From pan-Arab nationalism to political Islam: a Ricoeurian reading of Al-Jazeera's coverage of the '6th Arab-Israeli war' in Lebanon

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Abstract:

Set within the wider framework of exploring the relationship between mediated representations of war and public understanding and perception of conflict in the Arab region, this paper focuses on Al-Jazeera coverage of the July war in Lebanon. From a broad theoretical viewpoint, it attempts to deconstruct the 'ideological model of war' (Carpentier, 2015) as depicted by Al-Jazeera, through its representation of the 2006 conflict between Hezbollah and Israel.

When Al-Jazeera framed it as the '6th war', it added Israel's attack on Lebanon to the series of five episodes of the Arab-Israeli conflict; this war follows the 1948 Palestine War, the Suez War in 1956, the June War of 1967, and the October 1973 War. Stemming from the work of Paul Ricoeur in 'Time and Narrative' (1984), this paper suggests a reading of Al-Jazeera's narrative of the war in three times: the first mediated configurations, the media emplotment and the re-activation by the channel's audience. While it situates the discourse of Al-Jazeera in relation to the Voice of the Arabs radio, which advocated in the 50ies for a nationalist, resistant and anti-colonial identity, this paper also explores the dual nature of Al-Jazeera between pan-Arabism and political Islam.

Introduction

Since the first Gulf War in 1991, the western media, and, more precisely, the major US networks, have failed in their attempts to represent conflicts in the Arab world without bias. At the time, the main global media networks, most notably CNN, failed to convince the Arab public of the 'international legality' of the 'allies' military operation against Iraq (Arquembourg, 1996). An Arab journalism that could harness the advances in digital technology, and break with what was experienced as the symbolic violence of the Western narrative was then felt to be necessary (Lamloum, 2004b).

Undoubtedly, the launch of Al-Jazeera in 1996 reconfigured the transnational Arab media landscape (Miladi, 2003). Very rapidly the channel became a reference point and a phenomenon: henceforth, media coverage of events was no longer limited to ritualised retransmissions of the speeches and ceremonies of Arab monarchs and lifetime presidents (Lamloum, 2004a). Al-Jazeera introduced adversarial debate, political duels and words of protest into the Arab media landscape, giving visibility to dissident and 'resistant' voices and contributing to the disruption of the 'dominant' state narratives that had previously monopolised the Arab media sphere.

Though founded and funded by Qatar, one of the main allies of the United States in the Gulf region, Al-Jazeera has negotiated for itself a space to continue questioning power balances in the Arab region. This paradox is proof of the channel's dual nature: both a tool serving the small and ambitious Qatari State, and a rebel voice in a highly polarised Arab space; reflecting and accelerating the erosion of obsolete regimes, the channel is at the heart of the region's mutations (ibid). Despite the fact that Al-Jazeera rarely criticizes the government of Qatar, and never with the same intensity as it does with other Arab countries, the channel has managed to establish a new power relationship with the Emirate, thereby expanding its editorial freedom, notably in how it deals with the two main pressing issues of political Islam and the Israeli-Arab conflict.

Set within a wider framework which aims at exploring the relationship between mediated representations of war and public understanding and perception of conflict in the Arab region, this paper focuses on Al-Jazeera coverage of the July War between Hezbollah in Lebanon and Israel (Avon and Khatchadourian, 2010; Palmer Harik, 2006; Ajemian, 2008; Achkar and Warschawski, 2007, Mardam-Bey and Sanbar, 2005).

After presenting a short genesis of the Qatari channel from its establishment until 2006, we will situate the discourse of Al-Jazeera at the intersection of Arab nationalism and political Islam. We argue that while the channel promotes an Islamic agenda, it has also succeeded in reviving pan-Arab sentiments similar to those conveyed by the Voice of the Arabs radio back in the 1950s (Dawisha, 2003; Hourani, 1993). In the second part of this paper, we suggest a reading of Al-Jazeera's coverage of the 2006 war in light of Paul Ricoeur's work in *Time and Narrative* (Ricoeur, 1984).

In a bid to explore the correlation between the activity of telling a story [which we argue is similar to the activity of constructing a media narrative of an ongoing conflict] and the human experience of time, Ricoeur explains that 'time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal experience' (Ricoeur, 1984: 52). This correlation, he says, is not merely accidental, 'it presents itself as a transcultural form of necessity' (ibid). Therefore, a Ricoeurian reading of Al-Jazeera's coverage of the July 2006 War would allow us to place the narrative configured by the channel at the heart of any human experience of the war itself.

Furthermore, through his interpretation of Aristotle's *Poetics,* Paul Ricoeur situated the correlation between narrative and human time between three moments of mimesis, which he 'playfully and seriously' called mimesis1, mimesis2 and mimesis3. Mimesis1 concerns the time of the emergence of the occurrence [in our case, the kidnapping by Hezbollah of two Israeli soldiers which led to the war]. Mimesis2 concerns the time of emplotment [the narrative that Al-Jazeera configured to tell the story of the 2006 war]. And mimesis3 concerns the time of the re-activation of the narrative by its audiences [the mediatisation of protests in support of Hezbollah around the world].

Ricoeur refers to mimesis1 and mimesis3 as the two sides [*l'amont et l'aval*] of mimesis2 for 'what is at stake' he says, 'is the concrete process by which the textual configuration (mimesis2, emplotment) mediates between the prefiguration of a practical field (mimesis1) and its refiguration through the perception of the work (mimesis3). The human experience of time hence provides itself with configurations, with authors, and with readers: 'We are therefore following the destiny of a prefigured time that becomes a refigured time through the mediation of the configured time' (Ricoeur, 1984: 54).

