

**The Maghreb at the cross-roads of
Europe and the Arab World : Arab and
European Satellites over the Maghreb**

Par **Dr. Ahmed BEDJAOU**
Maître de Conférences à L'ISIC

Keywords : *Arab , European, Satellites ,Maghreb, television, stations, state-run monopoly, Maghrebvision, network, satellite technology, RTA, National channel.*

Résumé

Depuis le milieu du 19^{ème} siècle, les pays du Maghreb ont vécu entre l'identité Arabe symbolisée par la Renaissance (Nahda), apparue au Mashrek et l'influence européenne représentée par le système colonial français.

La télévision est apparue en 1962 au Maroc et en 1966 en Tunisie. Est-il besoin de préciser que les trois pays ont reproduit dès le départ la tradition française de la Radiodiffusion publique ?

Qui aurait pu alors prévoir qu'avec l'arrivée d'Arabsat et alors même qu'elles étaient au sommet de leur réputation, les télévisions d'Etat maghrébines allaient subir de plein fouet l'hégémonie des chaînes satellitaires arabes ?

On l'a souvent dit, la première guerre du Golfe a laissé dans les opinions du Sud de la Méditerranée un fort sentiment de suspicion à l'égard des médias européens. Les publics arabes, déçus à la fois par « l'info-spectacle » caractérisant la “démocratie cathodique” à l'européenne et par l'immuable rituel des activités de leurs Rois et Présidents, ont découvert pour un temps, des journalistes arabes flirtant avec la liberté d'expression en utilisant le savoir-faire européen pour s'aventurer dans les préoccupations quotidiennes de leurs téléspectateurs arabes. Cet article tente de montrer comment la combinaison savoir/faire importé et discours endogène, semble nourrir l'aliénation et la schizophrénie biculturelle des publics arabes dans ce qui apparaît comme un parfait compromis entre la réalité du quotidien et les images qu'ils reçoivent à partir d'un environnement étranger, mais délivrées en langue arabe dans un style qui ne heurte pas les rites sociaux traditionnels. La ligne virtuelle de division pourrait être matérialisée par la relation des spectateurs avec la sphère publique lorsqu'ils suivent leur chaîne nationale et à la sphère privée lorsqu'ils expriment leur choix individuel pour une chaîne étrangère.

▪ **Introduction**

Since the middle of the ninetieth century, Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia have been living between the Arab identity embodied by the Nahda in the Mashrek and the European cultural influence represented by the French ambivalent colonial system.

Mainly because they belonged to the French colonial empire, the Maghrebi people have a long tradition of film goes before becoming television watchers. The beginning of television reception came in the late fifties when the three countries of the Northern part of the Maghreb were still under the French rule. The first transmission started in 1957 in Algeria, still considered as part of France. Actually, the launching of local television stations was a response to the successful propaganda programme developed by the Algerian Liberation Army through the production of a series of films. Television appeared in 1962 in Morocco and in 1966 in Tunisia. Needless to say, that the three countries obeyed to the French tradition of Media state-run monopoly. Nevertheless, they wanted to create a framework for a sub-regional Cooperation. As a response to their membership in the EBU Eurovision, the three countries decided to create in 1966 the Maghrebvision. The first shows were aired in 1970 only to come to an end in 1975 with the conflict on the Western Sahara which caused a long-lasting quarrel between Morocco and Algeria.

Because it was a colony (while the neighbouring countries were protectorates), Algeria inherited of a structured regional network that enabled the regime to achieve in 1974 the unification of the transmitters in the northern side of the country. 95 % of the territory was covered by the end of the seventies and the government decided to subsidise half of the price of the TV sets. This state intervention allowed 85% of households to have almost a free access to the national channel. Wishing to display the image of his socialist ideology to the remotest enclaves of the population, President Boumediene decided, as early as 1975, to invest in one of the first attempts (along with India) to use the satellite technology for the coverage of the immense Saharian territory where less than 10% of the Algerians lived. The state owned Broadcasting organisation known as RTA (Radiotélévision algérienne), opted for a transponder on an Intelsat satellite designed for an indirect transmission to 14 small local relay stations on band C. Half of the capacities were used for radio and TV frequencies and the rest for telephone connections. At that time, individual reception requested a 11 meter dish. Still used nowadays, the system is based on 60 local relays, although the signal is sent through a new generation of satellites like the Newsy NNS 7 on digital band KU, which allows both direct and indirect transmission covering the whole African continent.

