**Why Al-Jazeera Walks**
**The Contra-Flow Tightrope**

This paper examines within the realm of news media, handicaps likely to hamper a specific contra-flow venture. To dissect these handicaps or challenges, I use Arabic network, Al-Jazeera as a typical example of the media theory of contra-flow. This will help in understanding the network’s experience in challenging the Western media monopoly in the field of news production and dissemination. Contra-flow is born out of the fact that there exists a huge information imbalance between the North and the South. This imbalance is tilted in favor of the North, because there is more information trickling from developed nations to the so-called peripheral nations.

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“Why was the Al-Jazeera bureau in Afghanistan bombed?” Question posed to guests by Faisal Al-Kasim, the host of Al-Jazeera’s flagship show, *The Opposite Direction* on November 20, 2001.

Information flow is an important ingredient that enables a contemporary society to function daily. There is no doubt that without information flowing from all corners of the globe, the world would come to a standstill. Just imagine a day without the flow of information. Again, figure out waking up one morning only to find that all telephone lines are dead, the Internet is gone, and cable networks – CNN, Al-Jazeera, or NBC can’t transmit news that an Iraqi reporter hurled two shoes at President Bush in the middle of a news conference with Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki in Baghdad. All said, however, the important thing isn’t the mere flow of information, but how this information flows is critical in all facets of our lives. How the information flows around the globe is crucial, because it has far-reaching ramifications – culturally, socially, economically, and politically. Information is power. In the book *Mass Media Law*, Pember and Calvert observe that “……those who control the flow and content of information exercise considerable power.”

Communication studies teach us that effective communication is two-way traffic. Today, however, an avalanche of studies point to the fact that there exists a huge imbalance in information

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flow – between the North and the South. This imbalance is tilted in favor of the North – meaning that more information trickles from North to South. This is partly because major media conglomerates and transnational corporations in the world are based in developed countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, and France, for example. The leading top six media conglomerates are: Time Warner, Disney, Sony, Viacom, Bertelsmann, and News Corporation. Time Warner, for example, owns CNN, Cartoon Network, and Time magazine; Disney owns ABC and ESPN; Viacom owns CBS, MTV and Comedy Central; and News Corporation whose majority shareholder is Rupert Murdock, an Australian-American global media mogul owns Fox News, 20th Century Fox, and Sky TV. These corporations are immensely wealthy as pointed out by Daya Thussu in *International Communication* where, for example, in 2004 Time Warner, Disney, Viacom and News Corporation combined made a staggering profit of $9 billion. Complaints made by Third World countries during the 33rd session of the United Nations General Assembly which adopted a resolution on the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) in 1978 support the fact that there exists an information imbalance between North and South. These complaints were as follows:

- Owing to the socio-technological imbalance there was a one-way flow of information from the ‘center’ to the ‘periphery,’ which created a wide gap between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have nots’;
- The information rich were in a position to dictate terms to the information poor, thus creating a structure of dependency with widespread economic, political and social ramifications for the poor societies;
- This vertical flow (as opposed to a desirable horizontal flow of global information) was dominated by the Western-based transitional corporations;
- Information was treated by the transnational media as a ‘commodity’ and subjected to the rules of the market;
- The entire information and communication order was a part of and in turn propped up international inequality that created and sustained mechanisms of neo-colonialism.²

Since whoever controls information wields considerable power, information is therefore used by powerful nations to propagate and maintain their cultural imperialism, hegemony, and dominant

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ideology over poor countries. It is through these corporations that Western nations are capable of setting the agenda on many important issues affecting the world. The volumes of information transferred by the Western media giants exert enormous social influence on people around the world. Such information – mainly in the form of cultural products and news content – and consumed in large proportions contain elements of U.S-centric or Eurocentric values, beliefs, knowledge, ideologies and behavioral norms.

Therefore, to understand the magnitude of cultural imperialism, it is essential to compare the exchange of cultural products between powerful nations and the so-called Less Developed Countries (LDCs). Evidence available indicates that the balance of cultural information exchange is skewed in favor of the First World countries. For instance, according to Miller et al. in the book *Global Hollywood*, Lebanon’s total film imports stood at 557 in 1999. But out of this figure, 455 imports were from the U.S. In the same period, Zimbabwe imported 36, and 26 were from the States. Such trade imbalances which replicate the unfair flow of information translate to an inequality in consumption of cultural products between developed countries and the LDCs. This means that populations in LDCs continue to consume products from dominant countries and in the process get culturally brainwashed into believing that things from the West are ideal. This is how the West has managed to build hegemonic structures or other systems of dominating over the rest of the world.