This approach will allow us to analyse how this conflict was represented by Al-Jazeera, to then understand how it was perceived by the channel audiences, through the mediatisation of the protests in Lebanon and around the Arab world. This paper is thus organized around the two following questions: Which depictions of the Arab-Israeli conflict are put forth through Al-Jazeera's coverage of the July 2006

war? And which versions of the history of the 'Arab nation' is the channel drawing on through its representations of the events and the agents of this war?

1. A short genesis of Al-Jazeera between pan-Arabism and political Islam

<u>1.1 Al-Jazeera's success stories since its establishment until the 2006 war in Lebanon</u>

Al-Jazeera's history is first notable for its coverage of 'Operation Desert Fox' led in 1998 by Bill Clinton's armed forces against the regime of Saddam Hussein. At the time, Al-Jazeera was the only news channel able to report on the successive waves of bombs and cruise missiles being fired on Baghdad. It was also in December 1998 that Bin Laden first appeared on Al-Jazeera (Miladi, 2003). Already a wanted man, Osama Bin Laden was then known as a wealthy Saudi businessman 'urging Muslims to reply to the attacks on Iraq by killing Americans, British, and Jews in Palestine' (Miles, 2006: 59).

The outbreak of the second Palestinian intifada followed in 2000. During its coverage of the events in the West Bank and Gaza, the Qatari channel became a window onto the conflict for the rest of the world. Western news channels, who themselves were used to being in a dominant position, woke up, and became aware of Al-Jazeera's existence in the autumn of 2000[i].

And when Jamal al-Durra and his son Mohammed were caught between the bullets of Palestinian factions and Israeli troops, Al-Jazeera captured the image of this father trapped by a hail of fire, watching his child die in his arms. Mohammed al-Durra became the symbol of the second intifada and his image, caught on Al-Jazeera cameras, travelled around the world. The channel's coverage of the 2000 intifada hence gave rise to worldwide condemnations of Israel; 'the Jewish State had been pictured as a David fighting an Arab Goliath, but the roles now seemed reversed. Israel could no longer claim to pretend a moderate use of force, with the sole aim of containing Palestinians when Al-Jazeera's reports showed this was not the case at all; for the first time, Israelis were no longer pictured as persecuted, but rather as the persecutors' (Miles, 2006: 90).

On May 24, 2000, when Israeli troops withdrew from Southern Lebanon, Al-Jazeera compared the coverage to the 1975 fiasco of American troops in Vietnam. Hezbollah was thereby seen as the only political player capable of challenging the seemingly invincible Israeli army and of liberating Arab land, since the establishment of the State of Israel. The former head of the Al-Jazeera office in Beirut, Ghassan Ben Jeddo, travelled from Qatar to provide live coverage of 'Liberation Day', after which Al-Jazeera decided to open an office in Beirut (interview with the author, Beirut, 2009).

From its coverage of the very first Hezbollah operations in 1999 (Houri and Saber, 2010), until the July 2006 war, Al-Jazeera never pictured the 'Party of God' as a 'Shiite militia supported by Iran', but rather as a 'political party working for national liberation'. Hence, the Qatari channel is far from being neutral towards the opposing forces of the Arab-Israeli conflict, to the contrary, it intends to promote a narrative of anti-Israeli 'resistance' in Palestine, in Lebanon and in Syria.

It was probably Al-Jazeera's coverage of the 2001 war in Afghanistan that exposed the general discrediting of major western media in the Arab-Muslim world, re-affirming the powerful resurgence of an Arab alternative. In October 2001, from Kabul, then controlled by the Taliban, Al-Jazeera was the only witness to the beginning of Bush's 'War on Terror'. For the first time, its coverage reversed the flow of information, formerly from North to South; 'For the first time in recent history, the United-States no longer monopolised the representation of a conflict they were part of; Al-Jazeera hereby broke the monopoly over war images and managed to challenge the myth of the surgical war' (Lamloum, 2004a: 111).

Then, it was during the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 that Al-Jazeera became the most watched news channel in the Arab world[ii]. In the last few hours preceding the outbreak of the war, and while journalists, diplomats and humanitarian inspectors were retreating from Baghdad towards Jordan, as instructed by George Bush, the Qatari channel stayed put. Al-Jazeera was also the only news channel to refer to the coalition forces as 'occupation forces', and never during the twenty-one days of attacks did it recognise the slightest democratic goal to this intervention; the war on Iraq was not a 'liberation operation', but rather 'a colonial conflict' (Miles, 2006). This editorial framing remains unchanged today regarding the situation in Iraq.

Moreover, Al-Jazeera was the first platform to introduce adversarial debates and political duels into all Arab households, thus becoming a space where opposing, censored and criminalised voices could be heard. By giving both a face and a voice to Islamist, feminist, liberal, Baathist and nationalist dissidents for the first time in the region's modern history (Miladi, 2003), and by giving them the means to voice their opinions, expose corruption and demand civil liberties, Al-Jazeera shattered one of the main prerogatives of Arab states: the monopoly of political discourse (Lamloum, 2004a).

In this manner, the leitmotif 'opinion and its opposite', held up as an identifying refrain and inherited from the BBC school, is illustrated in many advert breaks, adopted by countless journalists and distilled into various slogans, thereby constituting the foundation of the channel's code of ethics. This rule is what guides the coverage of any event or reporting, as well as the organisation and layout of any debate or interview with guests. It is the commitment to this same slogan that led to Al-Jazeera taking the controversial decision to invite Israeli officials onto its programmes, thus putting an end to their longstanding ban from Arab TV.

1.2 From the Voice of the Arabs to Al-Jazeera: the resurrection of a pan-Arab narrative

In their Article *'Le public qu'on se prête, trois chaînes arabes et leur 'présentation de soi'* [The audience that we create, three Arab channels and their strategies of self-representation], Baudoin Dupret and Jean-Noël Ferrié (2008) give a great deal of attention to Al-Jazeera's 'About us' section on its website[iii].

