

Geographical Considerations or the Relevance of the National Scale

Tourya GUAAYBESS*

1. A Brief History of Communication Studies and Arab Media

Information and communication sciences or Communication studies (or media studies, the appellations are different from one country to another) have emerged during the 20th century in Western countries.¹ At the beginning, studies on media and communication were scattered into different academic disciplines of social sciences like sociology, anthropology or political science. Media studies began to be identified as a science, an autonomous and “official” science, from the 70s on through the emergence of specific departments in universities, learned society or specialized reviews. This science is of course the product of specific social contexts: it is due to the will to have a better understanding of the propaganda between the two World wars, it is the product of the fascination exerted by artificial intelligence after the emergence of the first electronic calculators and before the computers and it is the product of the constant interest of society for the last media set up (from the print media to broadcasting, and to the Internet nowadays). At the very beginning, studies on media in the Arab countries by Western scholars were not bound to a specific discipline and they were far from being bound to the communication studies. There have been an *a posteriori* reorganizing work which brought about an apparent coherence but Arab media were not inscribed in a distinct discipline until a relatively recent period. Arab electronic media (radio and television) have been a topic of research — although marginal — for sociologists and anthropologists after the Arab countries became independent from the colonial powers.² This kind of research, labeled “area studies research,” dealt with Arab media with a certain distance and they considered right away the Arab region as a part of the Third World. According to these scholars, Arab countries were part of the developing countries. With good intentions, they considered that they should participate in the development of poor countries and lead them to modernity. In other terms, they needed to provide some recipes to do so.³ Today many criticize these researches and consider that they are ethnocentric and paternalist. At the same time, we may question the validity of these critiques nowadays.⁴

* Assistant Professor, Blaise Pascal University, Clermont-Ferrand 2. Researcher, CNRS Laboratory “Communication et Politique”, Paris.

1 BOURE R. (ed.), *Les origines des sciences de l'information et de la communication. Regards croisés*. Lille, Presses universitaires du Septentrion, coll. Communication, 2002.

2 In France, François Chevaldonné was one the first researchers to work on the subject and devoted his life to it (see for example *Information et explication dans les domaines autogérés*, Alger, CNPA, 1971).

3 GUAAYBESS T., « A New Order of Information in the Arab Broadcasting System », *Transnational Broadcasting Studies*, Université Américaine du Caire, n° 9, 1st semester 2002. (<http://cadmus.iue.it/dspace/handle/1814/1822>).

4 GUAAYBESS T., « Orientalism and the Economics of Arab Broadcasting », in *Arab Mass Media: a*

However, it is important to stress that the first studies on mass media in Third World countries were done when the radio just began to be accessible (or affordable) to the peoples. The idea of modernization was central, as well as the idea of a break with traditions which were considered to be retrograde at that time. One of the most famous scholars of “modernity” is Daniel Lerner, a sociologist from the MIT. According to Lerner, media could lead to social development and it was a wonderful tool to be used to lead people to modernity or to change their mentalities. In his book *“The Passing of Traditional Society, Modernizing the Middle East”* (1958), Daniel Lerner gave an evolutionary modernization theory by presenting the different stages which were to articulate the process of modernization, and the role on mass media in this evolution. These theories defending the idea that media could efficiently fight poverty have been harshly criticized and they have undoubtedly shown their own limits. But I must say that they have been used in Arab countries insomuch that, at least until the mid 90s, one could find studies on the role of media for development, for family planning, for education of children, alphabetization and so on. Having consulted theses of students at the University of Cairo and the University of Rabat, I have seen shelves full of this type of studies. I have also written a paper based on a content analysis of the programs of the Egyptian TV and, until now, social development issues are tackled by some programs in the national channels.⁵ This faith in the media is not reconsidered or questioned even by the UNESCO for instance, which is continuing its crusade for modernization *via* the media and, today, *via* Internet. The UNESCO defends the idea of the necessity to put a stop to “the digital divide between rich and developing countries,” even though the role of media in development has never been clearly established.⁶ Sometimes, the approach one adopts to work on a subject — the scientific tools and paradigms used by the scholar — eventually shapes his topic of research more than the other way round.⁷ When studying Arab media and placing them in the huge group of developing countries or Third world countries, and adopting a sociologist and functionalist approaches, the researcher eventually gives more information about his own views than about his topic of research. Over the years, from the end of the 70s on, specific studies on media in Arab countries were initiated at the same time when communication

Research Handbook, Walter Armbrust et Kai Hafez (eds.), New York, New York Continuum Publishers, 2008.