The dominant flow of information can be countered through a concept called contra-flow. This is a reversal flow of information, from the South to the North. In the article *Challenger or Lackey? The Politics of News on Al-Jazeera*, Naomi Sakr writes: “….contra-flow in its sense would seem to imply not just reversed or alternative media flows, but a flow that is also counter-
hegemonic.” This paper, therefore, explores within the realm of news media handicaps likely to hamper a specific contra-flow venture.

In exploring these challenges, I use Arabic network Al-Jazeera as a typical example of media theory of contra-flow. Why it is paramount to explore these handicaps is because the wealthy nations and their influential media can be likened to a dragon, which when cornered is bound to snort, jump, kick and even attack. Therefore, they are most likely to fight back in a bid to protect their empires. In dissecting these challenges, I critically analyze the following factors in relation to how Al-Jazeera has weathered the turbulent media waters: freedom of expression and the press, reaction from the Arab world, reaction from the West, financial muscle, and professionalism in news coverage.

Key terms in this paper are: information imbalance, contra-flow, agenda-setting, cultural imperialism, dominant ideology, hegemony, and dependency theory. Information imbalance means (a) that some countries have a more useful information than others; (b) that some countries have better information capacities, that is, the ability to produce, record, process, and distribute information than others; (c) this capacity is dependent upon access to information hardware processors and carriers; and (d) it is equally dependent upon information software. Sakr says that “contra-flow occurs when countries once considered clients of media imperialism have successfully exported their output into metropolis.” According to Dearing and Rodgers, Agenda-setting “offers an explanation of why information about certain issues, and not other issues, is available to the public in a democracy; how public opinion is shaped; and why certain issues are addressed through policy actions while other issues are not.”

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4 Ibid., 116.
article, *Reconsidering Cultural Imperialism Theory* defining cultural imperialism as "a verifiable process of social influence by which a nation imposes on other countries its set of beliefs, values, knowledge and behavioral norms as well as its overall style of life." Dominant ideology is simply the ideology of the powerful and influential, but John Schwarzmantel explains that “dominant ideology on a global scale is seen as that of a globalized neo-liberalism.” Italian political theorist, Antonio Gramsci developed the concept of hegemony in 1930s. O’Sullivan *et al.* define hegemony as “the ability of the dominant classes to exercise social and cultural leadership - rather than by direct coercion of subordinate classes - to maintain their power over the economic, political and cultural direction of the nation.” Dependency theory is two-pronged: economic dependency which emphasizes the way in which formerly colonized countries remain dependent on the West. Economic dependency leads to cultural dependency which is achieved when the main media actors dominate peripheral nations.

The emergence of Al-Jazeera was an unprecedented phenomenon in the world of news and information flow. Never before had a media entity based in the South exhibited such an audacity to challenge the normative one-way flow of information from the North to the South. So, when Al-Jazeera hit international prominence in 2001, the main media actors and the powers that be in the North were caught by surprise. At the same time, it was all celebrations in the South, especially in the Arab world, because information consumers in the southern regions saw Al-Jazeera as a godsend phenomenon meant to tilt the balance of information flow. For the first time people in the South boasted how Al-Jazeera would articulate issues affecting them as well as getting a fairer representation to the western audience something that had not happened for many

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years. Speaking during the 33rd session of the United Nations General Assembly in 1978, Masmoudi Mustapha from Tunisia said “by transmitting to developing countries only news processed by them, that is, news which they have filtered, cut, and distorted, the transnational media impose their own way of seeing the world upon the developing countries.”

Al-Jazeera is based in Doha, Qatar’s capital. It was launched in 1996 with the Qatar government contributing a whopping $140 million to finance the pan-Arab 24-hour satellite news network’s operations for five years. Since then, the network has enjoyed a rocket-ride to fame across the world by establishing itself as an influential challenger to a Western monopoly on international news. On the network’s popularity, Sakr writes: “An advertising industry website reported in January 2005 that a poll of nearly 2,000 advertising executives in 75 countries had identified Al-Jazeera as the world’s fifth most recognized brand.” It is estimated that the network has an audience of around 40-50 million. According to the book *The Al-Jazeera Phenomenon*, Al-Jazeera is the preferred news station in the Middle East. For example, in Kuwait it enjoys a 56 percent preference and 47 percent in Saudi Arabia. In Jordan, 44 percent of news consumers prefer the controversial news network that has attracted loathing and criticism, not only in the West, but also within its home turf, Middle East. Perhaps nothing more attests to Al-Jazeera’s rock star fame than the following statement captured by El-Nawawy and Iskandar in *Al-Jazeera: How the Free Arab News Network Scooped the World and Changed the Middle East*:

…some U.S. TV shows devoted major segments to lampooning Al-Jazeera. One episode of NBC’s *Saturday Night Live*, broadcast on December 1, 2001, opened, ‘It is now 11:30, and if you are not watching Al-Jazeera, we are live from New York, it’s Saturday Night!’ The *Brain Trust*, a newspaper of political satire and the British equivalent of *The Onion*, ran a spoof about Al-Jazeera in its November 16, 2001 issue. The headline read that popular comedian and actor Bill Cosby had signed a $1.2 million contract to host talk shows, game programs, and occasional made-for-TV movies on Al-Jazeera.11

It is Osama bin Laden’s exclusives, however, that saw the station ride to fame, competing with such established news networks as CNN. Al-Jazeera was the first network to carry a televised interview with bin Laden, the man accused of masterminding the 9/11 attack on the U.S. soil. The interview took place in 1999. This was followed by the 2001 videotape speech from bin Laden which was broadcast over Al-Jazeera and then re-broadcast by CNN and other major networks in America and Europe. During the 1999 interview, bin Laden denied any involvement in the simultaneous bombing of the U.S. embassies in Nairobi (Kenya) and Dar es Salam (Tanzania) in August of the previous year. The network has also, time and again scooped Arab networks on breaking news. In December 1998, it ran its first exclusive within the Arab world when Saddam Hussein chose to announce his survival through Al-Jazeera, following the U.S. and UK raids against Baghdad over four nights. Its popularity through these exclusives has seen a number of prominent political leaders from the West appear on the network to explain their administration’s views on issues touching on the fight against terrorism and foreign policy. Tony Blair, Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice, and Donald Rumsfeld are some of the powerful leaders from the Western who have appeared on the Qatar-based satellite network.

We therefore, should take stock of our position and ask the following questions: Why this Al-Jazeera’s popularity? Is it just a desire and determination for contra-flow of information by people in the South that is behind the rise and the rise of Al-Jazeera? Mohamed Zayani, in the article Al-Jazeera and the Vicissitudes of the New Arab Mediascape explains some of the reasons behind Al-Jazeera’s fame within the Muslim world: “Al-Jazeera is often consumed by a populace harboring deep-rooted resentment toward the U.S. for what is perceived as anti-Muslim, anti-Arab foreign policy…..The popularity of Al-Jazeera reflected a frustration with the bias of the Western
media in general and American media in particular." Though, for many, it appears that the Arab network has managed to end the Western monopoly on production of news and its dissemination globally, however, mounting such a challenge is one thing, and sustaining it is another thing. This is so because it appears there is no any other network that has ever faced many problems or challenges in its mission to compete in the world of news production and dissemination than Al-Jazeera. First of all, there have been all manner of resistance from within the Arab world and the West on how the network goes about its news business. There has been a lot of skepticism as to what Al-Jazeera is up to. What is its objective? What’s Al-Jazeera’s agenda? These are some of the questions raised by Al-Jazeera’s friends and foe alike.

An image of Osama bin Laden as he appeared on the videotape released by Al-Jazeera on October 7, 2001. It is Osama’s exclusives such as this one that have catapulted the 24-hour Arab news channel to fame.
Source: El-Nawawy, M, & Iskandar, "Al-Jazeera: How the Free Arab News Network Scooped the World and Changed the Middle East."

One of the areas where the network has received mixed reactions is in freedom of expression and the press. Journalism can only flourish in an environment devoid of muzzling the

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press freedom. And it is from such a standpoint that the media is able to fulfill its cardinal role of being the public watchdog. Press freedom is a fillip for the growth of democracy in any society, a thing that ensures good governance, and respect for human rights, among others. That is why it is important to explore the environment under which Al Jazeera has operated in. Has there, for example, been efforts to curtail Al Jazeera’s editorial independence? It is important to underscore that Al Jazeera is a relatively free channel, but operating in one of the regions where the freedom of expression and the press has never been a success story. The emir of Qatar government has been at the frontline in ensuring the growth of the freedom of speech and the press by liberalizing the press and stopping media censorship. This is a move that has given Al Jazeera a free hand to operate without fear of reprisals from the government. The lifting of media censorship was achieved through disbanding the Information ministry which was responsible for media censorship.

