

The Geographical Transformation of Arab Media: The Decline of Offshore Media and the Rise of the Media City

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Abstract

This article aims to clarify the geographical transformation of Arab media and understand contemporary Arab media dynamics with a focus on satellite channels. After the 1970s, many Arab media publishers, initially operating in Europe, became influential actors in the Arab media scene. Since then, Europe has been regarded as a harbor for the freedom of speech. These media with headquarters outside of the Arab world, mainly in Europe, are referred to as 'offshore media.' The offshore media phenomenon and its consequence, the geographical division of Arab media discourse between the Arab world and Europe, were regarded as an essential characteristic of Arab media. However, after the mid-1990s, the development and proliferation of satellite television prompted the return of Europe-based Arab media companies, particularly satellite channels, to Arab countries, and this geographical division was dissolved. Now, most of the pivotal Arab satellite channels broadcast not from Europe but from within the Arab world. Importantly, in accommodating these previously Europe-based media channels (and a number of newcomers), a phenomenon called the 'media city' has played an important role. Some consider these media cities as the new harbors for freedom of speech, an alternative to the role previously played by Europe. This article will trace the geographical transformation of Arab media historically, with particular focus on the decline of offshore media and the rise of the media cities. Furthermore, through the analysis of three media cities in Egypt, Jordan, and the UAE, this article will suggest that the media city can function not only as a substitute for Europe, but also as a key device for promoting and maintaining the diversity and multiplicity of contemporary Arab media.

1. Introduction

1.1 *The Geographical Characteristics of Arab Media*

A significant development in Arab media during the 1990s, according to former American diplomat and leading Arab media scholar William Rugh, was the 'growth of newspapers and broadcasting stations that have their main editorial offices outside of the Arab world but at the same time consider their target audiences as being within the Arab world' [Rugh 2004: 167]. During the 1970s, some

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Arab publishers that aimed to attract readers from all over the Arab world took refuge in Europe from their politically-unstable regions and authoritarian regimes oppressive to freedom of speech. They published papers in Arabic, the *lingua franca*, which disseminated their thoughts to the Arab world. Media headquartered outside the Arab world, mainly in Europe, were named 'offshore media.' As these offshore media flourished during the 1970s and 1980s, capitals such as London and Paris came to be seen as harbors for freedom of speech. Therefore, not only publishers but also private Arab broadcasting companies started businesses in Europe. By the mid-1990s, those Europe-based media companies came to occupy a considerable presence in both the print and broadcast media [Sakr 2001; Rugh 2004; Rinnawi 2006; Lynch 2006; Kraidy and Khalil 2009]. The locale of Arab media discourse was geographically divided between Europe and the Arab world, and the extent of freedom-of-speech available to private Europe-based media over national Arab-based media had been expanded.¹⁾ As a result, this geographical division of Arab media discourse is considered to be a typical characteristic of Arab media.

However, during the 2000s, many Europe-based Arab media companies, particularly satellite channels, moved their headquarters to the Arab world and began operating there. Although some private presses stayed in Europe, most of them believe that the advantages of operating in Europe have disappeared [Jarrah 2008]. A number of media newcomers, particularly satellite channels, have started operating inside the Arab world. As a result, the presence of offshore media has declined, and the geographical division of Arab media discourse, once thought typical of Arab media, has dissolved, and is not considered typical any longer. This being the case, what has dissolved the geographical division between the Arab world and Europe? Where did previously European-based Arab media establish themselves? How was the situation of Arab media transformed?

To answer these questions, this paper considers two issues. First, the geographical transformation of Arab media is considered with a sharp focus on satellite channels, which have been highly influential on contemporary Arab society, and which spurred the decline of offshore media and thus dissolved the geographical division of Arab media discourse. Second, to analyze the situation after Europe-based satellite companies had come back to the Arab world, this article focuses on the 'media city,' considered the new harbor for freedom of speech. Thus, this article will examine the development and function of the media city in the contemporary Arab media scene.

1) Most media companies located outside Arab countries have generally tried to secure pan-Arab audiences when targeting the Arab market. In contrast, media companies that locate their headquarters within the Arab world usually target local audiences.

1.2 Conceptual Framework and Research Methods

For a systematic analysis of these issues, the theory of international communication studies is useful. According to Sinclair *et al.* [1996], understanding the dynamics occurring in the international media scene after the mid-1980s requires an analysis of the ‘geolinguistic region,’ defined as a region whose residents share a language. They consider geolinguistic regions to be ‘imagined communities of speakers of the same language and participants in similar cultures which form the geolinguistic regions exploited by the media entrepreneurs, especially the diasporic communities of émigrées on distant continents’ [Sinclair *et al.* 1996: 25].

Turning our eyes to Arab media studies, since the 1990s, many scholars have been working to reveal the characteristics of the Arabic geolinguistic region that has been created by new media technologies such as satellite television and the internet. In the book *Instant Nationalism*, Khalil Rinnawi argues that the penetration of satellite television into Arab societies has created a shared sense of Arab nationalism, which he calls ‘McArabism’ [Rinnawi 2006: xiii], a term inspired by Benjamin Barber’s *Jihad vs. McWorld* [Barber 1995]. Rinnawi considers this process the outcome of satellite technology and a confrontation between localism and globalization. He argues about the viewing of satellite television that, ‘when the television is turned off, Arab citizens return to their respective local lives and specific realities’ [Rinnawi 2006: xiii]. To describe the formation and meaning of McArabism, he emphasizes the structure of what he calls the ‘Arab media environment.’ In order to reveal its structural formation, he describes the history of Arab media from the mid-twentieth century, when the mass media first penetrated the Arab world. Although he provides a full description of satellite television, he unfortunately doesn’t spend much time discussing the media cities, which are considered to have been fundamental to the reshaping of the contemporary Arab media scene.