5 GUAAYBESS T., « Une analyse de contenu: de l’Etat-émetteur à l’émetteur Etat dans le champ télévisuel égyptien », in *Mondialisation et nouveaux médias dans l’espace arabe*, Paris/Lyon, Maisonneuve et Larose et Maison de l’Orient Méditerranéen, 2003.

6 http://portal.unesco.org/fr/ev.php-URL_ID=6060&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html 10-09-2002 Paris - The free flow of information, made possible by the advent of new technologies such as the internet, holds enormous promise of cultural dialogue and mutual understanding, of quality education available throughout our lifetimes and of more vigorous and participative democratic processes. But the so-called “digital divide” — the enormous and growing inequalities between rich and poor nations in access to the new information technologies (ICTs) — threatens to deny this promise from entire regions. (...).

7 BOURDIEU P., CHAMBOREDON J-C., PASSERON J-C., *Le métier de sociologue*, Editions de l’EHESS, 5th edition 2005 (first edition 1980), Paris.

research began to be a distinct science.⁸ As we all know even science depends on its social and political context, and during the 70s and after the Vietnam war many left-wing Western scholars defended the Third World countries. They assumed a Manichean view of the world with on one side the poor countries that must free themselves from the rich countries, and on the other side dominant countries which were enslaving Third World countries. In the international communication studies, this view is represented by the dependency theory and more specifically by the theory of the cultural imperialism defended by the American sociologist Herbert Schiller.

2. From One Trap to the Other

During the eighties and the nineties many studies broke away from these generalizing approaches⁹ and chose to focus instead on media in some specific countries in the “Third World” area and in particular in the Arab region. Many authors rejected the idea of cultural imperialism saying that firstly people of countries in the so-called “South” are able to renegotiate the meaning of the message they receive from the media (they have their own reading); second that they are not acculturated; rather they appropriate the new norms and adapt them to their cultural context, there is a creolization, hybridization of culture. Thirdly countries have “emerged” in Asia, South America or in the Arab region to become major broadcasting players on the international scene. Among these studies, we can quote for instance the book *New patterns in global television: Peripheral vision* edited by Sinclair and Cunningham in 1996. This book addresses precisely some countries which are important regional players in the broadcasting sector like India, China or Egypt. In their introduction Sinclair and Cunningham explain their approach which is mainly based on a total reject of the cultural imperialism theory that they consider ideological and too much generalizing or totalizing. They are surprised that Schiller has not rejected his own theory over the years¹⁰ Sinclair and Cunningham defend their approach that they called a “middle-range” approach which focuses on the regional space of broadcasting rather than the international or world space, like Schiller among other scholars. The former consider that the regions handled in the books of the latter are not peripheral as the imperialism theory used to qualify them. Their opposition to the dichotomous view of Schiller has undoubtedly some relevance, and the fact that they consider large broadcasting operators across the globe is also very enlightening. However, if we consider the structuring of the media markets described in their book we may

8 It is important to mention that books have been written on Arab media, and especially the press, since the 1960.

9 See SUI-NAM Lee, P. (1995), “A case against the thesis of communication imperialism: The audience’s response to foreign TV in Hong Kong,” *Australian Journal of Communication*, 22, pp.63–81.

10 SCHILLER, H. (1991), “Not yet the post-imperialist era,” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 8, pp.13–28.

say that they are not far from the Schiller theory they are criticizing so neatly in the sense that they are describing domination relationships of a country over several others. Eventually, their approach is just a change of geographical scale.

