmed (18 m.) commented by saying that it is ignorance on the part of the channel directors.¹¹⁵

Despite the positive comments by young people on religious programmes on satellite, they remain unpopular compared to entertainment on satellite television. Table [9] above showed that only 12.1% of the youth follow religious programmes as their favourite channel compared to 41.6% who cited movies and musical programmes.

¹¹⁴ Focus Group interview (3), United Arab Emirates, January 2005.

¹¹⁵ Focus Group interview (5), Egypt, March 2005

6.7 Youth Suggestions on Arab Satellite Television

During the focus group discussions, participants made several comments and suggestions about Arab satellite broadcasting many of which have been quoted in this chapter and others in other parts of this thesis, however, this section focuses on the comments and suggestions made by questionnaire respondents in an open-ended question about Arab satellite channels. The responses varied between demanding a complete ban on reality shows, increasing Islamic and religious channels, and having more programmes that offer a channel for youth to express their views. A 16 year old female from the Emirates wrote: ‘We need an Arab Islamic channel that reinforces Arab and Islamic values and traditions’ (*Questionnaire No. 1*). Another female (22) from the Emirates demanded that ‘Arab channels focus on the youth in order to nurture them, but not through music and video clips’ (*Questionnaire No. 2*).

Other respondents called for the banning of certain TV entertainment programmes: ‘The *ibahiya* shows such as ‘Super Star’ and other reality TV shows that aim to destroy youth must be stopped and banned,’ (*18 m. Emirates - Questionnaire No. 7*). Another 19 year old male from the Emirates demanded that shows such as Star Academy and Super Star be reduced (*Questionnaire No. 11*).

Other respondents wanted Arab satellite channels to focus more on the youth segment of the society and to help them. A 19 year old male from the Emirates demanded that ASB channels should ‘focus on the future of youth’ (*Questionnaire No. 14*). Similarly, a 22 year old Syrian female studying in Jordan called on ASB shows to be ‘more exclusive and focused on the youth’ (*Questionnaire No. 35*). Another wrote: ‘There should be channels that tackle youth problems’ (*21 f. Jordan - Questionnaire*

No. 36). 'Solutions should be offered to young people's problems rather than presenting problems without solutions.' (24 f. Jordan - Questionnaire No. 37).

There were also calls to have programmes presented by youths themselves that deal with their issues. A 20 year old female from Palestine, expressed her 'wish to see programmes presented by the youth and tackling their issues and problems' (Questionnaire No. 39) and 'to increase shows that deal with youth issues such as job opportunities and unemployment' (21 m. Jordan - Questionnaire No. 53). Others suggested that there 'should be programmes that contribute to solving youth problems' (21 f. Jordan - Questionnaire No. 41); ASB channels 'should address youth in a better way that will truly influence them in a real way...discussing their issues in a realistic way' (24 f. Jordan - Questionnaire No. 42).

Other respondents felt that ASB should promote Arab culture and identity and not encourage Western elements. A 19 year old male from Jordan suggested that ASB should 'work more on reinforcing Arab identity and distance it from Western thinking' (Questionnaire No. 52). Similar comments were made by a 19 year old female from Jordan (Questionnaire No 73) while a 17 year old Egyptian female demanded that 'Arab channels should have a distinctive identity and should have a message' (Questionnaire No. 29). In the same vein, a 19 year old Sudanese living in the Emirates demanded ASB to 'increase the shows that promote Arab culture' (Questionnaire No. 45). The same comment was noted by a 21 year old female from Jordan (Questionnaire No. 45).

Few respondents suggested increasing the religious element of Arab satellite broadcasting. A 17 year old female from Egypt demanded ASB to 'increase religious and Arab culture channels in order to influence the lives of the youth' (Questionnaire

No. 107). Similarly, a 24 year old respondent called for increased religious programming on ASB as well as encouraging 'audience interaction to allow viewers to respond to questions via live phone-in's (*Questionnaire No. 83*). Another female from Jordan suggested that there 'should be censorship so that the channels only show programmes that fit in with our religion and society' (20 f. - *Questionnaire No. 75*). Similar comments were made by a 22 year old female respondent from Jordan to questionnaire No. 66 and a 17 year old male respondent from Egypt to questionnaire No 82. A 22 year old male from Jordan suggested that ASB should 'create dialogue between religions, to focus more on scientific research, and to support youth in all walks of life' (*Questionnaire No. 51*).

Such suggestions and demands on the part of the youth show that the majority of them do not watch Arab satellite channels uncritically; they expect much more when it comes to youth voice, representation, and problems. They also want programmes that promote Arab culture and identity.

6.8 Conclusion

To date, Arab satellite broadcasting has largely ignored youth problems, especially those directly related to government, politics and social issues such as unemployment and under-representation of youth in politics and public affairs. More than a decade and a half after the emergence of this phenomenon, programmes that allow young people to represent themselves to each other and to decision makers are still lacking. In programming mainly music and movies, the majority of Arab satellite channels have assured for themselves a strong youth following but in fact, this research reveals that these same youth would also like quality factual programmes that would entertain while educating and informing. However, my research findings suggest that existing attempts at informative programmes for Arab youth have not only been ineffective

but counterproductive. Having a middle-aged presenter, for example, hosting a group of middle-aged men and women to discuss youth problems in front of a staged youth audience, was highlighted by my informants as a case in point. My respondents, who know their own problems, said they wanted to be given the chance to talk about their problems and debate possible solutions. The didactic tone, with direct guidance and advice, adopted by Arab media when dealing with youth programming has put young people off these types of programmes. They want to feel involved in shows that address issues from their perspective and not from that of an older generation. They want younger presenters and talk-show hosts.

The next chapter examines youth voice in the public sphere, arguing that while Arab youth have failed to find a voice in Arab media, they have found instead a breathing space, where entertainment offers a brief chance to escape reality and to imagine themselves in roles and situations unattainable in their real lives.

SATELLITE TELEVISION: A BREATHING SPACE FOR ARAB YOUTH?

7.1 Introduction

For more than a decade and a half, the popularity of satellite broadcasting has steadily risen in the majority of Arab countries, and although quality factual programmes that allow young people to represent themselves to each other and to decision makers are still perceived to be lacking (see previous chapter discussing Arab youth and television), the satellite channels have attracted a large youth following for their film and music programming.

This chapter will explore whether the type of programmes that are attractive to young Arab people via Arab satellite broadcasting have created a sphere in which young people find a 'breathing space'. As the actual extent of a so-called 'breathing space' is largely determined by the individual consumer, my research relies heavily on fieldwork interviews with young Arab people in addition to an evaluation of satellite programmes aimed at young people. This chapter and the following chapters ultimately assess the creation, acceptance, and effect of the 'breathing space' provided by Arab satellite broadcasting on youth culture, and the extent to which it offers young Arab people a voice and forum in which to express their social and political concerns or alternatively an avenue of escapism.

7.2 Arab youth and their representation in the public sphere

Young people are indeed very visible in the Arab public space and this is naturally due to the high proportion of young demographics in the Arab region as well as their high levels of unemployment. Walking down the streets of any Arab city there is a

strong, visible presence of young people in the streets, coffee shops, markets and shopping malls. It is not the case, however, that they are proportionately represented in the public sphere, defined as a virtual space in which young people's voices can be heard and where young people are active participants in debates.

The public sphere theory was one expounded by German philosopher and sociologist Jürgen Habermas in the 1960s (Habermas, 1989) and referred in part to the 'realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be found'. This thesis, however, interprets the public sphere as 'comprised of any and all locations, physical or virtual, where ideas and feelings relevant to politics are transmitted or exchanged openly' as described by Bennett and Entman (2001:3).

The public sphere is a condition for democracy because it produces informed citizens, without which no democracy can function properly (Dahlgren, 2001: 39, Poster 1997: 206). Citizens, in order to access and exchange information and ideas, need to be able to engage in debates and interact through the media. Thus one of the fundamental prerequisites of democracy is free and open dialogue among people, both as citizens and as representatives of community institutions and governments (Habermas 1989). Since the general pattern of governance in the Arab world leans towards authoritarian regimes, satellite broadcasting is claimed to be playing a significant role in pushing Arab governments towards openness and democratization by providing uncensored information and enabling Arab citizens to express their views freely. For the first time in decades, it is claimed, there is a public sphere in which they are able to debate and be critical of the policies of their respective governments. Numerous scholars have drawn a connection between media and political democracy (Curran and Park, 2000: 4) and between satellite television and political change. For example, Annabelle

Sreberny (2000: 69) argued that changes in the media landscape should be considered a major component of both internal and external pressures for political liberalization and eventual democratization being exerted on authoritarian Arab regimes. Marc Lynch (2003) maintained that Arab satellite broadcasting gave rise to a new Arab public sphere by undermining state censorship and government control over the media and information. He nevertheless recognized that this public sphere does not substitute for democracy, since the new media are not accompanied by political channels through which public preferences can be translated into policy outcomes.

Nonetheless, Sreberny, Lynch and others omit to mention that most of this new Arab space for criticism and debate is one-dimensional. A closer look shows it to be dominated by one set of issues, while many others pertaining to the daily lives of Arab citizens are largely ignored. The public sphere that the Arab satellite channels create is largely taken up with discussion of international politics and issues relating to Arab relations with Israel, the US and other Western states. This leaves little room for domestic issues such as national political reforms and development indicators, policies on poverty and unemployment, or a plethora of social and health problems including AIDS, drugs and the increasing divorce rate (Mellor, 2004). My own analysis of the subject matter covered on the three most popular weekly live talk shows on Al-Jazeera, over a period of ten weeks between April and June 2005, demonstrated how international interventions in the Arab world were given more attention than internal matters. Only three out of a total of 30 episodes of *Al-Ittijah al-Mu'aakis* (The Opposite Direction), *Akthar Min Rai* (More than One Opinion) and *Bila Huddud* (Without Limits) during these ten weeks were directly related to the principles and practice of democracy, reform or development. The remaining 27 dealt with issues such as Palestine (following the death of Yassir Arafat), Syrian

withdrawal from Lebanon, Sudan, international politics, and US and foreign interventions in Arab affairs. Thus, although it is quite true to say that Al-Jazeera talk shows provide a platform for criticism of Arab governments, it is also true to counter this, as Kai Hafez has, by saying that the shows make little contribution to a concrete democratic agenda within which people develop a vision of how to act and which political direction to take (Hafez, 2004). Without this, criticism of Arab governments is in danger of making no real impact on the political development in the region.

It is difficult to see how Arab satellite broadcasting contributes to the creation of a public sphere that is representative, open and free. Arab satellite channels set the agenda of the public sphere they create, not just by controlling the issues covered and debated, but also by controlling the information exchanged and who takes part, whether as guest, panellist or member of the audience phoning in a question live on air. Ownership considerations also mean that these channels are limited in the extent to which their programmes can include criticism of powerful interest groups in the Arab world. For example, Abu Dhabi TV or the Saudi-owned Al-Arabiya have limited scope for criticizing the UAE or Saudi governments, and criticism of friendly co-members of the Gulf Co-operation Council is also off limits.

These conditions and sensitivities under which Arab satellite channels function make it even harder for them to address issues related to youth such as political, economic, social participation, and integration. Whatever the changes in Arab television, the case remains that young Arab people have no voice, are highly under-represented and their issues are hardly discussed on television, and when discussed, largely without their real participation. Yamani (2000) argues that young people are calling for greater freedom of expression, criticizing censorship. "They feel that the state's concern for secrecy is in reality a screen for moral and economic failings" (2000: 27).

7.3 Youth perceptions of politics and entertainment

In the focus group discussions young people from different countries talked of being 'pushed away' from politics. When I asked them why young people seem uninterested in news and current affairs, I was told over and over again that the reason lies in the lack of freedom of speech. Put simply, as one of the participants explained, 'when young people watch news, which is largely about the killing of fellow Arabs, they feel involved. Yet, when they try to protest, they get harassed by the authorities'¹.

Mustafa (19 m.) added:

We do not have the freedom of expression to demonstrate freely to support the Palestinians or to protest against the war in Iraq. For example, in this country when the [Palestinian] intifada broke out and we all went on a demonstration, the guys who were in the first rows of the demonstration were taken in by the intelligence service ... We cannot even talk politics in cafés ... I hear about a place in Britain where you can go on Sundays and say whatever you like and criticize any president you like. This is democracy.²

Moreover, young people say they feel helpless and hopeless about the situation ever changing or the possibility that political leaders will do something about it. They say it is because they see existing leaders as part of the problem rather than the solution that their feelings tend towards frustration or indifference. Ibrahim (20 m.) said :

If we feel that there is any hope, then we can watch and follow up the news and get involved, but there is no hope. So, whether we watch or not watch it is not going to make a difference. So, when hope is lost, we start looking for entertainment.³

1 Focus Group interview (2), United Arab Emirates, January 2005

2 *Ibid.*

3 Focus Group interview (1), United Arab Emirates, January 2005

Similar comments were made by others:

We are not interested in news and politics, because it means getting involved and going out on the streets to protest. When we do protest, nothing happens; what happens is only what the president says. I used to be interested in the news and I used to go out on demonstrations, but demonstrations die out quickly and the president's standpoint stays at the end of the day. That's why it is all for nothing and we had better stay out of it (*Ahmed, 19 m.*).⁴

The leaders are not doing anything about the situation and there is not much that we can do about it. At least if the leaders meet and take a step towards doing something about it, then one could get involved (*Amjad, 19 m.*).⁵

Participants in another focus group expressed their feelings as follows:

Can anyone in our Arab societies talk about politics? No we cannot. We have undemocratic regimes, and any one who attempts to be critical of politics will disappear from the face of the earth immediately (*Hassan, 18 m.*).

Even when one is in a conversation about economics, the moment it gets close to politics, somebody will automatically remind the rest not to talk politics. So, it becomes the norm not to talk politics (*Saleh, 18 m.*).

The problem is that the youth have no influence on politics in their own country and society; I mean they are not allowed to be influential or make a difference. They are only allowed to watch and observe rather than participate in politics. And since you will be seeing the same scene time and again, you get tired and fed up, so you stop watching. So, if youth had the kind of influence we are talking about, for example, if young people could talk freely to rulers or any other officials, then everything would be different (*Hassan, 18 m.*).

No one is interested in attracting young people to politics. On the contrary they push you away from it. And if you do talk politics, then you may be in trouble. But they occupy you with singing and music. They give you what you like: nice and sexy girls. And if you vote on a TV programme you may win (*Zakaria, 20 m.*).⁶

4 Focus Group interview (3), Egypt, March 2005

5 Focus Group interview (2), United Arab Emirates, January 2005

6 Focus Group interview (3), United Arab Emirates, January 2005

Young Arabs protest that they have no voice on serious television programmes, be they political, social or economic. In one of the focus groups in Egypt, Najah (19 f.) pointed out that 'all the political and economic programmes have only old people ... I've never seen a political programme that has young people commenting or discussing the issues involved'. In the same group, Nadia (20 f.) said that 'in politics there is no voice for young people. That is a no-go area'.⁷

In another focus group,⁸ Medhat (19 m.) noted that, if TV programmes claim to be for or about young people, most of the time it is because they are offering songs and music. 'Young people are asked for their opinion only when the topic is music, songs and films' he said. Karim (18 m.) added: 'Yes, most young people's programmes are about music, films, etc. I've never seen a political programme hosting young people or seeking the voice of young people'. Agreeing with both of them, Mona (18 f.) reminded them that 'sports is another area where young people's voices are also sought and heard'. Medhat then gave an example from Egyptian TV, generating the following exchange:

Medhat: 'When they want to advertise a serious programme that will discuss Egyptian politics and economics for example, they bring someone who is very dull instead of bringing in someone with expertise in advertising who would attract many people to watch the programme. However, if the programme is on music, they bring in the most charming and articulate person so that they attract many people and thus make profits. They do this because they think that young people are interested only in music and dancing ...'.

7 Focus Group interview (1), Egypt, August 2004

8 Focus group interview (2), Egypt, August, 2004

Karim: 'Which is the truth....'

Heba: (18 f. objecting) No, not at all

Maher: (19 m.) 'What they should do is swap the two presenters'.⁹

Karim insisted that the problem could be with young people themselves rather than the media. He said: 'Our problem is that we are no longer interested in good stuff. Most young people would for example rather watch *Star Academy* (a reality gameshow song contest on LBC) rather than a programme on Al-Jazeera, which would of course be....', at which Shady (20 m.), interrupting him, suggested: 'It is because we sometimes feel suffocated. We escape from and try to avoid news programmes as they give us the sense we are suffocating.'¹⁰ Karim, continuing, asked other group members: 'We do not watch Al-Jazeera everyday, do we?'. They all replied 'No'. He went on: 'Even though it [Al-Jazeera] has terrific programmes and is even better than the BBC and CNN. However, Mazzika and Melody [music channels] are on all the time. It is because that is what we are interested in and that is who we are'.¹¹

The young people taking part in these exchanges made clear their conclusion that they have no voice in any so-called public sphere created by Arab media. In their eyes there was no difference between Arab satellite channels and terrestrial state television when it comes to giving a voice to the young. On the other hand, Arab satellite channels seemed to be winning the loyalty of youth audiences on account of the variety of entertainment they provide. Even so, acceptance of entertainment on Arab satellite television was far from being universal among participants in the focus groups. Opinions differed in all the groups when the interviewees were asked whether

⁹ Focus Group interview (2), Egypt, August 2004

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

they thought entertainment - especially music video clips and singing competitions like *Super Star* (the Arabic version of Pop Idol) - were helpful for young people. There was a divide between those who approved of such programmes and those who did not. However, what was striking was the consensus that such programmes attracted them. Those who said these programmes were not healthy for the young or the wider society confirmed that they still watched and enjoyed them.

Pressed on this point, the participants indicated that they resort to entertainment on television as a means of getting away from the burdens and problems of life, whether political, social, or economic. Atef (19 m.) said that 'most people, when they feel suffocated and would like to breathe, they say: 'Let's watch television, listen to music, watch comedy programmes on TV''. They have a laugh, feel better, and they have the right to do so and feel that way'.¹² With a growing feeling of malaise as a result of the conditions in their countries, young Arab people appear to find through entertainment on Arab television a means of distancing themselves, albeit temporarily, from their problems. In this connection, Atef's analogy of a 'breathing space' in relation to entertainment programmes is revealing. The idea of a breathing space seemed to take precedence over any sense of satellite channels offering a voice for young people or representing their social and political needs.

7.4 Breathing Space: TV entertainment and escapism

The notion of a 'breathing space', as described in this thesis, arose in the wake of the discussions I had with - and as noted and articulated by - the youths who took part in this research. The notion of 'breathing space' was clearly expressed in the interviews I had with young people in different Arab countries. It was first brought to my

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Focus Group interview (2), United Arab Emirates, January 2005

attention during the pilot study when Shady (22 m.) from Egypt said: ‘We avoid watching the news and resort to entertainment because we feel suffocated and need to breathe’.¹³

The concept of audiences seeking and finding a breathing space through consumption of media entertainment is not a novel one. Early Uses and Gratifications research showed that audiences were using radio to break away from the problems of their day to day life. Herta Herzog’s study of the female audience for daytime radio serials in the 1940s reported a range of satisfactions including escape from the routines of daily life, consolation for private worries, vicarious excitement and advice on personal problems (Piepe *et al.*, 1978: 27). Blumler and Katz (1974) noted that media was employed in a kind of diversionary role whereby the audience would use the media for escapism or emotional release from everyday pressure. They highlighted three main circumstances in which the media became escapist in nature: first, when the content ignores reality (music/dance/opera). Second, when the content offers a contrast to reality (such as when used to escape everyday worries and pressures). Third, when the content makes reality ‘better than life’ (the media term for this is called incorporation).

McQuail (1987) explains that people watch entertainment programmes for the purpose of being diverted from problems, relaxation, getting cultural and aesthetic pleasure and enjoyment, filling time, emotional release, and sexual arousal (McQuail 1987).

¹³ Focus group interview with Egyptian Youth (2), August 2004

Dr. Ahmad Khairy Hafez, the socio-psychology professor at Ein Shams University in Egypt, contends that television relieves anxiety, depression and stress. Dr Hafez who is quoted in an online report¹⁴ argues that the average Egyptian citizen instinctively knows the importance of TV in alleviating his worries, so he buys a satellite dish to get the necessary dose of entertainment that soothes stress and anxiety. Dr Hafez notes that people find what they are looking for in satellite programming, which is entertaining, fun and useful, unlike terrestrial channels, which do not help in relieving psychological problems.

In his analysis of why people in Egypt work very hard to purchase a satellite dish and have access to satellite television, Dr. Ahmad Al Majdoob from the Egyptian National Center for Social Studies gave amongst other reasons people's desire to be entertained. Dr Al Majdoob argued that people need a dose of entertainment due to the deteriorated economic situation and their inability to enjoy public parks because of their scarcity and crowdedness, not to mention that going out everyday is expensive for average families; this is why most people prefer to spend time in front of the TV for their dose of entertainment; as they did not get this from Egyptian terrestrial channels, they had no choice but to buy satellite dishes to satisfy their entertainment needs.¹⁵

To a great extent, programming is entertainment-oriented on Arab television stations and it is not unfair to say that both radio and television in the Arab world are believed by consumers to be primarily for entertainment purposes. The director of Egyptian television observed during a meeting in May 1980 that 'a television set is usually

14 *Dish-Mania: Five Million Satellite Dishes in Egypt*, 2004. Donia Al Watan 26 September 2004 [online] available from <http://www.alwatanvoice.com/articles.php?go=articles&id=10236> [accessed 5 March 2005]

15 *Ibid.*

bought in order to entertain. Nobody thinks of television as a means of education when they go to buy a television set' (Boyd, 1993: 9). However, this does not mean that educational programmes do not exist. And in some Arab countries a good deal of programming time is concerned with political information – though in general such non-entertainment programmes, including news and commentary (*ibid.*). Nonetheless, in the case of satellite broadcasting entertainment seems to be the most common offering on Arab satellite channels which are very popular amongst young Arab people who are the central focus of this study. Most young Arab people spend most of their viewing time watching entertainment on Arab satellite television.