The authors explain how pluralism, truth, professionalism and the promotion of humanist values are at the heart of the channel's self-representation strategies. Similarly, Al-Jazeera pictures itself as a key independent channel targeting an Arab audience that deserves free, independent and uncensored news coverage. Freedom of speech is framed as the cornerstone of the channel's philosophy, underlining its commitment to 'truthful programmes' where 'the plurality of sources and of opinions form the two sides of one objective: the truth'.

And the audience Al-Jazeera intends to target can be identified through the two political trends the channel brings together: an Arab nationalist trend mainly represented by the Syrian Faisal Al-Qasim (*Al-Ittijah Al-Mua'kis* - Opposite Direction), and a liberal Islamic trend embodied by the Kuwaiti Ahmed Mansoor (*Bila Houdoud* - Without Limits) (Miladi, 2003). These two trends complement one another to depict conflicts in the Arab space through a pan-Arab and nationalist framing, to condemn US-lead policies and depictions of the world, and to shed light on the calls for democracy and freedom voiced by emerging dissident voices in the Arab sphere.

Al-Jazeera's major innovation lies in its decision to open its studios to all expressions of political Islam: favoring debate over silence, Al-Jazeera was the first transnational public forum to speak covertly against the repression of political Islam, both in the Arab region and the world. In this context, Al-Jazeera hosted almost all the Islamist leaders thus far banned in their own countries and more generally on western media. By shedding light on these dissenting and antagonistic opinions, Al-Jazeera introduced new means

of identification to Islam, first as a religion, but also as a culture and a political stream. By showing the diversity, the internal battles, the power struggles and the inconsistencies of political Islam, Al-Jazeera contributed to its normalisation. In that context, the channel gave visibility to advocates and enthusiasts of political Islam as a way of revisiting and redefining some parts of the region's contemporary history thus far confiscated by the dominant narratives of authoritarian regimes (Lamloum, 2004a).

This image of a strictly Islamic Al-Jazeera is counterbalanced by a nationalist and pan-Arab narrative which transcends national borders and defies ruling regimes, thus enhancing the awareness of an Arab and Muslim self (in opposition to the American and European other). In that context, the show *Al-Ittijah Al-Mua'kis* deals with the Arab world as one global entity, and challenges intellectuals and Arab clerics on issues close to the anti-imperialist movement of the 1950s and 1960s. It was with this show that Al-Jazeera introduced political duels, until then forbidden by all Arab countries. No other show has sparked as much controversy as *Al-Ittijah Al-Mua'kis* in modern Arab history; thousands of audience comments denounced or acclaimed the debates it initiates and recordings of the show are still commonly sold around the region (ibid). The show has thus become the most popular show of its kind in Arab television history; it ignited countless international disputes and many times caused the suspension of diplomatic relations between Qatar and neighbouring countries.

By asserting this double Arab and Islamic identity, Al-Jazeera intends to deconstruct and make sense of the oppositions that structure the Arab-Muslim world. It represents, at the same time as it creates a globalised Arab-Muslim community, by reaching to the Arab diaspora and those exiled around the world. The channel is thus serving as an 'agora', reflecting the diversity of 'pan-Arabism' and political Islam and speaking against state control in the Arab world. It functions as a place where the imaginary and the identity of the Arab public is both expressed and constructed (Lamloum, 2004a).

This revamped nationalist thematic that Al-Jazeera came to express is not without a historical precedent. Like the Voice of the Arabs created in 1953 by Gamal Abdel Nasser and the Revolutionary Council, Al-Jazeera represents itself as a space for dissent against imperial and colonial hegemony. As described above, while Al-Jazeera's nationalism strives to give substance to a smothered cry for democracy, it also integrates an Islamic component, comprehending religion as an element of unification and resistance. In that sense, Al-Jazeera's nationalism is somewhat different to that of the 1950s and 1960s in their Nasserist, Baathist, authoritarian and secular variants. Yet it still obviously shares with it its rejection of the Western 'other' (Ibid).

Consequently, reporting the statement of former Al-Jazeera Director General Mohamed Jassem al-Ali, Hugh Miles (2006) highlights the Qatari channel's 'nationalist precedent':
> 'We have revolutionised the Arab media space,' explains al-Ali, 'our people had not been this united since the 1950s and 1960s, when Nasser's radio, Sawt al-Arab (the Voice of the Arabs) was stirring up passions in the Peninsula. At that time, just like today, a powerful message, combined with an uncertain social and economic climate led Egyptians to mobilise - back then, to free Egyptian territories, and now, in solidarity with Palestinians. If in the past, it was the personality and conviction of one man on the radio that united Arabs, this time, it is the plurality of opinions broadcasted on a visual medium that made this possible' (Mohamed Jassem al-Ali cited by Miles, 2006: 103)

As a natural component of this pan-Arab trend, Palestine is at the heart of Al-Jazeera's narrative, thus participating in the reconstruction of Palestinian memory in the Arab space. The representation of the Israeli-Arab conflict is no longer limited to mere accounts of Israeli raids, pictures of funerals in Gaza, and children throwing stones in the West Bank. Al-Jazeera's talk shows and documentaries have, since the early 2000s, framed the Palestine War of 1948, and more broadly the Palestinian cause, within its historic, social, economic, cultural and political contexts. By reconstituting this memory of the Arab-

Israeli conflict, Al-Jazeera contributed to the reappropriation of the region's history and of the Palestinian cause by new generations (Lamloum, 2004b).

