Manufacturing the 'News Value': How Pan-Arab Satellite TV Journalism Participated in Shaping the Palestinian Split

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Abstract

Objectives: The study aims at emphasizing the term 'news value', as one central concept in mediatised conflicts. It so aims at examining the role that pan-Arab satellite TV journalism (henceforth PASTV) might have played in shaping political processes while covering the Palestinian internal conflict (Palestinian split). The study explores the PASTV's involvement in the conflict and how that was reflected in the conflict and its political trajectories.

Methods: Considering the three major pan-Arab transnational Satellite TV (PASTV) channels; Al-Jazeera, Al-Arabiya, and Al-Mayadeen as case studies, the study draws on qualitative data generated through a non-probability, reputational snowball sample, of thirty semi-structured interviews with key Palestinian 'insiders' in the two sectors of news media and politics, for their insight on the issue of research and its interlaced dimensions.

Results: Data analysis shows with evidence, how, in their sought to meet the interests of their financers of political powers, PASTV channels framed the news –in varied levels between them- to create/maximize the news value and attract public attention. PASTV aimed at creating public consonance with a local ally, also marketing fear from the 'other'. While serving their financers, PASTV produced 'instrumental journalism', and participated in shaping Palestinian politics, and the perpetuation of conflict became a by-product.

Conclusions: Considering the interventionist role that most PASTV channels played. It is recommended that PASTV journalism can play both an objective and constructive role, and foster reconciliation policy prescriptions.

Keywords: Palestinian split, mediatisation of politics, mediatised conflict, pan-Arab satellite TV journalism, news value, media faming.

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تصنيع "القيمة الأخبارية": كيف ساهمت الصحافة الفضائية العربية في تشكيل الانقسام الفلسطيني

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ملخّص

الأهداف: التأكيد على مصطلح "القيمة الأخبارية" كمفهوم مركزي في النزاعات المدفوعة بالإعلام. كما تسعى الدراسة إلى استكشاف الدور الذي لعبته صحافة الفضائيات التلفزيونية العربية عبر الوطنية في تشكيل العملية السياسية في أثناء تغطيتها لأحداث الصراع الفلسطيني الداخلي (الانقسام الفلسطيني). تستكشف الدراسة تدخلات الفضائيات في الصراع وكيف انعكس ذلك على الصراع ومساراته السياسية.

المنهجية: اعتمدت الدراسة منهج دراسة الحالة وتناولت ثلاثةً من أكبر الفضائيات العربية عبر الوطنية، وهي؛ الجزيرة، والعربية، والميادين. اعتمدت الدراسة على بيانات نوعية جرى تجميعها من خلال عينة كرة الثلج غير الإحتمالية المبنية في اختيار عناصرها على التوصية. تكونت العينة من ثلاثين مقابلة شبه منظمة، أجريت مع نخبة من "المطلعين" الرئيسيين في قطاعي الإعلام والسياسة الفلسطينيين، من أصحاب الرؤية الثاقبة والخبرة الطويلة في مسألة البحث وأبعادها المتداخلة.

النتائج: يُوضح تحليل البيانات بالأدلة الكيفية، أن الفضائيات قامت بتأطير الأخبار -على مستويات مختلفة فيما بينها- لخلق وتعزيز القيمة الأخبارية في صحافتها، وجذب انتباه الجمهور. يأتي ذلك ضمن سعيها لتلبية مصالح ممولها من القوى السياسية الإقليمية في الصراع الفلسطيني خصوصًا، والمنطقة عمومًا، والمتمثلة في خلق حالة من الانسجام الشعبي العام مع الحليف الفلسطيني لممول كل منها، وكذلك تسويق الخوف من "خصمه". وفي أثناء ذلك، أنتجت الفضائيات ضربًا من 'الصحافة الناشطة'، شاركت من خلالها في تشكيل المشهد السياسي الفلسطيني، بينما جاء تصعيد الصراع واستمراره نتاجًا ثانويًا.

التوصيات: بالنظر إلى الدور التدخلي الذي لعبته غالبية الفضائيات، أوصت الدراسة انه بإمكان صحافة PASTV أن تلعب دورًا موضوعيًا وبناءً، من شأنه تعزيز الوصفات الضرورية لعملية المصالحة.

الكلمات الدالة: الانقسام الفلسطيني، أعلمة السياسة، الصراع المدفوع بالإعلام، صحافة الفضائيات العربية، القيمة الإخبارية، التأطير الإعلامي.

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Introduction:

In 'mediatised conflict' research, [1] Palestine is a unique case, also key target for foreign and regional political interventions, accompanied with news media involvements. Those came in the aftermath of a series of pivotal events that took place in the ME started with the Oslo accords in 1993, followed by the Third Gulf War in Iraq in 2003. The impact of these events was reinforced during the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings and the emergence of the regional political/sectarian split in the Arab world, which fragmented the political culture in most Arab communities, and also generated an American allied pro-Saudi camp versus a pro-Islamist, predominantly Iranian camp. Within this regional competition, Qatar has also emerged as a third influential player, that "has successfully employed a combination of diplomatic hyperactivism and hedging, the American security umbrella, economic prowess and branding to position itself as an influential actor in the region and beyond" (Kamrava, 2013, p. 102). One major consequence of those circumstances, the 'Palestinian split' was embodied in a political dispute over power and ideology, which erupted in 2006 in the wake of the Palestinian legislative elections between the two main parties - Fatah and Hamas - two major and powerful actors on the Palestinian political scene. Colonialism and orientalism, as two central factors that played major roles in designing the Palestinian post-Oslo sociopolitical landscape, are also recognized as having contributed to the exacerbation of the ideological paradox between the two major Palestinian parties. Fatah is secular and to an extent backed by the pro-Saudi camp, as well as the United States, United Kingdom and European Union, based on Oslo accords and for practical purposes is tolerated by Israel. Hamas, in contrast, is an Islamic-nationalist, religious movement, with strong connections to the 'Muslim Brotherhood' network in the ME, holding a deep-rooted position against the Oslo treaties, as well as the recognition of 'Israel' –which identifies the movement as a pro-Iranian ally and by default an antagonist for the pro-Saudi camp. Fatah and Hamas are more powerful than the other twelve Palestinian political parties included under the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). [2] The increasing competition between regional powers in Palestinian and other regional conflicts involved key state apparatus, with special reliance on their sponsored/financed news media, principally PASTV channels.