The balance of power that defenders of the cultural imperialism paradigm observed in the international arena is also taking place within regions or at the regional level. The balance of power that the supporters of the imperialist view were observing in the international arena is also valid at some regional levels (the Indian sub-continent, the Arab region, Latin America...). Within the regions some very dynamic centers emerge, develop broadcasting activities and exchanges at an intermediary level between the international and the national level. For instance, Egypt which has never imported programs from Arab countries exported massively its own productions to the whole Arab world before the early nineties. Doing so, this country was spreading — if not imposing — its language (the Egyptian dialect or “*‘āmmiyya*”), its norms and values to the other Arab countries. This does not mean that the Egyptian culture was threatening the other cultures in the various Arab countries, but in the broadcasting field its resonance and influence must not be underestimated. Moreover, the paradigm of Sinclair and Cunningham does not invalidate the theory of a domination and influence of the Western and above all the American culture over the Arab world. In the Arab region these Western programs are passed on by the major transnational Saudi networks like ART and Orbit which have established partnerships with multinational companies like Viacom Inc. which distribute channels like Disney Channel, ABC, Fox News or Showtime, not to mention the US serials among other types of programs regularly broadcast on the Hertzian networks of Arab countries. I defend the idea that there are several possible scales of analysis but one must be consistent: even if some dynamics are observable at several levels, some facts we can observe at the regional level are not valid or relevant at the international or the national levels. In fact the more we narrow the focus, the more complex are the phenomena observed.

3. A Methodological Approach Required by Recent Evolutions

So it was relevant to narrow the analysis to the regions above all after the 90s with the overwhelming proliferation of satellite channels across the globe. The Mexican *telenovelas* of the *TV globo* company or the “Bollywood” media cultures (or *mediascapes*) have become commonplace. Studies on Arab transnational media, specific journals or courses dealing with Arab media, have been set up in a very recent period in major universities of Arab countries, in the US, the United Kingdom or elsewhere. Information and scientific productions we can get about Arab media are often related to the regional level or focusing on some particular transnational channels. The example of the figures we can most easily get is instructive with this respect. *Less figures on countries viewership, more figures on channels viewership*

Concerning the flow of information or in other words the movements of broadcasting programs from one country to another, it is difficult to have an idea of the density and the direction of the messages all the more so as satellite broadcasting has spread considerably. Before the satellite era, exports of television programs from one broadcasting authority to another were tangible and the main difficulty for the researcher was to get data from national organisms of television. Incidentally, the data displayed by official authorities were biased, say to the advantage of the public broadcasting policy. The movements of the major part of the programs are less easily measurable nowadays as they are transmitted *via* satellite (Direct to Home or DTH satellite). Therefore quantitative data on exchanges between states are not enough. However new data are available today, they relate to the viewership *per* channel within each Arab country. Indeed, polling institutes have expanded in Arab countries to estimate the popularity of the different channels. The various actors have therefore the ability to identify the most successful channels to use them as support for advertising. Often, the polling organizations are joint ventures between Arab and Western companies as the latter have the required *savoir-faire*. *Sigma* was created in 1998 in Tunisia as a private company and has offices in Algeria, Morocco and Libya. The *PARC* or the Pan Arab Research Center based in the United Arab Emirates covers Middle Eastern Arab countries. *Marocmétrie* was created in Morocco in 2002. Before the advent of these companies, it was difficult to get accurate estimation of viewership *per* channel and it was also tricky to know who was watching what and when. We did not have figures because it implied huge and costly poll surveys, now we *do* have figures thanks to the advertizing industries and the growing interest in TV channels as the main medium for advertisements. We are now able to get some quantitative data, by accident, in the sense that surveys are made for and sponsored by advertisers and sometimes for State institutions.