In addition to hosting right-wing and left-wing Israeli officials, Al-Jazeera is also the first Arab channel to acknowledge the 'Israeli fact' as a territory delineated by borders. Maps of Palestine and Israel show the latter in its 1967 borders, and this made it possible for Al-Jazeera to comprehend the Arab-Israeli conflict in all its contradictions, and social, ethnic and political tensions. Thus, as Lamloum (2004a: 84) puts it, 'the Jew is no longer an imaginary unitary construction of the Arabs' minds, but rather a reality that can no longer be ignored'.

Bearing with its motto 'opinion and its opposite', Al-Jazeera constructed the Palestinian space as the site of power struggles, ideologies, and hegemonic and counter-hegemonic narratives and opinions. As early as November 1999, Hamas leaders were invited by Al-Jazeera to talk about their military operations and 'resistance' against the 'Israeli colonisation' of Palestine, thereby 'challenging the institutional hegemony of Fatah. The Palestinian cause is thus no longer the cause of Yasser Arafat only' explains Lamloum, 'it also bears the face of people such as Sheikh Yassine, Azmi Bechara, Marwan al-Barghouti and Khaled Mesh'al' (Lamloum, 2004a: 89).

Henceforth, Palestinians on Al-Jazeera are no longer represented as victims or memories, they are also 'the resistance'. But unlike the Lebanese Hezbollah channel Al-Manar, Al-Jazeera's narrative of resistance does not cause the channel to fall in the sanctification of martyrology as the sole means for struggle (Ajemian, 2008). Al-Jazeera's narrative diversifies this figure of the 'resistant' without implying any hierarchy: 'Resistant is the priest who refused to surrender the Trinity Church during the reoccupation of the West Bank. Resistant is the intellectual Edward Said who speaks against the logic of hegemonic and dominated. Resistant are civil populations who protest against the wall.' (Lamloum, 2004a: 88). And resistant is also Lebanese Hezbollah.

That is how, when in 2006 Hezbollah kidnapped two Israeli soldiers on the borders, and Israel launched a broad offensive against Lebanon, Al-Jazeera went to war alongside the Party of God. The channel will then dedicate its airwaves to what it will rapidly call the 'sixth Arab-Israeli war', mobilising for thirty three days a broad network of correspondents in Beirut, southern Lebanon, the North of Israel, Jerusalem and the occupied territories. According to the Qatari channel, this is the 'sixth' war because it is inscribed in the series of five preceding episodes of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The July 2006 War follows the 1948 Palestine War, the Suez War in 1956, the June War of 1967, and the October 1973 War.

2• The Threefold representation of the July War

<u>The time of the emergence of the event and the first narrative configurations (mimesis1)</u>

The first dispatch arrives at the offices of AFP in Beirut just after 10am.

Beirut, July 12, 2006 (AFP) - At around 9am local time (6am GMT), Hezbollah, the Lebanese Shiite group, captured two Israeli soldiers and killed eight others, in an operation to free, according to its leader, Lebanese prisoners in Israel.

One hour later, another dispatch announces the emergence of a new event:

AITA CHAAB (Lebanon), July 12, 2006 (AFP) - The Israeli army continues its aerial and ground based bombings of the infrastructure of the South of Lebanon and of Hezbollah positions, two and a half hours after the Shiite group's announcement of the capture of two Israeli soldiers, according to the police. The

Israeli offensive, at medium and low altitude over Lebanese areas bordering Israel, has bombed several Lebanese Hezbollah positions, as well as a bridge in the western sector of South Lebanon, police have detailed. Israeli artillery has fired dozens of shells into the surroundings of several frontier towns. An Israeli military spokesperson has announced that 'Israeli aircraft, tanks and artillery are operating in Lebanon'. The Israeli Minister of Defense, Amir Peretz, has confirmed the capture of two soldiers by Hezbollah, sworn enemy of the Jewish state, and the Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has affirmed that 'those that try to challenge Israel's determination will pay a heavy price for their acts'

The inaugural character of these two dispatches concisely sums up the beginning of the action, mimesis1, which forms, according to Paul Ricoeur, 'the first side of the poetic composition' (Ricoeur, 1984: 46). It is in this mimesis1 that the emplotment that follows will find its initial anchor. In other words, these two dispatches offer us pre-understanding of the world of the action as they give us answers to the *what, why, who, how* and *to whom* questions of the action. These elements define what Ricoeur calls 'the conceptual network that structurally distinguishes the domain of action from that of physical movement' (Ricoeur, 1984: 54). Actions imply goals, refer to motives and have agents, 'who do and can do things which are taken as *their* work, or *their deed*. As a result, these agents can be held responsible for certain consequences of their actions' (Ricoeur, 1984: 55).

AFP in Beirut tells us that the major operation launched by the Israeli army against Hezbollah is an act that implies a goal, which is the destruction of the Party of God. They return to the first motif, the capture of the soldiers, and an underlying one, the danger armed Hezbollah represents to Israel. This brings the two agents to the table: on one side Israel and on the other Lebanese Hezbollah. This is an interaction that will continue until the end of the war.

'We can see the richness in the meaning of mimesis1, writes Ricoeur. 'To imitate or represent action is first to preunderstand what human acting is, in its semantics, its symbolic system and its temporality' (Ricoeur, 1984: 64). But it was necessary to wait for this information to leave the AFP offices, for it to be recounted and reconfigured by other journalists, for it to be woven into a narrative, in order that the event can really exist and that the second side of the poetic composition can start.

'That which signals the event is its capacity to initiate, to engender something new. Rupture, chaos, the emergence of the unanticipated; the dramatic schema of a genesis is tied into every event' (Arquembourg, 2006: 15). Thus, events disrupt the order of things, introduce to it, sometimes with violence, rupture and the unexpected, provoking questions such as 'what's happened? what's it about?'