In ME politics, understanding the Palestinian internal conflict is a vital sociopolitical issue that has been neglected so far in academic work about the Palestinian internal conflict and related media research. This paper focuses on answering one major question: ***How did PASTV journalism participated in shaping Palestinian domestic politics during the internal civil conflict?*** Accordingly, this article scrutinises the interrelationships between regional political powers along with their affiliated Palestinian parties, through PASTV journalism, in one of the most divided stages in Palestine's already fragmented political culture. Hence, the article provides a professional and critical analysis of how certain sociopolitical, ideological and geopolitical factors intersect and reinforce each other, whilst interplaying over media platforms during this internal conflict. So to answer the aforementioned broad question, the article examines the nature of the involvement of PASTV journalism; what *need* did the channels try to meet by affiliating with political powers? What *value* did competing political actors seek in the news coverage? And how such -value versus need- interaction influenced the PASTV journalism role in covering the conflict?

Literature review

This article explores the role that news media play in shaping the politics of ongoing conflicts, and so, contribute to the media studies in ME from a unique angle; the mediatised conflict. It further embodies the first attempt to apply the Western theory of 'mediatisation of politics' to non-Western case studies, mainly when considering several other ongoing civil conflicts flaming in the ME. Evidently, initial efforts to explore the role that news media plays in society and culture were made by Western media scholars, who have made several attempts to categorize the media systems. Early contributions

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[1] The concept of 'mediatised conflicts' was coined by Cottle (2006). It offers an empirical approach that is informed by the theory of mediatisation, and emphasizes "the complex way in which media are often implicated within conflicts while disseminating ideas and images about them" (p. 8).

[2] Together, Fatah and Hamas constitute nearly 90% of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC). Fatah (34% of the PLC according to a poll in 2006) was always more powerful than the Palestinian Authority's (PA) government, with its flagrant monopolization of the leadership, taking fateful decisions in the peace process and international fora. After the split occurred in 2007, authority in the Gaza Strip (GS) shifted to its main opponent Hamas, who won 56% of the PLC in a 2006 poll, where the party dominates the government and sovereign institutions, especially media platforms.

came in 1956 from three pioneers in the field - Siebert, Peterson and Schramm, when they developed the "Four Theories of the Press", discussing the philosophy of the press and communication and how they exert influence on social life (Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1956). Further exploration was carried out by Ostini and Fung, who published "Beyond Four Theories of the Press" (Ostini & Fung, 2002, pp. 41-56.). Beyond these works, scholars' efforts became oriented towards examining the role of media in various circumstances. Special emphasis has been given to how media exert influence on society due to a key theory about how media exerts influence on politics and its central role in conflict coverage; the theory of 'Mediatisation' describes it as a long-term process of interaction between the institutions of news media and politics, which generates significant media influence, on politics and other societal institutions, with far-reaching impact. In mediatisation, media scholars sought to explore the influence exerted by news media messages on politics and policy making, with special focus on the TV news media (Aalberg, Strömbäck, & Vreese, 2012, p. 163); See also: (Andreas & Krotz, 2014; Esser & Strömbäck, 2014; Hjarvard, 2013; Jesber Strömbäck, 2011a; Thompson, 1995; Weaver, Randal, Brownlee, Paul, & Cleveland, 2007). These influences can culminate in either a change in, or reinforcement of audience beliefs and behaviours; both aspects receive focal focus in this work.

As a media-centric theory, mediatisation deals with mass media as a primary mover in social change. McQuail emphasized this notion stating that "socio-centric theory mainly views the media as a reflection of political and economic forces" (McQuail, 2010, p. 7). For Flew, "a more media-centric approach […] can enable a better understanding of trends in contemporary politics than the traditional approaches of political studies" (Flew, 2017, p. 44). Likewise, Aalberg et al. maintain that mediatisation of politics specifically focuses on TV news media and its influential imagery spectacle (Aalberg et al., 2012, p. 163). In studying the interplay between media and democracy/politics, Hall introduced the two central concepts in Marxist theories of culture and ideology; the concept of 'hegemony', and the concept of 'relative autonomy' (Hall, 1977). He placed these concepts as two keys in studying the relationship between media and other social forces, mainly politics. Hall's central concepts are relevant in this work; with lack of democracy in Arab states hosting PASTV channels, these channels lacked sovereignty and were compliant with their financers, producing subjective journalism, as emphasized by many participants during the field work.