The fact that some programmes are only watched for their entertainment value does not preclude their political message. Street (2001) notes that although such programmes as soaps and game shows are typically assigned to the category of 'escapism', the presumption that they are devoid of political content is mistaken: 'soaps and the like are integral parts of a society's political culture' (p.75).

As chapter [5] explained, movie and music channels are most popular among young Arab people, who watch television largely for entertainment purposes rather than education or knowledge. The bulk of time my informants spent watching television was dedicated to watching movies or video clips on music channels. About 27.4% of the respondents to my questionnaire said that movies were their most watched programmes on television.

Entertainment may be the most popular reason for watching satellite television, but certainly not the only reason, and some young people find religious programmes equally satisfying. Not many of my respondents were strongly religious, however Karin Werner (2001), whose focus was exclusively the female members of Islamist

groups in Egypt, found that the media was used to 'get closer to God'. She writes: 'the media consumers can use the media to detach from the "profane" activities of their everyday lives and to slip into the hyperreality space [Baudrillard] of the media, which invites the user to go on mental journeys' (p.200).

The movie channel, MBC2, was the favourite channel amongst the young people who took part in this study and was the most watched one. When asked to list their favourite channels, the majority of the respondents to the questionnaire wrote MBC2, a free-to-air 24-hour channel which airs Arabic and foreign movies with Arabic subtitles. It is worth noting that the question was open-ended and no list of channels was offered.

Participants in the focus groups told me that their lives are serious enough already without trying to look for more serious matters from television. Entertainment, they said, gave them the chance to forget about their problems. Nada (18 f.), from a middle class family in Cairo, said that television helped her to 'escape from her problems'. She explained: 'Had it not been for TV, my problems would stare me in the face all the time. TV gives me the chance to break away from my problems'.¹⁶ Amjad (19 m.) said that he watches television, especially music video clips and movies, when he feels bothered. 'For me, when I feel bothered or bored, without knowing what's wrong with me, I go and watch music video clips. I think that most young people do the same'.¹⁷ Mohammed (20 m.) agreed. 'I do the same', he said. 'If there is something on my mind or something that I would like to forget, problems that I try to ignore, I watch music on television ... Just like some people go to sleep if they feel concerned or bothered'.¹⁸

¹⁶ Focus group interview with Egyptian Youth (1), August 2004

¹⁷ Focus Group interview, United Arab Emirates (1), January 2005

¹⁸ Focus Group interview, United Arab Emirates (1), January 2005

Most of the participants in a focus group in Gaza city, Palestine, rejected entertainment on Arab television, especially reality shows and music video clips. However, when I asked them how they would then explain the fact that these shows are popular and especially amongst young people, they all said that young people find relief in watching such shows. Mohammed (18 m.) said that young people like such programmes because they ‘seek some sort of self relief ... they are not particularly convinced of these shows, but find them helpful to cope’. Adham (18 m.) said that ‘it is self-entertainment for young people and they use it to relieve themselves of the pressures of life’.¹⁹

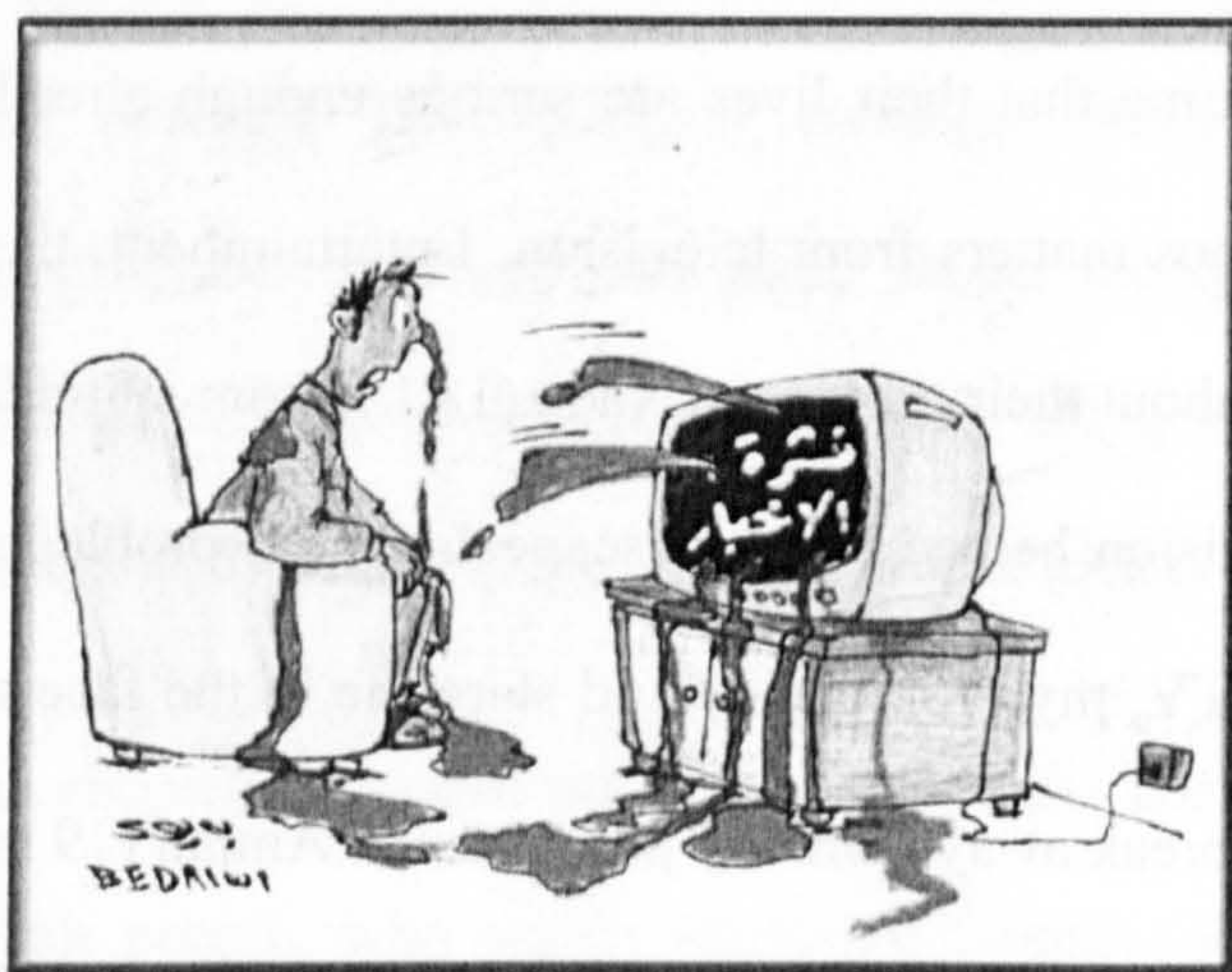


Figure 9: The TV screen reads ‘The News’ and highlights the general feeling that news content consists of only blood and gore!

Source: Elaph, first Arab electronic newspaper,: <http://www.elaph.com/ElaphCartoons/CartoonDetails?imageid=57568> accessed on 24 April 2005

Moreover, young people find news and politics unfair, depressing and dull; hence, entertainment seems to be the way out. Entertainment appears to be the most common way to distance young people from the problems of their lives and from politics. Yahya (19 m) said: ‘We watch entertainment channels to escape from the depressing mood of politics. Politics is dull and depressing and that’s why people stay away from it and go towards entertainment’. In the same focus group, Ibrahim (19 m) echoed

¹⁹ Focus Group interview, Gaza city, Palestine January 2006

Yahya, adding that entertainment attracts young people because they get enough of politics on all the different channels. 'All you get in the news is "seven Palestinians were killed during the day and 17 were killed in the night"; it becomes routine. There is nothing pleasant about news'.²⁰ In a different focus group, Assem (19 m) argued that young people distance themselves from politics because it is depressing: 'Nothing is new...it's all about killing'. Saleh (18 m) added that 'political programmes do not offer any solutions and that he finds them even insulting to young people's intelligence'.²¹ Riyadh (24 m.) rejected the idea that news programmes are all the same. 'Why do we always say that the news is the same? That is not true. There are always developments in the news'.²² In Jordan, Rita (20 f.) felt that entertainment on the different channels was the same. 'If we look at the movie channels or the music channels or even the so-called variety or cocktail channels they all have the same principle, same content and same ideas. So any of these channels will be sending out the same message and then the variety is pointless. If you watch one or a hundred channels, it's all the same. However, this is not the case with news channels'.²³

Half of the respondents to my questionnaire said they watch television exclusively for entertainment [see table (12)], 21.4% watch television for information and knowledge, and 13% ticked both boxes for entertainment and information. Another 8.9% said they watched television to pass the time, while 4.2% said they watched it to escape from problems in their lives.

20 Focus Group interview, United Arab Emirates (1), January 2005

21 Focus Group interview, United Arab Emirates (2), January 2005

22 *Ibid.*

23 *Ibid.*

Table [12] *Main reasons for watching television among 16-27 year olds.*

Reasons	Per cent
Entertainment	50
Information and knowledge	21.4
Both entertainment and information ²⁴	13
Passing time	8.9
Escape reality	4.2
Other	2.6
Total	100.0

This need for entertainment explains why most young people whose views were solicited for this study felt that TV was a necessity rather than a luxury. Lutfi (24 m.) said that a TV set is no longer an accessory. It is just like cars and mobiles that were accessories and have now become a necessity. ‘TV has become like food. You cannot live without food and you cannot live without TV’. Lutfi added:

Personally, I have to have even my own TV with satellite in my own room. Along with the mobile and the car, TV and satellite have become basic requirements in our lives and we simply cannot do without them.²⁵

Musa (22 m.) agreed with Lutfi adding that TV with access to satellite has become important, even necessary, because satellite can provide things no other media can provide [referring mainly to state-controlled terrestrial channels]. Najla (22 f.) added that people have got used to satellite television so that they can no longer do without. ‘People can watch what they like on TV via satellite: News, entertainment, etc. Everything is available in the quantity and quality that one needs.’²⁶

In another focus group both males and females asserted that TV is ‘very important and even essential’ for them. Some participants went to the extent of making the presence of a TV a condition of existence. Rawya (20 f.) said ‘I cannot live without television. The first thing I do as I get home after attending my university is to turn

²⁴ This was not included as an option in the list, but some respondents ticked both options.

²⁵ Focus group interview (2), Jordan, March, 2005

the TV on. Even when I do my studies and homework, I do it while sitting in front of the TV. I watch mostly movies on Rotana Cinema (a movie channel) and lots of songs and video clips.’²⁷

Nidal (25 m) described a TV set in a house as just like ‘the fridge, it’s essential and I cannot do without it.’ Nidal added that: ‘TV is essential in every home. With the spread of satellite broadcasting people have more choice and can watch what they like. Girls for example can watch beauty and make-up programmes, while boys can watch programmes to do with cars or whatever they’d like to watch.’²⁸

7.5 Conclusion

Clearly, the centrality and essential nature of TV and especially entertainment in young people’s lives is very much linked to their need for a ‘breathing space’. Young people seem to resort to entertainment on television as a means of getting away from the burdens and problems of life. They believe that they have enough serious issues in their lives without importing more from television and therefore entertainment gives them the chance to forget about problems in their lives.

Traditionally, young Arab people have had no voice at home, at school or out in the wider world. In both private and public they have been expected to listen to the advice of older people and act on it. This does not appear to have changed with the advent of Arab satellite broadcasting. This chapter demonstrated that satellite television, while flaunted by some authors as capable of providing a democratic sphere of discussion, has to the contrary failed to provide an adequate political space for young Arab people – in particular for potential future political leaders. The responses given by informants in this study demonstrate that this is not exclusively

26 Focus group interview (1), Jordan, March, 2005

27 Focus group interview (2), Jordan, March, 2005

28 *Ibid.*

the fault of satellite channels, but of the home political situation whereby young people are subsequently unable to express, either vocally or physically (e.g. on demonstrations), sentiments raised by watching TV in their home environment/countries.

Satellite broadcasting has, however, been able to fulfil the entertainment needs of many young Arab people by providing a constant stream of music and film, the popularity of which by far surpass other programme formats in such a way as to occupy an indispensable place in the life of many young Arab people. Critics contend that Arab governments actually encourage entertainment to 'hypnotize the already snoozing Arab mind and drive it away from issues that really count and problems that actually matter'.²⁹ I argue that young Arab people have found in entertainment channels a form of 'breathing space' in which to escape reality, albeit for a brief moment while viewing. Whether the 'breathing space' extends to post-viewing will be contemplated in subsequent chapters when the wider repercussions of entertainment escapism is discussed in the construction of dreams, aspirations, and the building of identity in self and society, and its crystallization into an 'Arab youth culture'.

29 Amina Khairy, 'Arabic video clips flirt with desires of Egyptian youth', *Transnational Broadcasting Studies*, 14 (Spring 2005) <http://www.tbsjournal.com/khairy.html>

ARAB YOUTH CULTURE: THE ROLE OF SATELLITE TELEVISION

8.1 Introduction

The media not only reflects and represents culture, but also produces culture in such a way as to distinguish between the two spheres theoretically or conceptually difficult. There is a powerful argument within public discourse which contends that entertainment on satellite television is influencing youth lifestyles, attitudes, and practices. Because the youth are avid consumers of media, it seems to follow that they must be being shaped by it. Conversely, it is argued by others that the process of cultural consumption is not passive. From that point of view, youth consumption actually influences Arab media programming³⁰ and by challenging existing cultures and embracing new forms, have the power to be producers of culture.

In the Arab world the explosion in entertainment-oriented satellite channels has laid the foundations for what is referred to as 'Arab youth culture'. However, this 'youth culture' is rejected and criticised by a large majority of youth as well as by older generations as a culture of *dancing* and *singing* as opposed to the youth culture associated with *resistance* and *liberation* (Hijazi, 1978). Criticism of this so-called representative youth-culture and the demonization of some of its aspects has proved to be a useful political and social tool for many speaking in the media under various political or religious guises. Whether the focus is on the effects of too much 'Westernization' or the lack of Arab identity, and whether comments come from politician, entertainer or performer, parent, or from the youth themselves, criticism of 'youth culture' is proving important in the construction of self- and societal identity,

³⁰ Whether Arab youth are actually able to influence programming will be debated subsequently in the light of my research findings which indicate that Arab youth do not feel consulted on TV subject matter and do not feel TV matter reflects their tastes.

national, pan-Arab, or international. Attitudes towards contentious issues can be valuable for their role not only as markers of the existing boundaries of what is 'non-acceptable' to different groups according to age, gender, class, and ethnicity, but also as indicators of changes in the culture of these groups. For this reason, satellite television's role in focusing issues such as nation, identity and religion, is discussed in the following chapter with the aim of understanding its formative role in youth culture.

The chapter pays particular attention to programmes aimed at the Arab youth currently shown on Arab satellite TV and their acceptance within national and local (eg family) spheres. As in previous chapters the (official) adult media discourses will be presented alongside youth discourses and analyzed with regards to their 'reactionary' or 'constructive' roles and their part in the creation of peer social mores. The satellite debate has particularly focused on the Arab music clip and this will be discussed below within the framework of its influence on youth lifestyle, whether positive ('we want to *be* like that') or negative ('that's how we do *not* want to be').

8.2 Youth, Role-models and Television

'The youth love to imitate' (Juma' and Al-Shawāf, 2005: 235).

[The video clips] are a true plague for the younger generations... it would be a catastrophe if anyone followed these singers as their role-model...³¹

Role-models have great significance in youth culture by contributing to the image, strengthening identification with the 'group', and distinguishing between the 'in-group' and those outside it (Biskup and Pfister, 1999: 201). Mass media, in particular

³¹ *Media Professors Attack Video-Clips: Satellite Channels Raising the Slogan of Shaking Bellies*, Donia Al Watan website, 19 August 2004 (Available in Arabic at <http://www.alwatanvoice.com/articles.php?go=articles&id=8710>). The seminar was held in 2004 by the Public Polls Center at Cairo University department of media and communication studies and was titled 'Video clips and Arab identity: the impact on Youth Values'.

television; allows youth to establish relations with sports, film and pop stars, thereby presenting them with role-models. Gripsrud (2002:15) notes that one of the reasons that some people are worried about the 'effects' of the media is because of the unconscious elements that are commonly seen as important parts of young people's identification with media stars. Identification with television stars is one outcome of television viewing that is believed to mediate audience responses (Hoffner *et al*, 2006: 7). Identification describes the psychological process whereby an individual desires or attempts to become like another person, and many scholars have recognized that identification can extend beyond the viewing situation. Bandura (1986, 2001), for instance, contended that the modelling process goes far beyond simple imitation of behaviour to include changes in attitudes, values, aspirations, and other characteristics (as quoted in Hoffner *et al*, 2006: 7).

Biskup and Pfister (1999: 199) argue that children and adolescents need role-models as they offer essential help and orientation. Learning from role-models is an essential component of the socialization process, as individuals are guided by orientations and appropriate ways of behaving without having to test this behaviour themselves in all situations (p.200). This is especially true in the case of media-produced stars and idols who take on the functions of role-models. They are the substance from which dreams are made; they make the world more lively and colourful, and they bring sparkle and glamour into the workaday routine. 'Idols and models symbolize and reinforce the ideals and norms prevailing in a society or in a specific group, thus also reinforcing gender identities and gender hierarchies' (p.199).

Krcmar and Vieira (2005: 267) contend that it is family, not television, that provides the most important role-model for children. However, it can be argued that children and young people are learning less from live models and more from mediated ones. Biskup and Pfister's (1999: 212) study of 97 children (44 girls and 53 boys) in five Berlin schools (3rd, 4th and 6th grades) shows that the girls and boys mainly found their role-models and idols in the mass media: TV and film personalities, actors, singers and music groups as well as sportsmen and women. Family and the direct social environment played only a marginal role as models. Moreover, children chose their role-models according to divergent criteria: boys liked their idols for their superiority, strength and bravery, whereas the decisive factors in the girls' choice of idols were appearance and positive social behaviour.

According to a world-wide study conducted by UNESCO, 30% of boys and 21% of the girls named action heroes as their role-models, and 19% of the youngsters interviewed named pop stars. 88% were familiar with Arnold Schwarzenegger for his role as 'Terminator' in the movies of that name. He was a role-model for 51% of those in 'violence-prone' countries, but for only 37% of those in more peaceful regions of the world (Biskup and Pfister, 1999: 204).

Youth generally take their role-models from numerous sources. Arab youth have traditionally emulated individuals from their immediate environment such as family and friends, but media and educators have been a further source of role-models. With the increase and popularity of entertainment on Arab satellite television over the last decade, concern amongst critics have been mounting as regards the potential of satellite broadcasting to provide youth with a wider variety of 'unsolicited' possibilities for identification.

8.3 Youth, Satellite Television, and Arab Role-models

When I was growing up in Palestine during the 1990s, I was told by my parents that the people I should look up to as *qudwa* (Arabic for a role-model) should be my uncle who is a successful doctor, my school teacher, and the Imam at the mosque. The term *qudwa* in Arabic has a positive connotation; hence a role-model should be a person who is highly successful and socially accepted. Professions such as a footballer would come towards the bottom of the list, along with dancers and singers. Increasingly, however, Arab commentators warn that satellite television is providing youth with ‘uninvited’ and ‘illegitimate’ role-models of just such kinds of people. .

In a conference in 2005 in Abu Dhabi organized by the Emirates Centre for Strategic Studies and Research, former Bahrain education minister Dr. Ali Mohammed Fakhro, warned that satellite channels are creating new role-models who are mainly ‘artists and sporties’. Dr. Fakhro, who is currently the Chairman of the Bahrian Centre for Studies and Research, talked about ‘imitating the West’, ‘programming the mind’ and creating a consumerist culture which he described as ‘anaesthetic, sensual, and visual’. He talked of ‘media values standing against education values’, warning that ‘what is emphasized through the media can eventually turn into culture’.

In the same conference, Ali Al Shuaibi,³² talked of ‘a jungle of Arab satellite channels’. Mr. Al Shuaibi said that entertainment is ‘needed and essential especially when the people feel frustrated, but Arab satellite channels have turned into something like a constant corner in a nightclub’. He asked what kind of role-model these channels are offering to our youngsters. Al Shuaibi told of how a friend of his

32 Ali Al-Shuaibi currently serves as Director of the Security Awareness Department and Media Advisor to the Community Service Department at the Dubai Police Headquarters. Previously, he worked as senior TV director at UAE TV in Abu Dhabi. He holds a PhD degree in radio and television studies from Cairo University.

was shocked when his teenage daughter innocently told him that she wanted to become a dancer.³³

Juma' and Al-Shawāf (2005) posit that the antidote to the corrupt 'all day-and-night' TV programming is to 'make them aware of the dangers that surround them, and provide them with an alternative in Arab and Islamic society's values...good Islamic role-models played by elders in the community' (p. 190, 330).

The music video clips' popularity among the young has triggered much social introspection. Egyptian Mohammed Ajami (30 m.) is an assistant university lecturer in English. He says the stars' clothing and dance styles 'spread like fire' among his 'students (Sharp, 2006). Gharib Abdel Sameea, Professor of Sociology at Helwan University, at a seminar on 'Video clips and Arab identity: the impact on Youth Values' at Cairo University, described music video clips as 'a true plague for the young generations'. He said: "It would be catastrophic if anyone took these singers as their role-model...Instead of spreading the philosophy of using minds, these channels advocate another slogan which is shaking bellies".³⁴ Dr. Abdel Sameea asserted that these songs are worth nothing in the world of art and talent, and that youth don't memorize their lyrics because they are watching more than listening.

