Truth, Al Jazeera, and Crisis Journalism

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Abstract: Truth is the generally accepted standard of news media organizations and of social media networks. Most of the codes of ethics including Al Jazeera's specify the reporters' duty to tell the truth. In the traditional view, objective reporting is not merely the standard of competent professionalism, but considered a moral imperative. With the dominant scheme increasingly controversial, theoretical work in international media ethics seeks to transform it intellectually. Truth needs to be released from its parochial moorings in the West and given a global understanding. A new concept of truth as authentic disclosure accomplishes this, and that definition means to get at the core issue, to see the essence of things. The question in researching Al Jazeera is whether it practices what might be called "interpretive sufficiency." This is a robust view of news as knowledge production, in contrast with news as simply informational. Using Al Jazeera as a case study, the new definition of truth-as-disclosure is applied to crisis journalism.

Keywords: International News, Truth, Media Ethics, Interpretation, Propaganda.

INTRODUCTION

Truth is not only a basic issue, but a perennial one in media ethics. Nearly all codes of ethics include the reporter's duty to tell the truth under all circumstances, as does Al Jazeera's Code of Ethics: "Endeavour to get to the truth and declare it in our dispatches, programmes and news bulletins unequivocally in a manner which leaves no doubt about its validity and accuracy" (Principle 2) [1]. Credible language has long been considered pivotal to the media enterprise as a whole, including news and editorials, documentaries, magazine features, and online formats. Though interpreted in various ways, media ethics as a scholarly field and professional practice recognizes that truth is the immovable axle around which both ethical theory and news morality revolve. Regarding the norm of truth in global ethics, does Al Jazeera meet this standard and contribute to it?

It is generally understood around the world that truth as unbiased information has a central role in journalism. The Norwegian scholar, Tine Ustad Figenschou (2016), puts it accurately in these terms:

> The professionalization process in modern journalism was first initiated in Anglo-American media throughout the nineteenth century in response to political and economic pressures, but it has had a global presence and became a global influence over the last century. International studies find that the core values of objectivity, accuracy and truth, are at the core of professional ethics globally and central to the understanding of good journalism worldwide" [2].

Journalism's obligation to truth is central to journalism ethics. Truth-telling is the generally accepted norm of the media professions, and credible language is pivotal to the very existence of journalism. Using Al Jazeera as an illustration, how does the important ethical principle of truth apply to crisis communication [3]?

Al Jazeera achieved status and prominence during the Iraq War that began with the United States military invasion on March 19, 2003. Al Jazeera had a network office in Baghdad since its beginnings, and was the news voice of Saddam Hussein when he was in power. When U.S. President George W. Bush was in office, Al Jazeera was condemned as a platform for terrorists and the television home of Osama bin Laden. And Al Jazeera was known for putting corpses on the screen and showing the bloody faces of the wounded beyond typical understandings of human decency [4]. For its American critics, Al Jazeera was propaganda not news [5].

At the same time, Al Jazeera was reviled by authoritarian governments across the Middle East. In a region where political leaders typically control media systems and unflattering portrayals of leaders are unacceptable, the independent Al Jazeera has been an outrage. Saudi Arabia bars Al Jazeera from its territory. Algiers has cut its signal. Yemen authorities confiscated its equipment [6]. Morocco has blocked it from the airwaves. During the Arab Spring protests, the Egyptian government condemned it as the chief culprit in fueling the unrest [7]. Al Jazeera's office in Cairo was

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burned down and its bureau chief and seven correspondents arrested [8].

Al Jazeera was born in war and its programming has centered on turmoil ever since. Does it meet the truth standard for news? Is it the home of sensation and bias rather than of truth [9]? Does Al Jazeera disclose the truth about Iraq, then and now, about upheavals in Afghanistan and Yemen and Syria? Was it the truthful voice of the Arab Spring [10]? The issue for this article is the strong view of truth as disclosure, not just traditional objectivity. Do Al Jazeera reporters live up to the principle of authentic disclosure in their practice of crisis journalism [11]?

Truthtelling as the normative core of professionalism is not controversial. However, for this assertion to be credible for Al Jazeera as an international news organization, both the concept of truth and the nature of news must be redefined. The issues of definition are complicated, and need to be worked out in detail.