The literature on mediatisation discusses how, through framing of political events, news media not only narrow the choices of current events with which the audience can engage, but further suggests how they should think about them (See: Entman, 1993, p. 52; Raychuk); "*Choice* is the basic act that transforms essentially private thoughts and values into "public activity," i.e., *decisions*" (Rabushka & Shepsle, 1972, p. 24). Narrowing choices offers news media the opportunity to intervene and shape viewers' perceptions and opinion of framed issues. To frame, according to Entman, is:

"To select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (Entman, 1993, p. 52).

For Strömbäck, framing is the final stage in the process of mediatisation of politics (Jesper Strömbäck, 2008), where, according to Raychuk, "something is presented to the audience (called "the frame") influences the choices people make about how to process that information" (Raychuk). In mediatisation, this issue receives special emphasis; primarily how media exerts influence on politics and its central role in conflict coverage. The theory describes this as a process of interaction between the institutions of news media and politics, which (through the production of the 'news value') generates significant media influence, on politics and other societal institutions, with crucial ramifications. Weaver et al. argues that, "News values can be seen less as a reflection of what type of information citizens want or need, and more as a reflection of organizational, sociological and cultural norms combined with economic factors" (Weaver et al., 2007 cited in: Harcup & O'Neill, 2017, p. 1473). Convincingly, these intersections as conceptualized in Weaver's argument facilitate the reflection on the participants/informants' perceptions to find out on the one hand, whether (and if so how and why), PASTV journalism provided information that fit with the factious desire of the divided Palestinian citizens (contentious news that fed their prevailing partisan mindset), or responsibly provided news that fit to their urgent need in attenuating and mitigating the divide. While on the other hand, Weaver's argument facilitates the inspection of whether (also how and

why), PASTV journalism embodied any ideological or sociopolitical interests for any of the regional and domestic powers. Those conventions in Weaver et al. argument also fit with scholarly criticism for the PASTV journalism in the other ongoing conflicts in the ME (Lynch, 2015) See also: (Zayani, 2004). Media scholars criticized such role as being ideologically based and politically oriented, working as escalatory media that lack much of its objectivity (Bajraktari & Parajon, 2007), See also: (Barkho, 2008; Lynch, 2015; Zayani & Ayish, 2006). In the same direction, Bajraktari and Parajon argue that,

"The international [also transnational] media seems a very haphazard bellwether of conflict and an even more cursory method by which to set international [as well regional] policy agendas. Media, and the way in which it selects material to report, is simply not a reliable catalyst for policy change. [...Transnational and] international media has the potential to influence governments and international organizations, and as such can have an agenda-setting effect. These reports, however, are not always the most accurate reflection of the relative severity and risk of a particular conflict" (Bajraktari & Parajon, 2007).

A careful review for the above discussion shows high degrees of concurrence between views of media scholars about transnational news media and the informants' perception of the PASTV journalism, which endorses the conclusions reached in this regard. Weaver et al. argument about news values alongside other scholars' findings and criticism of the global and PASTV channels' role (Bajraktari & Parajon, 2007; Hall, 1977; JUNNE, 2013; Livingstone, 2003; Staab, 1990); these findings largely fit with the informants' perceptions of the PASTV role in covering the Palestinian internal conflict. Principally, field scholars meet over the importance of news value for political powers, mainly in terms of utilizing it in manipulating public perception of the conflict circumstances. According to Harcup and O'Neill,

"News values themselves are part of an ideologically constructed way of perceiving the world that favours and "naturalises" the perspectives of powerful elites. This ideological role of news selection (and treatments) [...] is one of the most important areas of journalism studies. It goes to the heart of what is included, what is excluded, and why" (Harcup & O'Neill, 2017, p. 1471).

For Hartley, the relationship between journalists and their audiences makes the media sphere, which associates the public sphere and its much larger cultural sphere (Hartley, 1996, p. 78). This article discusses the framing of news as a process to which PASTV journalists referred to produce the '*news value*' in service of their financers' interests, primarily by shaping reality in a way that associates media sphere and its much wider public sphere, in serves of financers' interests.

Method

A 'case study' is an adequate approach for examining complex conflicts, particularly those within intricate contexts like Palestine, where boundaries between the phenomenon and its regional context are not clearly evident (Yin, 1994, p. p. 13). Three powerful Pan-Arab channels: Aljazeera, Alarabiya and Almayadeen, were selected as case studies among many other pan-Arab channels; each channel is unique in its audience, belonging and ideological background. According to Eisendhardt, "cases may be selected to fill theoretical categories and provide examples of polar types" (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 532). Units of analysis are hot stories and political events as covered by these channels during the ongoing conflict time span, primarily the period between 2007 and 2019. In order to produce a clear view about the nature of PASTV involvement in Palestinian domestic politics, I referred to examine PASTV channels' coverage from a local media professional and stakeholder/insider participant (i.e., informant's) perspective. Rather than investigating news content per se (as media researchers used to do), the analytical focus in this paper emphasizes the importance of identifying and investigating key characteristics in the process of news' production and the intentional treatment of news and how that can play a key role in the political trajectories of the conflict. More precisely, investigating the process of 'news treatment' is vital to understand the function of 'news value' as an input or determinant in the process of news production, and so, the news content of selected stories is eventually judged from an informants' perspective. Primary data was gathered between August and December 2019, through thirty open-ended, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews, with this significant segment of the Palestinian community; the informants are high profile stakeholders and key players in Palestinian politics and the media industry. Further significance of the informants' judgments stems from being operating within the same sociopolitical context of the internal protracted conflict, where the interplay between PASTV journalism and regional-domestic politics

took place. Most significantly, they act as the pulse of Palestinian politics; they are substantially involved in its political reality and pertinent political communication processes – thus they are *manufacturers of public opinion* since their judgments are widely adopted by the public. As such, they are hosted by both PASTV channels and local media networks, influencing both the policies of rival parties and audience attitudes.