An article entitled 'Sexy stars push limits in Egypt', which appeared as part of the 'Young in the Middle East' reportage on BBC news, elicited numerous responses from the public internationally. It was noticeable that all the responses posted by the

³³ Conference: Arab Media in the Information Age, the Emirates Centre for Strategic Studies and Research, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, January 2005.

³⁴ *Media Professors Attack Video-Clips: Satellite Channels Raising the Slogan of Shaking Bellies*, Donia Al Watan website, 19 August 2004 (Available in Arabic at <http://www.alwatanvoice.com/articles.php?go=articles&id=8710>). The seminar was held in 2004 by the Public Polls Center at Cairo University department of media and communication studies and was titled 'Video clips and Arab identity: the impact on Youth Values'.

BBC on its website, related the controversial music clips with social factors such as religion, female emancipation, liberalisation, and Westernization (Sharp, 2006). These responses demonstrate that a singer's persona, image and what they represent, are almost more important than the music itself. In other words, the discourse may be more powerful than the person him or herself, in constructing a youth (or even adult) culture.

Public debate is replete with warnings of the emergence of an Arab youth culture that is either assimilated into or strongly associated with Western culture. In discussions I have had with young Arabs, the question was raised as to whether television provides them with role-models which influence their own or other young people's lives. Besides the negative influences on youth behaviour, preoccupation with the physical appearance was also blamed on the imitation of TV personalities. Hamed (22 m) a Kuwaiti student in Jordan, said that youth look up to their favourite TV celebrities and try to imitate them where they can and that is in the way the young look. 'Many young people put on a new look copying a TV celebrity. When you see someone in the street with a new look, you immediately know that he has taken it from a TV star'.³⁵ Hamed's statement was supported by both male and female participants. Rita, (20 f.) said that most people change their hair-style or how they look by what they see on TV: 'You see someone around you who has changed his or her style and you realize straight away which TV celebrity they've taken it from. There was a time when Amr Diab's dress code was copied and people would put on the cap and the t-shirt with strange sleeves'.³⁶

³⁵ Focus group interview (1), Jordan, March, 2005

³⁶ *Ibid.*

Monjed (27 m.) said that it is only a question of time before most people join in. Influence may start from television, but then it moves to the street and peer pressure. He gave the following example: 'When there is a new style, for example, the spikey hair style, and you will find most of the students at the university appearing with the new look, you will feel tempted to do the same even if you were not convinced'³⁷. Hamed was keen to clarify this statement, insisting that 'When talking about influence, we talk about whether television and video clips influence young people or not, but we do not always necessarily mean this to be a negative influence as there are also positive influences'.³⁸

In a focus group with participants from a poor working class in Cairo, Abeer (18) said that girls try to look like celebrities on TV: 'If a girl sees a dress in a shop that she saw worn by a celebrity on TV, she would try to buy it. In fact, she would feel that she has to buy it. This is because of the boys. The boys would go after (flirt with) the girl who has that dress and will leave the good self-respecting girl'.³⁹ In the Emirates, I asked participants if they thought that Arab celebrities (generally understood to be famous figures in the media such as actors, TV presenters, and singers, rather than politicians) were good *qudwa* (role-models) for Arab youth. Hassan (18 m.) dismissed the thought as to whether they were good or bad, but was rather more concerned that the pan-Arab and even international celebrities were more well-known to his fellow youth than aspects of their own nation:

What role-modelling are you talking about? The 6600 Samsung mobile is called *Asala* (after the name of Syrian pop singer *Asala*) because she made a promotional advertisement for it. Arab celebrities are more famous than Arab rulers. We are citizens of the United Arab Emirates and we have seven emirates but I doubt that my friends here can name

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Focus group interview (4) Cairo, March 2005

them all. I confuse them and always confuse Ajman with Al Quweem.⁴⁰

Saleh (18 m.) did not want to generalise, and distinguished between the different Arab singers:

I respect singers like Asala and Kazim Al Saher and the fact that singers may promote products is not necessarily bad depending on the product advertised: The real problem lies in the satellite channels and the fact that they are projecting girls who are half-naked.

Hassan said that it is no longer 'a woman thing' in Arab society to follow fashions and to imitate celebrities: 'Man, you talk about girls imitating female celebrities. Look at us boys. You see Amr Diab or Jawad⁴¹ in a new dress, next day youth want to go any buy the same or similar dress'. Saleh agreed and gave the following example:

Star Academy last year was hosted by Wael Khourey⁴². He wore a glossy sparkling shirt that not even women would accept to wear but as he has many fans, when they see him in that outfit, they try to do the same as they think it is fashionable.

Hassan explained:

For us Arabs, good appearance is about good dress. The hair style, beard style, tight clothes, and make up, however, are all Western stuff. Now we the Arabs are interested in them and have taken them in. We, the youth, care about it, we also have tight fitting clothes and they say it is the design and the fashion. The '*abaya* [woman's dress that the covers the body and commonly worn by women in the Gulf] is now being redesigned, made tight and transparent so that you can even see through it. They call it a 'French gown' but what do the French have to do with gowns?⁴³

In Jordan, Basil (23 m.) complained the satellite television made things worse for men as they now have to pay more attention to how they look: 'Before the satellite one used to dress and look decent without having to worry too much about fashion,

40 Names of two of the seven Emirates making up the United Arab Emirates. The other five are: Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Fujairah , and Ras al-Khaimah.

41 Egyptian singer Amr Diab and Saudi singer Jawad Al-Ali are both Arab pop stars, but Diab is probably the most successful pan-Arab pop star. His professional singing career now spans twenty years and he is also one of the most well known Arab singers in the West, winning two World Music Awards in 1998 and 2002. See www.amrdiabworld.com.

42 Born 1974, Lebanon.

but now thanks to satellite one has to follow fashion and latest styles'. Pressing this point, Rola (21 f.) said that there were other negative things coming out of satellite. In Rola's opinion, 'Young girls are imitating half-naked sexy Arab female icons on TV and it may not be long before we see girls walking half-naked in the streets.' She added: 'There are women who sing on TV half-naked. Thankfully, presently not every girl can just simply dress in the same way because of the social restrictions, but when people start imitating those on TV, it gradually becomes normal. There are too many negative things now and they should be censored'.

8.4 Arab Satellite TV: a threat to Arab culture?

A strong concern in media evaluation is the appropriateness of the images and messages which are being transmitted. What do they portray and how relevant are they for viewers? Many commentators believe that satellite TV has a 'tremendous influence on how people think, how they dress and what they value in their lives'.⁴⁴ Ragah (19 m.) said that downloading sex movies from the internet or watching them via European satellite on an individual basis 'will not destroy our society or affect our culture as much as the popular Arab satellite television would'.⁴⁵

Culture is variously interpreted as including the religious and social elements that help bind a society. In Arab society, Islam and traditional family forms are regarded as essential to the maintenance of culture and, moreover, as authentically Arabic. Not surprisingly, the question of authenticity of culture (in Arabic, the *asala*) is a factor which enters most public debates surrounding the Arab satellite television portrayal of Arab society, youth and culture. Major fears expressed by the many critics of

⁴³ Focus group interview (3) Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, January 2005

⁴⁴ Dr Farhad Atai addressing fellow participants at the Bergedorf Round Table conference, Isfahan 2003. See reference: The Middle East and Western values: a dialogue with Iran. Bergedorf Round Table, Isfahan Oct 25-26 2003, Isfahan

satellite TV are of Arab cultural homogenization and negative influences on viewers. These fears ignore, however, the reception and conditions on the ground whereby Arab satellite becomes more than a mirror of Western or globalizing values. We need to pay attention to the particularity of the Arab situation. Giddens (1999:31) arguing against the traditional globalization theory, says that:

Globalization today is only partly Westernization. Globalization is becoming increasingly decentered - not under the control of any group of nations, still less of the large corporations. Its effects are felt as much in Western countries as elsewhere.

In the same vein, Dr Christoph Bertram⁴⁶ observes that: "Globalization might impose global values on regional cultures, but does it not also provide new opportunities to these cultures to express themselves?" (cf. Ien Ang, 1990). It is an oversimplification to argue that satellite broadcasting is a cipher of Western (or globalizing) imagery since the content is also influenced by Arab factors. Moreover, when such images are distributed, they are received by Arab audiences that are active interpreters of what they are shown.

The debate on the negative impact of Arab television on youth culture centres on the impact of music video clips, especially those of sexy Arab female singers who show parts of their bodies. Speaking in a seminar on music video clips organized by the Egyptian Opera House in Cairo, Professor Azza Karim suggested said that video clip singers were responsible for the increase in divorce and drug-abuse rates among Egyptian youth. She argued that family degradation ratio has increased after the new wave of video clips was released, along with the start of Arab and international satellite channels. Karim also contended that it is the harsh conditions youth live in - including the difficulties of marrying (due to housing shortages), along with frustration, unemployment and the emptiness of life - that cause all these 'immoral

45 Author interview with Ragah. Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. 24 January 2004.

changes in our society'.⁴⁷ However, what Karim and others fail to provide is corroboration of their arguments with ethnographic research findings.

Recently, Moslem Brotherhood Members of the Egyptian Parliament criticised video clip female singers and demanded that Egypt's Information Ministry ban their music on Egyptian TV. The Deputies singled out Lebanese singers Nancy Ajram and Alisa, and Tunisian singer Najla, and described them as posing a 'danger to the nation'.⁴⁸

Even Arab singers, including some females, have been critical of the phenomenon of Arab music video clips that show the female body. Christian Arab Syrian singer Majeda Al-Romi, who is also a UN Good Will Envoy, described what she called 'nudity in music video clips' as another image of the conspiracy against the Arab World. She described it as 'painful', and representing a deviation from 'our Arab culture and tradition'. She was surprised that Arab homes [families] could produce female singers who would show their naked bodies on video clips.⁴⁹ Egyptian singer Mohammed Nouh described current Arab songs as 'artistic drugs'.⁵⁰

Egyptian and Arab newspapers have launched a campaign against the phenomenon of video clips as well as singers who appear in sexually-suggestive video clips, citing examples of the Egyptian Ruby, Bousi Samir and the dancer Luci, and the Lebanese Hayfa Wahbi, Nancy Ajram, Alissa and the Tunisian Najlaa.⁵¹

46 *The Middle East and Western values: a dialogue with Iran*. Bergedorf Round Table, Isfahan Oct 25-26 2003, Isfahan

47 *Hayfa' Wahbi wa ukhwātuhā sabab al-talāq wa al-mukhadarāt*. [Hayfa' Wahbi and her sisters are the reasons of divorce and drugs] Al-Jazeera.net 15 April 2005 [online] available from <http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/BF8BE1F0-48D5-4F01-ACFB-358CE14FA25E.htm> [accessed 15 April 2005]

48 *Moslem Brotherhood launches campaign against female video clip singers*, Aljazeera news website 19 January 2005. [online] available from <http://www.aljazeera.net> [accessed 16 April 2005]

49 Majeda Al-Romi attacks nudity in Video Clips, Al-Jazeera.net, 3 March 2004. (www.aljazeera.net)

50 Current Songs Are Artistic Drugs, Al-Jazeera.net, 16 March 2005 (www.aljazeera.net)

51 *Hayfa' Wahbi wa ukhwātuhā sabab al-talāq wa al-mukhadarāt*. [Hayfa' Wahbi and her sisters are the reasons of divorce and drugs] Al-Jazeera.net 15 April 2005 [online] available from <http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/BF8BE1F0-48D5-4F01-ACFB-358CE14FA25E.htm> [accessed 15 April 2005]

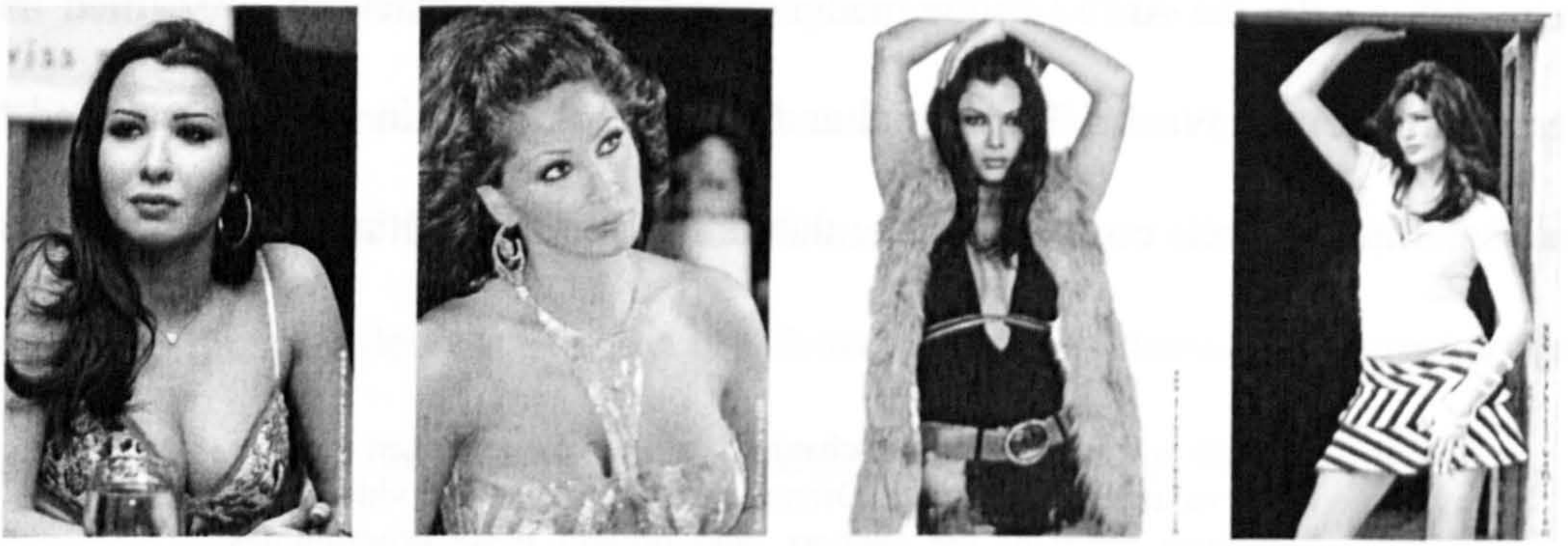


Figure 10: Controversial Arab female singers. From left: Nancy Ajram, Alissa, Hayfa Wahbi, and Maria. Source: www.arabsexywomen.com

A number of Egyptian magazines decided to stop publishing articles about some Arab female singers in an attempt to lessen their popularity. According to the online version of the London-based Elaph newspaper, top celebrities Egyptian magazine Al-Kawakib and Al-Nujum announced that they will no longer make any mention in any of their articles of female singers like Ruby (Egyptian), Najla (Tunisian) and others who ‘use seduction and inappropriate means in their music videos to gain fame’, because writing about them will only bring them more popularity and is a form of advertising for them.⁵² The magazines called on the media to do the same and ban provocative singers and to stop bringing them popularity. However, despite the move, their regular appearance on music channels such as Rotana and Mazikka as well as uncensored access via the internet means that the boycott by print media, while having a morally pervasive effect through society, has little actual effect on celebrity status.

⁵² Mohammed Abdelrahman, Egyptian alliance against nude music videos. *Elaph electronic newspaper* 5 February 2005. [online] available from <http://elaph.com/Music/2005/2/38633.htm> [accessed 5 February 2005]

Waheed Taweela, the Arab League media expert wrote an article in 2002 titled 'New Media in the Arab World: The Social and Cultural Aspect' in which he argued that Arab satellite channels create an image that is far from the culture of the communities they represent:

Anyone who watches these channels will have a mistaken view of Arab values and traditions. Drama, advertisements and video clips and even some of the anchors who present these programmes portray social models that are in no way related to the Arab culture. Observers will imagine that the entire Arab nation is living in a state of luxury and economic abundance similar to that projected in the extravagant, consumption-oriented lifestyle portrayed in Arab drama' (Taweela, 2002: 2).

In the same vein, Palestinian poet Tamim Al-Barghouti criticised TV images in an article to the Lebanese Daily Star, arguing that the portrayal of the lives and culture of the Arab youth on Arab television is a culture of an elite minority and does not represent the vast majority of Arab youth. Al-Barghouti wrote: 'The vast majority of Arab women do not look like those on television, nor do they dress, walk, talk, live, or die like them. Nor do the vast majority of Arab men own those kinds of cars and mansions. The green background is something Arabs only hear about. The culture that is produced by the television is of the young Arab elite, a de-politicized, disengaged elite that seems to be coming from outer space' (Al-Barghouti, 2004).

Al-Barghouti and others argue that this elite's culture reflected by Arab television is not just 'of an extremely low value', but also is 'a unfortunate, distorted imitation of American pop culture and secular European man-woman relations.' Al-Barghouti writes:

Instead of forming and reforming identity and imagination, and redefining what beauty means, the video clips on Arab channels make Arab youth want to become what they can never be, and make them want to become an image of their colonial masters. While the masses try hopelessly to imitate the elite and become it, despite the socio-economic barriers that would insure the impossibility of that dream, the elite is hopelessly trying to imitate the American model and become it (*ibid*).

Such discourse is reconfirmed and built upon by 'ground-level' commentaries and exchanges between youth and their friends and youth and their parents, families, the wider circle. Most of the criticisms are focused on music video clips and Reality shows. The music video clips which are shown on music channels and music video clips channels show half-naked women singing and dancing. Reality shows on the other hand show young Arab men and women socializing and mixing in contests.

In my conversations with the young adults many were critical of Arab music channels and music video clips. Ragah (19 m.) said: 'What is important is that we do not expose bodies and destroy our culture on mainstream television....Downloading sex movies from the Internet will not destroy our society or affect our culture. It will only affect the guys involved. But, in television we are not only destroying the younger generation, but the whole society...for example it is not only me who watches video clips, but also my father. I'll tell you a real story: One day I was visiting my uncle in Al Ain city [Emirates]. At the time Ruby has just released her clip Enta Aref leih, which was filmed in Denmark or Holland. My uncle was enjoying watching the video clip, but it caused such an argument with his wife that they did not sleep in the same bed that night. My uncle slept in the same room as me – all because of Ruby!'⁵³

Complaints about the video clip contents also abounded in the focus group discussions. Ahmed (18 m.) in Cairo said 'We got to the stage of blind imitation (of the West) without any thinking'. Marwan (17 m.) said that some musical channels 'break the ethical boundaries. They do not respect the conceptual skill of the person who is watching. Let's say they are insulting his intelligence by creating a video clip that has no point, the singing is very bad and the people who appear in it are not as

⁵³ Author interview with Ragah. Abu Dhabi, UAE. 24 January 2005.

responsible as they should be'.⁵⁴ Randa (22 f.) tried to explain: 'The Arab people are deprived and therefore want to imitate the West even blindly to the extent that the people outside think of us as ignorant and backward'. She added, 'The Arabs should not imitate the West. I'm not saying we should be strict as I'm not strict myself and do not cover my head, but I say that there should be respect. There are areas and streets where the dress code should be respected'.

Jumana (21 f.) from Palestine said that music and singing should be about arts and creativity. 'But these are not songs. They are pictures with melody and tunes'. She added, 'If we are to look at the youth and youngsters who imitate them, we would realize that the parents did not direct them towards something better. There is no censorship, and things get worse and worse...these songs are merely images and pictures'.⁵⁵

Saba (24 f.), an Iraqi student in Amman, said that she likes to watch the video clips that are not cheap and do not have 'cheap stuff' in them [referring to women's bodies]:

There is no comparison for example between between Amal Hijazi's last video clip which was respectful (about a child and a mother) and a cheap video clip on the other hand, like one of those songs where the singer dances up and down with sexy images that drain the mind. The moment the mind is dealing with or trying to absorb an image, the second image comes in a flash and then the third.

Saba added, 'If this does not affect us, it would certainly influence those who are younger than us. I have younger sisters who have the TV on all the time on music and they keep switching/ flipping through the channels to see the latest video clips once twice and three times'.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Focus Group (5) Cairo, Egypt, March 2005

⁵⁵ Focus Group (1), Amman, Jordan, March 2005

⁵⁶ Focus Group (2), Amman, Jordan, March 2005

Other informants expressed sentiments that the society's values and traditions were changing. In the Emirates, Saleh (18 m.) commented that Western culture has 'infiltrated even the oldest of Arab traditions'. In Jordan, Nidal (25 m.) said that certain TV programming has wrecked a lot of 'our social values. We Arabs have many things - like the brother would fear for his sister, the father for his daughter - the most precious things, but the Europeans for example do not have that. He added:

The Arab woman has always considered her body as her honour and the most precious thing. Showing Arab women's bodies has never existed before. Now when a 13 year old girl sees Arab women on television displaying their bodies and beauty on the screen for no aim or purpose, this wrecks the values of the society. They say that civil society will not develop without removing these values and changing them. This is what they are trying to get us to believe: that development and modernization can only happen if we get rid of the culture of 'eib [shame] - that seeing a half-naked girl in the street should not be a big deal. That's the only way that society would progress... They are trying through opening business to eradicate our values and traditions.⁵⁷

Dana (21 f.) said that the culture is 'changing because of television and mainly video clips'. 'We see how 18 year old girls dress today. We did not do the same five years ago when we were their age. What's happening? Is there no more cloth [material] to cover the body? Video clips have a negative impact on the younger ones'.⁵⁸ Nidal (25 m) said that Arab society was being changed. 'Even the youth interests have changed... Our interests and dreams were limited and simple. Now you talk to even a 12 or 13 year old and they scare you with their interests and dreams... things even we would not know about'.⁵⁹

Sami (24 m) agreed saying: 'The values themselves have changed as has the language. 14 year olds today have access to things we did not and although they are still kids, they are able to know of things that even we do not know of. It's because of

⁵⁷ Focus Group (2), Amman, Jordan, March 2005

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

the changes happening around them that they grow mature. They are taken from their reality and put in another where they are made to believe that they are older than their age'.⁶⁰

Similar to adult opinions, the youth are clearly critical of entertainment on Arab television, and while they argue that they are to some degree resistant to its influence, still they have concerns that younger ones are more prone to being influenced by what they see on the screen. The following section analyses the two most controversial categories of Arab satellite programming: music video clips and Reality shows. The section will discuss the views expressed in the Arabic and foreign media, and amongst the youth themselves. It discusses the aspects which 'threaten' the society and how they are viewed by Arab youth.