For instance, the state owned Algerian TV covers with a small transmitter installed in the Algerian embassy the city of Nouakchott where half of the population of Mauritania lives. Morocco uses the same device to complete the coverage of its national TV through satellite.

At the beginning of the eighties, the Maghrebi countries were connected to the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) through Eutelsat. Additionally to EBU, Algeria was also connected to the socialist countries of the IRTOrganisation via Interspoutnik.

The Maghreb at the cross-roads of Europe and the Arab World : Arab and European Satellites over the Maghreb

1- The French and Arab temptations

Willing to counterbalance the European influence, the countries of the Maghreb played an active role in the creation of the Arab States Broadcasting Union. Abdallah Chekroun, the former manager of the Moroccan national TV was the first General Secretary and Tunisia became the headquarters of the Union. When Arabsat was created, Abd el Kader Bairi an Algerian TV leader, was appointed in 1982 as the manager of the project.

After their unsuccessful attempt to escape from the French predominance through a sub-regional co-operation, the Maghrebi countries obviously opted for the Arab World area as a second circle of a transnational framework

That was in 1984 and the Northern Maghreb channels with their engineers and experts trained in Europe, appeared after Egypt as the most dynamic and experienced region in the Arab world for producing modern programmes. The volume of local images reached an average of 44% in Algeria while the manager of the Moroccan RTM confided in an interview to *El Maghrib* dated 1985, "my ambition is to produce one daily hour, but we would need to increase the budget of our television by 400%".

Who could predict that, with the advent of Arabsat and at the very peak of their reputation and power, the state-run channels of the Maghreb were going to lose their dominant place and become passive, ordinary consumers of a strong wind coming from the Mashrek?

The first Arabsat satellite named A2 and launched in 1982 was used for telephone use as well as for the exchange of programmes between the state-run channels in the Arab world. Algiers was chosen to shelter the activities of this centre. The founders of Arabsat were very respectful of the state monopoly in force in the 22 member countries. It rapidly appeared that the technical potentialities of the two first Arabsat satellites considerably exceeded the exchange of production Arab capacities. We may as well say that the first Arabsat satellite have been as costly as of little usefulness. As the Egyptian expert Hamid Kandil put it very sarcastically, "Arabsat was designed, produced, launched, supervised and controlled by others. The Arabs transferred the product, not the process. It the same old story : we have stolen the Aladdin lamp, but when the spirit escaped from it, we proved to be unable to take it back"¹.

2- Aborted inroadson state-run monopolies

While the governing elites, whatever their ideology or political system, seemed satisfied with the state-run monopolies, many experts warned them of the imminence of the invasion of their hertzian space. They advised them to invest in the creation of new channels, to encourage a dynamic production policy and to prepare to compete with a national private sector before having to face the sky channels in a more than dubious battle. Conscious of their fragility inn front of the approaching tide, and in spite of their reluctance to abandon their monopolies, the three countries reacted in different manners. Among the three national channels the Algerian television seemed at the beginning of the eighties the most structured in term of production capacities. Algerian experts choose to launch in 1984 a second national channel which was supposed to stimulate the public service. A few months before its inauguration, President Chadli cancelled the project and condemned Algeria to live twenty years later, with a single channel. Because they were more conscious of the fragility of their television, Tunisia and Morocco adopted a different approach. Tunisia was the first country of the region to create a breach in the state monopoly when it decided to allow the Italian RAI Uno to install herztian

The Maghreb at the cross-roads of Europe and the Arab World : Arab and European Satellites over the Maghreb

transmitters which in 1989 covered the whole country. Given the limited number of Italian speaking people, the competition was far from being fierce. The real danger could derive from a French speaking channel. While Algeria was closing an all Algerian second channel, the Tunisian government very cleverly decided to launch under a joint venture agreement with France, a second channel based on the airing of the French state owned France 2 programmes. As to show the limits of this opening, the French news were replaced by an official local bulletin before the entire channel did without the French partner to become Canal 21. On the 7 November 1992, anniversary day of President's Benali take of power, the Canal Horizons Tunisia (a subsidiary of Canal + France), began its transmission of partly encrypted programmes. Most of these latter were sent from Paris via the satellite Intelsat VI before their transmission through the local network and their reception for the equivalent of 25 US\$. The project targeted a significant number of 50 to 70 000 subscribers to become profitable. A few year later, the subscription price and the growing competition represented by MBC killed the progression of the channel which never exceeded 20 000 subscribers. This way, Tunisia discreetly returned to a complete state monopoly control on the media.