Figure 1: The Informants: Key segments in the Palestinian media and political sectors included in the study sample framework

In recruiting the participants, a convenient and accessible 'reputational snowball' (chain-referral) sample was employed, which included participants with varied, but also relevant backgrounds and expertise. One key segment includes prominent Palestinian figures from the two rival parties alongside other influential parties. Another segment included columnists, intellectuals and political writers. Importantly, interviews also targeted prominent media researchers, news producers and analysts, newscasters, academic scholars in the two fields of politics and media. Particular interest was given to interviews with correspondents for key PASTV as well as other regional and international news agencies, in addition to media observers and journalists from civil society research centres. Further interviews targeted, as much as it was possible, the PASTV channels' editorial and managerial staff, as well as their field correspondents in Palestine. The judgments of news broadcasts as expressed by these prominent informants, who are referred to by both regional and local media outlets, are relevant to this study. Informants' testimonies were anonymously encoded in letters and numbers (INFO-01 to INFO-33). Those codes were necessary to confidentially quote informants' testimonies, and three interviews were discarded for quality considerations. Interviews mainly considered informants' perceptions, as a specific and unique analytical lens, through which, the study explored the thorny interrelationships between regional powers and Palestinian politics through PASTV journalism.

The informants' testimonies were analysed through the qualitative data analysis software 'NVIVO'. The data related to the main four topics the article aimed to explore were coded as core themes. This offered overarching categories of common attributes across multiple participants. This facilitated the identification of key patterns across the participants' testimonies to support the argument on how the split news was framed to fit designated political interests. These patterns (as key findings), were highlighted in the discussion as the goals that each player tried to achieve during the interplay between the media logic and political logic. At this point, looking on that interaction through the lens of mediatisation (mediation, framing and exerting influence) made it feasible to figure out how that interaction was reflected on the channels' role.

The Interviews' Guide:

The interviews focused on the four main topics that this work aimed to explore, which are also the gist of the research questions. 1) Exploring the interplay between local and regional politics via PASTV new media (between the political logic and media logic), i.e., exploring the nature of the involvement of PASTV journalism in the split's politics; 2) the catalyst (*need*) behind the channels affiliation with political powers; 3) the returns (*value*) that competing political actors seek in the channels' coverage; and, ultimately 4) how this -value versus need- interaction worked and influenced the role of PASTV journalism in covering the conflict. Each of these topics was covered by laying four open-ended questions directed to the interviews in the five aforesaid segments (see figure 1). Together, they make twelve sup-questions that were integrated together in a semi-structured questionnaire. In certain cases, these sub-questions were slightly tweaked to meet the nuances in the characteristics of the five segments interviewed in the study.

Discussion of Findings

Van Dijk argues that media reporting is not simply to maintain a neutral and impartial role when covering events in political conflicts (Dijk, 1943). McNair also maintains that evidence from many analyses of the media role within communication studies literature shows that, "Their accounts of political events are laden with value judgments, subjectivities and biases" (McNair, 2011, p. 11). Shoemaker and Reese also share the same vision stating that, "Generally we find that reality is much too complex to be described objectively by any one source" (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, p. 5). Media involvement therefore has its political significance, and plays a decisive role in conflict coverage (Ortiz, 1995). Field studies identify the possibilities for news media to cover '*political reality*' in one of three ways: *objectively; subjectively;* and *constructed* political reality (Kaid & Johnston, 1991 cited in: McNair, 2011. p 11). The latter type of political reality is the most crucial. This is because it primarily refers to the cases when political events are framed by the editorial to fit certain political desires. As asserted by most informants, the third category was evident in PASTV coverage of the Palestinian split. The majority of informants' **testimonies** confirmed the *instrumental* role played by PASTV journalism in shaping Palestinian public opinion and manufacturing consent on certain issues through framing propaganda news. Their point of view is that PASTV journalists relied on treating and framing of news to create and affirm public consent towards the policy of their local ally, which would service the agenda of their financers. A key news analyst provided some vital examples on how the channels' coverage of split events was interfering in party politics:

"In their attempts to mobilize and polarize public opinion, Alarabiya and Aljazeera selectively and in a timely manner went into detail on issues that have social and economic consequences. For example, they stressed issues like: the suspended salaries of PA [Palestinian Authority] employees working in Gaza; the implications for the PA in blocking [Egyptian and Israeli] crossings to Gaza as a Hamas controlled area; the mounting health crisis in Gaza; the 'covert cooperation' of PA security with Israeli forces; and so on. These controversial issues were always raised [interchangeably] by the channels, within their news and talk-shows, to exert pressure on one party against the other during the dynamic times of the split" (INFO-04: Media Analyst at Key Policy Research Center).

A PLO officer and former MP criticized PASTV coverage as intervening through mobilizing support for one party against the other and propagandizing their narratives:

"It was central to the extent that in their presentation of the split you could rarely see neutral or independent coverage. Overtly they were working as advocates for the two parties; Aljazeera was seen as the Hamas mouthpiece, while Alarabiya was the Fatah mouthpiece" (INFO-33: PLO Executive Committee Member and Former MP).