Mimesis2 has the potential to offer answers to these questions, for to make up a plot is 'to make the intelligible spring from the accidental, the universal from the singular, the necessary or the probable from the episodic' (Ricoeur, 1984: 65). It is then, that the time of *emplotment* begins, an act that extracts a figure from a succession. 'This configurational act', says Ricoeur, 'consists of 'grasping together' the detailed actions or what I have called the conceptual network of the action. It draws from this manifold of events the unity of one temporal whole' (Ricoeur, 1984: 66). And a thing is a whole if it has a beginning, a middle and an end' (ibid., 38).

We will situate the beginning of our mimesis2 at the moment where Al-Jazeera constructed its first narrative configuration - the first comment of the director of Al-Jazeera's office in Beirut Ghassan Ben Jeddo after AFP's inaugural dispatches. The middle of our plot is constituted around Al-Jazeera's coverage of the Cana massacre, and its end the channel's coverage of the 'Victory Festival' when the ceasefire was adopted thirty-three days after the beginning of the war.

2.1 Al-Jazeera's emplotment of the first few hours of the war (mimesis2)

Just a few minutes after the official announcement by Hezbollah of 'Operation Truthful Pledge', and as the first Israeli bombs were falling on south Lebanese border towns, the Al-Jazeera presenter Abdul Samad Nasser begins to broadcast from Doha. He announces that a vast Israeli military operation has begun against Lebanon and asks Ben Jeddo the following question: 'Ghassan, do you have information about the taking by Hezbollah of two Israeli soldiers from the Israel-Lebanon border?'[iv]

Ben Jeddo then responds that he was informed of the operation an hour previously but could not pass on the information before Hezbollah's official announcement. Here is the transcription of the first narrative constructed by Ben Jeddo of the beginning of the war:

> 'To tell you the truth Abdul Samad, a source in the Lebanese Islamic Resistance contacted us an hour ago to confirm the operation's success. We were also asked not to pass on this information before Hezbollah's official announcement. You well understand that because of security considerations we could not share any information; this kind of operation takes place in the greatest secrecy. But we can assure you at this time that an operation took place in South Lebanon this morning, and, as the resistance says, the operation was a great success. This explains the mortar fire that can be heard from various parts of the border. Apparently Hezbollah had been preparing for this operation for a long time and today's strike has been brilliantly successful. Announcement of the kidnap is always a few hours after the operation to permit the transfer of prisoners into secure zones. We don't know where the two soldiers are, nor if they are still alive or not… this information can only be divulged by the Islamic Resistance. So we can't tell you, but what we can officially assure you of is that Hezbollah has kidnapped two Israeli soldiers successfully and that this is an important event in political and security terms. This is on top of the kidnap operation that took place a few days ago in Palestine, and I think that Lebanon, Palestine and the whole region will enter a new stage that will sideline all previous political concerns.'

What strikes us straight away in Ghassan Ben Jeddo's initial emplotment is the enunciation around which his response is constructed: there is a lot of doubt and uncertainty in his intervention. But even more importantly, in this event's configuration, the quest for meaning that usually directs journalists when faced with a new event is almost completely deferred to Hezbollah. Ben Jeddo does not make his own analysis, but is satisfied for the present to transmit the word of the 'Islamic Resistance'.

For Al-Jazeera's Beirut director, this event disrupts the usual order of things and moves Lebanon and the region into a new phase. He configures his narrative around a present, a past and a future. The temporality into which this event is inscribed is thus apparent as the notion of 'triple present' as described by Ricoeur citing Augustine: 'there is not a future time, a past time and a present time', he says, 'but a threefold present, a present of future things, a present of past things and a present of present things' (Ricoeur, 1984: 60).

Faced with the present event that breaks the normal order of things, the journalist begins to build a plot, to project himself into a future moulded by the event, in order to distance himself little by little from a past altered by its impact.

Then, the presenter attempts to return the operation to its Lebanese context and asks Ben Jeddo what he thinks will be the consequences for the debate in Lebanon around Hezbollah's military arsenal. Ben Jeddo's response is particularly interesting:

'While those in power in Lebanon debate the matter of Hezbollah's arms, there is an undeniable truth: the occupation of the Chebaa Farms. Even if there is an internal debate about weapons, Hezbollah is officially recognised as a national resistance movement and has the right to an armed response to attacks. This is exactly what it has done today. And so even if this makes certain Lebanese authorities uneasy, on the official and popular levels, this action is a legitimate action, consistent with the mission of Lebanese resistance, and it is its natural right.'

Roles are clearly defined from the first hours of the conflict: Al-Jazeera sees 'a legitimate act of resistance' in the kidnap operation, and recognises Hezbollah's right to respond militarily to any Israeli offensive. Ghassan Ben Jeddo goes on to explain that any debate about the legitimacy or otherwise of the operation is henceforth a marginalised discussion: 'the two soldiers have been taken,' he says, 'and that is the new given. Hezbollah is no longer only in dialogue with the Lebanese. We can therefore say that the success of this operation is from the outset a determinant of the new regional equation, and Israel will be forced into accepting indirect dialogue with it (Hezbollah).'

Citing Reinhardt Koselleck's 'Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time' (2004), Jocelyne Arquembourg explains that the event is never enclosed in the time of its emergence, but other perspectives criss-cross through it like open escape routes to the past or the future. 'Past events are reread in the light of questions arising from and around the present event', she writes, 'the field of experience is therefore completely animated by what constitutes its horizon of expectation' (Arquembourg, 1996: 33).