TRUTH DEFINED AS OBJECTIVITY

The objectivist worldview has been the standard definition of truth in the mainstream media. Objective reporting is not merely a technique, but withholding value judgments is considered a moral imperative [12, ch. 6]. However, as is commonly recognized, it is western, so this definition will not be used to judge the ethics of Al Jazeera. The facts in news have been said to mirror reality. The aim has been true and incontrovertible accounts of a domain separate from human subjectivity. In the received view, truth is defined as accurate representation and precision with data. News corresponds to neutral algorithms and professionalism is equated with impartiality. Journalistic morality is equivalent to unbiased reporting of neutral data.

In the objective Greek view of truth, Plato saw it as corresponding to reality and for Aristotle truth is correct or accurate statement [13]. For Descartes, truth is precise, mathematical propositions. Genuine knowledge is identified with the physical sciences, and the objectivity of physics and mathematics sets the standard for all forms of knowing [14]. In the received view, truth is defined in elementary terms as accurate representation [15]. In Stephen Ward's (2009) elaboration, traditional objectivity is a web of ideas that the newsroom has operationalized:

All opinion must be clearly attributed to the source, accompanied by direct quotation and careful phrasing. Objective practice asks reporters to verify facts by reference to documents, scientific studies, government reports and numerical analysis. To enhance objectivity, reports are written from the detached tone of the third person [16, p. 74].

This longstanding view of human knowledge has been attacked steadily for a century, until we face in our own day a crisis in correspondence views of truth [17].[1] In reporting, objectivity has become increasingly controversial as the working press' professional standard. This shriveled down concept of truth as equivalent to neutral facts is now seen as too narrow for today's social and political complexities [18]. As Ward (2015) describes it, "the traditional notion of objectivity, articulated about a century ago, is indefensible philosophically, weakened by criticism inside and outside journalism" [12, p. 4]. In addition to "a corrosive post-modern skepticism about objective truth" and "cynicism about the ethics of profit-seeking news organizations," Ward (2009) adds a third reason for "wear and tear" on the "pillars of truth and objectivity:" the belief that "non-objective journalism is best for an interactive media world populated by citizen journalists and bloggers" [16, p. 71]. "Traditional news objectivity is, by all accounts, a spent ethical force, doubted by journalists and academics" [12, p. 280].

TRUTH DEFINED AS AUTHENTIC DISCLOSURE

Instead of abandoning the concept, a credible idea of truth needs to be developed. Rather than defining truth in technical terms as static and objective, it can be theorized as cultural and moral. As the framework for this article on Al Jazeera's practices, a definition of truth is proposed as opening up the authentic underneath the surface. When a theory of truth is articulated in an international framework instead of the western version of objectivity, truth is best understood as the disclosure of the genuine. The Canadian philosopher, Charles Taylor, calls it *The Ethics of Authenticity* [19]. Truth is the process of making reality intelligible for human existence. For Nikolas Kompridis, this new definition of truth means to unveil "the symbolically structured world within which we find

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[1]For a comprehensive compilation of twentieth century scholarship on truth, see Lynch [64] and Kirkham [65].

ourselves; it refers to the disclosure of new horizons of meaning" and to opening up "previously hidden dimensions of meaning" [20, p. 37; 21]. Human existence is impossible without an overriding commitment to truth. As a primary agent of the lingual world in which we live, the news profession has no choice but to honor the definition of truth-as-disclosure as obligatory for its mission and rationale.

A more sophisticated concept of truth is disclosure, getting to the heart of the matter. Already in 1947, the famous Hutchins Commission Report, *A Free and Responsible Press,* had called for this alternative. It advocated a deeper definition of the press's mission as "a truthful, comprehensive and intelligent account of the day's events in a context which gives them meaning" [22]. Dietrich Bonhoeffer contends correctly in his *Ethics* that a truthful account includes the context, motives, and presuppositions involved [23]. Truth as authentic disclosure means, in other words, to strike gold, to get at the core issue, the heart of the matter, to see the essence of things [24].

The best journalists understand from the inside the attitudes, culture, and language of the persons and events on their news beat. In the process of weaving a tapestry of truth, reporters' disclosures will be credible and realistic to those being covered. Rather than reducing social issues to the financial and administrative problems that politicians define, the truth principle requires that the news media disclose the depth and nuance that enables readers and viewers to identify the fundamental issues themselves [25].