8.5 Music Video Clip channels: The emergence of Arab video culture

For many Arab commentators, the Golden Age of Arabic music (between the 1950s and 1970s) ended with the passing of singers Umm Kulthum and Abdel-Haleem Hafez, the two great symbols of high culture. Many consider that they were replaced by the sounds of 'low culture' (Hammond, 2005) particularly as this new 'low culture' (usually referring to Arab pop music), had by the late 1980s come to dominate the Arab soundscape with a new, infectious genre comparable in melody, style, and presentation to Western pop. Hammond describes it as 'still rough at the edges, but today the music industry has caught up with the West by merging state-of-the-art production with Arabic musical forms to create a successful indigenous sound' (p.141).

⁶⁰ Focus Group (1), Amman, Jordan, March 2005

With Arab satellite broadcasting, a new wave of channels appeared specializing in broadcasting music video-clips around the clock. The Arabic music video clip is comparable in format to Western MTV-style music clips and whereas previously the star would make a music video, today, according to Mustafa (2004) the ‘video clip makes the star’. Arab singing and music video-clip channels have dominated the scene with controversial music video clips that draw angry criticism from across the society and calls for censorship. As popular female stars have revealed increasing amounts of flesh, controversy has inevitably grown, and from all directions (see Sharp 2006). Lebanese singer Nancy Ajram’s first video clip in 2002’s *Akhaasmak Aah* (I would fall out with you), she belly dances her way through a men’s coffee shop in a tight-fitting dress, leading to protests when she performed in Bahrain and calls in numerous Arab parliaments for a ban on broadcasting the video. Similarly, Egyptian singer Ruby provoked an outcry with her 2004 song *Leih byidaari kida* [Why does he hide like that?] (Hammond 2005:151).



Figure 11: Nancy Ajram in *Akhaasmak Aah*

These exclusively music and entertainment channels are particularly popular among the youth and within the domestic spheres. 50% of Arab youth interviewed for this research only watched these music and movie channels which provide cheap 24 hour entertainment. The music channels are, hence, perceived by critics as following a European and American model of song clips. But despite the huge criticisms surrounding them, it appears that they have become more and more popular,

especially amongst the young, leading - in the words of Saudi female journalist Abeer Mushakhas - to the emergence of ‘a wave of Arab youth charmed with the Western world, and happy to watch an Arabic version of MTV’ (Mushakhas, 2004).

The visibility and availability of music video clip channels go beyond the living rooms of Arab homes to be found in most places frequented by the youth. In her BBC news reportage ‘Sexy stars push limits in Egypt’, Sharp (2006) described the music video clips as ‘the visual wallpaper of choice in the cafes, shops and discos frequented by Egypt's young people’. The spread of Arab music channels via satellite television, and the genre of images which they broadcast, raise issues with regards to the penetration



Figure 12: Al-Ahram Weekly comparing images from the 1940s/50s Egyptian film musicals (top) with ‘sexy female singers’ in modern music video clip images.

Clockwise from top: Soad Hosni in *Khalli balak min zuzu*; Umm Kalthoum; Abdel-Mottaleb; Asmhan and Youssef Wahbi in the movie *Gharam wa intiqam*

Stars of contemporary video clips: Clockwise from top: Nourhan during the making of *Habibi ya eini* videoclip; Hayfa Wahby; Ruby

Al-Ahram Weekly 17 - 23
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of highly controversial images into the family home. Egyptian writer and scholar Abdelwahab Elmessiri (2005) argues that although belly dancing, with its explicit erotic dimension, is part of the Arab cultural tradition, 'an art form that was largely confined to movies and weddings...video clips are normalising an otherwise exotic erotic dance, and bringing it into our living rooms all the way from the floorshow' (Elmessiri, 2005: 2).

In the same vein, Al-Barghouti (2004) argues that the women seen in Arab satellite TV - whether presenter, singer or Reality TV participant - rarely accurately portray the lives of the majority of Arab youth. He notes that the average Arab young woman living in the cramped districts of Cairo or Marrakesh would watch the guy with a convertible Porsche and a Gothic mansion with great admiration and she would identify with the girl-model he is courting, even though she knows that that model is everything she is not and visa-versa.

Al-Barghouti adds:

The Syrian or Sudanese man, sitting in a coffee shop, too poor to get married, and who might have not been able to hold a woman's hand in the street until the age of 40, would identify with the guy singing in the middle of a dozen half-naked belly dancers, but he knows he cannot ever be like him. And he will like him precisely because that handsome singer represents a socio-political system that oppresses and deprives his spectator. Seldom do the men and women watching television in the slums make the casual connection between their own poverty and the singer's extravagance.⁶¹

Similarly, the image of house-wives, children, and women, the majority of whom dress very conservatively outside the house and live under strict codes of propriety, is in stark contrast to the images and messages which are being received via these music channels. The discrepancy between the images of women on television (whether the

singer herself or the female backing chorus of a male singer) and the life Egyptian girls are expected to lead, represents a dichotomy and contradiction in 'morals'. Those that regularly listen to and watch the clips express their disapproval of them, mostly in terms of clothes (or lack of), the 'sexy women', and the low quality of music. Even Elmessiri, who is greatly concerned about global politics and the implications of the video clip for Arab society, admits in his article entitled 'Private Pleasures' to finding the performers 'beautiful, titillating, and pleasant to watch. They move ...in continuously surprising ways that set my head spinning. I could say a few things about the sets, the makeup, and the clothing or lack thereof' (2005: 3).

Before the emergence of the video clips, the lyrics of many of the light 'pop' songs of the day and their accompanying enactment were the centre of criticism for their vulgarity⁶² (See Lagrange, 1994). Today it is largely the visuals that attract the critical attention so that video clip songs have become 'artistically worthless because youth pay more attention to the images than to the song lyrics'⁶³:

'...in the ubiquitous hands of the video clip, even love songs - a once ambiguous, complex and delightfully varied genre - have undergone a negative transformation...The image, on the other hand - especially when it is the image of [a] half-naked, beautiful girl jumping up and down and, in the process, moving all that can be moved in her body, and in a less than objective way - is an immediate assault of the senses.' (ElMessiri, 2005: 1-2)

Although most Arabs will readily admit that the majority of pop singers are passing 'fads' and of dubious musical quality, video-clips are, as previously mentioned, very popular among many young Arabs and thus represent a lucrative source of income for

61 Tamim Al-Barghouti, Video clips and the masses: two worlds apart, The Daily Star, June 10, 2004 (http://dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=10&categ_id=4&Article_id=5043)

62 They sung about polygamy, drugs, alcohol, divorce, male/female relationships to varying degrees of explicitness.

63 *Media Professors Attack Video-Clips: Satellite Channels Raising the Slogan of Shaking Bellies*, Donia Al Watan website, 19 August 2004 (Available in Arabic at <http://www.alwatanvoice.com/articles.php?go=articles&id=8710>). The seminar was held in 2004 by the Public Polls Center at Cairo University department of media and communication studies and was titled 'Video clips and Arab identity: the impact on Youth Values'.

artists, producers, and music channel, becoming the 'goose that lays the golden egg' for satellite channels (Mustafa, 2004: 4). The high profit-margin from video clips (cheap production costs and high revenue from public phone-ins, mobile text messages and downloadable ringtones) explains their popularity with producers and TV channels, which are then blamed for debasing and compromising the quality of the music and ruining the 'public taste'. Quality is sacrificed to commercialism as:

'the more the video-clip is hot and includes sexual gestures, covert or overt, the better the distribution the commodity gets, and the more sales and profits it makes...as a respect of values and principles doesn't govern the production of the clip as much as a profit element, so it is not strange that video-clips are filled with naked scenes that are shown on satellite channels day and night.' (Mustafa, 2004: 15)

Conversely, Sami Yusuf, a young male British Muslim who sings only religious songs mainly in Arabic and English with minimal instrumentation was very popular and the video for his 'hit' song *Al Muallim* [The Teacher, referring to the Prophet Mohammed PBUH] was regularly shown on the Arab satellite music channels [See Pond, 2006].

Yet, the popularity of the video clips amongst the youth does not mean that they are universally accepted. Most young people whose views were solicited for this study were very critical of the clips and the channels behind them. Rana (17 f.) criticized video clips for their lack of story and dependence on the physical. 'I think the video clip today has no story. It is all about showing off the body and it is not of interest to me.' Randa (22 f.) responded by saying that while it equally was not be of interest to her, 'For some people it may be interesting. I guess if you like different types of video clips and music you watch it. I do not have to watch something I do not like'.⁶⁴

64 Focus Group (5), Cairo, Egypt March 2005.

Ahmed Esmat (17 m.) commented that 'If the video clip doesn't have some kind of strip dancing it won't get popular - but not every one likes to watch this. When a couple of friends discuss the clips, they watch and enjoy them, but then they start to say: 'this is not singing - it's covered up pornography' (Sharp, 2006).

Despite the harsh criticisms from the majority of my informants to video clips, only a few said that they don't watch them. Heba (18 f.) from Cairo said that she does not watch them 'because they corrupt my morals'.⁶⁵ Safa (24 f.) in Jordan described the video clips as 'ridiculous' and said if it was up to her, she 'would stop them'. In the Emirates, Riyad, (24 m.) said that he does not watch and prefers to watch 'serious programmes'. The common factor between all the respondents who said that they do not watch the music channels was that they were practicing Muslims.

8.6 Youth and Reality TV in the Arab World

One recurring theme in the debate on Arab television has been the threat posed by American and Western popular culture to authentic Arab culture and identity. This debate, although decades old, has recently focused on the phenomenon of Reality television (Aslama and Pantti, 2007: 51). Arab Reality television shows are the current issue inflaming debate around the Arab world and Arab youth are at the centre of this debate as they not only form the majority of Reality TV viewing public, but also are the participants and producers of this new TV genre in the Arab World.

There is a stark contrast in the perception of Reality shows of Arab scholars and their Western counterparts. Although Arab debates on Reality shows are almost exclusively negative, (addressing the new TV genre as a form of cultural imperialism, aiming at penetrating Arab culture by introducing new and alien elements), Western

scholars seem both implicitly and explicitly to view Reality TV as a global phenomenon (Aslama and Pantti, 2007).

However, what Arab and equally Western scholars seem to ignore is the potential of Reality shows that are localized on national televisions in constructing national identity. A new study by Aslama and Pantti (2007) argues that Reality TV plays an important role in constructing national identities, something that comes out of the process of localizing Reality TV shows. In their study, Aslama and Pantti (2007) argue that while all the debates around Reality TV seem both implicitly and explicitly to address Reality TV as a global phenomenon, little attention has been given to any national characteristics that may emerge in its localized variations. Using a Finnish adventure show *Extreme Escapades* as a case, Aslama and Pantti (2007:49) argue that national television still plays an important role in constructing national identities; that Reality television as a popular cultural product should be viewed in the context of “banal nationalism”; and that the genre may indeed redefine the meaning of national television in the globalized media sphere.

Arab Reality TV became an instant success in the region. Scoring record audience numbers and racking up unprecedented advertising spending and sponsorship deals, the shows revolutionized Arab television (Stigest 2005:14). Aired on 24-hour satellite channels, Arab Reality shows feature young Arab women and men living together in contests that proved a big hit in a region where private lives are taboo subjects and sexual segregation remains the norm. This has triggered strong opposition to Arab Reality shows not just by the elderly and the religious, but also by the young and the cultural elite. It was difficult to pass on the image of young men and women living in a house together – even though they slept in separate bedrooms.

Although most of the youth interviewed enjoy watching Arab Reality shows, they nevertheless agree that most of these shows are not compatible with ‘Arab-Islamic culture and tradition’. Nonetheless, they do not completely reject Reality shows, but distinguish between the different ones.

8.7 Arab Reality Television

Reality television entered the Arab World at a time of significant turmoil in the region: the war and subsequent violence in Iraq, contested elections in Egypt, the struggle for women’s political rights in Kuwait, political assassinations in Lebanon, and the protracted Palestinian-Israeli conflict (Kraidy, 2005). This geo-political crisis that currently frames Arab politics and Arab-Western relations is the backdrop to the controversy surrounding the social and political impact of Arab Reality television, which assumes religious, cultural or moral manifestations.

The Arab world's first Reality TV show, Super Star, [the Arab version of Pop Idol or American Idol] was launched in 2002 by Future Television, a Lebanese channel owned by the family of the late Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri. The show had its debut rated as the best variety show in the Arab world (Hi Magazine, 2004b).

A dating show, '*Ala Al-Hawa Sawa* (On Air Together), produced by Arab Radio and Television Network (ART) followed in 2003. ART created a special channel named after the programme '*Ala Al-Hawa Sawa*'. The channel aired around the clock and featured 8 women aged 18 to 35 from different Arab countries living for three months in a mansion in Lebanon. They eat, drink, gossip, fight and sleep on air. Viewers are then invited to vote on the right girl to get married, and the channel funded the winner's wedding party.⁶⁶ The programme was not very popular and thus was not perceived as very successful and that is probably why it did not trigger as much criticism and controversy as subsequent reality shows did.

Other forms of Reality shows, especially singing contest programmes like Star Academy and *Al Ra'is* [Big Brother], soon followed and became prominent. Star Academy, is the Arab version of Fame Academy and is produced by the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation (LBC). The show is 'unequivocally the most popular and probably the most controversial satellite television programme in Arab history' (Kraidy, 2005: 1). *Al Ra'is*, [the Arabic version of Big Brother] was produced by the Dubai-based Saudi-owned Middle East Broadcasting Centre (MBC). The show caused too much criticism that MBC had to pull it less than two weeks after its première (Stigest, 2005:14).

The latest entrant to the music Reality shows was in April 2006 when the music channel Rotana launched *Ikseer al-najah*, the Arabic version of the X-Factor in Britain. However, just before submission of this work, the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation (LBC) announced it was going to launch in May 2007 a new Reality TV

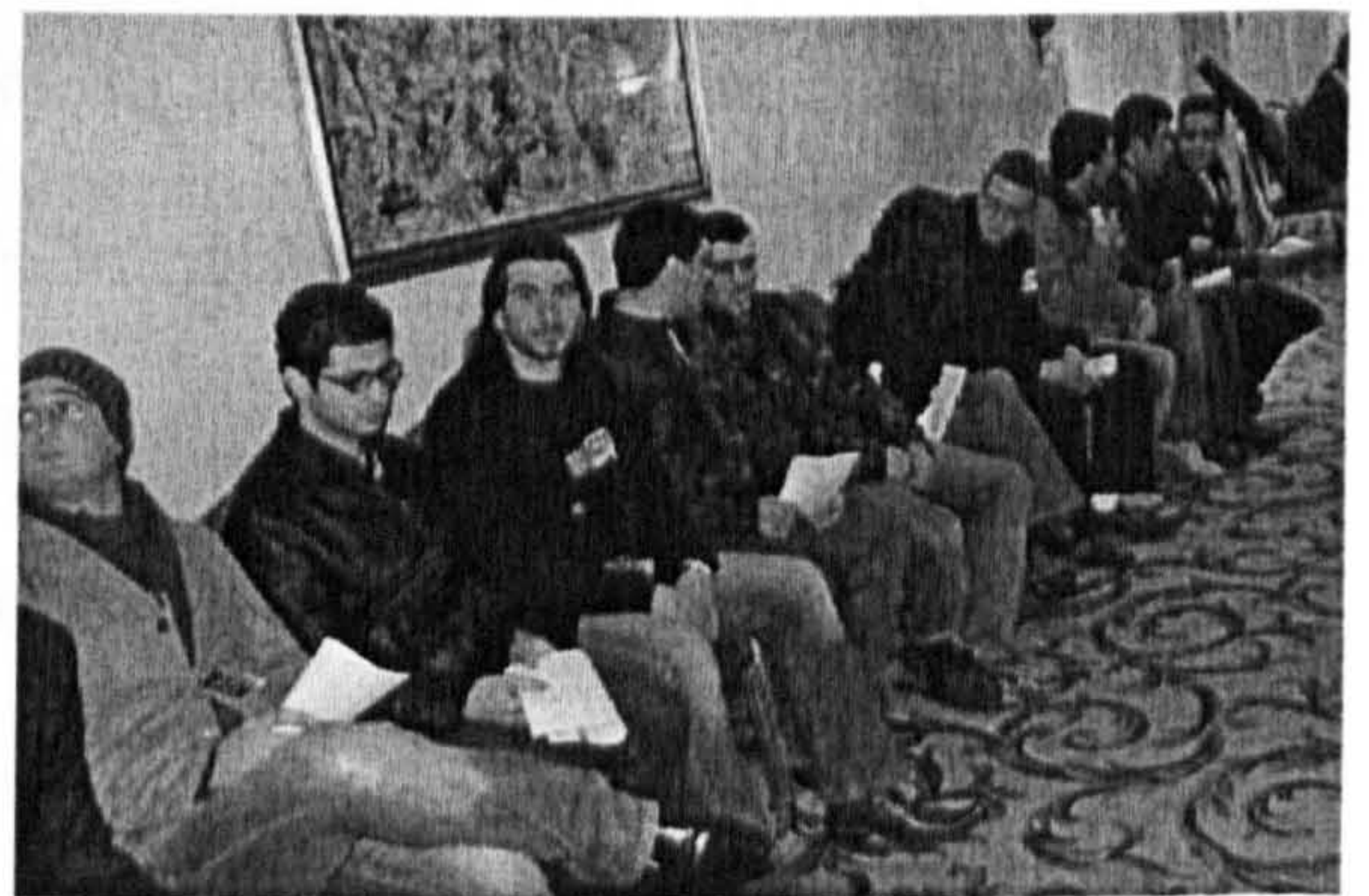
⁶⁶ Reality TV: Destroying Our Reality and Making its Own, May 22, 2004

show, *Kisma wa naseeb* (the Arabic version of The Perfect Bride), a dating and couple matching show.⁶⁷

Super Star and *Star Academy* were very popular and successful and survived strong criticism. However, the launch of the Arabic version of Big Brother caused such a public outcry that it was ‘pulled’ less than two weeks after its première (Stigest, 2005:14). The image of twelve young men and women from across the Arab world living in a house together was unacceptable to a majority of the viewers and the wider public – even though the protagonists slept in separate bedrooms and met only in the lounge, kitchen and garden.



Figure 13: The Arabic version of the X-Factor reality show. Courtesy of alriyadh.com



Queuing to audition for the second series of *Ikseer Al Najah*, Beirut, Lebanon, 31 January 2007. Courtesy of elaph.com

MBC's efforts to take into account Muslim sensitivities, including placing males and females in separate living and sleeping quarters, as well as providing a prayer room, were not enough for the critics to deem the programme Islamic. Some members of Bahrain's parliament demanded to question Information Minister Nabil Al-Hamr

⁶⁷ *Kisma wa naseeb: find a bride and get married on LBC*. Al-Jazirah 16 May 2007. [online] available from <http://www.al-jazirah.com/156409/at4.htm> [accessed 18 May 2007]. Al-jazirah is the first online Saudi newspaper.

about Big Brother. “We are an Islamic country with our own traditions. This programme spoils the morals of our sons,” said MP Jasim Al-Saidi.⁶⁸

Commenting on a kiss that appeared on the Arabic version of the British Reality show ‘Big Brother’, the Imam of the Mecca Sanctuary, Sheikh Abdul Rahman Al Sudeisi, described Arab Reality shows as ‘shows of mass destruction that ruin values and virtues’ (Hi Magazine, 2004a). About 1000 people demonstrated in Bahrain against the show, which they described as un-Islamic. The protesters gathered near the island where the production was being filmed and raised banners saying: ‘Stop the Big Brother programme’ and ‘We disapprove of Big Brother’, and chanting ‘Stop Sin Brother! No to indecency!’ The crowd included MP Muhammad Khalid, who was quoted as saying “We do not agree that the programme be filmed in Bahrain because it goes against our traditions. We support any development and tourism project provided it is not at the expense of our values and our traditions”.⁶⁹

Figure 14:
protests in
Bahrain against
Big Brother



Women in Bahrain protesting against the Arabic version of big brother. 8 March 2004.
<http://www.islamonline.net/Arabic/news/2004-03/08/article17.shtml> accessed 21 January 2005



Bahrainis demonstrate against the show, deeming it ‘un-Islamic’. (*Arab Big Brother unplugged*, <http://english.aljazeera.net>)

68 Arab Big Brother unplugged, Al-Jazeera.net, 02 March 2004 [online] available from <http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/C7E2375E-3F30-45DD-9E1C-96B65492AC17.htm> [accessed 03 March 2004]

69 Bahrainis oppose Big Brother, Al-jazeera.net, 27 February 2004 [online] Available from <http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/08DAE45E-F241-4857-8A53-F937254A59E8.htm> [accessed 27 February 2004]

MBC had to stop the show. In a statement that followed the decision, MBC said that they had to unplug the show to avoid exposing MBC and its programmes to accusations that 'it offends Arab values, customs and morals, because we consider MBC to be first and foremost a channel that belongs to the Arab world'.⁷⁰

Since its debut, Arab Reality television has been faced with strong opposition especially from religious leaders who have condemned it for violating Islamic principles of social interaction and facilitating cultural globalization characterized by Western values of individualism, consumerism, and sexual promiscuity (Kraidy, 2005). The chief cleric in Saudi Arabia considered the programme as 'an open call to sin' and 'a source of all disasters and misfortune for Islam and Muslims' (Taan, 2004). The Permanent Committee for Scientific Research and the Issuing of Fatwas or religious rulings in Saudi Arabia issued a lengthy Fatwa, replete with citations from the Koran and Hadith⁷¹, prohibiting watching, discussing, voting in or participating in shows like *Star Academy* (Kraidy, 2005).