So, we should make do with these data, try to complement them and compare them with other data. This question of the nature of the data is much related to the point I mentioned previously on the approach/topic relationship and how the social context shapes the researcher's perception. By the tools we are able to use, we also reveal the priority of the moment. Data coming from transnational companies shows the highly commercial dimension of the Arab Broadcasting system. This is crucial point of our analysis. This economic dimension of the Arab media landscape, and the expansion of the regional advertizing market has several implications and consequences, all the more so as one of our main theses is the *systemic* dimension of the Arab broadcasting arena. This means that all Arab television are interrelated as they are all aiming at the same audience, sharing the same language.¹¹

11 GUAAYBESS T., Le système télévisuel arabe, PhD dissertation, Lyon 2 university, 2000.

4. The Analysis at the National Level: A Methodological Choice

We have chosen to analyze media in their national context. Obviously the national level is in a dialectical relationship with the other levels, regional and international. What does the national level reveal or show? What are its characteristics and its interest? So what does the national level reveal or show? What are its characteristics and its interests? The national scale observation allows to reach a better understanding of the economic, political and cultural issues of the transnational broadcasting as this field of research is physically limited or constrained. Importantly, by recurring to a comparative analysis (and comparative political science) we can draw general trends and laws from comparing the broadcasting structures of several Arab countries.

4-1. Culture, Actors and National Media

At the national level, it is feasible to grasp the national culture broadcasted by the different TV channels. Of course this culture is not homogeneous but rather the product of a specific and dynamic history and a multiplicity of identities defined by the belonging of citizens to different social groups. This culture, or rather these national cultures, are the product of blending and re-appropriation of exogenous cultures — these phenomena are referred to as “creolization,” or “mediascapes,” some use the neologism of “glocalization.” The national culture is also made of various norms and values sometimes contradictory, which can filter through the various broadcasting productions. Considering the national scale permits to point out some identity specificities of States, and to understand better their translation into the broadcasting sector. For example, the State is the guardian of Islam in Morocco and in Saudi Arabia. This explains the broadcasting policy of these States and their will to set up religious transnational channels. In Egypt the official Al-Azhar institution coexists with the Muslim Brotherhood which is rooted in the Egyptian society since the 1920s, and participates in social life (and political life through congressmen). The message of the Muslim Brotherhood is relayed by famous personalities such as Sheikh Al-Qardawi on transnational channels — just like televangelists in the US. Before him, there was Sheikh Muhammad Mutawali al-Sha‘rawi, an Azhari who has a more rigorous understanding of the Islamic precepts than Al-Qardawi, and who was one of the first if not the first Muslim television preacher.

To analyze the level in which actors are rooted allows us to understand and to make sense of the path of actors considered as transnational. Let us take some examples. Rafik Hariri: the former Lebanese Prime Minister was a media mogul. Beside his political responsibilities, he set up one of the most successful transnational channels of the Arab world, *Future TV* which is considered as the Sunni channel because of the Sunni identity of its owner. Youssef Al-Qardawi : the ability of Sheikh Al-Qardawi to catch the attention of millions of viewers all over the Arab countries during his program on Al-Jazeera (*Al-shari‘a wa-l hayat*,

or the Shari‘a and life) or on the Qatar TV is of course due to his communication skills but it is also due to the fact that Al-Qardawi is an Egyptian even if he is now living in Qatar: he uses a language understandable by all Arab viewers. Besides, he has been a brilliant scholar at Al-Azhar university which is a great backing, and his affiliation to the Muslim Brotherhood movement lead him to jail several times. Two other figures: businessman Sheikh Saleh is one of the main operators in the Arab Broadcasting arena, and Sheikh Walid Al-Ibrahim is a Saudi media tycoon. Their financial power and their will to establish transnational networks are linked to their belonging to the Saudi royal family. If they created commercial channels broadcasting from abroad, it is clearly to avoid hurting the conservative national norms, while at the same time enjoying the benefits of economic liberalism. Al-Ibrahim’s transnational information channel, Al-Arabiyya is not considered as an “anti-American” channel, and this can also be explained by its national identity. The last example here is the Emir of Qatar: Hugh Miles in the book I edited wrote an insightful paper in which, through the personal biography of the Emir of Qatar, he gives the reasons which lead to the setting up of “the Emir’s channel,” Al-Jazeera. The major players of the Arab media arena — their path, their ambitions — are understandable at a country’s scale. The researcher can, by studying their social environment understand them, and gather first-hand information. And knowing and understanding these players, allows to make sense out of their incentives — be they commercial, religious or political — on the national and extra-national levels.