In Morocco, the state monopoly on broadcasting frequencies started to crumble with the end of the exclusivity detained by the national radio. King Hassan II decided to allow a joint venture (with the French SOFIRAD and Saudi interests) to launch in the former international area of Tangier a private radio called MEDI 1. This channel adopted a certain freedom in its treatment of foreign affairs. It is still very successful among the Maghrebi audiences because the two most largely spoken languages in the Maghreb Arabic and French are alternately used. A few years later, the same principle was applied to television with the commercial channel 2 M international that started to transmit in 1988 after SOREAD, a Moroccan company controlled by ONA, another state institution share the project with the French first channel TF1 and SOFIRAD. The new channel was also financially supported by the French Government. 2 M I transmitted (through Intelsat 5F3 relayed by retransmitters) encrypted programmes (mainly French) and produced a few hours of local unscrambled shows.

Again, M 2 I's ambition of conquering 90 000 subscribers was far from being achieved. This situation led the Royal government to buy back the foreign shares and to transform 2M into state own second channel. The privileged relations established between the Moroccan Kingdom and France in the framework of the French speaking countries organisation, opened the way to Tv5 Europe in Morocco. The channel started its transmission in 1984 through a satellite(Ecsl). The richer received the channel with a big dish and the rest of the population on the national herzian network. Until Tv5 covered in one of its news bulletin G. Perrault's "Our Friend the King". King Hassan decided to boycott Tv5 and to hand the earth network to a less subversive channel: the Saudi funded MBC.

Canal Horizons made in Morocco an attempt which rapidly failed. The Canal Horizons Afrique programmes are presently sent via a satellite to the whole continent. No doubt that the commercial destiny of 2Mi and Canal Horizons Morocco has been partly undermined by the unscrambled presence of Tv5 and MBC.

If Tunisia pretended to make inroads on state monopoly and Morocco really tried to, what about Algeria? As told before, Algerian authorities banished in 1983 an attempt made by TV experts to launch a second channel and initiated the year after a reform of the Broadcasting system broken into four state companies. The new organisation resulted in the destruction of

the most performing production facilities in the area and in a growing mediocrity of the unique channel. The 1988 riots showed the great anger of the population against the state-run media,

The Maghreb at the cross-roads of Europe and the Arab World : Arab and European Satellites over the Maghreb

especially television. After the adoption of a pluralist Constitution in 1989 and the Information law in 1960 which established the freedom of expression and the right to be informed, the Head of Government Sid Ahmed Ghazali signed a decree which guaranteed to the private sector a free access to frequencies for transmitting new channels. The new law was respected except for state monopoly on Television which is illegal but still into practice. The good news is that Algeria has since that period probably the most independent and offensive print press but also one of the most mediocre television of the Arab world. "The state television imagined to accelerate the national unity finally has radically denied the deep cultural differences which actually shape an integrated society", says Lotfi Madani².

3- *The wholesky for a dish*

Meanwhile, the most fortunate citizens among the ruling classes in the Maghreb had started in 1987 to buy the expensive equipments which will soon allow them to develop their schizophrenic relation to the Kings and "Zaims" on the one hand and to the former colonising country on the other hand. The obscure desire of their desire was in fact embodied in the French channels which had started transmitting their programmes by satellite. Thus, the very few could have a free access to other sources of news without suffering from the language obstacle.

A year later, the 1988 riots that took place in Algeria showed for the first time the extent of popular discontentment. The failure of the political system represented by the governing party and its double rejection by the elite and the poorest people led to a rush towards the satellite dishes. This failure was also felt through the lack of credibility of the official media. "It was as if in the collective imaginery, the breach with all forms of archaisms inevitably meant the access to the new technologies regarded as the compulsory passage to Modernity". As a consequence, and "while they had proved under the socialist rule their inability to find a consensus on the maintenance of common living spaces, the Algerians associated their efforts in order to share the price of the expensive equipments necessary for the satellite reception of foreign news. A survey led by the governmental CENEAP clearly indicates that the largest number of the people who connect themselves (for the equivalent of 50 US\$ per Family) to a satellite dish, live in popular buildings and that every dish is tied to a number that varies from 120 to 300 homes with small re-transmitters in between. Although the phenomenon was still very new, Lotfi Madani writes that, according to a Proxima Conseil survey, at least 35 % of the Algerians (9 millions) had between 1988 and 1993 connected their TV set to a dish antenna³. This strong collective movement clearly expressed a claim for another type of social and political communication. But as Joëlle Stoltz wrote in a article entitled "the Algerian Watch Dallas", "this spontaneous form of unionised gathering against the state, his abuses and failures" is the expression of the meeting between social dynamics and the lust for technical innovation⁴.