When Saudi national Hisham Abdul-Rahman won *Star Academy* 2005, more than 60 sheikhs (religious leaders) urged him to repent and lambasted LBC's popular show as a crime against Islam. 'Young Arab men and women were put together in an abnominal state of mingling of sexes ... exposing themselves, singing, dancing and corruption', they wrote in a statement posted on the Saudi news website Al-Wifaq. The statement added: 'What happened is considered a crime against Islam and a great offence against the Islamic nation' (MEBJ, 2005: 15).

Such voices of discontent were not limited to the religious, but also included nationalists, conservative politicians and political activists who believe that Reality

⁷⁰ *ibid.*

shows are trivial and divert people's attention away from more important issues in the region, such as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the situation in Iraq.

The Islamic Action Front, a Jordanian political party with ties to the Muslim Brotherhood, issued a statement on *Super Star* condemning it for 'promoting cultural globalization' and the Americanization of Islamic values, but the debate in Jordan fizzled out when Jordanian female contestant Diana Karazon won the competition (Kraidy, 2005). The Palestinian 'Islamic Resistance Movement' known as Hamas [in government since 2006] condemned Palestinian reactions to *Super Star's* second series when a Palestinian contestant from the West Bank, Ammar Hassan, rose to favourite contestant status. On the nights when he performed, the 12,000 residents of his hometown, Salfit, stayed indoors, glued to their screens, and when he got to the finals against the Libyan Eyman Al-Atar, 2,000 people gathered in a local park to watch together, chanting "Ammar, Ammar, *Super Star*!" In a statement opposing the show and Palestinian reaction to it, Hamas said that 'our people are in need of heroes who are resistance fighters, and contributors to building the country and are not in need of singers, corruption-mongers, and advocates of immorality' (Kraidy, 2005: 7).

Political analyst Khaldun Sulh described *Super Star* and *Star Academy* as 'not so innocent'. 'They are meant to keep Arab youth away from national causes at a time that Iraq is occupied by imperialism and when Palestine continues to bleed,' he said.⁷² There are other voices demanding the banning of Arab Reality television shows but, for different reasons. They argue that such shows are trivial and degrading to Arab culture. Writing in the Lebanese Daily Star, Ramsay Short (March 2004) demanded

71 The sayings of Prophet Mohammed.

72 New reality TV dazzles Arab youth', Al-Jazeera television website, 10 January 2004 [online] Available from <http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/26606D52-FC0B-4D97-9316-F5E25F41A2C9.htm> [accessed 10 January 2004]

that Reality TV be banned because it is ‘devaluing our intelligence and culture’. Short describes Reality shows as the ‘McDonald’s of television. Fast food nation meets fast-food television’. Short says that he rarely finds himself in agreement with ‘conservative politicians and the devoutly religious’, but on the issue of Arab Reality shows he ‘concurs with them completely’. He writes: ‘I don’t have the authority of the Dean of Islamic studies at Kuwait University, Mohammed Al Tabtabai, who has issued a Fatwa against *Star Academy*, but I agree with him at least on the banning of the programme, though not the why’ (Short 2004):

‘Ban it. Take it off the air. Wipe it from the face of the planet. This form of mindless, lobotomizing television threatens to destroy thousands of years of human evolution in a single bound, microwaving our brain cells and addicting us to watching the immensely dull characters that populate the living quarters of “*Star Academy*” and “*Big Brother*.” My brain needs to be fed, my intellectual capacity needs to be stimulated. Don’t get me wrong I love voyeurism. I admit it. We are all voyeurs: it is basic human nature. It is a stimulant, it turns us on. Watching people getting up to things without them knowing is a secretive, sexy pleasure. But being forced to watch talentless teenagers try and communicate together, and then actually try and sing and dance is just a pain. I can feel my synapses fizzing as the signal stops transmitting like snapped electric cables.’

Dear viewers: we apologize for not covering the [Israeli] excavations under the *Al-Aqsa mosque*, because we are broadcasting live the Reality show *Super Star*. But, we promise you if the *Al-Aqsa mosque* collapses, that we will cover the event live. Thank you for your understanding



Figure 15: This online cartoon reflects the sentiments shared by many commentators that Arab television is ... the attention of Arab citizens from national issues such as the Palestine question and the occupation of Iraq. Cartoon courtesy of Marsad Al Watan website (<http://marsad.watan.com>).

In January 2005, Saudi Arabia's main mobile phone operator, Saudi Telecommunications Company, announced that it was blocking its 9.5 million customers from sending text messages of their votes for *Star Academy* 2, on the grounds that the show did not 'match the values of Saudi Culture' (Stigest 2005:14). The negative publicity surrounding *Star Academy* proved too much for financial backers, and some withdrew their sponsorship, such as Nescafé, which pulled out of its sponsorship deal with *Star Academy* (Stigest, 2005: 14).

Nonetheless, there are – albeit a few - voices of support for Arab Reality shows. For example, Hania Taan defended *Star Academy* against the criticisms that the programme was trivial and corrupting. She wondered whether all the criticism was 'because these young people, most of whom were Muslims, hug each other?' Taan (2004) argued, in an article she wrote for the Daily Star, that the young students who have been living under the same roof for four months had become like sisters and brothers. "No wonder their 'condemned' hugs come spontaneously. And some of them, namely the Muslims, always refer to Koranic verses when they are together, so they know their religion pretty well." Taan continues:

Moreover, you cannot imagine the pressure they are subject to during classes, nominations, primes and the cameras watching them. And even when they eat they work as all students have been following a diet and many have had to give up the junk food that they love. Most of all, they have not seen their parents for a long while and this was really hard for some, as they were not used to being away from their families. It is definitely disturbing to live while you are being observed even when you sleep (Taan, 2004).

Others see a political impact to Arab Reality TV. In this sense, Arab Reality TV is seen as giving Arab viewers the chance to vote freely, as people were asked to vote for their favourite participant. Millions of viewers at homes took part in voting in different Reality shows including *Super Star* and *Star Academy*. Saudi female journalist Abeer Mushakhas, editor of *Akhbar Al Arab* newspaper in Jeddah, argued

in an online article that home voting seems to appeal to Arab viewers as they feel that their vote will count, and that they will eventually have a say in choosing the winner 'unlike the local political game, where they know that their votes will be wasted' (Mushakhas, 2004).

Kraidy (2005) argues that Reality television is the harbinger of an alternative future. He contends that *Star Academy* is, in many ways, a political programme: 'It is political first in the sense advanced by the 'alternative future' explanation of the show's popularity, in that it stages an apparently fair competition whose participants count on their personal initiative, creativity and skills, and whose winners are determined by a popular vote'. Kraidy argues that "this 'reality' is discordant with that of most young Arabs, who are prevented from expressing their opinions, who get their jobs because of connections and rarely because of competence, and where power is wielded arbitrarily by unelected rulers and officials" (p.12).

8.8 Youth attitudes towards Arab Reality shows

Despite strong opposition, Arab Reality shows continue to be popular and probably the most popular in the history of Arab television, especially amongst the youth. Youth attitudes toward Arab Reality shows vary from oppositional to supportive. What is interesting is that almost all of the youth know of, watch, and follow up Reality shows; however, they differ in how they feel about them. Hassan (18 m.) said that all youth watch both shows: 'When it comes to *Super Star* and *Star Academy*, don't believe those who tell you that they do not watch them. I myself watch though my mother is a practicing Muslim and she's prevented us from watching music video-clip channels like Rotana. However, she's fine with *Super Star*.' When I asked the

participants why they thought Reality shows were popular, Hassan offered the following explanation:

It is like the fast food phenomenon. Fast food was never an Arab thing. Every Arab country had a popular dish for example *Mandy* in Yeman, *Kabsa* here [Abu Dhabi-UAE], *Koshari* in Egypt, *Mojadara* in Palestine etc. But when the fast food was introduced, it proved to be successful and popular; why? Because it is new, unusual and accessible. However, the difference with these programmes on television and the example of the fast food is that these programmes have been messing/muddling with our religion and moral values.⁷³

Saleh (18 m.) agreed and added that Reality TV shows and music video clips are successful because anything that is prohibited and weird is appealing. 'I stress more on weird' he said, adding 'When I see a new thing and tell you about it, you want to see it even if it was weird and unacceptable stuff'.⁷⁴

In Abu Dhabi, Riyadh (24 m.) who said that he does not watch *Super Star* or *Star Academy* described both shows as 'drugs' adding that profit making was the main concern of the producers. 'I do not watch them ... and even if I did, this is still about making profits on the part of the channel. It's like dealing or trading in drugs'. Sami (18 m.) agreed with Riyadh, adding, 'But drugs would be discreet while these programmes are available to all people'.⁷⁵

Sami (18 m.) who strongly opposes Arab Reality shows but nevertheless watches them, said that 'Reality TV is a dangerous thing. I do not understand how they [Reality TV producers] are not taking it [the moral issue] so seriously. How it is easily accepted that boys sleep alongside girls. This is against our traditions [literal translation is 'intuition' or *fitra* in Arabic], which prevents us from receiving such things. They try to make us receive such things. Unfortunately they call us backward

73 Focus group interview (3) Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, January 2005

74 Focus group interview (2) Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, January 2005

when we reject these behaviours. However, this is something that is against intuition and all that does not go with intuition is weird.’⁷⁶

In Egypt, Rana (17 f.), who was dressed in jeans and did not have her hair covered, found the mixing between the two sexes in *Star Academy* unacceptable. ‘I like it, you know, but there are some parts which I do not like because it is not related to our tradition and religion’.⁷⁷ She explained:

I’m talking about *Star Academy* where boys and girls live together and fall in love with each other. Some people find it shocking and wonder oh my God how are they doing something like this. They are all Arabs! And it is not Arab to do something like this.⁷⁸

In Palestine, I asked participants of a male focus group in Gaza what they thought of Arab Reality television and asked them specifically how they felt about *Super Star* and *Star Academy*. Mohammed (18 m.) said that he would close down all Reality TV shows if he could. Sharaf (18 m.) said that the Palestinian reality meant that people could not watch such shows. ‘Our reality stops us from following up TV shows like *Star Academy* and *Super Star*. Even if one wanted to and did, he will not psychologically feel comfortable with himself while other people around him are suffering. But in the Gulf community, they must be addicted to such shows.’ Then, Abdelfattah (18 m.) made the following comment:

‘Like [Palestinian contestant] Ammar Hassan in *Super Star*, he reached the final at a time when [Palestinian political) prisoners were on hunger strike [in Israeli jails]. It was not good that he was aiming for victory through singing and songs while all the prisoners were thinking about and demanding was freedom.’⁷⁹

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Focus group interview (4) Cairo, Egypt, March 2005

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Focus group interview (1) Gaza, Palestine December 2005.

Mohammed said that such shows aim at frustrating the Resistance [against the Israeli army in the occupied Palestinian territories]. 'These shows are meant to send a message to the Resistance; to say that these are the people you are trying to defend; look at them and what they are interested in.'⁸⁰

When asked how then they explain the fact that these shows are still popular and especially amongst the youth, they all responded that youth find relief in watching such shows. Mohammed said that the youth like such programmes 'because they seek some sort of relief ... they are not convinced of these shows, but find them helpful to cope'. Adham (18 m.) said that it is entertainment for the youth and they use it to relieve themselves of life's pressures.

Nonetheless there were some voices of support to Reality shows across the different focus group interviews. Some of the youth felt that Reality shows had a positive aspect to them. Randa (22 f.) did not see *Star Academy* the same way as most of her fellow interviewees did in a focus group in Cairo. 'It is not about boys and girls together,' she said. 'They are giving young people the chance to become stars in a healthy way. They are teaching them in the right way, how to talk, how to sing. They are giving them chances that young people need.'⁸¹

In Jordan, Nidal (25 m.) said that Reality shows were about young people trying to achieve something. He criticized Arab society as always looking at the negative side of things:

Even music programmes like *Super Star* and *Star Academy*, what are they all about? They are about young people wanting to reach something; to become a singer. Whether it is negative or positive at the end of the day this is a French or foreign programme that has been brought into Arabic. We also have to consider other aspects. For example, how much money has *Super Star* brought to Lebanon? A

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Focus group interview (4) Cairo, Egypt, March 2005

lot... How many jobs has it provided?... Why do we always take the negative side of things?⁸²

Razan (21 f.) responded to Nidal's comment by saying: 'Yes but here you are putting the interest of few individuals over the interest of the society as a whole.' Nidal responded by saying that the society needed such programmes.⁸³

Other informants pointed out the difference between different Reality shows, especially *Star Academy* and *Super Star*. Hassan (18 m.) said that the good thing about *Super Star* 'is that it produces talents, yet they also focus on the appearance, clothes and fashion. You'll find two judges, but also there is always a woman who takes care of their clothing.' Saleh (18 m.) added that a 'former Miss Lebanon was in charge of dressing the female contestants. The clothing is important, but it does not show the talent, yet it is given importance in a provocative way.'⁸⁴

Hassan said that he prefers *Super Star* and thinks that it is acceptable socially and morally. '*Super Star* is much more accepted than *Star Academy* mainly because in the former the two sexes do not mix and live together. In *Star Academy* they sleep in the same place, see each other all day, exercise together, etc.'⁸⁵

Sami (18 m.) in Abu Dhabi said, '*Super Star* is much better. *Star Academy* is a Western programme, anyway'. Though both shows are Western in origin and format, Sami singled *Star Academy* as Western. In the same group, Abu Eida (18 m.) said that *Star Academy* was 'more dangerous for moral rather than political reasons' adding

82 Focus group interview (2) Amman, Jordan, March 2005

83 *Ibid.*

84 Focus group interview (3) Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, January 2005

85 *Ibid.*

that 'programmes may be stopped for political reasons, but not for moral reasons, unfortunately'.⁸⁶

In Gaza, Riham (18 f.) said that she watched *Star Academy* even at times when she has exams. However, she said that her preference goes to *Super Star* as boys and girls do not live together in the show:

I watch *Star Academy* even when I have exams. *Star Academy* is about girls and boys living in the same house for 24 hours and their actions are broadcast live on television. But in *Super Star*, the girls are separate from the boys and it broadcast one day a week with a full singing show accompanied by voting from the public. I prefer *Super Star* as in *Star Academy* girls and boys live in the same house.⁸⁷

Though most Arab youth seem to be critical of the content of Arab Reality shows, especially when it comes to the mixing of the two sexes, still they like to watch them and form the majority of the viewing public. Some argue that this is because Arab Reality shows provide Arab youth with a 'false reality' to which they can escape from their own reality.

Hassan (18 m.) pointed out that Reality shows are breaking boundaries, but still it is difficult to materialize in real life. Pointing towards one of his fellow interviewees, Hassan said, 'Take the example of Mustafa, one of us, who is Western in his thinking, when he wants to see a girl, he still cannot see her in front of her family nor can he dare to be seen in public with her. However, with television young people are not just seeing each other, but sleeping in the same place and living together in front of the whole world.'

Saleh (18 m.) added that boys and girls do not only sleep in the same place, but 'they kiss as well', adding that this is a 'Western culture'. Saleh pointed out that Reality

86 Focus group interview (2), United Arab Emirates January 2005

87 Focus group interview (2) Gaza City, Palestine, January 2006

shows and singing video clips are worse than cinema films. 'When there is a new film released, it stays in the cinemas for one, two, up to three months at the longest. If you want to watch it then you will have to go and watch it while in cinemas. But with the video clips on television it is like you have to watch them whether you like it or not. They are there all the time and there is a different song every 5 minutes or less.

8.9 Conclusion

The exclusively music and entertainment channels are particularly popular among the youth and within the domestic spheres. Arabic Reality TV shows and music video clips fill the entertainment and music channels, and have triggered concern in academic, social, religious and even political circles for their potential effect on youth.

This is very much linked to media (the internet and satellite) globalisation's perceived influence as an insidious tool of neo-colonialism particularly in the light of its increased accessibility and presence in Arab daily life. The effect of what is perceived as a strong Westernizing force - be it real or imagined - as a result of foreign imperialism (or modern day neo-colonialism) is felt within the cultural and musical discourses. Images strongly associated with the Western way of life (arguably propagated by satellite television today) are targeted as threats to Arab national political and social identity. It is, however, the internal political and social sentiments that dictate to what extent 'Western' elements are deemed positive, acceptable, or threatening. For example, it is the 'Western image' portrayed, and the Arab artists themselves, rather than the video clip *per se* or the 'Westerner', that is presented as a danger to ethical, societal, and national affiliations.

Significantly, the concern is equally shared by the youth who admittedly are the biggest consumers of entertainment, but the popularity of the video clips and Reality shows amongst the youth does not mean that they are universally accepted and the youth I have shown in this chapter are clearly very critical of them.

Moreover, while adults seem to regard this kind of entertainment as a direct attempt to destroy Arab culture and traditions, the youth see it as blind imitation on the part of the producers of Western programmes and a mere profit-making attempt on the part of the channels. While they stress the need to modernize, the youth made it clear that they want to maintain and respect their own culture and identity.

SATELLITE TELEVISION AND YOUTH IDENTITY

9.1 Introduction

As identity is most commonly and accessibly expressed through symbols that are felt to represent a group, some fear that exposure to the foreign symbols carried by satellite television will weaken allegiance to and eventually replace existing symbols. This assumption has been expressed in political, cultural, religious and academic circles in all Arab countries. Most of the critics of Arab satellite television refer to the increasing number of youth who consume Western media (as well as food and clothes) as being ‘Western’ or becoming ‘Westernized’.

In contrast to the assumption in public discourses, this chapter argues that ‘Arab’ identity is highly variable, neither constant nor unchangeable (Hall, 1996: 2) with different aspects playing stronger roles depending on external and internal socio-political factors. Emphasizing the wider significance for Arab society and identity of ‘the representation’ for ‘the construction, negotiation, and transformation of sociocultural identities’ (Born and Hesmondhalgh 2000: 31), the chapter highlights some of the main features of representation that concern Arab youth. It will also attempt to gauge the significance of this representation in terms of its influence on youth construction of its social visions as well as whether youth engagement with satellite television and associated public discussions might engender changes in identity. The chapter also explores the extent to which youth identify with the entertainment programmes with which they are commonly associated and their acceptance or disapproval of them.

9.2 Arab youth and identity

The debate on the impact of Western culture on Arab youth identity falls into two – principally negative – categories: firstly, that it affects the national identity of the youth, depoliticizing them and making them care less about national or pan-Arab issues; secondly that affects the Arab and Islamic identity of the youth, distancing them from Islamic culture and values. Yamani (2000), for example, notes that ‘traditionalists’ are concerned with maintaining a coherent and constant Islamic identity and protecting the values they regard as crucial to it. They feel threatened by the effects of Westernization, especially from satellite television, and the increased commercialization of Saudi society (p.116).

Both categories often appear in arguments employed by politicians, Islamists, religious leaders and intellectuals. Some go so far as to describe Arab satellite channels as a disease, a cancer, a poison, a weapon of mass destruction or a ‘war of attrition’⁸⁸ (Al-Robe’i, 2004; Lata, 2004; Juma’ and Al-Shawāf, 2005).

Political leaders also articulate their fear of outside influences and cultural changes particularly if it results in political disempowerment. President Bashar Assad of Syria (in office since July 2000) warned against the ‘forces behind the modern trends that would exploit and generate societal upheaval in the Arab world, leading to the cultural, political and moral collapse of the Arab individual and his ultimate defeat without a fight’.⁸⁹

Speaking in a recent speech to the Congress of Syria’s ruling Ba’th Party meeting in June 2005, Assad said that the evolution of communication and information

88 Suleiman Al-Robe’i, Arab Satellite Channels and the War of Attrition, Al-Riyadh Daily, 7 February 2004 [In Arabic]

89 CNN News: Assad: Media, tec crushing Arabs, June 6, 2005 [online] available from

<http://edition.cn.com/2005/WORLD/meast/06/06/assad.syria/index.html> [accessed on 11 June 2005]

technology made Arab society open, and this opened the door for confusion and suspicion in the minds of Arab youth.⁹⁰ Assad added that a media influx, the ultimate objective of which was to destroy Arab identity, had left Arabs 'swamped by disinformation' about themselves:

For the enemies of the Arab nation are opposed to our possessing any identity or upholding any creed that could protect our existence and cohesion, guide our vision and direction, or on which we can rely in our steadfastness,⁹¹

Assad warned that 'they simply aim at transforming us into a negative, reactive mass, which absorbs everything that is thrown at it without the will or even the possibility of thinking or rejecting or accepting it'.

Similarly, Palestinian poet and writer Tamim Al-Barghouti wrote in the Lebanese Daily Star in 2004 that the current television culture depoliticizes the minds of young men and women, and 'prevents them from asking questions about their misery and impotence'. Al-Barghouti argues that 'princes and businessmen who own star-making corporations and television channels produce a colonial culture that consolidates a colonial reality' (Al-Barghouti, 2004).

More dangerous to Arab culture, however, were the Lebanese satellite channels, namely LBC and FUTURE TV, which have been beaming the world of young Arabs with daring political, social and cultural programmes, talk shows, game shows, song contests, and Reality shows. Lebanese channels were the focus of criticism until other channels, such as Saudi and Egypt-owned ones, also began to air music and Reality TV.