From an early era field scholars warned that, in terms of political participation, members of the public are most likely to act upon the image that the media has portrayed in their minds (Lippmann, 1922). A close empirical look at media performance, shows how "the "pictures" we get from the media differ from the world outside" (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, p. 34). This section focuses on understanding how the 'news value versus finance need' intersection occurred. It discusses how, during the interaction between politics and news media, the aims of media organizations and political powers intersected through news production and produced instrumental journalism. In order to fit both the political interests of the regional powers and the needs of PASTV channels, the developments in the Palestinian split and the narratives of the two

parties were deliberately presented (within PASTV journalism) through designated frames to serve certain aims/agendas. Accordingly, the analysis discusses issues pertinent to the news' treatment, primarily the process of news' selection and preferred framing (Esser, 2009; O'Neill & Harcup, 2001; Jesper Strömbäck & Nord, 2006). Data analysis signifies two main approaches that PASTV journalism utilized in framing the split events to create the news value and influence the public opinion: The shaping of public opinion to create public consonance with the narrative of a local ally; and promoting fear of the rival party as to shake his political stand and public image.

The Shaping of Public Opinion

The influence of the regional powers targeted Palestinian public opinion and decision making in both Palestinian parties. Among other diplomatic and political means, this was also exerted covertly through PASTV journalism, which framed the news to support the narratives of the two parties. This was done by different methods and at varied levels depending on a channel's policy. For the dean of a media department at a Palestinian prominent university:

"The influence of their coverage was evident in the public reactions to their news. Palestinians are avid consumers of news; on several occasions, the proponents of the two parties acted upon what the channels released in the news. We attribute that to the channels' editorial policy, which stems from the policy of hosting states." (INFO-20: Dean at a Media Department).

A supporting point of view was stated by a renowned media analyst:

" […] through utilizing their influence on the PASTV channels, the regional powers managed to employ their news coverage not only to intervene in shaping Palestinian public opinion, but also Palestinian politics, by manufacturing narratives that could change political trajectories during the split time span." (INFO-04: Media Analyst at Key Policy Research Center).

Several informants emphasized the channels' endeavours to frame the split events in a way that reinforced the image of their ally, whilst seeking to shake the image of the rival. According to several informants, in both cases the imprint of regional powers on the channels' role was clear. Such imprint was also evident in the conclusions of Lynch's study (2015), in which he examined the involvement of key PASTV coverage in recently erupted and ongoing Arab conflicts (Lynch, 2015, p. 91). Through such involvement in shaping the narratives of the two parties, PASTV channels were intervening in parties' decision-making processes. This issue was confirmed by several Palestinian party members during the interviews. According to an MP and PLO official who had joined the negotiations between the two rival parties:

"If we referred to the political developments at that time, and the way they covered and reported the meetings, it becomes clear how they were intervening in the negotiations in tandem with the position of their states during that time. As a matter of fact, in certain circumstances, the news from these channels was taken as a source of information by leadership in both parties; many times decisions were built on what these channels reported" (INFO-27: Former MP and Fatah Leader).

Primary data show how PASTV journalism offered a passage for two-way message transmission between regional and local politics. In several occasions, informants discussed how each regional camp attempted through PASTV journalism to drive the trajectory of negotiations according to his interests. A senior media analyst at key Palestinian policy research centre highlighted vital methods that were used in PASTV journalism to manipulate public opinion:

"Their news concentrated on points of conflict instead of commonalities. This was clear in 'the way' they were hosting representatives from both parties; their ignorance of two youth initiatives in 2011 and 2012 to bring an end to the split, while concentrating on priming controversial stories; the absence of the voice of civil society against the voice of extremes in two parties. All this have contributed to the perpetuation of the split and public frustration" (INFO-04: Media Analyst at Key Policy Research Center).

The 'narrowing' or focusing of public attention towards stories of violence in media coverage is a vital issue that mediatisation researchers stress is at the core of framing (Entman, 1993, p. 53) See also: (Raychuk, 2011; Deitram A. Scheufele, 1999; Dietram A. Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007; Vladisavljević, 2015). This issue was also a key finding in INFOCORE study of six conflicts similar to the Palestinian conflict, which found that: "Much media attention is narrowly

focused around salient events, oriented toward reporting violence rather than peace related news, and wanes as violence drags on" (Baden & Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2018, p. 11) See also: (Aalberg et al., 2012). The informants also emphasized on several occasions during the interviews, that in order to influence public opinion, the channels, in general, concentrated on reporting events of field clashes and political disputes, rather than moments of pacification. The voice of Palestinian moderate movements, civil society organizations and youth initiatives, were not used as sound bites in the news – unlike the clashes.

Filtering the news while covering the split events not only signified the channels' intentions to hide the voices of dissent, but also to ignore the voices of moderate civil movements which sought an end to the divide. This is what media scholars call the '*mediated reality*', or the reality '*constructed*' as media organisations (and associated power holders) wanted it (Cottle, 2006, p. 230) See also: (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Jesper Strömbäck, 2008). The channels' policies in covering the split events were inconsistent, and selectively concentrated on shaping public opinion towards issues that supported the ideological perspectives of their regional financers. The editorials at PASTV channels, even those few who kept the same distance from the two parties, used to filter out the news about the conflict, leaving the "*cleansed residue*"; news that fitted with the interests of power dominators (Herman & Chomsky, 1988, p. 43), with a small margin of neutrality to claim objectivity.

