

**Al Jazeera English: Global news in a changing world. Edited by Philip Seib. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, pp. 204. ISBN: 978-0-230-34021-3.**

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Al Jazeera English (AJE) is the first 24-hour English language global satellite news channel to beam from the Middle East. Hitherto, the negative portrayal of Islam and Muslims by Western global media had engaged the attention of communication researchers in the Muslim world; as such, media reports had occasionally led to street protests and diplomatic tensions between Western and Muslim-majority nations. In fact, the nations of the South have expressed concerns over the Anglo-American domination of the world's one-way flow of information with its attendant cultural and economic hegemony against the sovereignty of nation-states. Al Jazeera Network was established to correct these anomalies and to ensure balanced and horizontal flow of information between the global North and South. The book under review, which, according to its editor, is the first of its type, is devoted to evaluating the extent to which AJE has contributed to the avowed objectives of the Al Jazeera Network.

The book begins with an introduction by its editor, Philip Seib, Professor of Journalism, Public Diplomacy and International Relations at the University of Southern California. The ten-chapter book, with valuable contributions by scholars from the United States, Europe, and the Middle East, delves extensively into the origin of AJE, the nature of its global audiences, its worldwide areas of coverage, the channel's mission and messages, and its problems, prospects and achievements.

In the opening chapter, Shawn Powers, Assistant Professor at Georgia State University, traces the origin of AJE back to its Arabic-speaking elder sister, Al Jazeera Arabic which was launched on November 1, 1996 by the immediate past Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani with a mission to produce journalistically sound programming that is free of government interference. According to the author, Al Jazeera Arabic established itself as a globally acclaimed news channel

in the aftermath of the 2001 American-led invasion of Afghanistan. Being the only global news network with a bureau in Kabul, it became the only credible source of information and hence, its footage was repackaged and sold to major world news organizations and networks around the planet. This, he said, prompted the idea of establishing Al Jazeera English, which began with the introduction of English subtitles and dubbing of Arabic programmes into English. However, an initial cogent step by Al Jazeera to directly reach English-speaking audiences started with the establishment of an English language website, tagged 'Al Jazeera Net' on March 23, 2003, five days after the America-led invasion of Iraq. Faced with different technical, administrative and political challenges, Al Jazeera management decided to transform Al Jazeera Net into a full fledged global news network and hence, AJE was launched on November 15, 2006, coinciding with the tenth anniversary of Al Jazeera Arabic.

The nature of AJE's global audiences is discussed in chapter two by Hussein Amin, Professor with the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, American University in Cairo. According to him, AJE beams from four centres in Doha, Kuala Lumpur, London and Washington to over 250 million households worldwide. While claiming that AJE broadcast reaches nearly all the nations of the world, he admits that it is difficult to estimate the channel's audience size, as the breadth of its coverage extends to areas not covered by rating agencies. However, coverage barriers facing the channel in the United States, Africa and South Asia are highlighted in the subsequent chapters. In chapter four for example, Will Youmans, a PhD candidate in the Communication Department, University of Michigan, explains that AJE's depiction as a terrorist-affiliated network by the administration of George W. Bush created obstacles for the channel in the United States and some Western nations.

Hence, AJE gained scant access to Americans in 2011 through cable systems only in three cities: Washington, DC, Toledo, and Burlington. According to him, the situation changed for better with the uniqueness of the AJE's coverage of the Arab Spring when the channel became the primary source of information for American audiences, including government officials and major American networks. He observes that the U.S government opposition to AJE subsided, adding, however, that cable companies are still reluctant to cooperate with the channel for fear

of reactions by their customers, advertisers and other influential private interests.

As for Africa, Amelia Arsenault, Assistant Professor of Communication at Georgia State University, explains in chapter five that AJE serves as a counter-hegemonic force challenging the dominance of Western media and giving voice to the voiceless Africa. According to her, AJE does not only have more bureaus in sub-Saharan Africa than any other competitor like BBC and CNN, it also maintains permanent operations in many major cities on the African continent and it uses local reporters instead of foreign correspondents who may not have proper connection with the indigenous people. The author, however, points out that AJE's audience penetration in Africa remains comparatively low due to limited availability of satellite access and the fact that radio still remains the dominant news medium in parts of the continent.

Giving an account of the AJE performances in South Asia, Michael Kugelman, a Programme Associate with the Asia Programme at the Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars, explains in chapter six that the channel, with a centre in Kuala Lumpur and 3 bureaus in Islamabad, Kabul and New Delhi, has covered a variety of stories across South Asian nations. He, however, observes that AJE still has a modest audience size in South Asia due to a number of factors, including the negative perception of the channel as a terrorist Islamic network, the language barriers, the limited cable and Internet access as well as the region's crowded media environments. The author, therefore, concludes that rather than capturing the South Asian audiences, AJE now captures South Asia for global audiences with its frequent coverage of the events in the region.

The mission and message of AJE as well as its level of objectivity in the coverage of the world's major events are extensively analysed in chapters 3, 7, 8 and 9. In chapter three, Tine Ustad Figenschou, a post-doctoral fellow in the Department of Media and Communication at the University of Oslo, sees AJE as the channel of the global news contra-flow with a mission to balance the one-way information flow between the South and the North. Her quantitative analysis of the AJE News Hour from October-December 2007 to May-July 2008 reveals that the Global South (Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Latin America) was more frequently covered than the Global North (Europe and North America)

with a ratio of 61-38%. Assessing AJE's coverage of Gaza 2008-2009 in chapter seven, a Palestinian, Rima Najjar Merriman, who is an Assistant Professor of English Literature at Al Qudus University, observes that the channel was able to break the Israeli global media framing of issues by presenting balanced and independent reports of events. In chapter eight, an Israeli, Eytan Gilboa, a Professor of Communication and International Relations at Bar-Ilan University in Israel, expresses a contrary view, saying that AJE failed to meet the criteria for peace journalism with its presentation of the Arab perspective of issues during the invasions. In chapter nine, Mohammed el-Nawawy, an Associate Professor in the School of Communication at the Queens University of Charlotte praises AJE's balanced coverage during the Ground Zero Mosque controversy in New York and concludes that the channel has a great potential and ample opportunity to play a conciliatory media function when it comes to covering divisive and controversial issues around the world.

Summing-up the authors' divergent views on AJE in the concluding chapter, the book editor, Philip Seib, observes that AJE, like any other news organisation, is far from being perfect but its achievements so far merit recognition, saying that the channel has the prospect of becoming one of the world's most authoritative sources of news for its level of editorial independence.

Over all, the book has succeeded in providing readers with in-depth and comprehensive information about the origin and workings of AJE. Hence, the book is a valuable addition to the existing works on Al Jazeera. It is, therefore, a must read book for scholars and researchers on broadcast journalism, international communication, satellite global media and international relations as well as for other members of the public who may want to gain an insight into the history and activities of AJE. However, one expects that the book would have included studies on the audience impression and evaluation of the channel's news reports. Perhaps, the next edition of the book may take this into consideration.

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