Speaking of the geolinguistic region created by broadcast media, Tourya Guaaybess argues that ‘national broadcasting landscapes’ transformed into an ‘Arab television landscape’ after the 1990s, mainly through the development of satellite technology [Guaaybess 2002]. Like many scholars, she also considers that the recent Arab media scene was reshaped by the appearance and development of satellite television, which infused fierce competition into a previously static market. She proposes, therefore, that it is helpful to consider recent developments from two perspectives: ‘sky-competition’ and ‘ground-competition’ [Guaaybess 2005: 226, 2011]. The former term refers to the satellite realm: satellite television rapidly intensified its presence in the Arab world immediately after it first appeared, generating fierce competition between satellite and terrestrial channels, and between national and private channels. Now, satellite television is a cutting-edge medium and has opened up

the contemporary Arab media scene. At the same time, as Guaaybess says, sky-competition was a prelude to what she calls ground-competition. Since the mid-1990s, privileged areas called 'media cities'²⁾ have been competing to host private media companies, particularly satellite channels. In addition to countries such as Egypt, Jordan and the UAE that already have media cities, a number of other countries are also constructing them or planning to do so. However, studies on the media city are scarce, and those pioneering studies on media cities that do exist tend to discuss each media city separately or compare their legal and economic aspects.³⁾ Consequently, they do not inquire into the relationships between one media city and the other media cities, or between media cities and media companies, particularly satellite channels. Therefore, the question underlying Guaaybess' conception, how the sky and ground react to each other, has yet to be addressed. In order to understand the dynamics of the contemporary Arab media scene, we need to shed light on the role that contemporary media cities can play, and on the interaction between the media and their locations, thereby bringing new perspectives to contemporary Arab media dynamics.

This paper consists of five sections including this introduction. The historical formation and transformation of Arab media scene with particular focus on its geographical aspect are narrated in Section 2 and Section 3. These chapters are based on the preceding research both in English and Arabic. In Section 4, the development and relationships between three media cities in Egypt, Jordan, and the UAE are discussed. To describe the latest situation of media cities, I made several visits to media cities in Egypt, Jordan, and the UAE in 2011.⁴⁾ I also conducted several interviews with staff of media cities, and visited some TV companies located in the media cities. Through these

2) Several names for this area exist: Krzysiek [2009] calls it a 'free media zone,' while others simply call it a 'media city.' I follow the latter.

3) Some studies argue the launch and development of each media city separately. For example, Schleifer [2000] and Sullivan [2001a] reported the launch and the prospect of a media city in Dubai, and el-Baltaji [2007] argues its development and the problems that it encounters after operating for several years. Kraidy and Khalil [2009] must be the most recent study that mentions the media city. However, their focus is also just Dubai's case. Also Kandil [2000], Forrester [2001] and Oaf [2006] argue the launch, development and prospect of a media city in Egypt. In addition, Hamdy describes the tendency of tenant users in an Egyptian media city. In 2001, first media city appeared in Jordan, and Sullivan [2001b] reported its launch. Those studies don't consider the relationship between one media city and the others. Other studies do examine several media cities together. For example, Quinn *et al.* [2004] discuss the economic aspects of media cities in Egypt, Jordan, and the UAE. And Krzysiek [2009] compares the legal aspects of existing media cities. However, they don't inquire into the relationship between them. Guaaybess [2002] relates the potential of media cities to the Arab media industry. However, no other study has followed the situation after 2002.

4) The field research in Egypt is from January 14th, 2011 to January 28th, 2011. The research in Jordan is from January 28th, 2011 to February 7th, 2011, and from November 17th, 2011 to November 26th, 2011. The field research in Dubai is from February 7th, 2011 to February 12th, 2011, from February 17th, 2011 to February 21th, 2011, and from November 11th, 2011 to November 26th, 2011.

field researches, Section 4 describes the latest state of media cities and reveals the dynamics that contemporary media cities can create. Finally in Section 5, the conclusion and outlook of future research is discussed.

2. Historical Overview

2.1 *The Dawn of Pan-Arab Broadcasting*

To understand the conditions that produced offshore media and spawned pan-Arab broadcasting, we must first take a look at the state of the Arab world's media in the mid-twentieth century.

As the *lingua franca* of the Arab world, Arabic has played a crucial role in conveying ideas and information throughout the region. According to the definition by Hussein Amin, the 'Arab world' generally refers to the eighteen countries: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen [Amin 2001: 23]. These eighteen countries define the Arabic language as their official language and have had the advantage, particularly since the late nineteenth century, of being able to circulate information in a common tongue, thus creating a sense of unity in spite of the geographical distances that separate them.

For disseminating a message, some form of medium is essential. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century, the printing press was an important medium through which Arab elites and intellectuals exchanged knowledge and Egypt and Lebanon, as the main cultural suppliers, played central roles in this process. This is clearly reflected in the traditional saying, 'Egypt writes, Lebanon prints, and Iraq reads.' However, the Arab literacy rate has always been generally low and thus broadcasting has had more influence on the masses and a more profound impact on societies than the printing press. Broadcast media such as radio and television should be the focus of any media analysis of the Arab world, and we should not overlook Egypt's desire to be acknowledged as having hegemony over the Arab broadcasting arena.

Radio, the first broadcasting medium, appeared in the Arab world in 1925,⁵⁾ but its widespread use and expansion started after 1952, when the Egyptian Free Officers Movement overthrew the *ancien régime* and began propagating their revolutionary message inside and outside Egypt. Nasser (Jamāl 'Abd al-Nāṣir) utilized the radio for this effort and thereby promoted its expansion. The most famous radio service was the 'Voice of the Arabs,' which Nasser used for his own political purposes. The Voice of the Arabs started on the July 4th, 1953 as a 30-minute program on Radio Cairo.

5) According to 'Abd, A. [2008: 41-43], the exact date of radio's inception differs among scholars. I followed the date mentioned by 'Abd, A. and N. 'Abd [2008: 14].

Although the program expanded rapidly soon after its launch and became independent, it was designed to appeal not only to the Egyptians but to all the other Arabs as well. On this point, James [2006] observes that, just a month and a half after its launch, the program was already protesting the French authorities' deportation of the Moroccan sultan. Appealing to the Arab masses through these broadcasts was Nasser's way of taking the initiative in Arab affairs. Nasser also used the Voice of the Arabs to criticize Arab governments that were critical of Egypt and give the anti-establishment figures of other Arab states the opportunity to criticize their governments [Kosugi 2006: 338-341].

The Voice of the Arabs was the Arab world's most widely listened to radio service of the 1950s and 1960s: it was particularly popular in Egypt and the Mashriq countries.⁶⁾ Arabs listened to the airwaves coming from Egypt because of its cultural supremacy in the Arab world.⁷⁾ Thus, many Arabs listened to the Egyptian radio service even though it was sometimes seen as propagandistic. Whether effective or not, the popularity of the Voice of the Arabs is frequently cited as evidence of Egypt's supremacy in the Arab broadcasting scene of the 1950s and 1960s. A sense of rivalry and the wish to shield their citizens against Egyptian radio services became the driving forces that made other Arab states, particularly the Gulf states, developed their own broadcasting capacities [Chiba 2012a: 122-123].