Thus, having linked this operation to that carried out two weeks previously by Hamas, Ben Jeddo makes projections anticipating shock waves:
'Will this operation lead to an escalation of Israeli violence, or an extension of the attack on the collected Lebanese lands? Well, that really depends on the strategy that Israel decides to adopt, not only in Lebanon but in Palestine and the region. But there is absolutely no doubt that this operation has changed the status quo thus far imposed'

This event makes its own past emerge, and at the same time opens on a future from the perspective of which this past is re-evaluated. The future into which the present opens doesn't yet exist, it's the result of a process of production through new frames of interpretation which permit the prediction of potential futures, since 'every event organises a before and an after, bringing in its wake a cortege of un-anticipatable futures' (Koselleck, 2004; Arquembourg, 2006; Pickering, 2004).

Last minute information interrupts the split screen conversation between Doha and Beirut; Abdul Samad Nasser announces that Israel has just attacked various bridges in southern Lebanon in order to cut it off, and Ben Jeddo leaves the screen, replaced live by Walid el Omari, the Al-Jazeera office director in Ramallah.

The July 2006 War has just begun for the Qatari network.

2.2 Showing death

From the outset of the Israeli offensive, Al-Jazeera devotes its entire broadcast to the coverage of this war, deploying a powerful media apparatus constituting an important network of correspondents in Lebanon (Beirut, Bekaa, the South), in Israel (the North, Jerusalem) as well as in the Palestinian territories (Gaza and the West Bank) and several other Arab countries. Al-Jazeera's news coverage will continue throughout the conflict in a ritualised form, linking live reports from its network of correspondents, reports, screens split with journalists, specialists and analysts in the Beirut and Doha studios. In this section we are interested in 'Hasad el-Yom' (Al-Jazeera's night time news show) on July

30, 2006, and more precisely in the coverage of the massacre perpetrated by the Israeli army in the village of Cana; it is the middle of Al-Jazeera's emplotment of the narrative of the war.

Al-Jazeera adopts a quite particular format in this edition that it preserves until the end of the war: its two presenters welcome viewers from Beirut and Doha, constructing, from both countries, a single narrative of the July 2006 War. The Qatari channel wants to be closer to Beirut, so it moves part of its studio to the heart of the action (the Al-Jazeera presenter is no longer in the channel's Beirut office; he is in a studio that overlooks the city centre and passes the broadcast from time to time to Ghassan Ben Jeddo in the channel's Beirut office.)

Paul Ricoeur writes that the characteristics of the complex plot are reversal (*peripeteia*) - *coup de théâtre* - and recognition, to which must be added suffering (*pathos*) (Ricoeur, 1984: 43). The bombing of Cana unites these three characteristics into a single event: on the 19th day of the war, the Israeli army carries out a dawn rain on the village of Cana. Lebanon wakes up to images of thirty-seven corpses of children scattered over the rubble. The world cries massacre, and images from Cana are looped on Al-Jazeera. For the 8pm programme Al-Jazeera had time to put a new 'jingle' together: over classical music with dramatic resonances, images of small children blown to pieces mix with those of bloodied dolls, after which in red appear the words: 'Cana, once more'[v].

In 'Can the image kill?' Marie-Jose Mondzain writes that 'The image is not just one sign among others, it has a specific power; that of making one see, of rendering the forms, spaces and bodies presented to the gaze visible.' And the image derives its visibility from the relationship that is established between those that make and those that see it' (Mondzain, 2002: 36). Al-Jazeera's public knows its policy vis-a-vis images of death, which is in fact a legacy of the Afghan and Iraq wars, still evident today.

Gamal Rayyane, Al-Jazeera presenter, then introduces an initial report by Abbas Nasser, which 'relates the massacre of the heart of South Lebanon'. The report opens with the following words:

'It was 1am when time stopped in Cana. More than half of them were children. The majority of the children are dead. Some of them had only known a life of war. Three of them were only a few months old. Nothing saved them and they stayed, until the early morning, beneath the rubble. Entire families were killed. But the hardest part is that the sole survivor has now been lost'.

Images of the extraction of the dismembered corpses of children and victims of the bombing now take over the screen. They 'fall upon' us; we don't know what to do with the image we see. Next, a new ticker loops: 'Voices of Cana', with a 40 second sequence showing women in tears and men displaying bodies of children shouting 'This is the work of Arabs, and of the USA!'

Then, in a report ascribed to Mazen Ibrahim, Al-Jazeera questions 'the objectivity of the Western media' and more specifically the professionalism of the BBC and CNN, who both refused to broadcast images of children in Cana. The report opens on a close up, first of the face, then of the bloodied corpse of a little girl buried beneath rubble: 'Zeinab has shut her eyes forever, and her angelic image will not leave the memory of those who have seen her beneath the rubble. Zeinab probably didn't want to be taking over all the television screens, but her death and the depth of the crime have demanded it. But in spite of the extent of the atrocity, certain channels have denied these children their screens, and their death has remained theoretical for numerous western viewers.'

In other words, Al-Jazeera sees a denial of the event itself in the refusal to broadcast images of the victims of Cana; in the absence of media images of death, did the massacre even take place at all?

From Doha, Al-Jazeera, introduces the British 'media specialist' Nicolas John. John explains why the BBC has chosen not to show images of the children in Cana. Al-Jazeera sees in this a pro-Israeli framing and reiterates that without images of death, it is impossible to 'speak' Israel's atrocity. As the debate is presented in cultural rather than ethical terms, the interlocutors cannot find common ground. A close up of another corpse is shown, without warning, on Al-Jazeera's screen. 'Film from this angle', shouts the man holding the body of the child by both arms to better display it for the camera. Next, more images of dead children follow one another, without pause, onto the screen which tries to vindicate through insistence the rights of the dead and its right to broadcast death, through what the channel calls an 'objective coverage of the massacre.'