It is said that Al Jazeera’s zeal to expose malfeasance within the corrupt and autocratic leadership in the region has helped develop a sense of accountability by leaders in the Middle East. In 2001 Thomas Friedman, a New York Times columnist extolled the channel as “a beacon of freedom.”

But what shocked the media world was the bombing of Al Jazeera’s bureau in Kabul, Afghanistan in 2001 by the U.S. The bombing was unbelievable – coming from the U.S., a leader in the protection of freedom of speech and the press. Perhaps nowhere in the world except in the U.S. where free speech is one of the core values of American culture. In fact, the U.S. constitution is explicit on the view that any attempt by the government to muzzle the freedom of the press is unconstitutional. Also, it was ironical that the U.S. bombed Al Jazeera’s offices, yet, Qatar’s freedom of expression and the press rules and ethics are founded on the America’s First Amendment – the wellspring for nearly all U.S. laws on freedom of speech and freedom of the press. The First Amendment adopted in 1791 states:

13 Ibid., 21.
Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.\textsuperscript{14}

The bombing of Al-Jazeera’s offices was met with seething anger from the TV channel and other advocates of a free press. They saw the move as meant to silence one of the most independent voices among the Arab media. Faisal Al-Kasim, the host of the network’s flagship show, \textit{The Opposite Direction} posed to guests the following question on November 20, 2001: “Why was the Al-Jazeera bureau in Afghanistan bombed?”\textsuperscript{15} “We learned media independence from the United States, and now the American officials want us to give up what we learned from them,”\textsuperscript{16} Al-Jazeera’s managing director, Mohammed Jasim Al-Ali, said during a phone interview on December 10, 2001. The International Press Institute (IPI) was not left behind in condemning the U.S. action. In a protest letter directed to then Secretary of State Colin Powell on October 8, 2001, IPI termed the move as “an infringement of editorial independence and has serious consequences for press freedom.”\textsuperscript{17} Saleh Dabbaker said: “It is precarious that the same people on whose image Al Jazeera was built are now criticizing the station for sticking to their rules of game.”\textsuperscript{18} Therefore, attempts to muzzle Al-Jazeera’s independence in news reporting is a representation of the handicaps that contra-flow schemes are bound to encounter.

Let’s explore the second handicap: resistance from within the Arab world. There is a saying that “charity begins at home.” Therefore, if Al-Jazeera has to tell a success story, it has to start from home – in Middle East, the Arab world. It is important to get a positive reaction from this region (the main target audience) before moving to other regions. There is no way one can

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\item Ibid., 176.
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conquer the world without first being a victor at home. Contrary to the perception that Al-Jazeera is doing very well at home, the truth of the matter is that the network has faced many problems than can ever be imagined. Studies show a barrage of criticism from Arab nations, criticizing the station for meddling with their internal affairs as well as exposing their leaders in bad light. The station has also been accused of being a threat to the stability of Arab regimes.

However, for being such an independent station, the network has to contend with an Arab world not known to respect the freedom of expression and the press. Across the Muslim world, from Morocco in North Africa to Jordan, Al-Jazeera has faced some of the worst experiences a media house can come across. In 1998, a Saudi cleric praised the decision by Arab States Broadcasting Union (ASBU) to reject Al-Jazeera’s application for membership. A Saudi newspaper, *Ukaz* accused it of “fomenting hatred and arousing grudges in the Arab world.” Kuwait has not hesitated in criticizing the station for showing a favorable bias towards Iraq. In an unprecedented move in 1999, the Kuwait government closed the network’s bureau accusing it of violations of professional ethics. Al-Jazeera’s reporters were subsequently banned from covering stories in Kuwait. And in 2001, Al-Jazeera was ordered by a Kuwaiti court to pay a local lawyer $16,237. This was because the channel accused Kuwaitis of killing Palestinians and Iraqis at the end of the 1991 Gulf War. Jordan also closed Al-Jazeera’s bureau in 1998. In the neighboring Bahrain, the authorities there expelled Hamid Al-Ansari, a former Al-Jazeera talk-show host. The station caused a diplomatic tension between Qatar and Morocco with the latter claiming that the network has been leading a “hostile” campaign against its monarchy. Following this diplomatic spat, Morocco recalled its ambassador to Qatar on July 20, 2000. A similar action was taken by another North African country – Libya. This followed criticism from Tripoli that one of Al-Jazeera’s programs

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criticized Libya’s style of leadership – calling it “a mere façade for (Libya leader) Muammar Qaddafi to make all decisions.”