2.2 *The Era of Informational Independence*

However, after the 1967 Arab-Israel War the Arab media situation suddenly changed. During the war, the Voice of the Arabs deliberately delivered false news, and the Egyptian radio services lost their credibility after the Arab's defeat. Since the decline of Egyptian radio, as Lynch [2006: 36] states, 'despite many efforts nobody—certainly not Saddam Hussein—has successfully recaptured Nasser's mantle.' The defeat of 1967 damaged the dream of Egyptian leadership, and though leaders such as Qaddafi, Assad, and Saddam wished to rule the next 'Arab Prussia,' in Sivan's words [Sivan 1997: 207], nobody succeeded or created an influential radio service equivalent to the Voice of the Arabs.

While Egypt still exercised a strong influence upon other Arab countries even after the 1970s through cultural exports such as dramas, and films, many Arab states began to strengthen their own

6) Although it is quite difficult to find empirical statistics on the size of the service's audience or its degree of influence (because little pan-Arabic research occurred in this period), we can infer its strong influence from audience research done in the mid-1970s showing that nearly one fifth of the people in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, and Jordan were listening to the Voice of the Arabs more than once a week [Rugh 1987: 151; Boyd 1999: 22].

7) A long time after the Arab Renaissance at the end of the nineteenth century, talented celebrities such as Umm al-Kulthūm and Muḥammad 'Abd al-Wahhāb along with skilled electronic technicians, had been producing attractive radio programs that permeated the whole Arab world.

broadcasting capacities by developing their equipment and establishing information agencies. The development of national news agencies and the impact of television were particularly important. By 1970, most Arab states had started their own television services or had nationalized previously foreign and privately owned television services. Other states, some of the Gulf states, had also nationalized their broadcast and news agencies by the mid-1970s. In general, many Arab countries were ready to control their information flows by the mid-1970s.

Television permeated into Arab society during the 1970s and 1980s, and together with radio became the main media in Arabs' daily lives. Because of its visual nature, television appealed to the masses, who quickly became accustomed to it. However, the range of television was confined within national borders and only touched adjacent parts of neighboring countries, so the more Arabs became accustomed to watching television throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the more they became accustomed to getting their information from a national source. Therefore, the national diffusion of television generally contributed to the sustenance of 'closed regimes' [Rinnawi 2006: 30-34].

This inward-looking media tendency was exacerbated by the failure of cooperative organization among Arab countries. In the 1970s, Arab states entered into a partnership to establish collaborative news agencies and information organizations in the spirit of international movements, such as New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO), who called for the closure of information gaps between developed and developing countries.⁸⁾ However, virtually all attempts failed or malfunctioned for nearly two decades, mainly because of the discord among the respective nations. Even though some leading figures, such as Mustafa Masmoudi, former Tunisian Minister of Information, contributed to the drafting of UNESCO's Mass Media Declaration, the situation deteriorated with most Arab states postponing the establishment of regional information agencies and strengthening national media boundaries [Chiba 2012a: 128].

2.3 The Advent of Offshore Media

The Arab media environment became insular and led to the oppression of freedom of speech during the 1970s. At the same time, changes in the regional, political, and economic situation gave birth to offshore media that were 'produced by Arabs, for Arabs, in Arabic, with Arab agendas and attitudes, but outside the stifling confines of the Arab states' [Jarrah 2008]. The 1970s saw the appearance of pan-Arab presses, most of them edited and headquartered in Europe. The pan-Arab presses not only contributed to reshaping the pan-Arab media environment of the time but also affected the Arabic

8) The collaboration led to the establishment of Maghrebvision in 1970, Gulvision in 1977, the Arab States Broadcasting Union (ASBU) in 1969, and the Arab Satellite Organization (ARABSAT) in 1976. For details on Maghrebvision, see [al-Shāl 1993].

broadcasting structure of the 1990s, typified by satellite television. In considering the trajectory of the Arabic broadcasting scene, the pan-Arab presses should be discussed.

The birth of the pan-Arab presses had two main geopolitical causes: the inner conflict in Lebanon starting in 1975, and the prosperity of the Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia, and their increasing investments. The Lebanese conflict forced journalists to flee from Lebanon to European refuges, particularly London and Paris. The Gulf states have provided financial subsidies to offshore media companies, who hired journalists from areas such as Lebanon and Palestine.⁹⁾ As a result, many Arab publishing companies appeared in the 1970s, particularly in London. In 1977, the Saudi Research and Marketing Group began publishing *al-Sharq al-Awsaṭ* paper from London and distributed it to Arab countries through satellite technology. More dailies, such as *al-ʿArab* and *al-Zamān*, were published in 1978. Famous pan-Arab dailies, such as *al-Ḥayāt* and *al-Quds al-ʿArabī*, also began publishing from London [Rugh 2004: 173; Rinnawi 2006: 35]. In addition to dailies, weeklies and magazines were also published there. Although several reasons can be provided as to why so many Arab publishers established their headquarters in London, factors such as editorial freedom, qualitative edge, and the existence of a number of people of Arab origin with a Western university education can be considered the most important.¹⁰⁾ Even though Saudi Arabia held influence over many of them through the investors with close relationships to the Saudi royal family, the benefits of publishing outside the Arab world exceeded the disadvantages of publishing inside it. Basically '[i]t was the quest for political influence rather than commercial profit that was the principal driving force behind the expansion of the offshore Arab media' [Jarrah 2008].

3. Trajectory of Offshore Media

3.1 Satellite Television and the Lasting Geographical Division

The first proposal to launch media satellites occurred in 1967, when it was agreed to establish an organization to govern satellite broadcasting at a meeting of Arab information ministers in Tunisia. However, because of internal political tensions, the first satellites, the ARABSAT 1A and 1B, were not launched for another two decades and remained unused for five years. In 1990, the Egyptian government launched its first satellite channel, the Egypt Space Channel (ESC). The purpose of the ESC was to broadcast programs to Egyptian military personnel dispatched in Kuwait during the Gulf

9) Moreover, some prominent Lebanese journalists have set up their newspapers in Europe and have been afterward financed by petrodollars.

10) For example, Arab journalists such as Jihād Khājīn, a famous columnist for some London-based pan-Arab papers such as *al-Ḥayāt*, started his career as a reporter at Reuters and then moved to Arab media [Kraidy 2010: 74]. This is one example of the recruitment of an Arab journalist by a London-based Arab publisher.