Moreover, the Maghrebi regimes managed to insidiously and massively transfer the activities related to news, culture and entertainment to the unique state-run TV channel, as if they wanted to jail the individuals in their inner space in order to obtain their allegiance to the official speech delivered every night at eight. The number of tickets sold in the Algerian film

theatres reached 23 millions in 1982 to fall to 11 millions in 1990 and less than one million in 2003. During that period, 95% of the film theatres closed their doors.

Since Boumediene's death, there was a large consensus about the failure of socialism and the urgency of introducing deep democratic reforms. Ten years later, and in spite of its agricultural and natural resources, the system was still based on the Party/Nation/State rule and proved unable to create

The Maghreb at the cross-roads of Europe and the Arab World : Arab and European Satellites over the Maghreb

anything else than corruption. In 1988, Algeria was confronted to an enormous economic crisis which sounded like the collapse of the entire puzzle.

The advent of the sky channels took place in this highly deteriorated climate. The Algerians (but also the Tunisians and History will later show that Moroccans were in the same mood)

who did not believe their national media any longer, with a special mention for the unique state TV channel, wanted to have access to other sources. I would like to insist here on the fact that the movement towards the foreign sky channels responded to a free choice decided by citizens from inside their society. The term “invasion” is rather used by the state “apparatchiks” who prefer referring to “Masses” instead of citizens.

Abdallah Chaqrun, the former ASBU manager compares the reaction of the three regimes in front of what they regarded as a dangerous invasion. Tunisia is the first country of the region to pass in 1985 a bill which imposed a preliminary agreement from the Ministries of Interior and Defence which meant that the dishes were not available for ordinary citizens. This coercive measure did not prevent the percentage of equipped households to progress from 5% in 1991 to 39% in 1998. Riadh Ferjani who gives this statistics adds that two thirds of the purchases were unauthorised. In 1992, the Moroccan government decided that it would cost a tax of 700 US\$ for the purchase of a dish ⁵.

Regarding the aftermath of 1988 riots and the rapid dissemination of the dishes in the popular suburbs, the Algerian authorities decided for a total “laissez-faire”, which led 60% of the Algerians to receive the sky channels in 1998. More confusing adds A. Chaqrun, is the repressive decree taken by the French government in 1993 which imposed a permit from the local councils before installing a dish. Aesthetic reasons were put forward to justify this decision which essentially targeted the emigrates (most of them Arab speakers) who were trying to connect their sets to Arab channels and starting from 1997, to the Algerian Canal Algérie which was a simple off-shoot of the state-run TV. Algerian TV was received in Europe through Eutelsat. It was soon followed by the Moroccan first and second channels (2M) and by the Tunisian TV.

4- *The attraction/rejection schizophrénia*

Contrarily to the Middle East, where only the highly educated elite could follow English speaking channels, the majority of the Maghrebi have a good understanding of French, when they are not fluent. On the other hand, compulsory education had considerably enhanced the percentage of people who master Arabic. This bilingual situation offered to the Maghrebi watchers, geographically close to Europe but sharing with the Arab world the same culture, the possibility to choose between the Arab and the French channels. At the beginning, four of these latter attracted the majority of the viewers seduced by a successful commercial model of society. That was a time when satellites meant modernity and success. Until the invasion of Kuwait and the war led by an international coalition against Iraq in 1991.