However, the station enjoys great popularity in Palestine with the late Yasser Arafat being quoted in the Kuwaiti newspaper *Al-Watan* in 1998, saying: “I consider Al-Jazeera to be a badge of honor for Qatar. I believe it is an important and respectable channel.”

By attempting to reverse the order of flow of information to the chagrin of its foes, Al-Jazeera became a thorn in the flesh of the wealthy media and government institutions in the West. There is no way the West could easily allow this to happen without hitting back, hence the reason why Al-Jazeera became a kind of anathema in the West and plans were afoot to check its influence. That is why Al-Jazeera’s emergence was tantamount to stepping on the toes of the Western media conglomerates and their institutions of governance bent on maintaining their grip on information flow so as to reap maximum benefits, including astronomical profits. The ruthless reaction from the West following the birth of Al-Jazeera is a snapshot of the monumental task that lay ahead in trying to reverse the normative flow of information. The biggest obstacle in achieving what Al-Jazeera is attempting to do is seen from a Western hegemony perspective that is not only keen on maintaining the status quo in information flow, but is also bound to use all tactics and tricks at its disposal to stop Al-Jazeera from realizing its objectives – one of which as argued above is a reversal of the old imperialist imbalances. The West is not ready to be exposed on its unfair representation of the southern regions. It is also not ready to be challenged or represented in bad light or proved wrong in many areas it has called the shots over the years. This is so because striking a balanced flow of information from the two spheres of the globe has its own demerits – one of which is that the West would be the biggest loser in a new information flow dispensation. Such a balance is a threat to cultural imperialism by the West. “However, mounting a challenge is

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20 Ibid., 124.
21 Ibid., 126.
one thing and making it effective is another. It became obvious that during the 1990s that Al-
Jazeera faced hindrance in a large number of Middle Eastern states. But it took rather longer for
the obstacles it faced in Western countries to become equally clear,"22 writes Sakr.

First, the West was keen to nip in the bud Al-Jazeera’s radical approach to news coverage
and its portrayal of the West especially within the realm of politics and military power. So, later, a
series of tribulations orchestrated by the western governments befell Al-Jazeera. For instance, Al-
Jazeera Syria-born correspondent who interviewed Osama Bin Laden was arrested in 2003 and
charged with membership of a terrorist group. He was later sentenced to seven years in jail. The
same year, the New York Stock Exchange briefly banned the channel’s reporters from its trading
floor. In the same vein, Sakr writes “…..a committee representing the CIA, FBI, Pentagon and
Congress had urged President Bush to insist that the Qatar government should order Al-Jazeera to
moderate its television output or be closed down.”23 Don’t forget the United States bombed Al-
Jazeera’s offices in Afghanistan and Baghdad. One of the complaints from the West and especially
from the U.S. diplomats was that the channel was giving too much airtime to anti-U.S. activists,
especially bin Laden. Condoleezza Rice, then National Security Advisor criticized Al-Jazeera that
its news content could be used to “send coded message to terrorists in so-called sleeper cells in
the United States and elsewhere to kill Americans or prepare their next attack.”24 Al-Jazeera has
also been accused of acting as a mouthpiece for Islamic fundamentalists. Mohammed Zayani
writes:

Upon transmitting the famous post-September 11 Al-Qaeda videotapes, Al Jazeera was accused
of serving as a mouthpiece of Al-Qaeda, glorifying bin Laden and presenting him as a romantic
ideologue. Al Jazeera was viewed to be allowing bin Laden to use the channel in order to spread

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23 Ibid., 126.
his propaganda and providing him with a platform from which to preach Jihad on the West, in
general, and the US, in particular.\textsuperscript{25}