'All visibility engages spirits and bodies to carry out a constructive or destructive rapport with violence (...) And confronted with the emotion images provoke, when they are imposed on us, it is imperative to analyse and understand the new reign of passion they establish and the place they make for whom they are directed to' (Mondzain, 2002: 54)

But what place is made for us, Arab spectators of the narratives of Al-Jazeera? What freedom do we have to choose to witness, or not, the spectacle of our own death? None.

None, because our media judges it 'normal' in the name of an 'Eastern journalistic and media culture' to show images of the corpses of children mutilated in the horror of war, as if their display made them 'martyrs once more'. This paper is therefore also a cry against 'this trauma of images' that Al-Jazeera and our other Arab media inflict on us. To this effect, an apology to Susan Sontag who, in 'Regarding the pain of others' (2002), wanted atrocious images to haunt us, so we know what human beings are capable of doing. An apology for disagreeing, and a passage by Frederic Lambert, which he justly titles 'Towards an education of image and media'

'Certain images we are shown on television or in newspapers are close to our nightmares. They appear unreasoned and mute, and so, one may say, emerge from actuality, witness the history of the present. And in spite of a few disclaimers, which arouse our curiosity; 'we have hesitated very much to show this to you' say the presenters sometimes. These images wound us. Given raw, thrown naked. They touch the frontiers of the unsayable, they touch us, and they leave us silent. It is in this silence that injury takes root, in this foreclosed place: I can say nothing, the image is stronger than my reason, it makes no sense, and it takes me defenceless, cultureless and even without morals. It is then necessary to meet the image with a thought that only education and literacy can engender.' (Lambert, 2005: 106)

2.3 A 'divine victory' for an Arab and Islamic 'nation'

'To follow a story is to move forward in the midst of contingencies and *peripeteia* under the guidance of an expectation that finds its fulfilment in the 'conclusion' of the story. This conclusion is not logically implied by some previous premises. It gives the story an 'end point', which in turn, furnishes the point of view from which the story can be perceived as forming a whole. To understand the story is to understand how and why the successive episodes led to this conclusion, which, far from being foreseeable, must finally be acceptable, as congruent with the episodes brought together by the story' (Ricoeur, 1984: 67).

In this way, after 33 days of war, 1187 dead, 4092 wounded and 1 million displaced (Human Rights Watch, 2007), the ceasefire adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations comes into force on August 14, 2006. It is the final point of our mimesis2, the end of the emplotment.

The fact that Hezbollah was able to stop any potential Israeli invasion of southern towns and that it held its ground for 33 days were enough for the party to consider it had won the war against Israel. Therefore, after the kidnap operation was baptised the 'Truthful Pledge' - in after the promise made by Hassan Nasrallah a few years earlier to free all Lebanese prisoners in Israeli jails - the July 2006 War ends with a 'Divine Victory' for the Party of God.

And in order to show their organization was more popular than ever, Hezbollah leaders decide to orchestrate a grand celebration of their 'Divine Victory', in suburban south Beirut, on September 22, 2006. Hezbollah General Secretary Hassan Nasrallah insisted on addressing the exceptional crowds, regardless of safety concerns, to celebrate keeping his party's pledge. This is the first time he has appeared in public since the press conference held on July 12, 2006, on the first day of the war.

A few minutes before the beginning of Nasrallah's speech, from the set in Doha, Al-Jazeera's presenter asks Abbas Nasser to share his first impressions with the network's audience:

'We are expecting the Secretary General's speech to have great strategic and political overtones. He won't be talking to the crowd as a Lebanese leader and figurehead, but as an Arab leader, and he will frame this victory not only as Lebanese, but as an Arab victory as well. In other words, he will be addressing the entire Arab and Islamic nation.'

Thus, for Al-Jazeera, it is as new leader of the Arab nation that Hassan Nasrallah delivers his 'victory speech' on September 22. And when he appears smiling on the large stage, as the song *'Nasrak haz el dini'* (your victory makes the world tremble) is blasting over the human sea gathered for him, he addresses the crowd with these words:

'Welcome to everyone, from the camps of Palestine, Syria, Iran, Kuwait, Bahrain, and all countries of the Arab nation (...). Remember I made a promise to you on May 25, 2000 that the time of defeats was over, and that the time of victories has now begun.' (Hassan Nasrallah speech, September 22, 2006. Translated by the author)

'This is a great celebration of victory', comments Abbas Nasser, 'regardless of the human and material losses caused by Israel in Lebanon. Hezbollah held ground for 33 days, and resisted until the very last second.'

Al-Jazeera's screen is divided in two parts: on the left, images of the human sea buoyed by songs of joy and victory, and on the right, Abbas Nasser looking down on the crowd and repeating that what must be remembered from this speech and occasion is that Hezbollah is now even stronger than it was before the war:

'Those who believe Hezbollah was weakened by the war are mistaken; Hezbollah is even stronger than before. It promises to free all prisoners in Israel. Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah wants to turn his resistant party into a resistant country and why not a resistant nation. The General Secretary has spoken as leader of the Lebanese resistance and as leader of the nation, reminding us of the situation in Iraq and Palestine. Each time Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah speaks, he reminds us of the importance of the struggle for Palestine, and for preventing a sectarian conflict in Iraq. Iraq and Palestine are at the heart of Hezbollah's concerns, because they are at the heart of the nation's concerns.'

One can see in Abbas Nasser's comments a consecration of Hassan Nasrallah as leader of the Arab nation. But unlike the one advocated by Gamal Abdel Nasser fifty years earlier, this one not only affirms its pan-Arab and resistant identity, but also speaks the language of political Islam.