War. Compared with terrestrial channels whose coverage was limited to within national borders and parts of adjacent countries, satellite channels are characterized by their widespread transmission coverage and have eroded the earlier existing forms of television broadcasting. Therefore, in the era of the satellite channel, every Arab regime is threatened by the loss of the informational sovereignty that it could previously exert. Therefore, the setting up of ESC stimulated other countries to launch their own satellite channels.¹¹⁾ After the ESC, as for national satellite channels, the UAE began Emirates Dubai TV (EDTV) in 1992, and others followed.¹²⁾ In addition, the Gulf War spurred an increase in private satellite channels, mostly owned by Saudi investors. Saudis did not learn about the outbreak of the war until five days after it had occurred because of a government enforced media blackout. Word got out only because satellite television channels such as CNN were watched by wealthy Saudis.¹³⁾ This incident, called the ‘CNN shock,’ made people aware of the importance of collecting information from outside their nation [Hosaka 2005: 62].

In the appearance of satellite channels in the Arab world, the lasting influence of the pan-Arab presses can be pointed out. Unlike the national satellite channels, most private channels located their headquarters in the West, marking a clear geographical division between national satellite channels and private ones. Most private channels preferred to locate their headquarters in London or Rome. Famous channels that started in London include the Middle East Broadcasting Centre (MBC), Showtime Arabia, and the Arab News Network (ANN). Channels with Roman roots include Arab Radio and Television (ART), Orbit, and LBC-sat.¹⁴⁾ Except for the ANN, owned by the estranged cousin of the Syrian president, most networks were owned by entrepreneurs with strong connections to the Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia [Kraidy and Khalil 2009: 21].

In considering the geographical aspects, it is quite easy to see that the trajectory of the pan-Arab presses of the 1970s and 1980s was inherited by the early Arab satellite channels. They hired many Arab journalists with European experience; in fact, many Arab satellite news channels owe much to the Europe-based pan-Arab presses. The career dependency between the pan-Arab presses and the private satellite channels is obvious. Like the pan-Arab presses, the Arab satellite channels, in their early stages, were typical offshore media.

11) When ESC started, most of its programs were the same as those on Egypt’s terrestrial channels.

12) Jordan began Jordan Satellite Broadcasting in 1992. Egypt added one channel, Nile TV, in 1993. Morocco began Radio Television du Maroc (RTM) in 1994. Syria began Syrian Television (STV) in 1995. By the mid-1990s, most Arab countries had their own satellite channels.

13) CNN has been re-beamed by the terrestrial TV in Saudi Arabia and Egypt in 1991.

14) The LBC’s satellite channel was officially launched in April 1996, transmitting from Italy tapes recorded in Lebanon [Kraidy and Khalil 2009: 21].

Table 1. Selected Private Satellite Channels between 1996 and 2003

Inaugurated Year	Name	Country-Link	Headquarter
1996	Future TV	Lebanon	Beirut
1996	al-Jazeera	Qatar	Doha
2000	al-Manar	Lebanon	Beirut
2000	NBN	Lebanon	Beirut
2001	Dream TV	Egypt	Cairo
2002	Zayn TV	Lebanon	Dubai
2002	al-Mihwar	Egypt	Cairo
2003	al-Arabiya	Saudi Arabia	Dubai

Sources: Rugh [2004]; Sakr [2001]

3.2 The Decline of Offshore Media

However, this situation gradually changed after the mid-1990s. Newly launched private channels started to locate their operations in Arab countries rather than Europe. These channels included some Lebanese channels, such as Future TV, launched in 1996 and owned by the family of ex-prime minister Rafiq al-Ḥarīrī, and al-Manār TV, launched in 2000 and closely connected to Ḥizb Allāh. In Qatar, al-Jazeera TV, subsidized by the Amir of Qatar, started as an independent satellite channel. Thus, in most Arab countries, private satellite channels set up their operations from within Arab territories, not in Europe. Many leading satellite channels after 1996, as shown in Table 1, started broadcasting from within Arab territories.

In addition to those newcomers, most of the Arabic satellite channels that had operated in Europe moved their headquarters to Arab countries. In 2001, the MBC channel moved its headquarters from London to the UAE. The ART channel and its offshoot the Iqra' channel moved from Italy to Egypt in 2002, and then moved to Jordan in 2004. In addition, Orbit, a leading satellite channel, also moved from Italy to Bahrain in 2005 [Kraidy and Khalil 2009: 21]. After returning to Arab countries, these channels began to create offshoot channels, which doubled the number of Arabic satellite channels. Jordan, Egypt, and the UAE were the most popular broadcasting centers. As a result, the vast majority of the leading Arabic satellite channels now operate from within the Arab world rather than Europe.

Some private presses, such as *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, and *al-Ḥayāt*, are still edited in London. However, Jarrah [2008] observes that most of them no longer had a reason to continue operating in Europe and that remaining there is now only a matter of prestige.¹⁵⁾ The few exceptional cases, such

15) In fact, *al-Ḥayāt* has offices in London, Frankfurt, Cairo, Bahrain, Beirut, New York, and other major cities. In 2002, *al-Ḥayāt* and LBC merged to establish their news department.

as *al-Quds al-‘Arabī*, Mustaqilla TV, and al-Khalifa TV, show that Europe is still a harbor for freedom of speech.¹⁶⁾ However, the power of this fact has lessened, and the presence of offshore media has accordingly declined. It is not an overstatement to say that offshore media and the geographical division of Arab media discourse that had been regarded as the fundamental characteristics of Arab media are now almost extinguished.

3.3 *Behind the Transformation*

By the mid-1990s, it had become the dominant belief in the Arab world that locating outside the Arab world was a prerequisite for freedom of speech. This belief was reinforced by the emigration of Lebanese media to Europe after the breakout of the Civil War in 1975.

What changed? El-Oifi attributes this change of belief to al-Jazeera:

Al-Jazeera has put an end to the perception that Arab media cannot thrive within the Arab world.... The example of Al-Jazeera shows that Arab media implemented in an Arab country can, in fact, have a larger margin of freedom. As a consequence, Saudi media in Europe has gradually started to come back to the Middle East region [el-Oifi 2005: 71].

As he emphasizes, al-Jazeera has been the leading Arab media player and thus might have contributed to ending the predominant belief that Europe was the harbor for freedom of speech. However, even if we admit the leading role of al-Jazeera at the cutting edge of the Arab information revolution, we cannot attribute everything to the success of that network.