4-2. States and National Broadcasting Sectors

The national territory is linked to a State, that is to say a government in power, an official authority. The State structures the society and it is sovereign within a territory clearly limited by terrestrial borders. This classical definition of a “State” linking the governing power to a territory is crucial when it comes to media and especially *trans-border media* (satellite channels, Internet) which challenge the sovereignty of the State over its territory. States, elites in power, take part in a national destiny and political traditions. They create fluctuating ideologies like Nasserism, Arab nationalism, Baathism, before finally abiding, for the vast majority of them, by the precepts of the IMF and the World Bank. Today, the dominant value could be labeled a “*stated democratism*.” This ideological vacuum would, according to some, be the reason behind the resurgence of religion on the political scene.

Arab Broadcasting has been set up after the independencies in the newly-formed Nation-States. Radio and Television have been created as true emanations of the States, within devoted public institutions as natural referring framework. The first broadcasting used the terrestrial frequencies technologies, that is to say that States used to control all the broadcasting programs beamed within their territory. Until today, most of the Arab countries are represented by national broadcasting authorities even if private channels have been

established in the past years. These broadcasting bodies have evolved over the years and have been affected by a series of legal changes. The national legal system is an instrument allowing to measure the degree of political autonomy that the broadcasting sector enjoys vis-à-vis the government administration. Indeed, the legal framework is a highly national matter and it is a tool that States have used to keep the control on broadcasting. It is interesting however to note that *media free zones* dedicated to the broadcasting sector, established since the 2000s in several Arab countries, are means used by the authorities to bypass their own laws, enforceable within the national territory.

4-3. National Broadcasting Authorities as the Ideal Prism to Observe the Restructuring of Arab Broadcasting

Television authorities and government policies in the field of broadcasting are the prisms that I have chosen to observe and analyze broadcasting in the Arab countries: radio and television (terrestrial or *via* satellite). They are the ideal prism to analyze the relation between liberalization and national broadcasting in the satellite era.

The national broadcasting sectors are now being privatized. Is it just an economic liberalization? Is it hazardous to speak about a political opening of broadcasting? By a close scrutiny of this sector in one country, then another, and then by comparing the results obtained, we will be able to answer the question.

National broadcasting authorities have evolved in the Arab countries, but it is important to note that since the beginning of the 2000s, many have undergone deep reforms. This is precisely the nodal aspect of our research work when it comes to studying the national cases that we will compare.

5. Arab Broadcasting and Government Policies

Satellite channels, hence transborder, have of course an impact on the national broadcasting sectors precisely because they challenges the sovereignty of States over national broadcasting (of programs ad norms). But States deployed what I have called in a previous work *defensive* and *offensive* (or pro-active) reactions to prevent a complete liberalization of broadcasting.¹² Given the latest developments in the Arab media landscape, here is a summary of the trends we can identify.

1. The **first defensive reaction** of Arab States from the very beginning of the multiplication of satellite antennas has been, with a few exceptions (for example Lebanon) to ban the ownership of satellite antennas. If some of them withdrew the

¹² GUAAYBESS T., « Une analyse de contenu: de l'Etat-émetteur à l'émetteur Etat dans le champ télévisuel égyptien », in *Mondialisation et nouveaux médias dans l'espace arabe*, Paris/Lyon, Maisonneuve et Larose et Maison de l'Orient Méditerranéen, 2003.

ban after a short period, many of them maintained the prohibition, like Saudi Arabia. Those who withdrew the prohibition, like Morocco, Tunisia or Egypt, conditioned the ownership of the dish to a prohibitive tax or to an administrative authorization. Other countries kept perfectly silent about the issue. Of course, hard prohibition were not very rational, and were inefficient: illogical at a time of proliferation of transnational channels, some of them having been launched by the same States forbidding the access to satellite dishes, and inefficient because it was a great opportunity for an informal market of satellite antennas to flourish in the countries where the ban was in place.