The basis of the criticism is the assumption that these programmes threaten the Arab and Islamic identity of Arab youth. The danger posed by these programmes, it is

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

argued, is much higher than that posed by the Western and foreign channels. In his article *Lebanese Satellite Channels and the Culture of Cabarets*, Najdat Lata (2004) argues that Lebanese channels have a devastating effect on Arab youth's culture and identity and have replaced the previous sources of 'foreign invasion':

With the advent of the satellite revolution there was concern of a foreign cultural invasion to our societies, but it turned out that apart from the scenes of sexual nature there is no great danger coming from them as so few Arabs speak foreign languages - even English. Yet, it is a completely different story with the Lebanese satellite channels. As if those who are running these channels have undertaken the responsibility of the foreign invasion of our societies be it cultural, social or sexual. The Lebanese channels broadcast in Arabic and in both classical and colloquial. When you watch them you realise that it is fatal poison that they are emitting (*ibid.*).

Certain programmes broadcast on Arab satellite television have found themselves at the centre of public debates regarding their formative potential on the self and wider identity. Noticeably, the criticism is directed not at the Western channels that are also available for Arab consumption for those with a satellite receiver, but at the Arab channels and their producers. What we have here, critics argue, is Westernization developed in an Arabic vernacular, making it at once more influential and less reprehensible. The reasons for this lie mainly in the fact that Arab channels are more watched by Arab youth and society as a whole than the Western channels (Taweela, 2002, Abu Osb'a 2004); furthermore, as 'Arab productions' they are presumed or expected to be transmitters of 'Arab values', be they social or cultural, national or religious.

In the view of the consistent criticism and verbal attacks directed at the Lebanese satellite channels, I included a question in my questionnaire whereby I asked respondents how they would describe the Lebanese channels giving them six descriptive options to choose from (see Table [13] below). Only 14.2 % said the channels were *Westernized* preferring to describe them instead as *Liberal* (38.9%).

20.5% described them as *Entertainment* channels and 16.3 % viewed them as *Ibahiyah*.⁹²

Table [13] *How do you describe the Lebanese channels LBC and FUTURE TV?*

	Males	Females	Total
Entertainment channel	10.5	10	20.5
Western	5.8	8.4	14.2
Liberal	15.8	23.2	38.9
Ebahia	11.1	5.3	16.3
All of the above	2.1	1.1	3.2
Other	2.1	4.7	6.8

9.3 Youth identity: between attitude and behaviour

When critics of Arab television describe youth as ‘Western’ or ‘Westernized’, they are not distinguishing between behaviour and attitude. While some of the behaviour of Arab youth may appear ‘Western’, it is essential to see the behaviours in context. When Western and Westernized Arab media is consumed by the youth who may also eat McDonald’s and wear jeans, should one presume that their attitude has become Westernized or Americanized? Or that they have become less Arab or less patriotic? In other words, do they act, think or feel like Westerners do? Are these synthetic changes or deep-rooted identities in Arab youth? None of the youths who took part in this research said they did not want to be Arab, but it seems Western symbols may be employed more as an indication of sophistication, modernity, or fashion. Saudi academic and Islamic scholar Abdullah Al-Ghadhmi (2004) invites critics to judge the real youth identity not by how they dress, what they eat and drink or their daily behaviour, but more by their religious beliefs, language and ethnicity. In Al-

⁹² The word ebahia is translated literally porn, but used to refer to scenes of sexual nature or indecency

Ghadhami's view, the changes adopted by Arab youth are artificial and do not affect deep-rooted identities. He argues that 'the changes may happen in dress fashions, food and drink patterns, and daily behaviour, but the core identity which lies in the religion, language and ethnicity tends to resist changes' (ibid. 214). He adds that 'the proclaimed cultural invasion is a delusion that aims to exaggerate the fear of ourselves, because the youth who wear jeans and eat fast-foods are the same who stand against the imperialist policies; this occurs in our country the same way it occurs in Europe' (ibid.)

After all, despite the large number wishing to emigrate to the West, how do they really feel about the 'West', the USA in particular? And why? Their attitudes are very much oppositional to some aspects of the 'West' and what it represents, especially when it comes to Western foreign policies which are blamed for the miseries they live with [wars, lack of democracy and insufficient development]. Simultaneously, however, they seek the freedom, education and economic opportunities the USA and the 'West represent' (Burke, 2006).⁹³

Moreover, youth discourses indicate a strong opposition to elements in Western culture and awareness of television's ability to be a vehicle of Western cultural imperialism. In this sense, they are almost identical to their elders. However the youth strongly demonstrate the ability to negotiate and to reject messages coming from television, while adults seem to view youth as passive audiences which absorb whatever they are offered.

93 According to Burke (2006) "A recent poll in Egypt asked where people would most like to live and which country they most hated. The answer to both questions was, predictably, America. Europe, thrashing out a new *modus vivendi* for coming to terms with large Muslim minorities, has a key role to play in reconciling these two sentiments. But for all the clumsiness with which the misconceived 'war on terror' has been handled, the attraction, however conflicted, of 'the West' for billions of people remains our greatest strength."

In her study amongst 15 to 30 year old Saudi youth, Mai Yamani (2000) refers to the complexity of their identity. She notes that the dress the youth wear and the food they eat indicates the multi-layered character of their situation (see chapter two). Yamani explains that Western fashions inspired by satellite television and US-dominated global culture compete with Saudi culture and national dress. Nevertheless, she notes, Islam is still one of the core values – perhaps the core value – of the identity of the new Saudi generation (2000: 116). Their Islamic and Arabic heritage is the central influence (p133).

Many views solicited for this study showed that television was attempting to influence the culture of young people and hence their identity. Some informants considered TV to be a new form of ‘Western imperialism’. However, the form of influence, when analysed, is not always entirely Westernized, and frequently utilises Arab motifs. An example is the 2003 hit *Ah wa nuss* video clip, directed by Lebanese video clip Artistic Director Nadine Labeki, in which Nancy Ajram wears a blue and white striped *jallabeya* [traditional Arab peasant/country dress]. The video clip was so popular that there was an upsurge in the sale of this garment.⁹⁴

Youth reactions to satellite programmes show that they are very discerning about which facets of satellite broadcasting they accept into their identity, choosing to highlight mainly those which they consider contradictory to their identity.

The cultural and identity battle with foreign imperialism is still being enacted within many aspects of society and its discourses. Najla (22 f.), a Syrian student in Jordan, said television was ‘the new face of imperialism’. She explained: ‘During the colonial

period for example, Egyptians were influenced by the way British colonials dressed. Then the colonials influenced the life style of Egyptians, but now television is doing the job.’⁹⁵

Some of the young I interviewed felt that they were able to exercise self-control over their viewing patterns, whereas others claimed that choice did not exist and that the influence of satellite was pervading Arab youth identity [in particular that of others]. Musa (22 m.) considered TV as imperialistic. ‘It’s true that it brings the world to you, but it only the kind of world it wants’. Ahmed (25 m.) disagreed, saying that TV is the biggest blessing people and society could have. He continued:

TV brings to you the whole world while you are sitting in the comfort of your living room. The problem is in us not in the TV. One could have a 100 different satellite channels... So we have the freedom to choose and the question is how we use this freedom. We should know how to use this freedom rather than think of not having a TV at home. It’s a personal choice to start with, but by the end of the day we are governed by our society, traditions and the way we were brought up.

In a similar vein, Rita (20 f.) considered that ‘although they differ in form and presentation, TV and especially Arab satellite channels, are the same in thought’. She explained:

If for example, we look at the movie or the music channels or even the so-called variety or cocktail channels, we can see that they all have the same principle, same content and same thoughts. So, any of these channels will be sending you the same message and then there is no point in the variety. If you watch one or a hundred channels, it’s all the same. This of course does not apply to the news channels.⁹⁶

Further criticism was aimed at the propensity by youth to admit Western symbols into their own Arab identity and this was blamed in part on an identity vacuum or weakness present in the general Arab psyche. Respondents noted the numerous

94 See BBC In pictures: Arab pop fashion hits the high street [Nancy’s gelebiya]

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/picture_gallery/05/middle_east_arab_pop_fashion_hits_the_high_street/html/3.stm
[accessed 28 August 2006.

95 Focus group interview (1), Jordan, March, 2005.

military defeats or threats suffered by Arab countries especially from Israel [such as Egypt, Jordan and Syria 1967 and Lebanon 1982]. The popularity of the Western within the cultural sector, and particularly the music sector, is both indisputable and controversial. Pop music for example is one of the most visible vehicles for ‘foreign influences’, however the format is less of a matter of conscious pro-Western imitation than a successful and commercially-viable product.

Hassan (18 m.), in a group session in the United Arab Emirates, was critical of youth behaviour and attitudes, and blamed them on an Arab identity vacuum: ‘We are fascinated by anything Western because we have no identity. Arab youth are looking for an identity.’ Saleh (18 m.) agreed, adding that they are impressed by anything that is Western. ‘Excuse my language, but even if we see Western shit, we’ll say “wow!”.’ He wondered, ‘Why are we only impressed and interested in the negative things? The West is developed and they have many good things that we should be impressed by rather than these rubbish programmes such as *Star Academy*.’ Mustafa (18 m.) commented, ‘We Arabs have an inferiority complex. It’s called the foreign inferiority complex.’⁹⁷ Hassan gave the following example:

Here in the UAE where the ‘*abbaya* [Arab woman’s dress, usually black and popular especially in the Gulf countries] has been given new names such as the *French Abbaya*. What have the French got to do with the *Abbaya*? The new design is influenced by the West and is far away from the original purpose of ‘*abbaya* and that is to cover and protect the woman’s body. Now it is fashionable and revealing and has names such as *ninga*, and *khaima*. Guys see a woman walking down the street and say look at *the black* that is coming or look at *the jinni*.’⁹⁸

9.4 Entertainment, Nation, Politics and Morality

Many Arab writers and commentators are quick to blame producers of certain entertainment programmes on satellite television for social ills, even insinuating a

⁹⁶ *ibid.*

⁹⁷ Focus group interview (3), United Arab Emirates January 2005.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

'conspiracy on Arab society' (Elmessiri, 2005; Lata, 2004; Juma' and Al-Shawāf, 2005). Images of women, in video clips and reality shows, are particularly attacked as they are considered to detrimentally affect the morals of individuals and wider society. However, concerns with artistic representations reside deeper than mere 'video-eroticism':

Video clips amount to more than a sexy woman dancing and singing. Rather, they provide the public with a role-model, promoting a particular lifestyle that typifies a worldview in turn, one whose starting point is individual pleasure at any price (Elmessiri 2005: 3).

This is why the concern has even escalated into governmental discussions:

In recent years, parliaments in Kuwait, Jordan, Egypt and Morocco (at least) have debated whether the dangerous curves and heaving bosoms of stars such as Hayfa Wahbi, Nancy Agram or Ruby - seen in music videos that try to outdo each other in brazen sexuality - were a threat to national security (El-Amrani 2006).

Freund reports that the anti-video backlash has blamed the music scene for 'its attempts to divert the attention of youths away from the political and financial frustrations at home', and also that it was American policy to 'strip Arab cultures of their values' (Freund 2003b⁹⁹). Palestinian poet Tamim Al-Barghouti describes in an article entitled *Video clips and the masses: two worlds apart* (in Armbrust 2005) how the 'video clips on Arab channels make Arab youth want to become what they can never be, and make them want to become an image of their colonial masters'. Clips have thus become in the eyes of Al-Barghouti, another form of 'cultural imperialism' (Armbrust 2005). Professor Azza Karim claims that video-clip singers were responsible for the increase in divorce and drug abuse rates among Egyptian youth and the increase in 'family degradation' which was a direct result of satellite television.¹⁰⁰ Singer Majida al-Roumi accuses her fellow Arab singers who exhibit

99 Freund is Senior Editor of Reason magazine which describes itself as "a refreshing alternative to right-wing and left-wing opinion magazines by making a principled case for liberty and individual choice in all areas of human activity" <http://www.reason.com/aboutreason.shtml> [accessed 13 September 2006].

100 Hayfa' Wahbi and her sisters are the reasons of divorce and drugs. 15 April 2005
<http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/BF8BE1F0-48D5-4F01-ACFB-358CE14FA25E.htm>

such behaviour as nudity in video-clips, of 'deviation from our Arab culture and tradition', a factor which she blames on the 'conspiracy on the Arab world'.¹⁰¹ Sexual perversion, it is claimed, has spread in recent years through 'pornography', available through satellite television and the internet. The invasion of 'Western cultural' values, we are told again, is corrupting youth (Abaza 2001). Television programmes containing scenes of singing and dancing with scantily clothed women are often depicted in public debates as 'pornography' or *da'ara* in Arabic. Arab television's most watched talk-show described Arab satellite entertainment channels as 'prostitutions houses' and 'cabarets', that produce only 'prostitution and decadence' ('Opposite directions: Arab Satellite Channels and Brainwash Media' weekly discussion on Al-Jazeera Television, 21 June 2006). Similar themes may be found wherever there are debates about youth issues and their perceived 'sexual perversities'.

What some Arab critics refer to as *da'ara* or 'porn' is often mentioned in reference to the provocative poses taken by female singers in the music video clips. For example, in her video clip *Eba'Abelny*, the controversial Egyptian female singer Ruby appears in a two-piece neo-Pharaonic costume. As she sings she slides a very large snake around her neck and moves her body in provocative ways while the camera focuses particularly on her pelvic area.¹⁰² Another example, in her video clip *hayat albi* (The Life of my Heart), Lebanese controversial singer Hayfa Wahbi moves and dances in a sensual way as well as putting her finger in her mouth suggestively, which is uncommon even to Arab music culture.

101 Majeda Al-Romi attacks nudity in video clips.3 March 2004. www.aljazeera.net [Arabic]

102 Ruby, www.youtube.com/watch?v=mg5kkGr0bbQ [accessed 15 August 2006]



Figure 16: Hayfa Wahbi in hayat albi shown on Rotana Music channel.

In the West, media depictions of women are themselves always in contention. What might appear to some as erotica – even as harmless fun – appears to others as an exploitation of women’s already vulnerable position (Thompson 1997: 83). The use of women’s bodies in ways designed to incite or arouse men. The term ‘pornography’, in an Arab Islamic context, includes aspects of what passes as acceptable forms of entertainment in the West.

In contrast to those who see such these video clips as a danger to Arab society, are those who claim that they represent a ‘liberalising trend’. American commentator Freund, in his article *‘Weapons of singing destruction: the escalating storm over Arabic pop videos’* (2003b), asserts that they are part of ‘a struggle over the Arab world’s nascent liberal impulses’. He adds that while ‘arguments may often focus on eroticism and censorship’, these are the most superficial dimensions, and that fundamentally they are being used to assert power. Elsewhere, he advocates the interpretation of the video clip within the context of a wider social and political liberalisation believing in their revolutionary nature for society:

While sex may be the most immediately striking aspect of these productions, it is the least important aspect of their revolutionary potential. Rather, it is the political implications of these videos that make them so interesting...What this low, ‘vulgar’ genre is offering, in sum, is a glimpse of a latent Arab world that is both liberal and ‘modernized’. Why? Because the foundation of cultural modernity is the freedom to achieve a self-fashioned and fluid identity, the freedom to imagine yourself on your own terms, and the videos offer a route to

that process... The Arab world will eventually achieve its long-delayed goal of liberalized modernity; it might just as well dance itself there... Arabic pop videos, on the other hand, are produced for pleasure (not to speak of profit) and consumed by an immense audience that can turn such works into political artefacts on a grand scale (Freund, 2003a).

9.5 Youth responses to entertainment programming

This section further explores the youth identification with entertainment programmes on Arab satellite television and their acceptance or disapproval of them. Although the focus of the interviews concerned Arab satellite channels in general, many of the youth immediately spoke of the music and movie channels thus proving that these represent the most important aspects of satellite broadcasting for them.

As active consumers of pop-culture, especially via internet downloads and satellite music channels, the influence that the music clip may have on youth is a principal fear commonly expressed by both adult and youth commentators. By the same token that adults fear for youth, so do the youths interviewed fear for their own younger siblings. Each older generation fears for the younger, and believes that while '*they* are not influenced,' their younger colleagues *are*. Many expressed the dichotomy of watching and to a certain extent, enjoying the songs, and at the same time rejecting what they represent. Nihad (22 m.) was struck that although '90% of the people watch and enjoy the clips, they still reject them'. Saba (24 f.) said 'Something is wrong with the society... We reject the songs, but still listen to them and watch them.' Randa (22 f.) confronting a male colleague (Ahmed) in the same focus group, said 'We are contradicting ourselves. You are not allowing your daughter to do that, and at the same time you like to watch it on TV'. Ahmed (18 m.) replied 'Of course it's not right, and that is why I say that we Arabs have a complex', but he also added that 'things are moving gradually from the screen to the streets'. Rana (17 f.) complained that while she watched cartoons as a kid, her eight year-old cousin watches music

clips, and is ‘dancing in an inappropriate way, and I do not like that. It is not the way I’d like her to be...every generation is getting worse and worse.’ Another girl said: ‘Our generation is still OK, as we are able to make the distinction. But for girls aged 11, they will grow up just like Ruby.’ Another young woman said that ‘music channels reinforce the wrong values in society: values that are different to our culture, customs, and traditions. The young try to imitate them and consequently take that into the future with them’ (Dana 21 f.).

Nada (21 f.) added that this is because ‘there is no one to guide them and show that this is wrong. Youth also criticised the families who see their kids watching and do not even comment because it has become normal. Rola (21 f.) said there was another reason why people may now accept the new dress codes. ‘In the 1990s, there was no way a girl could wear what girls wear these days and that’s because her father would not let her. But now you’d see the father walking with his daughter in the street as if it is very normal. A father would look at his daughter and think “Well this is much better and decent compared to what girls dress on TV” [see figure 18. Having said that, this is still a minority and the influence of video clips and TV is still minimal in this respect,’ she added.

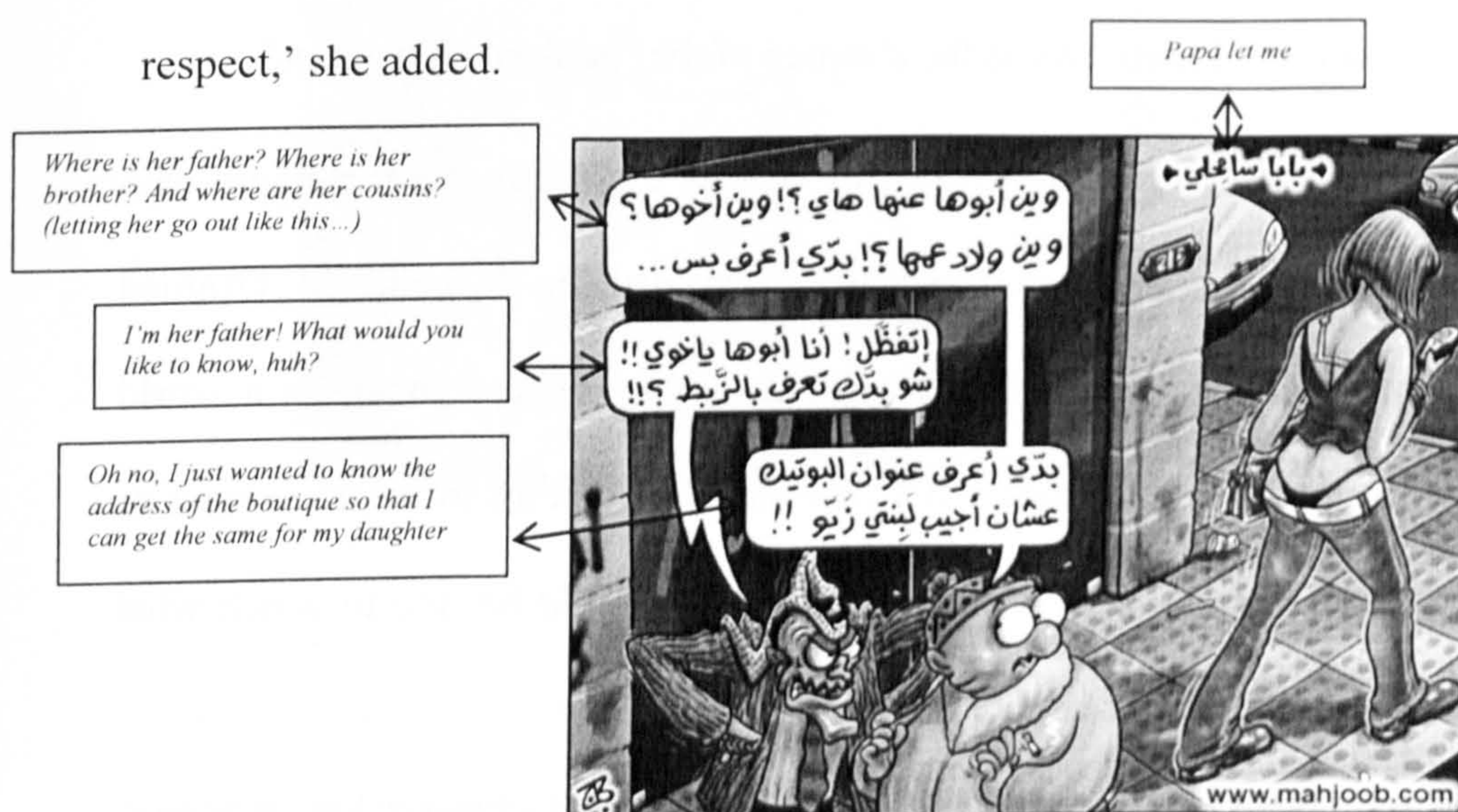


Figure 17: This online cartoon criticizes fathers (or other responsible males in the family) who allow their girls to go out dressed inappropriately. Courtesy of www.mahjoob.com

Disgust with the videos and their censorship was expressed strongly by the female focus group participants. In talking about 'dress', Rola (21 f.) said that although social restrictions were impeding the extent to which girls imitated the women on TV who sing 'half-naked', she feared that with time, these aspects would gradually become normal: 'There are too many negative things now and they should be censored'. Rola (24 f.) also claimed that if it was up to her, she would 'cancel the music clips and close down the companies or institutions which sponsor them'. However, the popularity of Sami Yusuf¹⁰³, was pointed out by Abdallah (24 m), who used to believe that it was channel policy to have 'those Western ideas', but now believes it isn't. However, Yusuf's clips, such as 'al-Muallim', filmed in a mansion-villa in the lush and wealthy suburbs of Cairo, driving a jeep, and wearing a Rolex (which the camera zooms onto) surely is also deemed reflective of the kind of lifestyle that only the most wealthy in Egypt could aspire to, supporting Al-Barghouti's criticism that the clips are 'full of half-naked, lovely women, and rich, young, handsome men driving convertibles, flirting in backgrounds of European green, or extravagant mansions' (Al-Barghouti 2004) - all that is different is the absence of the 'half-naked women!'