When a news organization earns a negative name because of the way it covers issues of
national or international importance, then it finds itself in a hot soup financially – because such
sentiments scare away potential advertisers who are the source of revenue for any media house
that has to survive in a competitive market. That is why in fear of scaring away advertisers, many
media stations compromise their editorial policies so as to appease those who pump money into
their news organizations. This is taking into account that a media venture is an expensive one and
requires a stable financial base, otherwise it would be impossible to cover major events across the
world and also compete with rivals. So, this means that financial factor is crucial to Al-Jazeera if it
has to succeed in its chief mission of competing with the affluent Western media. Lack of sufficient
financial flow can be a major hindrance to the network’s objectives. At one time, for instance,
former U.S. ambassador to Syria Christopher Ross said: “Al-Jazeera’s small total revenue from
advertising doesn’t merit much worry from huge international media conglomerates.”\textsuperscript{26} Also, note
that as earlier said Al-Jazeera is financially sustained by the Qatar government. “But a decade or
so after its launch, the station has fallen short of securing independence from the government by
supporting itself financially,”\textsuperscript{27} writes Mohammed Zayani and Sofiane Sahraoui in The Culture of Al-
Jazeera. The two authors continue to say that “Al Jazeera is far from breaking even by relying on
productions sales or on commercial advertising. The latter remains notably low as its controversial
reporting is still scaring off advertisers, many of whom have succumbed to a politically motivated
advertising ban imposed on Al Jazeera.”\textsuperscript{28} But Al-Jazeera’s Jassim Al-Ali contests this view putting

\textsuperscript{26} El-Nawawy, M, & Iskandar, A (2002). Al-Jazeera: How the Free Arab News Network Scooped the World and
Changed the Middle East. Cambridge, MA: Westview Press, 95.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 73
it that “advertising in the Arab world is driven by politics and not by viewership figures….In general, the trend for advertising in the Middle East is more towards buying around entertainment shows than around political, controversial and news programs.” In 1999, the Saudi government asked Tihama, Al-Jazeera’s Saudi-owned advertising agency, not to place ads with the network. Other local advertisers were asked to follow suit. According to Zayani and Sahraoui, Saudi Arabia controls about 40 percent of the Gulf advertising market. This isn’t good news for Al-Jazeera as it has on several occasions locked horns with the Saudi government over its manner of reportage.

Al-Jazeera’s professionalism has also been a thing of concern. In particular, the network has been criticized for its daring live raw news. Viewers are, for example, subjected to live feeds unfiltered news on Al-Jazeera. This has been a bone of contention between the viewers in the West and in the South. This is so because the latter has accused the Western media of feeding them with distorted information which is not a true reflection of what is happening on the ground. Thus, Al-Jazeera’s audacity to run unedited materials from the field has received more accolades from some sections of the Southern audience. But the West sees Al-Jazeera’s aggressive way of reporting as not only unethical, but also irresponsible journalism. This has put the station’s professionalism under great scrutiny from media professionals. Pushing an agenda that Al-Jazeera is unprofessional is another challenge facing a contra-flow scheme that offers something different from the status quo. Former Downing Street media chief Alastair Campbell said “Al-Jazeera airs lies, plain and simple.”

Zayani writes:

The network is derided for what is often described as its partisan and biased coverage. It is often portrayed as ‘less than honest,’ being more in the business of making stories than getting them. In this sense, Al Jazeera is perceived as lacking in fairness and balance. For Fouad Ajami, ‘its credibility us hampered by slanted coverage and a tendency toward sensationalism’ as it often engages in the ‘Holywoodization of news.’

29 Ibid., 73.
31 Ibid., 22.
In conclusion, the above analysis demonstrates that Al-Jazeera has faced a myriad of challenges as it strives to make a mark within the world of news media. Yes, the network might have succeeded in checking the monopoly by the Western media giants….but the problems it has encountered - mapped through the freedom of expression and the press, reaction from both the Arab world and the West, financial stability and professionalism explain how it is difficult for a Southern-based media entity to survive information wars. In the opening paragraph of this paper I made an observation to the effect that what matters isn't just the flow of information from either corners of the globe….but how this information flows is of paramount importance. I also observed that the flow of information from North to South is structured in such a way that it transmits elements of hegemony, cultural imperialism and dominant ideology from the West. That said, then, what is required in a contra-flow scheme isn't just the transmission of information from South to North. For contra-flow to succeed, it must challenge the hegemonic and related structures. This means a contra-flow should be counter-hegemonic. This is so because information wars are fought on the platform of these structures or fields. The South resists news products from the North, simply because they view such information as hegemonic and imperialistic. So, the question is: Has Al-Jazeera been counter-hegemonic enough? Also, for counter-hegemonic media practices to succeed, they must be incorporated within the dominant structures. I don't think Al-Jazeera has managed to penetrate into dominant structures. This is despite the fact that it remains a popular news channel in the world. From a dependency theory viewpoint and because Al-Jazeera’s contra-flow isn’t counter-hegemonic, it means the South continue to depend on the West for news.
References