2. The **second defensive reaction** of the States in order to keep their ascendancy over the national broadcasting sector, one of the most common reactions in authoritative countries, was the use of censorship. But what was an easy-to-do thing and an obvious way of functioning before the satellite era was then trickier to do. I interviewed Egyptian political leaders from the opposition parties for instance; they clearly told me that firstly, their apparition on Egyptian TV was rare, secondly that sometimes a scheduled program was cancelled at the very last moment, and finally that they were simply cut out while editing a recorded program. Nevertheless, they have, since the advent of Direct Broadcasting Satellite channels, the opportunity to be interviewed by journalists of transnational channels in Cairo and beamed all over the Arab region (at least). But, I have to add that rulers are able to make this outcome fail by intervening directly and making the channel change its schedule.

At all events, one of the main ways to prevent this from occurring and one of the most efficient ways of censorship used by the Arab State is to **establish agreements with other Arab countries**, a sort of rules of good behavior, what governments are used to qualifying as “code of ethics.” The implicit, hence the real rule is: “You don’t let your media criticize my regime, and I don’t let my media criticize yours.” This rule has always been respected and it is prevailing to date. This example shows that national broadcasting issues result sometimes from regional and inter-Arab decisions, the actions taking place in this field made the levels overlap. There is one exception which is Al-Jazeera who does not hesitate to cross the line even if the so-called rebellious channel is very cautious when it comes to the Qatari regime — which it has never criticized. This “multilateral neutralization of dissident discourse” in the media is regularly recalled under the auspice of the Arab League. The last inter-Arab agreement to date was in February 2008. The Ministers of Information of the Arab League states issued a charter on satellite television issues during a special Meeting organized by Egypt and Saudi Arabia — “Principles for Organizing Satellite

TV in the Arab World” Charter¹³: *“Stations are required not to offend the leaders or national and religious symbols in the Arab world...not to damage social harmony, national unity, public order or traditional values...to conform with the religious and ethical values of Arab society and take account of its family structure...refrain from broadcasting anything which calls into question God, the monotheistic religions, the prophets, sects or symbols of the various religious communities...and protect Arab identity from the harmful effects of globalization.”* Lebanon rejected this charter and Qatar did not vote.

3. An **offensive (pro-active) measure**: reforms. Prohibition and censorship are far from being the only tools used by rulers to keep their grip on the broadcasting sector. The former were defensive reactions. Arab governments are sometime pro-active. Thus, the second way to control satellite television and broadcasting in general is to launch reforms in this sector. This solution seems to be paradoxical at first sight. It is precisely why it is more efficient than prohibition and censorship which give a less positive image than the catchy idea of reforms. It is within this framework that we can describe and analyze the reforms of broadcasting authorities.

I use the term of “reforms” because recent laws actually lead to profound changes of national broadcasting. Of course, these laws are qualified as “reforms” by the rulers who pride themselves on them. Interestingly, these structural and say political reforms all took place in the beginning of the 2000s in many Arab countries.¹⁴ Here are the main trends of the reforms I have observed and I tried to classify, I stress that it is a work in progress, which will be completed and detailed during the research program.

- The first trend of the reforms is the complete reorganization of the national broadcasting authorities. The two main actions implemented are on the one hand the decentralization of the broadcasting activities into several institutions — dealing with radio, television, technical services, production, etc., and on the other hand the changing of the legal status of organisms of broadcasting. From state institutions, these have become public companies open to private participation. This change of status is a way for the government to attract investments in this sector which is becoming sophisticated and costlier over the years. *All* the Arab national broadcasting authorities did not undertake this policy of decentralisation and opening up to catch investors but this evolution is observed within too many countries to be eluded: Morocco, Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, and others.

¹³ See (www.article19.org).

¹⁴ GUAAYBESS T., « La réforme des télévisions arabes, où en est-on? Réflexions à partir du cas marocain », *Horizons Maghrébins*, Toulouse, September 2010.