In terms of communication, this war said Nur ed Dine Sail, a former programme manager at Canal + (France) and 2M (Morocco), “is the end of something and the beginning of a new era...The liberal West tolerated the American Army to impose a censorship on every image sent to us by CNN transformed by Bush and Saddam into a sort of world Media monopoly. Suddenly, war-time communication has turned into a non-communication system”.⁶

The Maghreb at the cross-roads of Europe and the Arab World : Arab and European Satellites over the Maghreb

With the socialist French administration supporting the war against Iraq, it was as if the European channels started disclosing pain and awe while they were expected to deliver pleasure and comfort. The French President Mitterand seemed very irritated by what he scornfully qualified as the demonstrations of the Maghrebi “street”. The divorce was inescapable and the majority of the population in the three countries tried to find heaven under the Arab satellites. In reference to a 1993 survey carried out in Morocco by Sunergia, Hassen Smili writes that the state-owned TVM remained far ahead the other channels, followed by 2M and MBC which already wins 14% of the audience, the Spanish TVE with 13%, while Tv5 achieves only 5%, a little more than the Algerian TV (mostly viewed by the neighbouring populations of eastern Morocco) with 4,6%. ⁷

Set up by the Saudi billionaire Cheikh Saleh and first based in London, MBC was the first satellite channel to achieve a significant penetration in the Maghreb. Its non-subscription status and its all Arab programmes combined to a European know how rapidly seduced the Maghrebi. B. Mostefaoui notes that according to a SOFRES survey led in 1993, the Arab speaking, the rural and the low-educated audiences are more represented than in 2M or TV5 in Morocco. But this is also true for the Algerians when we compare MBC to the French channels. The same survey proves that the French channels influence has become rather limited to young people and to a small percentage of the richest families living in the big cities. ⁸

5- *The War in Iraq and the media*

One of the outcomes of the war against Iraq was the global loss of credibility of the western media. This distrust was confirmed by many surveys in Europe, but it was felt as a permanent suspicion in the South of the Mediterranean among the partners of the European Community. Everyone knows that you may distrust TV news and keep on watching them massively. The audiences of the Maghreb who used to compare on the one hand the “infotainment” of the “cathodic” democracy supplied by the French channels (often based on confrontations implying their own leading politicians), and on the other hand the tireless immutable ritual of their King or President’s immense power and activities, these viewers discovered a new brand of journalists working for MBC : they seemed to combine the European cleverness and freedom of expression with an Arab anchor presentation, but also with a deeper insight into Arabs’ concerns. This combination seems to have nourished the viewers’ alienation and bicultural schizophrenia as it appears as a perfect compromise between their reality and the images that they receive from a foreign environment but delivered in Arabic and a moral monitoring. In fact, whether they are watching the state-run or the satellite channels, the viewers develop a strong tendency for a fantasy conception of themselves. The virtual dividing line could be their relation to the public sphere when they watch their national TV and to the private sphere where they express their own choice for a foreign channel.

According to a study led in Algeria and Tunisia, and even if they spend more time on the foreign channels, a majority of males viewers watch the evening news on the unique Algerian channel while 60% of the females prefer staying on the Arab channels. This seems to confirm that whatever their degree of acceptance or rejection of the ruling system, their loyalty to the major news journal may appear as a form of allegiance to the official speech. Consequently, and within the private sphere, their schizophrenic behaviour finds its foundation on a rejection/attraction relation to the different sources of information. And thus, as Dina El-Khawaga writes : “the growth of the satellite channels seems to delight both transmitters and receivers. The states affect to pretend that the satellite technology is an evidence of their modernism and political opening..., while the opposition forces see in these channels an efficient means of expression and public visibility”. ⁹

The Maghreb at the cross-roads of Europe and the Arab World : Arab and European Satellites over the Maghreb

In Algeria however, the Islamic Fundamentalists tried at the beginning to combat the new satellite channels, or at least to persuade the population to reject the dishes which were called the “devildishes”. Except that after the 1991 war against Iraq and before the parliamentary elections, the Algerian official channel opened its talk shows and programmes to the leaders of the Islamic Front of Salvation who suddenly discovered the great advantage of being media-propagated. When they won and the elections were cancelled, these same leaders discovered that overseas, they fascinated many European Media (mostly represented by women reporters) and that they were ready to keep them on the air. This way they continued to address their messages to their supporters through what they considered as the enemy.

On the opposite side, and in order not to openly denounce the rapid growth of the audience gained by the Arab speaking channels but also the freedom that the new technology provides, the ruling classes in the Maghreb started to develop a strategy of defence against what they (and the French) call the cultural invasion. This strategy has a name: the cultural exception.

In an article entitled Cultural Dependence and Audio-visual Creation, Yvonne Mignot-Lefebvre denies the concept of the growing hegemony of the western media on the southern media. She rather thinks that the new offer on the world market has created an attraction for new programmes like those produced by Globo in Brazil or Televisa in Mexico that has led to a revival of the Amerindian roots, but we can also give the example of the Arab series which fascinate millions of watchers¹⁰. We may also welcome the apparition of a new “transnational” imaginary and model of visual consumption.