Contradicting their colleagues' calls to censor or ban these clips, were others who advocated switching channel: 'If you do not like them, just flip the channel!' (Ahmed 18 m.). 'The music channels should not be shut down, because music is a world language. One likes to listen to music. It's personal if you want to see a channel or not' Nidal (25 m.). Farah (21 f.) felt that every person should be free to watch what

103 Sami Yusuf is a Muslim musician/singer. In the language of the youth, he has marketed his music (which consists mainly of percussion and male vocals) by issuing music video clips with his songs, which were considered highly original in the Arab world and in the wider Muslim community. There have been numerous interviews with him and he is almost pop-star in persona (one which he has quickly refuted).

they like. 'If you do not like something you can change channels. At the end of the day the cheap songs should not control you; you have the ability to control them.'

Others did not pay too much attention to 'scaremongering': 'I watch the music channels and enjoy them. I appreciate the music and do not pay attention to the dress code or make-up' (Hesa 19 f.). Dana (21 f.) said 'You think that they are trying to change your mind, but actually they put these songs so that they can make money.'

Others felt that the blame lay within Arabs themselves for imitating the West rather than with Western conspiracy theories: 'In the end we criticise ourselves. The Arabs should not imitate the West' (Randa 22 f.). 'Unfortunately, Arabs who studied television production in Paris and London are bringing in many of those Western ideas' (Abdallah 24 m.).



Figure 18: Students from Alexandria university demonstrate against Arab satellite video clip channels March 6th, 2005. Photo: <http://www.elaph.com/Music/2005/3/45642.htm>. accessed 3/9/2005

In a different focus group, Sami (18 m.) said that he thinks that entertainment on Arab satellite television is negative in the long run. 'We are not building, but destroying youth'. Riyadh (24 m.) responded by saying that a TV programme could be good or

bad for the youth depending on the content. 'Like anything in life there is a positive and a negative side to it. The negative impact is due to certain programmes that the youth watch. A cultural programme can attract me and can be very educative and positive. However, the youth watch youth programmes such as songs, movies, and TV series. I personally do not like to watch music video clips at all, although I do like to listen to the music.'

The entertainment aspect and value of music channels was admitted but an over-dependence on the music channels brought forth other wider social concerns for the youth and was expressed by many informants in different ways. Hana (21 f.) stated that by 'hypnotizing the youth', the channels were taking youth attention away from other issues. Nidal (24 m.) says their aim is to 'detract the attention of the youth through a process of hypnotization. When you watch the video clips, all you think of is what you are watching'. In this, they seem to agree with their elders on the aim of television, while disagreeing on its actual impact. While the elders think that the youth are being influenced, the youth themselves argue that they are aware of the potential of television to influence them.

Though many of my informants agreed that TV programmes, especially entertainment, were facilitating a 'Western culture', many of them rejected the claim that TV was 'poisoning' their minds, a term that is used to refer to TV 'corrupting' the youth. Most of the young people interviewed found this thought insulting to their intelligence. At the same time, however, they agreed that it could apply to children who may be more 'vulnerable' to such influences. When I asked a focus group in

Jordan whether entertainment on satellite television was ‘poisoning’ the minds of Arab youth, the following conversation took place:¹⁰⁴

Lana (19 f.)

Those people who accuse Arab satellite television of poisoning youth minds are people of words rather than action. They just want to pre-empt any blame that is to come. They say they reject so that no one would say that they’ve approved. They reject them, but what have they done? What solution have they offered? Just rejecting so that they satisfy themselves thinking that they’ve done what they could.

Ahmed (28 m.)

They [the critics] offer no alternative.

Najla (22 f.)

We the Arab people do not have a choice and we are being led. These days it’s all singing and dancing and we go with the flow. When the Palestinian Intifada broke, or when the Iraq war started, every one became nationalistic, wanting to listen to national songs as most TV and radio channels sang and broadcast national programming.

Lutfi (24 m.)

Because we are emotional people.

Najla

No it is reaction.

Lutfi

The Arab people are emotional and get emotional very quickly. When Mohammed Dura¹⁰⁵ was murdered by Israeli soldiers in the beginning of the Intifada, immediately all the Arab world was boiling and then, just as quickly, the Arab world returned to its normal state as if nothing had happened. The Arab people are used to that. We should not blame ourselves. We are used to this since day one in our life.

Najla

That’s why I’m saying that we are led by the media. If they want us out demonstrating in the street we’ll be in the streets; and when they want us to go back home we go. You find demonstrations all over the world. We did go in demonstrations for a month as long as they were encouraging us to do so. And when they stopped that, you simply cannot demonstrate by your own.

In another group, Saber (24 m.) said: ‘I do not think that one or two channels will be able to poison the minds of a whole nation.’¹⁰⁶

104 Focus group interview (1), Jordan, March, 2005

105 12 year-old Palestinian boy killed by Israeli forces in Gaza in September 2000, the day the Palestinian Intifada broke out.

106 Focus group interview (2), Jordan, March, 2005

When I put the same question to journalist Ahmed Enshour who writes for the Jordanian daily Al-Rai, he rejected the idea:

I'm against the idea that satellite TV poisons youth thoughts. I'd even argue that the biggest Arab achievement in the '90s was Egypt's launch of the Nile Satellite in 1994. The Nile Satellite carries over 200 channels of which 15 are educational channels and plenty are variety channels. I believe that this is our biggest achievement, that we Arabs have got our own satellite, our own satellite channels representing us and speaking on our behalf. What we need is a strategy. When it comes to the question of poisoning youth minds, it is the responsibility of the producers, those who rent the channels and those who broadcast (interview with author April 2, 2005).

There were other views on the impact of video culture on Arab youth. In Jordan, Nidal (24 m.) felt that the music channels makes youth less inclined to read books. 'Watching these channels will stop you from reading a book or any useful reading'. Indeed some informants admitted that watching TV makes them less inclined to read books. Esmat (17 f.) from Egypt stated outright that she feels tempted to watch TV rather than doing anything else. 'I love television and it is on all the time. I only watch light programmes for entertainment. I have books to read, I have access to the internet, but I find it easier to just lie down and watch television. I'm not saying it's a good thing, because it makes me lazy as I exert no effort.' Lamia (17 f.) also said that 'TV makes me very lazy. I could have 100 different things to do, but I prefer to sit and watch TV.'¹⁰⁷

9.6 Conclusion

Through satellite stations, video clips reach into our homes, mingle with our dreams, and reshape the way we see others and ourselves. (Elmessiri, 2005: 3)

Like youth elsewhere, Arab youth are open to other cultures and are aware of the limitations of their own. They are, in the words of Rami Khouri, editor of the Lebanese Daily Star, 'educated, almost universally peaceful and reasonable in their

¹⁰⁷ Focus group interview with Egyptian Youth (1), August 2004

political attitudes, and anxious to contribute to building more stable and prosperous societies. They are active and use available technology, especially satellite television, the internet and mobile phones to connect to the world and make a difference. They would like the opportunity to express themselves, rebuild their worlds and contribute to the making of a better future' (Khouri, 2005). He has been exploring through a United Nations project, the relationship between Arab youth and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). Initiated by the United Nations Development Program's Regional Bureau of Arab States, this initiative included three gatherings - in Bahrain, Yemen and Morocco, bringing together Arab youth and adults working with youth from almost every Arab country. Writing after taking part in a two-day gathering of youth, researchers, officials, and civil society activists focused on the condition and concerns of young people (aged 14-25 years) in Bahrain, Khouri urged decision makers to give Arab youth a voice and to take them seriously. He argues that young people need to enjoy better opportunities to express themselves, be heard and taken seriously, and participate in decisions affecting their lives. 'They want the opportunity to explore all reasonable means of achieving their full potential. They are proud and fearful - deeply anchored in their strong Arab, Islamic, tribal and family identities, but also concerned about the future and often anxious to emigrate at the first possible opportunity' (Khouri, 2005). (see Chapter five).

In this chapter, I have argued that just because youth find entertainment on Arab satellite television appealing and the fact that it is influenced by elements that are considered not to be part of Arab and Islamic culture, does not mean that they will lose their sense of belonging nor their identity. The youth should not be judged solely by their media preferences, but also by their attitudes and feelings towards what is

being offered and the culture behind it. Those who consume Western media are the same people who are found in the streets demonstrating for Palestine and Lebanon; against the war in Iraq; American foreign policies and globalization.

Many of the youth who took part in this study share with their elders a sense of 'Western cultural imperialism' targeting Arab society and culture. However, they reject the notion of TV destroying their identity, maintaining that it opens a window for them to the world. Yet many of them show concern that their younger brothers and sisters are more likely to be influenced by 'Western culture' coming to them in the form of Arab singing and dancing music videos.

This thesis is a new and unique resource on Arab youth as it offers for the first time a study based on empirical evidence of Arab youth and their media consumption instead of relying on the opinions of commentators. Employing a direct approach towards the youth segment of Arab society enabled the research to examine their media consumption through the bias of their own testimonies. In this respect, the thesis has filled a significant gap in the literature on Arab youth and endeavored to provide them with a voice. At the outset of this study, hardly any empirical studies existed that examined the relationship between satellite broadcasting and Arab youth nor any that recorded the perceptions and realities of Arab youths and their media preferences, consumption, aspirations and outlooks.

Satellite broadcasting plays a non-negligible role in the lives of its youthful viewers; its popularity and use steadily rising (even if only for affective reasons) to the extent that the young viewers expressed no doubt that it was influential in their (or those around them) lives, identity and culture. Quantifying the extent to which influence is felt has proved to be difficult as it is very hard to separate the influence of satellite from all other social and psychological factors involved in the construction of identity and formation of personality, but satellite broadcasting remains nevertheless a trans-territorial force to be reckoned with and thus deserving of scholarly attention.

In the light of the issues raised by this research, it was felt that Meijer's (2000) three points of reference to the construction of Arab youth identity [the state, the family and the street - discussed in chapter two] should be modified to include the satellite

realm. Although the state, the family and the street continue to play a role in the construction of young people's identity, the presence of satellite television as a fourth force can no longer be ignored. Satellite television has revealed itself through the rhetoric of my informants to be significant in the construction of their identity as youths, therefore acting as an additional force and creating tension with the other three forces.

The amount of time the youth spend watching satellite television, especially entertainment, provided another dimension. The youth consumption of satellite entertainment on such an important scale is mainly linked to their need of a 'breathing space', a space to escape, albeit, the burdens of their daily lives. The youths who took part in this research described a feeling of suffocation brought on by the many stories of injustices, wars and killings in the news in addition to the realities of youth unemployment and subordination to their elders.

To understand what the youth are saying, especially in relation to their description of their need for entertainment as a breathing space, it was necessary to contextualise their current conditions as the biggest segment in Arab society unemployed and unlistened to and to explore why they feel suffocated and are critical of the older generations.

A dearth of empirical audience research in the Arab world (and particularly for that focussing on the youth) has meant that most of the work existing on youth is largely reliant on an examination of media offerings and on unsystematic observation of youth behaviour. Therefore, I have argued and demonstrated that if we are to understand the relationship between satellite television and Arab youth, it is essential

to ground the research in empirical data observed across a wide cross-section of youths: in their lives and realities, dreams and difficulties, their current situation and future prospects as seen by them, and in their responses to satellite programming and their attitudes towards the 'West'.

Indicating the media's lack of interest either in tackling the problems faced by 'real youths' or indeed in offering solutions, the informants who took part in this thesis made it clear that they felt not only under- but also mis-represented. Yet, the significance of obtaining 'real' Arab youth opinions is especially important since youths constitute the majority of the Arab population and are often the focus of adult concerns. They are the future leaders, but the politically repressive regimes and recurring wars in or close to most Arab countries suggest difficult social realities for a majority of them. The media, and in particular visual satellite broadcasting, offers the potential to be a powerful, uncensored (or at least not State-controlled) channel of education and entertainment for youth and yet all the youth interviewed complained of being marginalised and disempowered from decisions affecting their future. Despite all the above, they demonstrated hope and positive-thinking about the future and the wish to 'make a difference'.

I have contested a recurrent theme in Arab discourse on youth that the youth consumption of satellite television affects their sense of national identity; depoliticises them; distances them from Arab culture and values; and makes them care less about national or pan-Arab issues. In place, I have presented more rigorous empirical data based on close contact with youths showing that Arab youths strongly identify with their Arab compatriots and so that wars in neighbouring Arab countries (such as Palestine, Iraq and Lebanon) are felt on a personal scale – more of a personal

affront. I have argued that 'Arab youth' identity is highly variable, neither constant nor unchangeable with different aspects playing stronger roles depending on external and internal socio-political factors. None of the youths who took part in this research said they did not want to be Arab or felt distanced from Arab culture and values. Rather Western symbols appear to be employed by some of the youth more as an indication of sophistication and modernity.

The thesis has given Arab youths a voice, a chance to express their opinions, concerns, aspirations and expectations from the media and society at large. Moreover, I have provided an insight into youth perceptions and intake of satellite broadcasting, exposed youth opinions and concerns regarding satellite programming, how they perceived its impact on their culture and identity, how it catered for them and which programmes were the most successful in fulfilling their expressed needs. It was clearly demonstrated that youth are active agents [making their own meaning of media texts rather than being a passive audience] who view the media and any perceived-to-be-western elements, their governments and their elders with a critical and discerning eye.

Nonetheless, the interviews clearly indicated that the youth are interested in entertainment for affective reasons. The majority of them do not condone Arab video clips and reality TV shows, but they do watch and enjoy them. They also love to watch foreign movies and sitcoms like *Friends*, but they refute the idea that these transform them into being more American or Western. The external behaviour of some Arab youths might appear Western, but they do not thereby identify themselves as Western and their behaviour may actually be oppositional. So while externally displaying characteristics such as dress or speech which might be associated with

their satellite viewing, such factors appear to be employed by the youth more as an indication of sophistication, modernity, or fashion, and so that rapidly, these same are developed using an Arab vernacular making it at once more influential and less reprehensible because the foreign stigma has been reduced. It is perfectly possible to wear denim jeans, smoke American cigarettes and watch Hollywood movies and remain assuredly Arab, for one may look out to other cultures while still being able to sustain a commitment within one's own traditions.

Therefore, I have also argued that Arab youth should not be judged by what the media offers them, nor by what they actually watch, but rather by their attitudes and views towards satellite television and its programming. In doing so, this thesis has challenged those who think youth are passive and vulnerable, especially to elements such as cultural imperialism. In fact youth are fully aware of the potential of television to influence them, though some find this attitude to be insulting to their intelligence, while others agree that there is an element of truth in these statements, and are worried not for themselves but for those younger.

The frequent use by youths of certain terminologies such as 'Western' and 'Arab' when discussing television programming is of interest. The term 'West' or 'Western' was used largely to refer to those programmes that they felt were not in accordance with Arab culture, especially those that are not produced by or for the Arab society. The term 'Western' was readily and easily used by the youth to signify an attack by an alien if not enemy culture. It was clear during the course of this research that my informants used the term 'Western' to refer to any perceived attack on 'Arabness', in particular Arab unity, culture, or religion. The 'West' was commonly posited in antithesis to Arab interests within the informant's rhetoric; however, it is a term

which is in itself problematic to define outside of its rhetorical context, particularly as it is often used in public discourse as an ‘umbrella’ word – to cover any enemy, whether from outside or inside. My informants revealed their interpretation of the term when used in comparative value judgments and also inherent contradictions that transpired through the rhetoric.

It was also interesting to note the apparent discrepancy between what the youth watch and what they say about it. Although my informants spoke negatively of entertainment shows and their content, they openly admitted to watching them and even expressed their viewing in terms of a need. At the same time, they said they watch few religious programmes yet they approve of their content and speak highly of them. The reasons for such apparent hypocrisy lay not so much in a common desire to socially conform as in the fulfilling of their escapist need or their ‘breathing space’. Alternatively, less time spent viewing religious channels did not mean inferior viewing quality (though this issue was not explored in this thesis).

Future research

Finally, this thesis has opened many avenues for further study which are left unexplored due to time constraints or being outside the focus of my thesis. For example, education as much as the media, family or the state, plays a key role in shaping young people’s perceptions of their own identity and culture. The new generation of young Arabs appear to grow-up faster than previous generations possibly because of a strong exposure to media and technological advances. However, the education system in most Arab countries remains under-developed and the curriculum is incompatible with modern requirements (Yamani 2000).

Building on this PhD work, and bearing in mind that interviewees will have had widely differing degrees of experience, garnered from travel, film, media discourse and friends who have been to the West, I propose that future research deepen and extend understandings of Arab thought amongst youth and their relationship with external factors with the aim of developing a more complete picture of the mind and mental state of Arab youths.

The empirical findings of this research show that almost 70 percent of Arab youth had entertained the idea of leaving their home countries. The top three reasons for leaving were education, finding jobs, and freedom. Europe is the favourite destination for Arab males, with 21 percent wanting to emigrate; the United States came second while other Arab countries came last. Therefore, future research, I propose, should investigate the relationship between youths' desire (or not as the case may be) to emigrate and their consumption of media entertainment which is largely Western influenced. Research might also look into the differences in backgrounds between those that want (or do not want) to emigrate, including their socioeconomic background, education, religious beliefs and patterns of media consumption.

Ultimately, any further research in this direction should aim to answer two questions: What is the relationship between emigration and popular culture? Is there a relationship between youth consumption of television and 'youth culture' - which is strongly associated in the Arab media discourse with elements of 'Westernization' - and their desire to emigrate to the West?

As the empirical data from this thesis show that Arab youth use entertainment to escape their realities and maybe live a virtual reality or a dream, this can be linked to

the notion of TV entertainment providing a breathing space for Arab youth by investigating the relationship between this media-facilitated 'breathing space' and what Sabry (2003) calls 'mental migration'. Future research, hence, should examine how [mental] migration is perceived by the Arab youth and how does it form part of the 'breathing space' investigated within the context of this thesis.

On a different note, more research is needed to find out – on the part of the media – why certain television channels have turned from variety channels into exclusive entertainment channels. For example, MBC2 started as something more than a mere movie channel. It had news bulletins and other programmes before it turned into a 24-hour movie channel. Youth channel ZEN TV started with a variety of programmes and chat shows and ended up as a pure 24-hour music channel.

I. Gender Differences

This section presents the fieldwork findings by gender differences. All results are in percentages.

In a typical day, how many hours do you spend watching TV?

Time spent on TV	Male	Female
Less than 1 hour	3.7	2.7
Between 1-3 hours	17.6	12.8
Between 4 and 6 hours	12.8	22.5
More than 6 hours	11.8	15
None	1.1	0.0

As could be expected, young people on average watched between 1-3 hours and 4-6 hours of television. Males watched on average 1-3 hours - a lower number of hours than the females who watched between 4-6 hours. Either side of these peak viewing times, the percentage difference between male and female viewing-time was less. [The question did not clarify whether 'watching TV' meant sitting in front of the TV in a conscious viewing or whether it was background while cooking or other activity]

The higher viewing-times for females can be explained by the fact that males generally spend more time outdoors whether with friends, going to malls, or coffee shops, whereas girls largely remain around/at home.

Why do you watch TV?

Reason	Male %	Female %
Entertainment	24	26
Information and knowledge	13	8.3
Both entertainment and information	3.6	9.4
Passing time	3.1	5.7
Escape reality	1.6	2.6
Other	1.6	1.0

What kind of programming do you watch most on television?

	Male %	Female %
News	13	6.8
Talk shows	2.0	5.2
Soaps	3.1	7.8
Music and singing	3.1	11.4
Movies	13	14.1
Sports	6.3	5.0
Religious	5.2	6.8
Documentaries	1.0	1.0
Other	0.0	1.6

How would you describe the Lebanese channels?.

	Male %	Female %
Entertainment [<i>tarfihiyyah</i>]	10.5	20.5
Western [<i>gharbiyyah</i>]	5.8	14.2
Liberal [<i>munfatihah</i>]	15.8	38.9
Pornographic / [<i>Ibahiyyah</i>]	11.1	16.3
Other	2.1	6.8
All	2.1	3.2

In your view, would you describe the effect of Arab satellite channels on young Arabs as?

	Male %	Female %	Total %
Positive	1.1	1.1	2.1
Negative	11.2	10.2	21.4
Both	32.6	39	71.7
None	1.6	3.2	4.8

An overwhelming majority of respondents described the effect as both positive and negative, which I think, belies their nonchalance towards the satellite effect, in contrast to more conservative interpretations presented in this thesis.

Moving the questions wider and beyond satellite, the youth were asked whether they had ever entertained the idea of emigrating outside their country? Over double the number of males than females answered positively:

Did you entertain the idea of emigrating outside your country?