Filtering the news was a major common aspect of PASTV journalism, which deliberately contributed to shaping the images of the two parties and the perceptions of their public. This was a vital issue that deeply affected public opinion. The targeting of the two parties' images was crucial, as the public predominantly develop their perceptions and judgments based on what they see and hear in the news; "By and large, […] we think what we read (or hear on the radio or see on TV)" (JUNNE, 2013) See also: (Hamelink, 2011). As noted by a dean at a media department:

"It was a routine action in their coverage to hide certain information and emphasize other information and also to augment the importance of certain information and reduce the importance of other information" (INFO-20: Dean at a Media Department).

For a prominent media analysist,

"An apparent change in their policy was always seen during the reconciliation negotiations. The channels' coverage, tone and content changed outwardly based on who was the 'sponsor' of the reconciliation round. To give examples - when Doha hosted the reconciliation negotiations in 2012, Aljazeera promoted the vitality of the reconciliation and used a positive attenuating tone. However, at that time, channels sponsored by the Saudi camp relied on sceptical and vague narratives. Per contra, the same supportive role was adopted by Alarabiya during the Saudi sponsored 'Mecca round' (2007) and also by the Egyptian STVs during the Cairo rounds [in 2012]. Each channel promoted the reconciliation based on the interests of its sponsor" (INFO-04: Media Analyst at Key Policy Research Center).

Two contradictory images of the Palestinian parties were skilfully constructed and repeatedly publicized. The images were disseminated through varied programs and news content of PASTV channels, from talk-shows to pundits and call-ins, alongside their extended internet and social media outlets. Over time, these terms and expressions became convictions within the divided political culture. They also gained widespread use amongst Palestinians both at the official and public levels - even amongst journalists and political actors themselves. The huge capacity and skilful teams -chiefly in key channels selected in this study- enabled them to exert powerful influence on the perception of their viewers, in varied levels between channels. As described by many informants, including key columnist and news analyst:

"You are talking about skilful teams equipped with modern technologies …. On a certain occasion, X of our colleagues at Aljazeera [he whispered the name of a skilful journalist] was able in a 45 second report to instigate the public against the PA" (INFO-11: Columnist and News Analyst).

Interventions by the channels occurred on several occasions, in varied levels, also in various forms, based on the events and its relation to a channel's financer. For instance, in response to their financers' desires, the channels were instrumentally involved in circulating sensitive leaks, or controversial debates expected to spark dispute and create a state of public confusion around a certain party or political figure. Furthermore, the channels' coverage used to fluctuate according to their

states or financers' interests in Palestinian politics, explains a correspondent for a prominent international news agency:

"Take for example the Egyptian PASTVs, when Egypt sponsored the reconciliation round of 2012, the Egyptian PASTVs praised the negotiations and covered the processes with optimistic affairs and balanced discourse. Once Egypt abandoned the sponsorship relating to the shift in Egyptian's political position after General Sisi ascended to power, the Egyptian channels attacked Hamas policy. The same role applies to other networks [despite in varied levels between channels] based on the split's and regional developments, a party's news was stressed or understated, prioritized or marginalized, given space or side-lined within PASTV journalism based on the channel's orientation." (INFO-22: Correspondent for an International News Agency).

The majority of informants emphasized the crucial influence of such PASTV coverage on the Palestinian political culture. PASTV journalism acted contrast to the Social Responsibility theory (Ostini & Fung, 2002), where media is expected to emphasize the priority of responsibility to society over journalism freedom or any other interest. Data show how framing and news treatment, to influence public opinion, were directed by the geopolitical interests of PASTV financers. Several informants discussed how during three Israeli military operations against Hamas in Gaza Strip (GS), regional agendas were apparent in channel coverage. Many informants highlighted how both of Almayadeen and Aljazeera channels covered the war by expressing high degrees of sympathy with Hamas (being under heavy shelling); Aljazeera further exposed the silence of the pro-Saudi camp on Israeli violations of international law and mass civilian casualties and infrastructural damage. On the other side, Alarabiya and affiliated channels presented a contrasting image; they intentionally emphasized that the mass losses and destruction in cities under Hamas rule was the result of the movement's impulsive and irresponsible policy towards its people. A PLO Central Committee member criticized PASTV channels interventional role:

"The [channels'] agenda was always fluctuating based on the political developments and changing interests of the regional powers. Their influence was covert and tentative, but definitely had deeply affected the policies of the two parties" (INFO-33: PLO Executive Committee Member and Former MP).

Also a staff member at a key PASTV station confirms that,

"Certain channels, which I cannot name here, managed to deceive their audience through a set of intersecting techniques, like raising spectacular slogans and using narrative that tickled consumers' feelings" (INFO-08: Bureau Chief for Key RSTV Channel).

Shaping Palestinian public opinion was a key target that regional powers pursued through their PASTV channels. Except for Almayadeen and Al-Manar channels that, in line with its financer's policy in this conflict (contrary to its position in other conflicts in ME), took fair distance from the two Palestinian rivals, and instead concentrated on Israeli front. Other PASTV channels aimed to create a state of public consonance that supported their affiliated party and spontaneously shook the position of their rival. Within the entrenched mind-set of the Palestinian public, the influence of PASTV journalism exacerbated the factious attitudes between the two sides and expanded the gap between them. With such type of inclined coverage, PASTV was presenting a constructed political reality, which was focusing the attention of the Palestinian public on violent news rather than aspects of pacification and mitigation. This was a key issue that mediatisation scholars highlighted as at the core of the framing of news. Within such '*escalatory*' journalism, the voice of moderate movements and civil society initiatives were marginalized, or even neglected to leave space to focus on clashes that could produce *value* within the news; attracting public attention, then exerting political influence.