Kraidy and Khalil [2009: 23] provide a more thorough explanation. They point to four factors: the clashes between media practices following Saudi and British journalistic norms,¹⁷⁾ the high cost of operating in Europe, the wish to be closer to Arab audiences geographically and culturally, and the development of media cities in the Arab world that many Arab countries had started to construct in order to attract private media companies. In addition to these, we could mention other reasons, such as amendments to the media laws in some Arab countries to allow private media companies to operate within their national borders, and the stabilization of Lebanon, which pulled Lebanese

16) Mustaqilla TV, a private Tunisian satellite network founded in 2000, operates in London. Al-Khalifa TV, a private Algerian satellite network founded in 2002, operates in Paris [Rugh 2004: 219]. However, most pivotal satellite channels have already moved their headquarters to the Arab world. Now, it is difficult to find any pivotal satellite channels that locate their headquarters in the West. Although some influential quality newspapers do headquarter in the West, Jarrah [2008] points out that those who still have headquarters in the West have lost the reason for being based there. And if there is any reason, it is just “a matter of prestige” [Jarrah 2008].

17) The plan to create the BBC Arabic services in collaboration with Orbit failed after the BBC broadcast a program entitled ‘Death of a Principle’ in spite of Orbit’s objections.

media back to their homeland. For example, Dream TV, the first private channel in Egypt, appeared in 2001 soon after a declaration from the Egyptian Information Ministry that it would permit the licensing of private companies. LBC-sat, initially registered in London, moved back to Lebanon in 1996, soon after the civil war ended.

3.4 The Increase in Satellite Channels and the Intensification of Economical Pressure

Although many interconnected factors are attributed to the geographical transformation of the contemporary Arab media scene, the political-economy approach requires us to analyze the economical aspect in particular.

A proliferation of television stations took place in the 2000s. The launch of Egypt's state-owned Nilesat expanded transponder capacity and lowered the rent for each one. With the entrance barrier thus lowered, Arab satellite channels proliferated. With the launch of Nilesat 101 in 1998 and Nilesat 102 in 2000, the two satellites' total capacity reached nearly 230 digital channels [Sakr 2007: 7], and the lower rent for transponders prompted entrepreneurs to enter the media business. Subsequently other satellites were launched which furthered the proliferation of satellite channels. Backed by the world's largest growth in satellite viewership, the number of satellite channels increased dramatically, as Fig. 1 shows. A study shows that the number of satellite channels reached 450 by January 2009 and is still increasing.

The dramatic increase in satellite channels intensified the economic situation surrounding Arab media. This economic pressure triggered the structural transformation of Arab media and prompted many Europe-based Arab satellite companies to go back to their homelands. For instance, ART announced in 2004 that it expected to reduce its operating costs by nearly 60% after moving to Jordan from Italy [Sakr 2007: 237; *Jordan Times*, September 10, 2004]. In 2005, Orbit moved to Bahrain because it was unhappy with the tax arrangements in Rome [Sakr 2007: 196]. In addition to those channels, Steven Clark, MBC News Director, said that it would 'be more economic to run operations from there [Dubai] than from here [London]' [Sullivan 2001a].

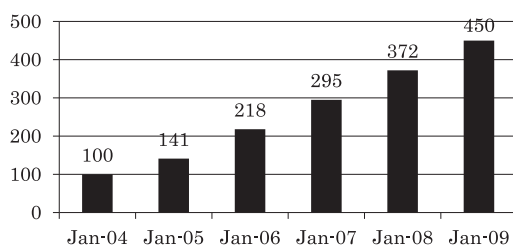


Fig. 1. The Increasing Number of Satellite Channels in the Arab World
Source: Dubai Press Club [2010]

However, even given this return to the Arab world, questions remain. Where, precisely, did they go? Where did the channels relocate their offices? To answer these questions, let us now consider the media city, regarded by some to be the new harbor for freedom of speech and thus an attractive location for contemporary Arab satellite channels.

4. The Media City and Its Meaning

4.1 *The Development of the Media City*

Since the 1990s, some Arab countries have constructed special economic zones within their borders to invite foreign companies to invest and set up industries in their countries. A 'media city' is one such economic zone that aims to attract non-governmental media companies. It is generally characterized by attractive advantages such as tax-exemptions, an offer of 100% foreign ownership, modern infrastructures, special laws, and limited intervention from governments. In accommodating the previously Europe-based media companies and a number of newcomers, the media cities have played an important role. Now, most famous private companies on the contemporary Arab media scene have their headquarters and bureaus located in one of these media cities.

Pioneering attempts to offer attractive locations for media companies were made as early as the 1970s.¹⁸⁾ However, media cities for satellite channels really took shape in the mid-1990s. The first media city, Egyptian Media Production City (EMPC), was inaugurated with much fanfare in 1997. This inspired the establishment of other media cities, such as Dubai Media City (DMC) and Jordan Media City (JMC). As a result, the idea of the media city became widespread, spurring the establishment of media cities in other Arab countries. By 2009, in addition to the existing eight media cities in Egypt, Jordan, Oman, and the UAE, plans to set up media cities were in progress in Bahrain, Kuwait, Iraq, Qatar, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Sudan¹⁹⁾ [Arab Advisors Group, November 1, 2009]. The ownership of existing media cities can be categorized into three types according to their shareholdings: government ownership, private ownership, and semi-government ownership. In addition to governmental and private efforts, political groups such as Ḥamās and the Lebanese Maronite Church have announced plans to set up the equivalent of media cities [Kraidy and Khalil 2009: 135].

Media cities have been perceived as 'oases of media freedom' [Krzysiek 2009: 79]. However, Krzysiek [2009: 79] believes that 'numerous incidents related to 'inappropriate' media practices force

18) In Oman, Halley Media Production (HMP) started in 1986 [Homepage of HMP]. In Jordan, something equivalent to a media city was started in 1978 as a semi-government sector [Sullivan 2001b]. However, those entities are different from contemporary media cities that are generally characterized by attractive advantages for private media companies.

19) Guaaybess [2008: 208] also mentions a media city in Tangiers, Morocco.

us to question freedom of speech within these ‘media oases.’ Even in DMC, the most advanced media city in the Arab world, two of Pakistan’s leading private television channels were forced to shut down after being ordered to stop transmitting via the UAE, probably for political reasons [*Gulf News*, November 13, 2007]. This suggests the necessity of considering the media city not only as a form of media democratization, but also as a way for cunning authoritarian regimes to meet the challenges of globalization and the global economy [Krzysiek 2009: 69]. However, the media city still positions itself as an alternative harbor for freedom of speech and an essential component of the contemporary Arab media scene.

4.2 *The Characteristics of Media Cities*

We can discern the development of media cities by focusing on three cases: Egypt, Jordan, and the UAE,²⁰⁾ the countries that spearheaded the media city trend. In order to clarify how they developed and analyze their characteristics, we will consider each of them briefly, with a focus on issues such as ownership, purpose, and recent developments.