Defining truth as authentic disclosure is an idea that warrants ongoing discussion, analysis, and application. Professionals are challenged to participate in its definition and implementation.

AL JAZEERA'S EPISTEMOLOGY

The rationale for this article can now be made specific. Truth as authentic disclosure is a transnational definition. Therefore, questions such as these are pertinent: Is truth-as-disclosure the standard for Al Jazeera in war and political conflict? Does this international network meet the cross-cultural norm of authentic disclosure for newsworthiness, and as a result report in multidimensional and explanatory terms beyond the ephemeral? "Contrary to the sanitized western media reporting which often conceals the reality of death and destruction, the 'mediated closeness' of Al Jazeera exposes the ugly face of

reality as experienced by affected populations" [26-27]. Whether or not Al Jazeera's "mediated closeness" is more advanced professionally than CNN or the BBC is interesting, but the deeper question is whether this strategy implements truth-as-disclosure [28]. This article is not media criticism in which professional practices and instruments are scrutinized, typically in comparison with the other international news systems. Media criticism focuses on professional values, and this article focuses on ethical principles. Al Jazeera is assessed in this article in terms of the ethical principle of truth. Are the policies and practices of Al Jazeera consistent with the new understanding of truth as disclosure of the authentic meaning?

Leon Barkho's research (2016) represents a productive methodology for assessing Al Jazeera in terms of the ethics of truth. His research centers on Tony Burman's news model as developed for Al Jazeera English during Burman's years as Managing Director from 2008-2011. Barkho relies on groundwork materials that reveal a mindset, on in-house documents such as the major report: "AJE Renewal Project—Al Jazeera English 2008-2011" of which Burman was the chief architect. "The year 2008 is a milestone in Al Jazeera English reporting, as Burman tried to rectify the mainstream western news coverage mindset, particularly in relation to the reporting of sensitive and controversial stories like the Israeli Palestinian struggle" [29, p. 489]. In applying his model to Israel's war on Gaza, "the coverage drew plaudits from across western media, including Israel itself" [29, p. 498].

"Burman's approach represents a shift from the mainstream western way of covering and reporting an event; it is a change from one mindset to another. I call it 'Burman's news model' in line with Thomas Kuhn [30, p. 23]. … Kuhn defines a paradigm as 'an accepted model or pattern' that scientists and practitioners use as a guide" for understanding "how knowledge and information are produced" [29, p. 486]. "Burman created a new 'shared mindset' among members of Al Jazeera English with its own 'shared' practices and guidelines on how to report controversial and sensitive issues of regional and international repercussions" [29, p. 486]. In this explanatory model seeking interpretive sufficiency, news coverage must include "the context of culture, the context of language, the context of history, the context of the human being himself and the diversity" [29, p. 493].

"Burman's way of news coverage" is an "explanatory model but without compromising the

foundations of the norm of objectivity. Good journalists, Burman says, should let 'the world report itself' rather than do the reporting themselves. To do this, journalists should provide comprehensive coverage of 'every angle, every side…from as many angles,'" as possible. They should "bring the perspective of the marginalized and less powerful 'to the forefront of public policy debates'; and make sure that truth is spoken to power 'regardless of consequences'" [29, p. 494]. In Burman's strategy, journalists must "'explain the stories,' and 'the background' should be 'more than contextual' and 'neutral.'" In other words, 'we can't play around with journalistic short hands when… dealing with different audiences.' Reporters, according to Burman, should 'help people navigate this ever-complicated world'." In doing so, the goal is "revolutionary: we simply want people to understand the full story, not a narrow one'" [29, p. 494]. As a result, Wadah Khanfar issues this directive to Al Jazeera professionals: "I do not ask you whether you are objective. I will ask you, is your explanation strong or weak? Is it good or bad? Is it profound or weak?" [29, p. 494][2].

"Burman's news model points to Kuhn's concept of 'paradigm shift' rather than paradigm repair." It is a peaceful different option "in which one conceptual worldview is replaced by another' [30, p. 10]. ...Burman's news paradigm model does not threaten the 'western' news paradigm model, but rectifies it by giving the weaker or marginalized side (for instance, the Palestinians) the same voice western media bestow on the stronger and more powerful side (Israelis)" [29, pp. 498-499; 31].