Males	69.2%
Females	30.8%

Clearly more males wish to leave their home county rather than females and the possible reasons for this are enunciated in the following: It is a man’s responsibility in Arab society to be able to materially provide for his family (both his own family such as parents, unmarried sisters, as well as his wife and children). This makes young Arab men aware of the need to look for a better future even if this is abroad in order to be able to have a family in the future and be able to provide for them, particularly as material responsibility and independence is almost a prerequisite for marriage.

It is less usual for women to express wishes of leaving home as this is as it is socially perceived as an ‘*ayb* [shame]. This also explains why most of those women who did express their wishes to leave gave education - which is socially justifiable - as the main reason behind the decision, although many Arab families (including my own) are reluctant to send their females on their own to study abroad. This also explains why these women have chosen mostly Arab and Islamic countries as their favorite destination [see Table below: *where would you go?*].

Where would you go?

Country	Males %	Females %
Europe	20.9	14.9
United States	12.7	6.7
Arab	11.2	17.9
Other	6.0	9.7

When asked about the reason behind considering leaving their home countries, males and females had various reasons although as a general principal, the males’ main reason was economic while the females’ main reason was education.

Male and female reasons for wanting to emigrate?

Reason	Male %	Female %
Political [siyassi]	4.5	1.5
Economic [iqtisadi]	18.9	5.3
Educational [ta'alimi]	10.6	15.9
Social [ijtima'i]	3.0	6.1
Exploring [hub al-istilla']	3.8	9.8
Freedom [al-hurriyyah]	5.3	4.5
More than one of above *	2.3	6.8
Other reason	1.5	0.0

* This was not included in the list, but some respondents ticked more one option.

How satisfied are you with your life?

	Males %	Females %	Total %
Very satisfied	5.6	7.2	12.8
Satisfied	30.3	36.9	67.2
Not satisfied	11.3	8.7	20.0

In response to claims that youth are dissatisfied with their lives, the questionnaire actually found that over half of Arab youth interviewed were satisfied with their life. The focus groups revealed that this result can probably be explained by a common attitude among youth and Arabs generally, of ‘al-hamdulillah’ in most of the youth; a type of positive resignation to their situation and fate, and to make the best of it.

Furthermore, youth held an even higher positive attitude towards the future, with 50% claiming things would be better. WHY?

How do you think the future will be?

	Better %	The Same %	Worse %
Males	25.5	8.9	13.0
Females	24.5	9.4	18.8
Total	50.0	18.2	31.8

II Country Differences

Country profile

EGYPT

Egypt is located on the northeast corner of the African continent. One of the most densely populated countries of the Arab world, its population has almost doubled from 38 million in 1976 (Dabbous 1994) to 74.9 million¹ in 2005 (UN statistics)² and of that number, 46-48% are under 15 year old (UNDP, 2004: 238, resulting in Egypt having a very young population.

Geographically, Egypt extends from the Mediterranean Sea in the north; Sudan in the South, and from the Red Sea on the east to Libya on the West. Even though the total area of Egypt is around 1 million square kilometers, less than 5% of the land is inhabited. Islam is the religion of the state and Arabic is its official language (Dabbous 1994).

JORDAN

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has an area of 89,000 square kilometers inhabited by about 6 million people more than 80% of whom are concentrated in one-eighth of the total land area. Jordan shares borders with Syria to the north, Saudi Arabia to the southeast, Iraq to the east, and Palestine to the West (Ayish *et al.* 1994). Jordan's population is very young. According to a government website (no date) 42.2% are aged 14 or younger, while 31.4% fall between 15 and 29 years of age.³ The *Arab Human Development Report* (UNDP, 2004) says that children under 15 years old accounted for 37-39% of the total population in Jordan (UNDP, 2004: 238).

More than 92% of Jordanians are Sunni Muslims, and about 6% are Christians who live mainly in Amman, Madaba, Karak and Salt. The majority of Christians belong to the Greek Orthodox Church, but there are also Greek Catholics, a small Roman Catholic community, Syrian Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox and a few Protestant denominations found mostly in Amman. Several

¹ More recent estimation shows the population at 79 million (CIA World Factbook 2006 <https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/eg.html>)

² BBC, Country profile: A Guide to the Middle East, EGYPT, 15 November 2006 [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/country_profiles/737642.stm (accessed 12 December 2006)]

³ Education in Jordan: A Commitment to Excellence: from a government website dedicated to the late King Hussein (<http://www.kinghussein.gov.jo/people.html>) accessed in 23 January 2007

small Shi'a and Druze populations can also be found in Jordan⁴. Islam is the religion of the Kingdom and Arabic is its official language.

United Arab Emirates

The United Arab Emirates was established in 1971 as a federation of seven emirates, Abu Dhabi (the capital), Dubai, Sharjah, Ras al-Khaimah, Ajman, Umm al-Qaiwain and Fujairah. The seven emirates collectively compose one of the youngest states of the Arab peninsula, and the federal capital is Abu Dhabi (Babbili and Hussain 1994).

The UAE lies on the east of the Arabia peninsula. It has a 470-mile northern shoreline in the area commonly known as the Lower Gulf, constituting more than one-third of the Arabian coast of the Gulf. The UAE has an area of 32,000 square miles, although figures vary. In the north, the UAE shares a frontier with Qatar, and its immediate neighbours are Oman to the east, and Saudi Arabia to the west and south (*ibid.*).

The UAE inhabitants are Arabs, the state religion is Islam, and the official language is Arabic, although English is widely used. The indigenous population is outnumbered by non-Arab immigrants from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Iran. In 1985, the total population was just over 1.6 million (*ibid.*). This figure has doubled in 2005 according to UN statistics, which show the UAE population in 2005 standing at 3.1 million⁵. According to the BBC, The UAE is one of the most liberal countries in the Gulf, with other cultures and beliefs generally tolerated. It held its first national elections - for an advisory body - in December 2006⁶

PALESTINE

For the purpose of this thesis Palestine refers to the lands of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem where the majority of the inhabitants are Palestinian. The actual research has been conducted only in

⁴ The people of Jordan: from a government website dedicated to the late King Hussein [online] available from <http://www.kinghussein.gov.jo/people.html> [accessed in 23 January 2007]

⁵ BBC, Country profile: A Guide to the Middle East, United Arab Emirates, 13 Novmber 2006
[http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/country_profiles/737620.stm (accessed on 12 December 2006)]

Gaza as the Israeli authorities do not allow movement of Palestinians between Gaza and the West Bank.

Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, have lived under Israeli occupation since 1967. The settlements that Israel has built in the West Bank are home to around 400,000 people and are deemed to be illegal under international law. Israel evacuated its settlers from the Gaza Strip in 2005 and withdrew its forces, ending almost four decades of military occupation⁷.

The Palestinian territories have an area 5,970 sq km (2,305 sq miles) for West Bank territories and 365 sq km (141 sq miles) for Gaza inhabited by 3.8 million people according to UN statistics for 2006 (BBC country profile: Palestine). The Palestinian population is very young and according to the *Arab Human Development Report* (UNDP, 2004) children under 15 years old accounted for 46-48% of the total population in Palestine.

RESEARCH FINDINGS: COUNTRY COMPARISON

This section presents the fieldwork results by country. All results are in percentages.

Do you think that what you watch on TV has an influence on your life in general?

Country	Yes	No	I do not know
Egypt	60.3	26.4	13.2
Emirates	62.9	7.5	29.6
Jordan	70.8	22.9	6.2
Palestine	66	28.3	5.7

Over half of the youth believed that watching TV did influence their life, and the Emirati youth expressed a high rate of indecision.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ BBC, Country profile: A Guide to the Middle East, Israel and Palestinian territories, 16 December 2006 [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/country_profiles/803257.stm (accessed on 22 January 2007)].

This is a recognition from a majority of Arab youth who responded to the questionnaire that television is important and has a role to play in their lives.

Do you think TV influences young people's behaviour and culture?

	yes	no	do not know
Egypt	77.7	9.2	12.9
Emirates	96.2	0.0	3.8
Jordan	91.6	6.3	2.1
Palestine	94.2	3.8	2.0

A high percentage of youth respondents in each country believe that TV influences youth behaviour and culture. This reflects the qualitative data which demonstrated that many youth recognized the influence in others or on youth in general but were less ready to believe that it had such an effect on themselves (see for example 62.9% of Emiratis believed that TV influenced themselves, and yet 96.2% of the same youth believed that TV does influence youth in general).

In your view, would you describe the effect of Arab satellite channels on young Arabs as?

	Positive	Negative	Both	None
Egypt	2	30	54	14
Emirates	7.4	2.2	66.6	3.7
Jordan	0	8.5	89.3	2.2
Palestine	2	25	73	0

The majority of Arab youth recognize that television could have both positive and negative effects on them. This question corroborates the above two questions, because youth preferred to tick ‘both’ rather than ‘neither’ indicating that there *is* an effect.

Do you think what you watch on TV helps you learn more about other societies and cultures?

	Yes	No	do not know
Egypt	81.4	5.5	13.1
Emirates	92.6	3.7	3.7
Jordan	95.6	2.2	2.2
Palestine	98.2	0.0	1.8

Clearly an overwhelming majority of youth respondents in each country recognize that television introduces them to other societies and culture.

Why do you watch TV?

	Egypt	Emirates	Jordan	Palestine
Entertainment	53.8	77.7	43.7	37
Information and knowledge	26.9	11.1	18.7	27.7
Both entertainment and information a	1.9	0.0	20.8	22.2
Passing time	9.6	11.1	8.3	3.7
Escape reality	7.7	0.0	4.1	3.7
Other	0.0	0.0	4.1	5.5

In all four countries the highest reason for watching is for entertainment.

How accurate would you describe the following sentence: TV helps youth solve their problems be it economic, social or emotional.

	Very accurate	Accurate	Not accurate	Do not know
Egypt	13	31.4	42.6	13
Emirates	0.0	33.3	51.8	14.9
Jordan	0.0	8.3	79.1	12.6
Palestine	7.5	41.5	39.6	11.4

Using the Likert scale of measuring, this table shows that a higher number of Jordanians disagreed with the above statement than in the other countries where consensus lay both in agreeing and disagreeing.

Do you prefer to watch?

	Serious	Entertainment	Both
Egypt	5.9	23.5	70.6
Emirates	0.0	26	74
Jordan	8.3	14.5	77.2
Palestine	5.6	15	79.4

Entertainment has a precedent over serious programming in youth preference in TV consumption. However, the majority of respondents in all countries clearly prefer to watch both rather than exclusive entertainment or serious programming.

Have you ever entertained the idea of emigrating outside your country?

	Yes	No
Egypt	65.4	34.6
Emirates	77.7	22.3
Jordan	73	27
Palestine	66.6	33.4

A majority of the respondents had entertained the idea of leaving their home country whether they were from the politically troubled Palestine, to the wealthy Emirates. However, the reason behind wanting to leave differed between the countries [see below]. The Emirati youth cited educational reasons higher than the economic reasons preferred by Egyptians and Palestinians.

Why?

	Egypt	Emirates	Jordan	Palestine
Political [<i>siyassi</i>]	0.0	10	2.8	13.8
Economic [<i>iqtisadi</i>]	38.2	20	11.5	30.5
Educational [<i>ta'alimi</i>]	17.6	50	14.2	22.2
Social [<i>ijtima'i</i>]	17.6	5	5.7	8.4
Exploring [<i>hub al-istitla'</i>]	8.8	5	25.7	13.8
Freedom [<i>al-hurriyyah</i>]	8.8	10	11.4	8.4
More than one of above ^a	0.0	0.0	5.7	0.0
Other reason	9.0	0.0	23	2.7

Obviously the economic reason for emigrating has less importance for the Emirates and Jordan as they are wealthier countries than the others. As their reasons are based on education, they have chosen Europe or America over the Arab countries as their preferred destination. (see table below) Egypt, Jordan, and Palestinian respondents selected other Arab countries (and sometimes Europe) over America.

In the focus group discussions, participants explained that post September 11th America is hostile to Arab emigrants and therefore, fewer people cite it as a preferred destination.

Where would you go?

	Europe	America	Arab	Other
Egypt	38.8	30.5	27.7	2.7
Emirates	38	33.3	0.0	28.5
Jordan	40	8.5	34.2	17.1
Palestine	28.5	14.2	48.5	8.5

LIFE SATISFACTION

How satisfied are you with your life?

	Very	Satisfied	not sat
Egypt	21.8	63.6	14.5
Emirates	18.5	66.6	14.8
Jordan	6.2	62.5	31.3
Palestine	3.7	74	22.3

Perhaps surprisingly, respondents living in the two countries that are the most economically and socially challenged (such as Palestine in state of war) actually expressed most satisfaction with their lives. Each country expected a better future

How do you think the future will be:

	Better	as it is	Worse
Egypt	59.3	16.6	24.1
Emirates	59.2	7.4	33.3
Jordan	45.8	16.6	37.5
Palestine	38.4	26.9	34.6

In all the countries sampled, a higher proportion of youth believed the future would be better, but more thought it would be worse than staying ‘as it is’.

How would you describe the Lebanese channels?.

	Egypt	Emirates	Jordan	Palestine
Entertainment [<i>tarfihiyyah</i>]	31.4	7.4	20.8	18.8
Western [<i>gharbiyyah</i>]	11.7	29.6	8.3	13.2
Liberal [<i>munfatihah</i>]	41.2	29.6	52	40
Pornographic / [<i>Ibahiyyah</i>]	7.8	26	6.2	24.5
Other	5.8	3.7	12.5	2.8
All	2 %	3.7	0.0 %	7.5 %

Obviously a distinction is being made between ‘Western’ and ‘liberal’ because a higher number of youth in all countries felt that Lebanese channels were liberal rather than Western, followed by entertainment (apart from the Emirates where respondents were divided fairly equally over its Western, liberal, and pornographic character).

Appendix 3: THE QUESTIONNAIRE

This is an English version of the questionnaire used to provide quantitative data for this study. Following is the original questionnaire in Arabic as it was used.



Arab Youth attitudes towards Arab Satellite Channels

Please tick (✓) the answer which you think is most appropriate:

Do you watch TV?

- () Yes
- () No

In a typical day, how many hours do you spend watching TV

School Time		Summer Time	
_____	Less than an hour	_____	Less than an hour
_____	between 1 and 3 hours	_____	between 1 and 3 hours
_____	between 4 and 6 hours	_____	between 4 and 6 hours
_____	more than 6 hours	_____	more than 6 hours

Why do you watch TV?

- () Entertainment
- () Information and knowledge
- () Both entertainment and information
- () Passing time
- () Escape reality
- () Other specify.....
.....

What kind of programming do you like to watch most on television?
Please list your top 3 types of programming?

- () News and current affairs
- () Talk shows
- () religious programmes
- () TV series
- () Music and songs
- () Game shows
- () Movies
- () Interviews with celebrities
- () Sports
- () Documentaries
- () educational programmes
- () Other specify.....
.....

Please list the top 5 channels you prefer to watch?

- 1.....2.....
.....
- 3.....
- 4.....
- 5.

Please list the top 5 TV programmes that you love to watch?

- 1.....2.....
.....
- 3.....
- 4
- 5.
- Others (specify)
.....

Generally, do you prefer to watch?

- () Serious programming
- () Entertainment
- () Both: Please give percentage
% Serious programming
% Entertainment

Do you consider Lebanese Channels?

- () Entertainment channel
- () Western
- () Liberal
- () Ebahia (*soft* porn)
- () All of the above
- () Other (specify)
-

Do you think that what you watch on TV have an influence on your life in general?

- () Yes
() No
() I do not know

Can you think of one event where TV affected your life in a positive or negative way:

.....

.....

.....

.....

Do you think TV influences young people's behaviour and culture?

Yes **No** **I do not know**

Do you think what you watch on TV helps you learn more about other societies and cultures?

- () Yes
() No
() I do not know

How accurate would you describe the following sentence:

Television helps young people in solving or dealing with their social, economic, and/or emotional problems?

Very accurate Accurate not accurate I do not know

Would you like to comment:

.....
.....
.....
.....

In your view, would you describe the effect of Arab satellite channels on young Arabs as?

negative positive both neither

Can you give example?

.....
.....
.....

Have you heard of ZEN TV?

() Yes
() No

If YES, have you ever watched any of its programmes?

() Yes
() No

If YES, could you please list them?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Any additional observations or suggestions on Arab youth and satellite channels?

Age: years

Educational attainment:

Does your family own or rent your house?

Own Rent

Number of television sets in the house.....

Number of people living in the house.....

ةيبرعلا تايئاضفلا وحن بابشلا تاهاجتا لوح نايبتسا

؟ زافلتلا دهاشت له

- () م عن
- () ال

؟ زافلتلا دهاشم يف يضقت تقولا نم مك

ةساردلا مايأ يف	ةيفيصللا ةزاجلا يف
ةعاس نم لقا ()	ةعاس نم لقا ()
تاعاس ثالث و ةعاس ني ب ام ()	ثالث و ةعاس ني ب ام ()
تاعاس ()	تاعاس تس و ةعبرا ني ب ام ()
تاعاس تس و ةعبرا ني ب ام ()	تاعاس 6 نم رثكا ()
تاعاس 6 نم رثكا ()	

؟ زافلتلا دهاشم نم يس يئرلا كفده وه ام

- () ةيلستلاو ةيفرتلا
- () ةفرعمل او فيقثتلا
- () تقولا ةعاضا
- () عقالا نم بورهلا

() بابسا ىرخا (ددح)

اهتدهاشم بحت چماربلا نم عاونأ 3 رثكا مقرر ؟ اهتدهاشم لصفتي تال چماربلا ةيعوني ه ام

- () ةيرابخإل چماربلا
- () ةيراوحلا چماربلا
- () ةينيدلا چماربلا
- () ةينوي زفلتلا تال سلسملا
- () ةينفل تاقباسملا
- () مالفال
- () ىقي سوملاو ىناغالا
- () ريدهاشم عم تالباقم
- () ةضايرلا
- () ةيقي ئاثولا مالفال
- () ةيميلعتلا چماربلا

() چمارب ىرخا (ددح)

ال يصفتي رثكال ا يه ىلوالا ةانقلا نوكت تيحب تاونقلا هذه مقرر ؟ قلضملا كتاونق يه ام
كدنع

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

ال يصفتي رثكال لوالا چمانربلا نوكتي تيحب اهدهاشت ي تال چماربلا عامسا ركذا

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4

5 _____

جمارب

ىرخا _____

قدهاشم لىضفت له ماع لكشيب

- () قداجالا جماربلا
- () قىههيفرتلا جماربلا
- () قىبسن عاطعا عاجرلا . امهالك
- قداجالا جماربلا % ----
- قىههيفرتلا جماربلا % ----

LBC قانقو لىبقىتسملا نوىزفلت لثم قىنانبللا قىئاضفلا تاونقلا فنصت فىك

- () قىههيفرت
- () قىبرغ
- () قىحتفنىم
- () قىحابا
- () ىرخا _____

ماع لكشيب كىتايح ىلع رىثات زافلتللا نأ دقتعت له

- () معلن
- () ال
- () فرعا ال

قىبلس و اىباجىا لكشيب نوىزفلتلا كىف رثا ثىح افقوم ركذا

بابشلا كولسو قفاقث ىلع رثوى زافلتلا نأ دقتعت له

- ☐ مەن
☐ ئال
☐ فەرەئال

ىرخا تافاقىشوتاعىمىتىم ىلە فەرەتلىك ىف كىدەسى زافىلىتىم ىلە دەشتام نى دىقتەت لە
 ؟ئەينىچا ۋا ئەبىرەئوس

- ☐ مەن
☐ ئال
☐ فەرەئال

؟ئەللىتىم ىلە قىدىم ىف كىيەرەم

؟ئەفلىتىم ۋا ئەفلىتىم ۋا ئەفلىتىم ۋا ئەفلىتىم ۋا ئەفلىتىم ۋا ئەفلىتىم ۋا ئەفلىتىم

- ☐ فەرەئال ☐ ئەفلىتىم ☐ ئەفلىتىم ☐ ئەفلىتىم

؟ئەفلىتىم ۋا ئەفلىتىم

؟ئەفلىتىم ۋا ئەفلىتىم ۋا ئەفلىتىم ۋا ئەفلىتىم ۋا ئەفلىتىم ۋا ئەفلىتىم

- ☐ ئال ☐ ئەفلىتىم ☐ ئەفلىتىم ☐ ئەفلىتىم

؟ئەفلىتىم ۋا ئەفلىتىم

؟ ئىاض فلانى نىز قانق نىع تىعمىس و تىدهاش لى

مىعن ()

الى ()

؟ اىچمىارب نىم و تىدهاش لى مىعن كىتابچا تىناك اىذا

مىعن ()

الى ()

مىهرىكدا مىعن اىذا

؟ بابىشلا قايىچ يىف اىرودو قىبرىعلا قىئاض فلانى تاونقلا لوح تاحارتقا كىدىل لى

؟ كىدىل جىراخ قىرچىل قىركف كىلابب رىطخ لى

مىعن ()

الى ()

بىبىسلا لى مىعن اىذا

يىسايسى ()

يىداصتقا ()

يىمىلعت ()

يىعامتجا ()

عالتسىالابح ()

() یرخا _____

() ابوروأ
() اكيرمأ
() ىرخأ ةيبرع قلود
() (ددح) ىرخأ قلود

○ ضار ريغ ○ ضار ○ ادج ضار

○ أوساً وهمك ○ لضفاً

سڻجڻ : () رڳو ()

قن ي دمل ا

ي حل ا

يملع

دع	صاخشالا	ن ي ذ لا	ن و ن ك س ي	ي ف
دع	ق ز ه ج ا	ز ا ف ل ت ل ا		ي ف
راج ي ا () ك ل م () : ق ل ئ ا ع ل ا ت ي ب ل ه				

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