4.2.1 *The Case of Egypt*

Envisioned as the ‘Hollywood of the Middle East,’ Egyptian Media Production City (EMPC) was inaugurated in 1997 [Kandil 2000]. EMPC is located in Sixth of October City, 10 km from the pyramids of Giza and 20 km from central Cairo. Initially, it boasted a huge area of two million square meters containing three complexes housing 29 studios equipped with up-to-date facilities, expansive outdoor shooting areas, theatres, and other necessary facilities [Kandil 2000]. The area and facilities multiplied rapidly and, as of January 2011, reached over four million square meters with six complexes housing 70 studios and an academy for media science and engineering.²¹⁾ The city is the largest in the Arab world.

The purpose behind EMPC was strongly reflected in the remarks of Şafwat Sharīf, the former Egyptian Minister of Information: ‘Egypt wants to continue leading in information, in media, and Arabic production’ [Forrester 2001]. It is evident that, through EMPC, the Egyptian government wants to showcase Egypt as the Arab world’s most prominent film and broadcasting centre. Strictly speaking, EMPC is nominally a semi-government organization and some private banks have joined EMPC’s Council of Trustees as shareholders (see Table 2). However, the Egyptian government maintains direct control through the Egyptian Radio and Television Union (ERTU), the national broadcasting union under the Ministry of Information that closely interacts with banks and

20) In addition to these three countries, Oman also set up Halley Media Production (HMP). However, the nature and role of HMP are still not clear, and there are few studies on it.

21) Interview with a staff member of EMPC (January 23, 2011).

Table 2. Capital Structure of the EMPC

Shareholder	Country-link	Share
Egyptian Radio and Television Union (ERTU)	Egypt	50%
National Investment Bank	Egypt	14%
National Commercial Bank	Egypt	5%
Bank of Cairo	Egypt	5%
Bank of Alexandria	Egypt	5%
Misr Insurance Company	Egypt	5%
Egyptian Company for Investment Projects	Egypt	5%
Egyptian Reinsurance Company	Egypt	1%
Public-held Stock	Egypt	10%

Source: Wizāra al-ʿIlām Jumhūrīya Miṣr al-ʿArabīya [2000: 257]

companies.

In 2000, in order to help EMPC and extend tax benefits to more media companies, Egypt Media Free Zone (EMFZ) was created in the area between EMPC and Nilesat's earth station [Kandil 2000]. Although national channels use some of EMPC's and EMFZ's facilities and studios, they are mainly assigned for private channels.²²⁾ The distinction between national channels and private channels is comparatively clear. A number of private satellite television and radio channels have located their stations within these special zones.

However, the case of Dream TV indicates that the government still wants to interfere with the media. In 2002, Egypt's free-zone authority suggested that Dream TV might lose its broadcasting license after it had broadcast programs both sexually explicit and critical of local government. Many suspected that this warning was a direct result of a political comment made during a program [Sakr 2007: 198]. Moreover, amid the turmoil of the 2011 protest movement, regardless of its location within EMPC, Egypt's Information Minister Anas al-Fiqqī suspended al-Jazeera's operations, cancelled its license, and withdrew accreditation from its staff [*al-Jazeera Net*, January 30, 2011]. These events all happened suddenly and were big news; they were enough to mar EMPC's image.²³⁾

4.2.2 The Case of Jordan

Jordan was the first Arab country to develop the concept of a media city. The predecessor of the current media city was built in 1978 and began operating in 1982 as a semi-government entity. However, due to a financial crisis, the venture collapsed in 1991 and its facilities were not used again

22) Interview with a staff member of EMPC (January 23, 2011).

23) After the revolution in February, 2011, Anas al-Fiqqī and former state broadcasting chief Osama al-Sheikh were both arrested from their homes [*al-Jazeera Net*, February 24, 2011]. So, the situation has been dramatically changing.

until 2001 [Sullivan 2001a]. The present Jordan Media City (JMC) was established as a private free zone by the Saudi Dallah Media Production Company, owned by media tycoon Šālih Kāmil, with the help of Jordan's Information Communication Technology (ICT) program [Krzysiek 2009: 69]. JMC is located east of Amman and near Queen Alia International Airport. Dallah Media Production Company bought the main building from Jordan Production Company, the predecessor of the current JMC, and rented the land measuring 40,000 square meters from the Jordanian government. According to an interview with JMC staff, the number of satellite channels that contract with JMC has reached around 250, and except for the pass-through channels,²⁴⁾ the number of channels that JMC is in contract with for transmission is around 60 (as of the end of November 2011).²⁵⁾ Those 60 channels include playout channels, fiber channels, internet channels, and radio channels. Because JMC's maximum playout capacity has been reached, the company recently upgraded its playout center to 90 channels [Homepage of JMC]. JMC took its building and equipment over from an earlier company and updated the facilities. The set-up cost was 10 million JD (15 million USD) [Homepage of JMC].

Although JMC is a private media city, the project, like other media cities, resulted from government policy. In an examination of the three media cities in Egypt, Jordan, and the UAE, Quinn *et al.* [2004: 5] point out that they share two common goals: 'to generate income and create jobs for the teaming masses in the Arab world who must find work.' King Abdullah of Jordan has always given his full support to JMC. Behind his support, of course, is the clear expectation that JMC will generate jobs and propel the national economy through knowledge-based industries. It is true that, on one hand, there were strong economic reasons for Šālih Kāmil to construct JMC in order to reduce the operational costs of his ART channel (by moving from Italy to Amman). However, on the other hand, the strong support of the king and the Jordanian government suggests that Jordan regards JMC as an important means of making itself the media hub of the region and an important symbol of modernity. The fact that Rađī al-Khas, former director general of the Jordan Radio and Television Corporation, has been JMC's CEO indicates the strong relationship between JMC and the Jordanian government.²⁶⁾

24) A pass-through channel is a channel that utilizes JMC only as a connecting point from one broadcasting satellite to another.

25) In 2004, only 16 satellite channels transmitted from the JMC [*Jordan Times*, September 10, 2004]. Further, the type of channels that JMC contracts with can be classified into four categories: playout channel, fiber channel, Internet channel, and pass-through channel.

26) Article in [*Jordan Media Institute*].