In her research on Al Jazeera's "self-declared difference and counter-hegemonic mission," Figenschou (2013) drew a similar conclusion: "The channel balances being different enough to stand out while being similar enough to matter" [32, p. 205]. In her view, Al Jazeera English aims to "alter global news within the constraints of its professional logic rather than aiming to revolutionize, replace or fundamentally alter it" [32, p. 205]. Nina Bigalke argues that this position, "allowed the channel to establish areas of disagreement with historically western news values that had a better chance for translation back into the wider professional field" [32, p. 205].

The news paradigm of Al Jazeera English, as developed by Burman, reflects the new definition of

truth as authentic disclosure. In countering the western techniques of objectivity by its explanatory reporting, Al Jazeera English is serious about authentic disclosure. But an assessment of Al Jazeera English in terms of the truth principle has multiple dimensions. In order to understand more comprehensively whether and how Al Jazeera reflects and contributes to the global ethics of truth, the news must be understood as knowledge production.

NEWS AS KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

The ethics of truth-as-disclosure requires a robust view of news as knowledge production [33]. News gathering and dissemination are not simply informational. Reporters do not merely hold up a mirror to reality, or in online journalism serve as a module of an electronic network. Following truth-as-disclosure, the professional news maker's task is knowledge production. The question for the ethics of truth is not primarily how reporters should treat their human sources or relate to their audience and viewers, minimizing harm and respecting their dignity. The media ethics of truth is intrinsic to the profession's occupational character, with news understood as knowledge production. "This adds an epistemological dimension to the process of structuring a news story." News is a "process of constructing reality," as seen "especially in news framing and narrative viewpoint" (34, pp. 237-238).

In the West's mainstream epistemology, "news-as-information-processing" uses social scientific criteria for its validity. However, "news-as-knowledge-production" follows the literary styles of logic and patterns of proof that are characteristic of the humanities. While interpretation is typically unexamined in social science, in the humanities the interpretive process is a preoccupation. Whatever is intelligible is accessible to human beings in and through language, and all deployments of language require interpretation. There is no self-understanding that is not mediated by signs, symbols, and texts. Humans do not live first of all in an objective world but in systems of thought and culture. There is always a pregiven interpretive context. The accumulated history of meanings is a constituent element in our own interpretations.

News-as-knowledge-production means that the news cycle is a process of constant learning, analytical thinking and rigorous argument. Following Teun Van Dijk's model, "news-as-knowledge-discourse" [35], Mohamed Erraji emphasizes the "processing of

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[2]Wadah Khanfar was the Managing Director of the Al Jazeera Channel in 2003, the Director General of the Al Jazeera Network in 2006. In 2011 he resigned as Director General of the Al Jazeera Media Network

different sources" to establish context; therefore, reporting "includes a significant amount of knowledge as it carries the new piece of information about current, important, and exciting events as well as knowledge that may be relevant to central historic events" (34, p. 238). News-as-knowledge-production integrates the existential with the conceptual. Experience alone is not the same as understanding it. In the process of weaving a tapestry of truth, the reporters' disclosures will ring true on two levels: they will be realistic to the natives and theoretically credible at the same time.

As Gerhard Vander Linde (2001) puts it, though in a different context, knowledge production as an alternative model is measured "in terms of richness of implications, in terms of the capacity to generate connections among disparate elements, and in terms of freshness of insights and scope" [36, p. 58]. The aim is always multiple meanings instead of swiftly concluding what is thought to be the truth of the matter. The emphasis in interpretation is on discovery rather than applying routinized procedures. Reporters aiming for robust knowledge production will follow what might be called "interpretive sufficiency" [37]. Explicit appeal to the interpretive approach will enhance the news story's completeness, rather than crudely tailoring events into a superficial cohesion.

When the news profession's occupational task is understood as knowledge production, with truth-as-disclosure its normative axis, news is released from Anglo-American objectivism. For truth-as-disclosure, the news media turn to interpretive studies. Forsaking the quest for precision journalism does not mean imprecision, but precision in authentic disclosure through interpretive procedures. Fiction and fabrication are not acceptable substitutes for fact and accuracy.