The Marketing of Fear – Demonizing the 'Other'

In the aftermath of the Palestinian internal conflict, the majority of Palestinians divided behind two parties; each side desired the narrative that promoted their party on a certain PASTV channel, and criticisms of their party by any side meant direct incitement or even aggression. Accordingly, in sourcing news about the political milieu, most Palestinians relied on the PASTV channels affiliated with their party, as their discourse fit in with their partisan tendencies, the issue that reinforced their factious attitudes. The following discussion of informants' views shows how PASTV journalism not only participated in shaping public opinion, but also framed the split's events in a way that marketed fear from the 'other' party

among the divided Palestinian public. Lynch confirms this issue in PASTV journalism stating that, "both mass media and social media magnified the fear and uncertainty that inevitably accompany transitions" (Lynch, 2015, p. 91). This issue served the regional powers wanting to exert their political influence, reinforce the clout of their Palestinian ally and destabilize the position of the opponent. A statement by a key PLO Central Committee member explained how propagandizing was serving both the regional powers and their domestic ally:

"Regional powers free the hands of the channels hosted on their lands to expose the missteps of the 'other' and criticize his policy. It was always clear how each regional camp used its channels as instruments to exert political influence. This becomes very evident in their coverage for the same events in their English international networks; in their English copy they maintained high standards of journalism and kept an objective position" (INFO-33: PLO Executive Committee Member and Former MP).

Propagandizing against the opponent served the regional powers and their domestic ally, at the expense of national priorities designed to cope with the massive challenges of a national unity, social cohesion and state building policy. The example above compares the objectivity and neutrality of the Arabic and English broadcasts on these channels. It also confirms other informants' testimonies, which identified a '*constructed reality*' in the Arabic version of PASTV journalism while covering the Palestinian split, when compared to their English version of the same event. Journalistically, this implies the existence of two different versions of reporting guidance for news coverage within the same channel - a 'neutral' English coverage (news for Western audience) versus a 'participant' and 'interventionist' Arabic coverage. By producing a constructed reality, the channels were intervening in the politics of the two parties fit to the interests of their financers. Most of PASTV coverage of the split embodies massive and prolonged *media exchanges* between the two parties throughout the split timeline. The exchanges intentionally generated hazardous consequences for Palestinian politics and political culture, by constantly shaking the images of the two major Palestinian parties - and thus undermining the Palestinians' political stand in their struggle for peace and state building. This type of participatory and interventionist journalism, practiced by PASTV channels, was identified by the majority of informants. As stated by a key media analyst:

"This is how they managed to mislead public opinion; they were expanding the gap between the divided public by presenting biased, and sometimes contradictory, interpretations of events and also by spinning their own interpretation of events in support of the two narratives claimed by the rival parties" (INFO-01: Writer and Columnist).

With the absence of democratic principles within Arab political systems, which can nurture professional journalistic standards, the channels sought to penetrate public awareness by spreading a state of fear about the opposition. For another media analyst:

"Some channels, primarily the pro-Saudi affiliated, also covered in a way that was a mix between Palestinian elected groups like Hamas and those of Islamic extremists like ISIS in the Egyptian desert of Sinai" (INFO-04: Media Analyst at Key Policy Research Center).

This point of view concurred with that of a political columnist:

"Their news was utilized as propaganda warfare, where most politicians in both parties were in the grip of obsession, monitoring PASTV's 'sentinel' journalism affiliated with the other side. A 'fear of the antagonist' was the style of news media that dominated the communications between the two parties through the PASTV news message. Of course, it was evident in different degrees between the channels" (INFO-01: Writer and Columnist).

The intention of the two parties to generate political fear against each other, over their dominated territories, was reflected in the message communicated by their affiliated channels. Several informants emphasized how PASTV channels covered central incidents by attempting to spread fear amongst Palestinians, as regards the policy adopted by the rival party. Interestingly, violations of the Oslo accords by Israeli policies during this time were overlooked in pro-Saudi PASTV journalism. A crucial point was raised by a key media analyst at a policy research centre; he pinpointed how, due to the excessive competition between their financers, PASTV channels became involved in demonizing the antagonist's party. Some other informants also emphasized how pro-Saudi affiliated channels like Alarabiya (as well as its sister channels also most Egyptian channels) were constantly connecting Hamas to terrorist groups in the Sinai. Meanwhile, Aljazeera focused

on the concealed cooperation between the PA/Fatah and the Israeli security apparatus, mainly during series of Israeli military campaigns targeted Hamas in GS. In the same context, in his statement above, the political columnist described how PASTV journalism circulated allegations and promoted incitement, whilst both parties were also monitoring messages between each other via PASTV news. This statement reinforces other testimonies, which emphasized the parties' reference to PASTV news as a source of political updates. This also suggests that PASTV journalism influenced the process of decision making within both parties, although perhaps at various levels depending on a channel's affiliation. The treatment of news through preferred framing, endowed the PASTV journalism with the *propagative value* that regional powers sought and appreciated in their competition with their opponent. As seen in the informants' testimonies, the effect of the news framing was influential and decisive in terms of its potential to generate serious implications at the level of Palestinian public opinion, and political culture. "By and large", as JUNNE says,

"We are what we eat and we think what we read (or hear on the radio or see on TV). Media play a very important role in spreading images - images of threats, of animosity, of "the other" (JUNNE, 2013) See also: (Hamelink, 2011).