4.2.3 *The Case of Dubai and the UAE*

Media cities in the UAE are the projects of each emirate. Four of the seven emirates have their own media cities,²⁷⁾ with Dubai having the largest. Like Egypt and Jordan, each emirate aims to be a regional and global information hub and aims to use its media city to create synergies between media and other economic activities. In the Arab world, Dubai leads the media city trend with four of them: Dubai Media City (DMC), Dubai Studio City (DSC), Dubai Internet City (DIC), and the International Media Production Zone (IMPZ). IMPZ had not yet been completed as of November 2011, but the other three media cities have attracted much investor interest and consequently huge investments. In the realm of broadcast media, DMC has been in the spotlight.

DMC was inaugurated in 2001, requiring an estimated 800 million USD for set-up expenses. In the set-up period, DMC boasted of two million square meters and many skyscrapers; both the size and number of the buildings is still expanding. DMC was constructed to help the UAE become a regional and global media hub. To this end, it developed several media activities: marketing, broadcasting, new media, publishing, music, film, and events services [Homepage of DMC]. DMC stands out among other media cities and has attracted many investors with its up-to-date facilities, attractive location, and capacity to offer skilled technicians. As manifested on its homepage, DMC's success reflects the support of Sheikh Muḥammad bin Rāshid al-Maktūm, Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai, who wishes to transform Dubai into a knowledge-based society and economy [Homepage of DMC].

The expansion of DMC has been remarkable. Since its launch, the number of the companies that operate in the territory of DMC increased from 880 in 2004 to over 1,200 in 2008. By 2009, 60 satcasters were operating nearly 150 channels from DMC [Kraidy and Khalil 2009: 135-136]. Under the umbrella of TECOM Investments,²⁸⁾ DMC enjoys interactivity with DIC, DSC, IMPZ, and other free zones such as Knowledge Village, inaugurated in 2003. Unlike Egypt and Jordan, the UAE can offer a multinational workforce from countries outside the Arab world, such as India. In addition to Arab media companies, international companies from India, Europe, and the USA have also established regional bureaus here [TECOM Directory 2011].

There have been several incidents where freedom of expression has been betrayed. For example, in November 2007, DMC blocked the satellite signals of two popular Pakistani news channels, Geo

27) In Dubai, there are four media cities, and Ras al-Khaimah has Ras al-Khaimah Media City (RAK Media City). Fujairah has Fujairah Creative City (FCC), and Abu Dhabi has TwoFour54.

28) The TECOM (The Dubai Free Zone for Technology, e-Commerce and Media) is a national project that aims to construct industrial privileged areas to promote the ICT (Information and Communication Technology) policy.

and ARY, accusing them of interfering with the politics of Pakistan. Although those two channels were allowed to resume broadcasting soon after they promised to abide by TECOM regulations, they announced that they were considering moving their bases out of Dubai [*Gulf News*, November 25, 2007]. In addition to this direct interference, el-Baltaji [2007: 5] points out that ‘the government’s involvement in the regulation of the media has driven a number of journalists to exercise self-censorship, which, in the region’s and possibly the world’s largest media hub, degrades the journalistic integrity of those writing and publishing articles in Dubai.’

4.3 Strategy of Differentiation

After comparing media cities in Egypt, Jordan, and the UAE, Quinn *et al.* [2004: 13-14] conclude that ‘these cities are competing in a tiny marketplace.... In the end, as Darwin has said, it is not the strongest or the most intelligent species that survives. It is the one that is most responsive to change.’ However, the media market of the Arab world has been expanding more rapidly than expected, and the growth of satellite channels had spurred the construction of media cities throughout the Arab world. Competitions occurring in the sky and on the ground have joined hand in hand, producing a situation very different from their observation that only flexible media cities can survive. Rather, as Sakr [2007: 195] argues, ‘any real competition among them might be expected to promote a decentralization of decision-making, with companies choosing between locations based on factors such as bureaucracy, property prices, labor costs and availability of skills.’ While it is difficult to determine which factor a media company considers most important when choosing its location, it is possible to identify each media city’s most appealing advantage. We will therefore now consider the strategies by which each media city competes with the others.

According to Hamdy [2002], EMPC’s tenants all share something in common: they are mainly private Egyptian channels and the bureaus of regional satellite channels. Taking a random sample of some of the channels with EMPC studios (see Table 3), reveals the validity of Hamdy’s observation. Many influential Egyptian satellite channels, such as Dream TV, Melody Entertainment, Mazzika Group, and al-Miḥwar actually broadcast from EMPC. Meanwhile, the rest of the channels include some influential regional media companies, such as the al-Baghdādīya Channel, al-Nās TV, and the MBC channel, and they lease studios from EMPC as their main or branch broadcasting center.

This tendency is also implied in the remarks of Ṣafwat Sharīf. In an interview, Sharīf said, ‘the Egyptian media are not for sale. I’m not in favor of privatizing the media, nor of selling the tools that shape the Egyptian mind and protect it against the challenges facing our developing country’ [Berenger and Labidi 2005: 87]. Even though the tone changed after his successors emphasized the privatization of Egyptian media more than his predecessors did, this tendency still continues. Thus,

Table 3. Selected Broadcasting Channels in EMPC

Channel	Medium	Country-Link	Ownership
Dream TV	TV	Egypt	Private
Melody Entertainment	TV	Egypt	Private
Mazzika Group	TV	Egypt	Private
Nogoum FM	Radio	Egypt	Private
al-Miḥwar Channel	TV	Egypt	Private
al-Baghdādīya Channel	TV	Iraq	Private
al-Nās TV	TV	Saudi	Private
MBC Channel	TV	Saudi	Private
O TV	TV	Egypt	Private
Modern TV Egypt	TV	Egypt	Private
Qīthāra Channel	TV	Iraq	Private
al-Raḥma TV	TV	Egypt	Private

Sources: Interview with a staff of EMPC (January 23, 2011), Several Websites.

the EMPC tends to offer its space to influential private Egyptian channels and some regional media companies.

Compared with EMPC, JMC is likely to attract comparatively newer channels. Except for the channels under the ART network's umbrella, most tenants are relatively newcomers and relatively unknown media channels [Chiba 2012b]. All the beginning, the JMC lagged behind the media cities in Egypt and the UAE in its infrastructure. During its set-up period, JMC refurbished its equipment, but it is still less impressive than that of DMC [Quinn *et al.* 2004: 8]. However, in a remark from Raḍī al-Khas, CEO of JMC, we find that JMC's strategy is different from that of DMC:

Jordan is different from Dubai. As far as regulation and tax free status, we are ready to compete aggressively with Dubai....Dubai, as everyone knows, is all about real estate—high-rise apartments and offices and quite spectacular development. This is not so in Jordan. We are sophisticated in a different way....We have plenty of channels which have moved from Dubai to us here in Jordan. Dubai is expensive, inflation is rising fast, communications in terms of traffic is a nightmare and people are realizing that Amman has a great deal to offer.²⁹⁾

This remark makes it clear that al-Khas wants to differentiate JMC from DMC. Unlike DMC, JMC is reasonably priced while offering comparatively skilled engineers and technicians. Unlike EMPC, JMC is more open to foreign companies and is willing to invite them. Thus, JMC's strategy is to

29) Article in [*The IBC Daily*].

offer a comparatively attractive location to media companies that are still not famous, but wish to position themselves to challenge the regional media market. Many of the companies in JMC are blessed with comparatively low costs and have comparatively highly skilled staff and quality equipment.