Interpretive studies are an alternative view of human knowing. In this perspective, investigations must be grounded historically and biographically, so that they represent complex cultures adequately. The interpretive model resonates with the attitudes, definitions and language of the people actually being reported on or studied. Rather than the fact-value dichotomy of the mainstream ethics of rationalism, the interpretive turn recovers the fullness of human agency, that is, intentions, purposes, and values. News-as-knowledge-production rests on the assumption that truth arises out of a "complex interactive process that shapes the meanings things have for human beings. The process is anchored in the cultural world" where "cultural objects and experiences"

are mediated in terms of salient socio-cultural categories, such as "family, race, ethnicity, nationality, and social class" [25, pp. 74,78]. Journalists trained in the news as knowledge production identify with cultural meanings in their role as participants, and as observers formulate seminal conclusions about these meanings. Through an understanding of interpretive methodologies, reporters come to grips with the multiple ways ethnography calls them to insert themselves into the process of news-making [39].

Consistent with their own assumptions, interpretive studies enforce the maxim that research imprisoned within itself and therefore self-validating is unacceptable. The deep truth of the matter arises in natural settings, not contrived ones; therefore, the more densely textured the specifics, the more closely a deep reading is achieved. This is what Al Jazeera hints at in its slogan "the truth and the other truth," as does the Hutchins Commission in its call for "truth in the context of meaning" [22].

Interpretive accounts of truth-as-disclosure reflect genuine features of the situation under study and do not represent the aberrations or hurried conclusions of observer opinion. There must be sympathetic immersion in the material until the journalist establishes, in Herbert Blumer's phrase, "poetic resonance" with it [40]. Does the reporter know enough to identify the principal aspects of the event being studied and to distinguish these main features from digression and parentheses? Using the body as an analogy, the blood and brain must be separated from fingers and skin, all of which are parts of the whole organism but of differing significance. If an authentic understanding of the inside meaning has occurred, then the data are valid and reliable even though they are not based on randomization, repeated and controlled observation, measurement, and statistical reference.

The interpretive process generates an insightful picture and distinctively conveys the meaning of a series of events. It gets at the essence, the heart of the matter. The interpretive process develops an integrating scheme from within the data themselves. Authentic truth unveils the data's inner character, with news discourse reflecting a dialectic of insight, observation and history. Generalizations arise from the language and definitions of the arena being reported. The thick notion of sufficiency supplants the thinness of the technical, exterior, and statistically precise received view [37].

News interprets what linguists refer to as culture. In this context, culture "means symbolic forms publicly available through which audiences discover and express meaning, including beliefs, rituals, art forms, and celebrations;" culture includes also "unofficial cultural forms such as the accent, chatter, stories and routines of day-to-day life." Hence, based on this cultural understanding of news as knowledge production, "it can be said that news contributes to audience awareness of and use of these available symbolic elements….Formulating the audience's cultures, stances and inclinations toward the different issues through its epistemological dimension is represented in news frames and news narrative" [34, p. 241].

The news-as-information model typically followed in the Anglo-American tradition, in general, uses the one-sided rationalization of inductive reasoning: evidence is gathered, patterns and relationships are identified, and a conclusion is formed. Generalizations are restricted to the data by journalistic guidelines, such as double referents, primary sources, and on-site observation. On the other hand, when understanding news as knowledge production based on interpretive sufficiency, reporters interpret situations and discourse in the light of their several parts and any particular part in light of the whole. All interpretive activity proceeds by way of a dialectic between presumptions and validation. News professionals judge the relative importance of the several parts. They validate an interpretation by vindicating it against competing interpretations. If newsgathering produces a plurality of coherent meanings, that plurality is a provocateur to further thinking and more investigation [41].

The challenge from this perspective is to identify the nature of the epistemic knowledge that characterizes Al Jazeera's discourse. Mohamed Erraji, in his 2016 study of Al Jazeera news, concludes that it does not follow the objectivist model. He calls it "an enlightenment model:" "An analytical study of the Arab issues discussed on the Al Jazeera Channel shows that an enlightenment model of knowledge forms the essence of the semantic structure of its discourse" [34, p. 244]. Al Jazeera uses the basic standards of the objectivist tradition in that is "relies on fact, field testimonies, known and verified sources, and documents rather than on assumptions and anonymous sources" [34, p. 244]. However, since the beginning," Al Jazeera has aimed higher; it has sought to provide Arab audiences with a disclosure of public crises and their meaning, "enabling them to see the truth, thus empowering them

and arming them with knowledge and awareness" [34, p. 238].