As N. Sail observed, the more our societies open their eyes on universality, the more we note an aggravation of a frenzy nationalism which inevitably leads to a more or less quiet schizophrenia. The nature of the request lies within the repressed different cultural components that structure the Maghrebi societies.

Therefore, the need is not created by the multiplication of the offer made by the Arab and western satellite channels but by the call and recognition that is expressed by any society. The Tunisian searcher Larbi Chouikha confirms that the choice for images does not go anymore through the state filter. The request is now formulated and built in a private sphere (mostly collective however) after conflicts, negotiations and ...compromises between different social, cultural and cultural behaviours. And L. Chouikha to conclude that “the remote control allows many travels without visa”.¹¹

6- *The situation after the second war in Iraq*

After the success met by MBC, a large number of Arab satellite channels appeared in the sky of the Maghreb. Among those who have a visible impact on audiences, the Saudi funded ART which recently acquired the exclusive rights for the African soccer championship and almost prevented the Maghrebi channels to screen the matches in which their national teams were involved. A compromise was founded a few days before, but if it happened in the future, the absence of national teams would be resented as a severe blow to what is still considered as emblematic for the old conception of sovereignty.

The third channel that for a time seemed to attract the viewers before standing back in the region was another Saudi group Orbit. Nilesat and its digital decoder is also present among a small percentage of the audience. But the greatest novelty was the intrusion of the Qatar-based Al-Jazeera in the small circle of all news channels along with BBC world, CNN and the French LCI. Because she seemed too

The Maghreb at the cross-roads of Europe and the Arab World : Arab and European Satellites over the Maghreb

flatter the Islamic values –the ruling elite would even say that it backs Islamic fundamentalism- , Al-Jazeera and its talk shows rapidly gained a large audience and often at the expense of MBC. Since it moved from London to the Middle East, MBC is reproached with programming films which are less in conformity with the Islamic values and ethics. With the terrorist attacks on New York and the invasion of Afghanistan, the impact of Al-Jazeera increased again to become dominant after the invasion of Iraq by the coalition. One may remember that in spite of massive demonstrations against the first war in Irak, the Maghrebi had showed a rapid but deep disappointment after Saddam shameful defeat. Everybody felt that after the different Arab regimes failures to resist Israel and the West, the Maghreb's peoples were willing to move away from the Pan Arab ideology and that get closer to Europe. At that precise moment, they wanted through the remote control, to limit their relation with the Arab World to what the satellite channels would provide in order to nourish a segment of their cultural identity. In spite of its media diplomacy approach, the Qatari channel met many crises with the Arab countries. It is a well known fact that Al-Jazeera channel is blind on the lack of freedom in the Gulf region, while promoting a one-way vision of "freedom of expression" for the Republican countries in the rest of the Arab World. It is said that on 27 January 1999, several Algerian cities lost power simultaneously, to prevent the population from watching a program in which the fundamentalists Algerian dissidents were backed at the expense of the Algerian Army. On 4 July 2004, the Algerian government froze the activities of Al Jazeera's Algerian correspondent.¹² "Helping to bring revolution to Egypt and Tunisia is one thing; fomenting uprisings in the Persian Gulf is quite another. But the situation is delicate in Saudi Arabia, where the regime is wobbling on the cusp of change. The kingdom either directly or indirectly controls most of the Arab media, including Al Jazeera's principal rival Al Arabiya, but it remains highly vulnerable to the kind of palpitations Al Jazeera could easily provoke."¹³

When the USA expelled the Taliban from power, the reaction of the populations of the Maghreb (who had suffered from terrorists training in this country) was rather positive. With the second war in Iraq, the disaffection of the people here for the Arab problems were confirmed. Except a small number of gatherings in Morocco, the rest of the North African cities remain very quiet, distant, and however attentive to the news coming from the Gulf. This situation was turned to good account by Al-Arabyia which found inroads to the local

audience. From that on, Al-Arabyia which is transmitted through Hotbird, is sharing the all-news slot with Al-Jazeera which however remains dominant in the region.

In fact it seems that the most largely viewed programmes are the talk-shows, especially when they involve participants from the Maghreb or/and when these talks deal with Islam, fundamentalism and the relations with the western world. Again we can see here that these channels are nourishing the cultural conflict that lies within the unconscious of every individual in this Arab-Berber land.