- The other striking trend of changes affects most of the Arab countries. It is the possibility given to private players to own a private media, TV channels or radio. Again, this started at the very beginning of the 2000s. Countries in this case include Syria, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Jordan, UAE, Libya, and so on. The legal framework which regulated broadcasting has been changed by the rulers to permit the entry of private actors in the national broadcasting scene.

6. This Apparent Opening Up Hides the Constant Will of the State to Control the Broadcasting Sector. How does it Keep its Control?

First, a licence has to be obtained before one can launch their private broadcasting media. Commissions have been created to deliver these authorisations. A rapid analysis of the composition of these bodies or commissions (with different appellations across countries) reveals that at least their president and one third of the members are appointed by the head of the State, the other members being close to it. Obviously, its decisions would not go against the wishes of the ruling power. As a consequence, the radio and television channels which got the licence in Egypt, Syria, Morocco or Tunisia are not political; rather they are entertainment channels; the owners of the media are invariably close to the power (if not members of the family of the President if we take the Libyan case). The private media cannot be owned by political opponents of course. Generally the owner would be a very wealthy businessman. The example of *Nessma TV* in Tunisia — which is an authoritative regime — is emblematic to a great extent. It is very convenient for the regime because it is an opportunity for the country to display a sophisticated and modern channel “for free.” It also displays an apparent freedom granted by the regime. The owners of private channels must abide by certain. In Egypt, Jordan and the UAE; they have to locate in the Free Zones. In Egypt, they also have to beam through the NileSat satellites. The setting up of Media Free Zones by Arab countries is closely related to the reforms. These make up the third trend of the reforms. Through these legal and fiscal incentives, governments try to make their broadcasting sector a regional leader. Many countries indeed try to take the leadership at a regional level. Doing so, they shift their policies closer to the market economy principles, implying more efficiency, more liberalism, up-to-date technology. Eventually, the goal is to try and attract foreign investments while giving the image of a modern economic and political system, able to adapt rapidly to an evolving international system. The broadcasting sector needs huge investments. Operators, private or public, compete to catch the largest investors. This entails a competition among national legal and regulatory frameworks. Egypt and the United Arab Emirates (Dubai), among others, built respectively Cairo Media City and Dubai Media City. Those Media Cities (neighboring Information Cities devoted to Internet activities and that are run in the same way) are zones equipped by up-to-date facilities. They are tax-free zones, and fully-foreign-

owned companies dealing with various media activities are free to set up there. Other free zones are proliferating in Arab countries like Jordan or Lebanon. *MBC*, *Showtime Arabia* moved from London to Dubai respectively in 2001 and 2004. *ART* moved in 2002 in Amman and *Orbit* in 2005 in Bahrain. These free zones are under specific regulations, more flexible than the ones prevailing outside these zones, this element being particularly important for professionals and investors.

7. Conclusion

The historical evolution of Communication and Information Sciences favored a type of approach stressing the international aspect of communication, and a Manichean vision of the world between the poor countries on one side, and the rich countries on the other, the Arab countries being included in the first group.

This gave way to a stream of research focusing on the social role of media. In the past few years, a different, somewhat more interesting and fruitful view of Arab media has emerged, bringing together researchers from Arab countries and from “Western” countries. I stressed how important it is to make a distinction between the three possible levels of analysis (national, regional, international). Of course, other scales are possible like an infra-national scale for example. The significance of separating the three levels stems from the fact that it helps us avoid mixing up the issues, and also avoid traps like exaggerating the role of Al-Jazeera in the political destiny of Arab countries. I then focused my attention on the national scale. After pointing out its main characteristics, I gave the preliminary conclusions as a political science and media studies scholar. Now let us devote more attention to the reforms implemented, to hear what they tell us about the liberalization of broadcasting at the national level, within each country. Most of the Arab channels do not enjoy freedom of speech and media opening is a challenge for them. As shown by the Arab Spring in 2011, media are only one of many factors leading to pluralism in societies. And it is precisely for this reason that we consider the study of broadcasting more like a prism to analyze the way rulers adapt to a changing social environment, given the new technologies of communication and information. These changes cannot be ignored by European researchers willing to free themselves from an essentialist and culturalist perception of media in the Arab countries.