Within the precarious and fervent environment of the Palestinian internal conflict, like any other ongoing civil conflict in ME, PASTV journalism that claimed itself to be independent and free, was performing in a way that promoted the gap between the two parties and their publics, and so contributed to the perpetuation of the conflict. A prominent media analyst supports this interpretation:

"The way they covered the internal conflict, focusing on daily fighting in the streets, imaging murder, torture and detention of Palestinians in the two split parts of the country, accompanied with constant attacks on each other's institutions, at the expense of their central issue (the future of a Palestinian State), reflected for the first time a very disastrous image for the Palestinians between themselves and among the Arabic and Islamic nations" (INFO-04: Media Analyst at Key Policy Research Center).

For a high-ranking PLO officer, it was a broadcast battle:

"We were able to see how they converted the reconciliation process to a competition for presenting the grievances of the two parties; both sides straddle PASTV journalism as platforms for justifying their policies and attacking each other through 'media exchange'" (INFO-33: PLO Executive Committee Member and Former MP).

For a director at a centre for the protection of press freedom, PASTV coverage:

"Not only was feeding the conflict by reflecting the factious desires and needs of both sides rather than the national need for social cohesion, but also covered in a way that recruited public opinion to serve the rapacious interests of their states in the conflict and also to fasten the grip of their Palestinian ally" (INFO-30: Director of a Palestinian Center for the Protection of Press Freedom).

Serving the interests of regional powers was a focus of most PASTV journalism, although at varied levels from one channel to another. The treatment of news through preferred framing, endowed the news with the *propagative value* that regional powers desired in their competition. This type of coverage increasingly misled Palestinian perception of the conflict and it also touched and shaped their belief in its future**.** By communicating two contradictory realities about the conflict, focusing on the grievances of the two parties, feeding the conflict by reflecting factious desires and spreading fear of the opponent, PASTV journalism not only manipulated the reality and deceived the public, but also trapped the potential of its opinion in the service of the political interests and agendas of the regional powers.

Conclusion:

With the lack of democracy in their operation milieu and their financial need to cover their huge running costs, PASTV channels adhered to their financers and produced constructed reality, framed to meet their political interests. This article explored, *from an informants' perspective,* two main tactics that PASTV journalism utilized in framing the split events to create the news value: Shaping public opinion to create consonance with the narrative of a local ally, and simultaneously, promoting fear of the rival party and its policy, in order to shake his political stand and public image. In both cases, PASTV journalism embodied key interests that their financers of political actors had in the conflict, as a pivotal part of their regional competition over ideology and territorial gains. PASTV sought to produce news value in support of the political stand of

the Palestinian ally and promote levels of public sympathy towards his narrative. However, the informants highlighted how, exceptionally, and contrary to its role in other conflicts flaming in the region, pro-Iranian channels kept same distance towards the two Palestinian parties. Such coverage is conceived to be stemming from the policy of its sponsor, whose politics maintained the same distance from the two rivals, and for practical reasons targeted the Israeli front, being implicated in civil/sectarian conflicts in the region.

By playing this role, PASTV journalism was intervening in and shaping Palestinian domestic politics. This was pushed by systematic propaganda in support of regional ideologies competing for territorial dominance in the ME, with its milieu of increasing turbulence, authoritarianism and political competition. With the parties' leadership constantly referring to PASTV journalism as a source of political updates, the channels managed to intervene in the process of decision making within both parties and at varied levels from one channel to another. PASTV journalism worked for more than a decade to set the stage for two competing ideologies of Hamas (religious) and Fatah (secular), and so participated in shaping the current contentious political landscape in Palestine. To serve the political interests of their financers, and gain their fund to cover the huge operational costs of these channels, the main competing ideological tendencies within Arab public space were clearly identified on PASTV screens. Three ideologies were working as catalysts for this type of journalism in PASTV channels; the Arabist pro-American, the Islamic pro-Iranian, alongside the Qatari diplomatic hyperactivism manoeuvring between the two ideologies. PASTV channels that are afeliated with these ideologies selected from reality what fitted best with their interests, making the chosen items more salient within the news to manipulate the facts and ensnare public interpretation. This facilitated the production of news value which attracted public attention; it narrowed audience choices about which events in the split to focus upon and also how to think about them. Framing, so, provided PASTV editorial with copious opportunities to intervene and shape viewers' perceptions and opinions towards framed issues and events during the split time span, and then placed them within a constructed field of designated meaning, in the interest of the ally. Furthermore, covering through designated frames narrowed public attention onto violent rather than pacifist news; the voices of Palestinian moderate movements, civil society organizations and youth initiatives were filtered out, signifying the channels' intentions to hide not only the voices of dissent, but also the voices of moderate civil movements which sought an end to the divide. Filtering/selecting news is a vital issue that mediatisation and news media researchers stressed as the core of framing – i.e. the huge difference between 'informing' and 'utilizing' public opinion (Entman, 1993).

This type of intervention deliberately contributed to the shaping of the two parties' images and the perceptions of their divided public. Palestinians relied on the channels affiliated with their party, which were not only misinforming them, but also feeding their raging feelings and fuelling their factious attitudes. By communicating two contradictory realities about the conflict, presenting the grievances of the two parties, feeding the conflict by reflecting factious desires and spreading fear of the opponent, PASTV journalism not only deceived and manipulated public opinion, but also confined its potential to servicing the rapacious interests of the regional powers. While catering for geopolitical agendas was the principal journalistic target, in fine, the intensification and perpetuation of the split became the by-products.

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