Since 1997, the state-run Algerian TV has tried to broadcast its programmes on a satellite channel, targeting the three and a half million North Africans that live in Europe, through Canal Algérie and the Arab world with Algerian TV 3 transported by Arabsat. These two channels proved to be a poor copy of a poor national television that is still devoting one hour a day for the President's activities. The same can be said about the Moroccan and the Tunisian channels. 2M seems to be the most largely Maghrebi channel to be seen in France.

Worried about the loss of influence of the French channels in the Maghreb and irritated by the presence of Arab speaking channels coming from the other side of the sea, the French government has

The Maghreb at the cross-roads of Europe and the Arab World : Arab and European Satellites over the Maghreb

decided to launch an all-news channel which is supposed to compete with CNN and Al-Jazeera, but without putting the sufficient amount of money in the project.

A new kind of satellite channels are appearing on the Maghrebi sky. They were initiated by Algerian born French citizens. The first one is Beur TV and although it is supposed to target the French population originated from The Maghreb, this channel is viewed by part of the Algerians. The second is Berber TV and its audience exists within the 10 million people who in Algeria and Morocco speak the Amazigh, which is the language that the people of North Africa spoke before the advent of Islam. The third is KTV. It is an all-news channel based in London and belonged to Moumen Khalifa the very controversial billionaire whose financial empire collapsed the year after in Algeria. The common point between these three channels is that although they have a European status, they nonetheless address Maghrebi audiences in a style that blends the European style and the Middle East Arab touch.

While independent newspapers appeared at the end of the eighties, in the area of broadcasting, the government has maintained a monopoly since 1962. A few years before a new legislation on broadcasting was adopted by the Parliament (2014), many new networks have been bypassing a lockdown by broadcasting their programmes from abroad. Until now there are 20 channels broadcasting offshore. Even if the editorial rooms and studios are based in Algeria, most of these channels are legally registered in Jordan, Bahrain, or the UK. With the recently published media law, these TV networks will have to comply with Algeria law to become Algerian licensed TV.¹⁴

These channels have become a stake in the Algerian internal political arena and their impact on the April 2014 presidential elections in Algeria has proven to be sometimes crucial. - Al Atlas TV was shut down before presidential elections for its government criticisms and its declared support to candidate Ali Benflis. On the other hand, Wiam TV was created just days before presidential elections to support independent candidate Abdelaziz Bouteflika. However, most of the channels allocated a balanced and fair share to all the candidates. As we may see, the competition in the Information market has certainly deeply modified the Arab

vision on the role of the media as well as their capacity to counterbalance what some resent as the western "hegemony". The question is to know whether this change stays on a consuming level or if it able to enhance the political and democratic vision of the average Arab viewers. I do agree with my friend Daud Kuttub when he expresses his doubts "about the "liberal" vision of steady progress towards democracy through free competition in the Information market"¹⁵. With the ambiguous and yet to be confirmed concept of "Arab Spring", much has been said about the sky channels' effect on the wind of change that affects the Arab world. More than 350 Arab speaking channels are competing in an attempt to influence the course of events. Since the advent of private local channels, Al Jazeera and Al Arabia have lost great segments of their audimat. There is a strong among the Arab viewers to privilege local programmes. The Arab societies have changed and the Arab media, especially the sky channels, are simply confirming and accompanying the process. Most of the regimes in the Arab world have seen the advantage of "instrumenting" the sky channels. They reinforce what Altermann calls "a real basic identity" (13) and have become a privileged space for Media diplomacy. They offer a momentum of exotic freedom to their citizens knowing perfectly that most of them will be present at the night ritual show with the King or President's activities. The all-news channels play the role that the print press plays in Algeria: they are free to say or write whatever they want, but once it is done, everybody returns to its former occupation and life goes on like a long undisturbed river. The freedom of the press in the western world is the natural result of a democratic evolution that has started with enlightenment several centuries ago. The Arab world is building its own democratic culture, often

The Maghreb at the cross-roads of Europe and the Arab World : Arab and European Satellites over the Maghreb

through painful processes. It would be adventurous to state that Arab TV channels are bringing an added value to this evolution.