Erraji concludes that Al Jazeera "employs a narrative intellectual viewpoint." It presents "its view of reality through propositional knowledge which focuses on a certain theme and defines the elements influencing its paths, monitoring the actors and the ethical dimensions that it poses." This style of discourse formulates "public opinion around the issues and crises facing countries in the region," particularly shaping their "epistemological, emotional and behavioral aspects." Al Jazeera's discourse includes "the negatives of the official doers" so as to assert its "view of the importance of the issues tackled in the coverage" [34, p. 259]. In that fundamental sense, Al Jazeera's discursive knowledge-production represents an epistemological frame that is different from objectivity [42].

"This intellectual enlightenment model in Al Jazeera's professional experience became firmly established in its different channels, appearing obviously in the winds of change witnessed in some Arab countries around the beginning and the end of 2011, and the repercussions of what was referred to as the Arab Spring ….During that era, Al Jazeera was witness to the political changes in these countries and influential in them with its enlightenment discourse model that sought to 'empower' the audience and 'arm them with awareness' of the reality of its political conditions and the path of change movements, their developments and outcomes." Currently, Al Jazeera remains witness "to the ongoing turmoil in the Arab Spring countries, particularly in the developments of the war in Syria, the military conflict in Yemen, and the growing political crisis in Egypt" [34, pp. 246-247; 43].

News as the pursuit of and production of knowledge makes clear the ethical issues involved. The intrinsic character of this production process establishes its moral obligation. "The most unique side to such knowledge are the facts and information at the foundation of its discourse, bearing in mind that 'knowledge is not merely knowledge but is an ethical case study" of whether or not it "says the truth" [44, p. 268]. Knowledge in which interpretation always involves ethical principles has been "intensified by Al Jazeera in its professional experience during the last two decades, turning it into an editorial policy – documented in the book of 'Editorial Policies and Guidelines'" [45, p. 22; 34, p. 243]. The ethical dimension of knowledge production is "the foundation

of the enlightenment epistemological model" and Erraji sees evidence of it in Al Jazeera's coverage of the Turkish coup: "Such performance from Al Jazeera stems from a realization that knowledge is an ethical matter that becomes a true belief in the presence of professional precursors, so the audience submits to the integrity of such knowledge, trusts and believes in its veracity" [34, pp. 243, 245-246].

Erraji discusses three examples of Al Jazeera's knowledge production that illustrates its "enlightenment model" of news: the Syrian crisis, the Yemen crisis, and the problems in Egypt since the coup [34, pp. 247-258]. In each of these case studies, Erraji researches moral values since they are a pre-eminent category of the media's knowledge production.

He concludes that the moral dimension of the Syrian crisis has three aspects: the Syrian people's desire to "live in freedom and dignity" by "choosing their own political system;" "questioning those responsible for the tragedy of the Syrian people;" and the government's "crimes against humanity through the systematic killing" of innocent people [34, p. 250].

Research on the moral dimension of Al Jazeera's discourse about the Yemeni crisis is also summarized in three aspects: "law and institutions rather than militias and armed groups;" the sustainability of Yemen "lies in civil harmony and peaceful co-existence;" citizenship is paramount rather than "racial/sectarian rule" [34, p. 252].

Since the coup in Egypt led by Abdel Fattah El-Sisi in June 2014, the country has been "turned into a grand prison for opposition, for journalists, for citizens that hold a differing opinion, sarcasm artists, and demonstrators, amassing a total of 60,000 political detainees" with 370 of them dead [34, p. 253]. Al Jazeera's discourse since the coup includes the ethical category: "freedom and rights…are breached" and "standards of a fair trial are totally lacking;" "means of living" with dignity are absent; the calls of international rights organizations "to respect and adhere to human rights" are ignored [34, pp. 253-254].

Truth, in its post-objectivity definition, is defined as disclosing the deeper meaning of news events. Erraji's discussion of the semantics of Al Jazeera's discourse suggests that its taking the ethical dimension seriously in these three cases is one way to implement the principle of truth-as-disclosure. News as knowledge production, in its multicultural dimension, locates persons in a noncompetitive, nonhierarchical relationship to the larger moral universe. Rather than reducing social issues to the facts and electronic data and specific events on the surface, the media, such as in Erraji's enlightenment epistemological model of Al Jazeera, disclose the depth and nuance that readers and viewers need to understand the issues.