This differentiation in media strategy applies, of course, to DMC. According to Sa'īd al-Muntafiq, former CEO of DMC, its recent success flows from the recognition that Dubai is different from other Arab countries:

We're not Lebanon, we're not Egypt, and we know what our strengths are and what our weaknesses are. Our focus...is primarily in the digital sense. We have the best technology infrastructure in the region here in the free zone. Our closeness to Dubai Internet City helps us to achieve that—the whole city is wired with fiber optic links. So in terms of creating content digitally, manipulating it digitally, post-producing it digitally, that's really where our focus is [al-Muntafiq 2001].

His statement indicates that DMC's strategy is not to boast of its huge area or its reasonable costs but rather its advanced infrastructure and synergies between media and other activities (such as economics and academia). In an interview, Zafar Siddiqi, CEO and Chairman of Middle East Business News (MEBN), gives two reasons why they put their headquarters in DMC. First, he emphasizes the unrestricted freedom of speech. Second, he emphasizes the importance of Dubai itself, saying that Dubai has become 'the focal point for most multinational companies operating out of this area, and that helps us [media companies] to get more interviews because more CEOs and chairmen are stopping over in Dubai' [Siddiqi 2001].

Al-Muntafiq [2001] points out that DMC's vision is 'not to be a regional base for broadcasters, but to be one of four or five global bases for broadcasting.' Obviously, the strategy of DMC is not directed only to local and regional media companies but also to regional and even global media companies. Through the statements of media companies moving to DMC, we discover that DMC's vision is shared by the media companies located there. The manifest vision of the MBC (Middle East Broadcasting Center) reflects this tendency well: 'with our heart in the Arab world, we are forging a global media group that enriches people's lives through information, interaction and entertainment.'³⁰⁾ In this statement, we see that the MBC is not targeting only Arab viewers but is aiming for

30) 'Mission and Vision' in homepage of [MBC Group].

global audiences.

4.4 Competition or Complementation?

As is evident, competition among Arab media cities does not always occur on only one level. Media cities do not always compete to attract clients who want to eat the same pie. Each media city tries to differentiate itself, conscious of its strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, it is not accurate to say that each contemporary Arab media city is merely a clone of the others, existing just to compete. In fact, through a strategy of differentiation, each media city targets different clients even when the differences are slight and overlapping. Generally speaking, media cities mirror the countries they are in: the geographical, social, political, and economic situations of each country are reflected in the characteristics of the respective media cities it contains. In addition, the media companies' choice of location reflects the characteristics of those media cities and is a reaction to the strategies of those media cities. This ultimately results in the diversification of the companies' locations.

The differences among media cities provide media companies with multiple options. The location of media cities offer media companies the opportunity to expand their regional and global presence. In the development and recent multiplicity of the Arab media scene, media cities have played a key sustaining and promotional role. Therefore, it is true that the media cities compete and complement each other. The differences among media cities create the basis for the multiplicity and diversity of contemporary satellite channels, which, in turn, contribute to the growth of these cities.

5. Conclusion

This article attempts to reveal the geographical transformation of Arab media and to understand contemporary Arab media dynamics with a focus on the satellite channel and the media city by taking two 'harbors for freedom of speech,' Europe and media cities, as the objects of study. After the 1970s, many Arab media publishers, initially operating in Europe, became influential actors in the Arab media scene. Beginning in the 1990s, satellite channels emerged, with most of the influential private ones headquartering in Europe. Therefore, Europe became known as a harbor for freedom of speech. These media with headquarters outside of the Arab world, mainly in Europe, are referred to as 'offshore media.' The offshore media phenomenon and its consequence, the geographical division of Arab media discourses between the Arab world and Europe were regarded as essential characteristics of Arab media.

However, this article has revealed that the development and proliferation of satellite television spurred competition in the Arab media industry and this competition promoted the return of Europe-based Arab media companies, particularly satellite channels, to Arab countries and dis-

solved this geographical division. Now, most of the pivotal Arab satellite channels broadcast not from Europe but from inside of the Arab world and the presence of offshore media has declined. Importantly, in accommodating these previously Europe-based media channels (and a number of newcomers), something called the 'media city' has played an important role. Media city is regarded as the new harbor for freedom of speech, an alternative to the role previously played by Europe. Many key private channels have located their headquarters and bureaus in Arab media cities, which work hard to be attractive locations. Because the media city is so crucial to the contemporary Arab media scene, this article has revealed how each one developed and how they relate to one another.

Most of the pioneering studies on media cities tend to discuss each media city separately or have compared their legal and economic aspects. Moreover, those studies do not inquire into the relationships between one media city and the other media cities. To solve these problems, this article examines their inter-relationships, and reveals that contemporary media cities have differing roles that are complementary to one another. Media cities tend to reflect the local situations in their respective locations, and they each have different advantages and demerits. Therefore, the administration of each media city targets different clients. This gives multiple-choices to media companies, which have different goals and visions and chose their location according to the features of each media city. Thus, media cities contribute to the diversity of the contemporary Arab media scene. In other words, with the development of media cities, small and medium sized private media companies and international media companies, all of which had difficulties entering the Arab media market before, can now enter the Arab broadcasting arena easily, thus bringing diversity to the contemporary Arab broadcasting scene. Ultimately, it is reasonable to say that media cities function not only as new harbors of freedom of speech but also as devices for the promotion of the diversity of contemporary Arab media.

Under the auspices of Arab governments, the number of media cities is likely to increase during the next decade, and with its expanding international influence, the development of the media city can be discussed as an aspect of globalization. Therefore, while this informational transformation is related to the political and social affairs in Arab societies, the phenomena of the media city and the transformation of contemporary Arab media should be understood by comparison with other case studies worldwide, and be located in the transformation of global communication. It goes without saying that further examination is necessary for assessing the impact and significance of the media cities.

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