■ **Foot Notes**

1. L. Madani, Modamité et usages de la réception télévisée par satellite au Maghreb », NAQD review N° 8/9 Alger 1995.
2. Op .cit.
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- 13 Algerian television channels: - ENTV (state-owned broadcaster) - Canal Algerie - TVA3 - Tamazight TV - Coran TV - Echorouk TV - Echorouk News Channel (news outlet of the Echorouk Media Group) - El Djazairiya TV - Ennahar TV - Hoggar TV - Dzairshop TV - Numedia News TV - L'Index TV (Constantine regional channel) - Dzair TV (owned by business tycoon Ali Haddad)) - Djurdjura Children Channel - Samira Women-dedicated Channel - El Bilad TV - Wiam TV created just days before presidential elections - KBC or El Khabar Broadcasting Channel (owned by El Khabar Media Group)
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■ **Short bibliography**

The Maghreb at the cross-roads of Europe and the Arab World : Arab and European Satellites over the Maghreb

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- Le Maghreb au défi de l'image satellite : ISJ/FFN Rabat

A. Bedjaoui / Le Maghreb à l'heure des satellites, Hassen Smili :Défi international et déficit de programmation nationale, A. Chaqrun : la loi et l'image satelliteN. Sail : Images, satellites et Maghreb.

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Al Jazeera's powerful images of angry crowds and bloody morgues undercut the Egyptian regime's self-serving arguments and stood in sharp contrast to the state-run TV channels, which promoted such a dishonest version of events that some of their journalists resigned in disgust. At least one popular TV talk-show presenter, Mahmoud Saad, was later seen being carried on the shoulders of triumphant demonstrators in Tahrir Square. While Al Jazeera was showing hundreds of thousands of people calling for the end of the regime, Egyptian TV showed humdrum scenes of traffic quietly passing by; when Al Jazeera reported hundreds of people queuing for bread and petrol, Egyptian TV showed happy shoppers with full fridges using footage filmed at an unknown time in the past.

During the uprising in Cairo, the Egyptian government systematically targeted Al Jazeera in an attempt to impede the network's gathering and broadcasting of news. On Jan. 27 Al Jazeera Mubasher, the network's live channel, was dropped by the government-run satellite transmission company, Nilesat. On Jan. 30, outgoing Egyptian Information Minister Anas al-Fiqi ordered the offices of all Al Jazeera bureaus in Egypt to be shut down and the accreditation of all network journalists to be revoked. At the height of the protests, Nilesat broke its contractual agreement with the network and stopped transmitting the signal of Al Jazeera's Arabic channel -- which meant viewers outside Egypt could only follow the channel on satellites not controlled by the Egyptian authorities. To the rescue came at least 10 other Arabic-language TV stations, which stepped in and offered to carry Al Jazeera's content. "They just volunteered," said Souag. "They were not paid, and we thanked them for that."

The next day, six Al Jazeera English journalists were briefly detained and then released, their camera equipment confiscated by the Egyptian military. On Feb. 3, two unnamed Al Jazeera English journalists were attacked by Mubarak supporters; three more were detained. On Feb. 4, Al Jazeera's Cairo office was stormed and vandalized by pro-Mubarak supporters. Equipment was set on fire and the Cairo bureau chief and an Al Jazeera correspondent were arrested. Two days later, the Egyptian military detained another correspondent, Ayman Mohyeldin; he was released after nine hours in custody. The Al Jazeera website has also been under relentless cyberattack since the onset of the uprising.

The Maghreb at the cross-roads of Europe and the Arab World : Arab and European Satellites over the Maghreb

Oil- and gas-rich Arab states can use their wealth to address some of the grievances that brought Tunisians and Egyptians onto the streets, but not all. Al Jazeera's home country, however, would appear to be somewhat safe from the wave of unrest. Power in Qatar is traditionally transferred by coup d'état, as in 1995 when the current emir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, seized power from his father Sheikh Khalifa -- but as the world's richest country with a GDP per capita in excess of [\\$145,000](#), it is highly unlikely to experience revolutionary convulsions about anything besides shopping. The most pressing socioeconomic problem the leadership currently faces is how to motivate a population of soon-to-be millionaires to keep showing up for work in the morning.

Helping to bring revolution to Egypt and Tunisia is one thing; fomenting uprisings in the Persian Gulf is quite another. But the situation is delicate in Saudi Arabia, where the regime is wobbling on the cusp of change. The kingdom either directly or indirectly controls most of the Arab media, including Al Jazeera's principal rival Al Arabiya, but it remains highly vulnerable to the kind of palpitations Al Jazeera could easily provoke.