Conclusion

In his exploration of the correlation between narrative and the human experience of time, Paul Ricoeur explains that for it to reach its full level of intelligibility, mimesis2 requires a third representative stage as its complement. 'It is only at the end of our traversal of mimesis that the thesis stated at the beginning of this chapter will receive a concrete content', he writes. 'Narrative has its full meaning when it is restored to the time of action and of suffering in mimesis3' (Ricoeur, 1984: 70). The reader [and in our case the audience of Al-Jazeera] is the 'operator *par excellence*' of the action of configuration, for he takes up 'through doing something - the act of reading [in our case the act of watching] - the unity of traversal from mimesis1 to mimesis3, by way of mimesis2.

Ricoeur therefore sees in mimesis3 a way to complete a theory of writing with a theory of reading; 'it is the intersection of the world of the text and that of the listener or reader' (Ricoeur, 1984: 77). In our case, it is the intersection between the world of Al-Jazeera's narrative of the war and that of the perception of this war by the channel's audience.

'In the act of reading', Ricoeur writes, 'the receiver plays with the narrative constraints, brings about gaps, takes part in the combat between the novel and the antinovel, and enjoys the pleasure that Roland Barthes calls the pleasure of text' (Ricoeur, 1984: 77).

After following Al-Jazeera's configuration of the July 2006 narrative from its beginning, to its middle, and its end, we will now explore the plot as re-activated by the audience of the Qatari channel.

There is a clear distinction in Al-Jazeera's narrative between the reactions of Arab political leaders, heads of State and members of government, and the reactions of the Arab populations. Throughout the thirty three days of the conflict, Al-Jazeera dedicated an important part of its airtime to the coverage of protests in support of Hezbollah around Arab capitals; the night bulletin closed every time on images of Arab women, men and children holding Nasrallah's pictures and Hezbollah flags and flooding the streets in their own countries, in support of the 'resistance' against the 'Israeli arrogance'. Through Al-Jazeera screens, we hear them accuse their leaders of 'collaboration with Israel'. Hence, the mediatisation of these protests offered Al-Jazeera the opportunity to criticise, in the name of Arab populations, 'the complicit silence of Arab leaders towards the destruction of Lebanon'. It also allowed the channel to consecrate Hezbollah as the new leader of the 'Arab nation's resistance' against Israel.

On August 14, 2006, the correspondent of Al-Jazeera in Libya, Khaled el-Dib, ends his report with the following words:

'The Arab street condemns the official positions of Arab leaders, and it admires the accomplishments of the Islamic Resistance. The Arab street seems to have taken the side of the resistance. For many of the protestors, this victory has given them back the dignity they have lost, almost half a decade ago, in their war with Israel.'

These words summarize well the 'ideological model of the July War' as depicted by Al-Jazeera; a discredited Arab political class, an Arab street that fully supports the resistance and its leaders, and an Arab dignity retrieved after many years of political and military defeats.

On the value of deconstructing mediated representations of war; 'would any war do?'

The July War ended ten years ago. Meanwhile, March 15, 2015 marked the fourth anniversary of the Syrian uprising. The movement, which first started with peaceful protests, inspired by the revolutions in

Egypt and Tunisia, quickly became one of the deadliest conflicts in our recent history. It has already killed more than 220,000 people and has left more than 4 million refugees scattered around the world (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, August 2015).

Recognising the role of the media as discursive machineries that attribute meanings to war (Carpentier, 2015) and acknowledging the power of media framing on the way people perceive and understand conflict (Butler, 2010), this paper is rooted in a wider research project that explores the relationships between mediated representations of war and public understanding and perception of conflict.

It is in that sense a response to an 'implicit plea' formulated by Nico Carpentier for the 'strengthening of Cultural War Studies, and for the recognition of the importance of ideology, representation, identity (...) and power as analytical categories for War studies' (Carpentier, 2015: 10).

This paper is focussed on the coverage of the July War because it is important for a better understanding of the identities articulated in the channel's narrative of 2006, which then necessarily informs the analysis mediated representations of the Egyptian uprising in 2011, and of the more recent Syrian conflict.

'Cultural Studies need to go to war again. [It] needs to engage with the horrific, the destructive, the violent-pornographic, the perverse, the vile and the prosaic in our present-day conjuncture, reassuming its key role of relentlessly uncovering the always hidden societal structures that generate oppression, suffering and death.' (Carpentier, 2015: 13)

In that sense, this paper is the first in a series of attempts to take Cultural Studies to war, in the Arab side of the world.

Notes:

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[i] In September 2000, an opinion poll conducted by the central Palestinian office revealed the channel was the first source of information for 75% of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, even if the channel broadcasted Israelis (Miles, 2006).

[ii] A 10% increase in its audience was seen, reaching fifty million viewers during prime time, more than 4 million Europeans subscribed to the channel during the first week of the war, hereby doubling the number of subscribers in the old continent (Miles, 2006).

[iii] Al-Jazeera: the vision and the project: Al-Jazeera is a broadcasting service of Arab affiliation and worldwide orientation, with the slogan: 'the opinion and its opposite'. It is a pluralistic forum aspiring for the truth and an institution respecting professional ethics. While Al-Jazeera works to raise public awareness of issues that are of interest to all, its ambition is to become a bridge between people and cultures to promote the right to knowledge, the values of tolerance, democracy, respect for freedoms and human rights.

[iv] All Al-Jazeera archives were accessed, transcribed and translated by the author in 2008, 2009 and 2010 in Beirut and in Doha.

[v] The first time was ten years previously, when in April 1996, following on from an escalation of clashes around the 'security zone' Hezbollah had fired *katioucha* rockets into the north of Israel, which responded by launching an operation it called 'The Grapes of Wrath'; the death of around one hundred villagers in the bombing of a UN base resulted in state funerals. Cana then became a memorial accusing Israel of 'genocide and terrorism'. The UN General Assembly adopted a condemnation of the act alongside a demand for the immediate cessation of military operations.

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