AL JAZEERA'S DISCLOSURES

When the ethics of truth is the norm for assessing Al Jazeera's mission and policies, and knowledge production is the framework for implementing truth-as-disclosure, researchers look for disclosures that reveal the genuine meaning beneath the surface. Tony Burman's explanatory paradigm positions Al Jazeera against the objectivity norm. For social and military conflict, Al Jazeera seeks to present all sides and all parties, with consensus-building efforts included as newsworthy. And Erraji's enlightenment discourse model is a credible iteration of news as knowledge production. Presuming the basic validity of Barkho and Erraji's assessments, the question is the nature of Al Jazeera's disclosure of the authentic meaning underneath. Three ideas are identified as summarizing the channel's truthtelling: pluralism, anti-propaganda, and its counter-flow perspective. The knowledge production of Al Jazeera can be understood in terms of these three features that are of interest to international crisis journalism [46].

Pluralism

With Al Jazeera came a new type of viewer, and these viewers were introduced to another kind of broadcast news. "Al Jazeera grasped the desire by Arab public opinion for pluralism and rapidly gained a following, highlighting the existence of pluralism and of a silent majority in Arab public opinion that has been repressed for decades" [47, p. 48]. These new viewers hear differences of opinion from "new elements—a plurality of discourses and issues around which national public debate" became possible, "such as local public affairs, political pluralism, resistance, foreign intervention, opposition and freedom" (47, p. 44). "Many ideas that had been expressed in secret are now open to scrutiny, interaction, exchange and reception…without the need for prior permission from ruling elites" (47, p. 56).

> Whether it is reporting on the Taliban in Afghanistan, Hezbollah in southern

Lebanon, Hamas in the Gaza strip, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the Houthis in Yemen, the Shiites in Bahrain, or the Rohingya in Mynmar, Al Jazeera has from the outset given prominence to the politics of the Other. In doing so it has more than served as a platform to otherwise non-state actors and alternative political players. It managed to infuse the geopolitical reality of the region with new dynamics and bring to bear additional vectors that would otherwise have been deflected….More than simply reporting on various unconventional groups and non-official players, Al Jazeera thrusts them to the fore and weaves them into a powerful narrative [48, p. 94].

In Figenschou's summary of the research on Al Jazeera English's sourcing practices, she concludes that "although the channel is elite-dominated, it has expanded the range of elite voices, representing independent, oppositional and civil society perspectives, in addition to the political, economic, and military establishment." Moreover, she concludes from the relevant research that "there are more independent elites on Al Jazeera English than on its international competitors. Independent elites are quoted more often, given more airtime, accorded more authority and invited to speak in more analytical news frames" [2, p. 202; 19].

One important result of Al Jazeera's pluralism is that power dynamics are understood to be "more malleable than they seem, that power relationships are not necessarily the purview of conventional players" [48, p. 94]. Al Jazeera's exposure to social media activists during the Arab Spring proves "that history is not written any more by officials but by ordinary people" [3, p. 85]. And Figenschou's (2016) conclusion from the research on pluralism is of equal importance: Al Jazeera's commitment to alternative sources "does not fundamentally alter the elite–grass roots distribution, the notions of hierarchical sourcing, sourcing relationships or even the elite notion of sourcing; it primarily alters the perception of which elites have been accorded credibility" [2, p. 202]. Miladi points to a byproduct of pluralism, in that "it has led to an ability to critique the coverage of Arabs and Muslims by western media as stereotypical" [3, p. 88].

Anti-Propaganda[3]

To Erraji, the clearest evidence of Al Jazeera's enlightenment discourse is its "independence from news sources or any political, financial, or economic authority" [34, p. 258]. This epistemological model turned Al Jazeera's discourse "away from the chameleon effect of propaganda, misleading information, and subjective expression that guides public opinion toward specific stances or serves the agendas" of the authorities in power [34, p. 258]. Al Jazeera's discourse does not "fall into the trap of propagating a specific political stream or party," and it does not "adopt the ideas or opinions of any of these streams." It is obvious to researchers, that Al Jazeera represents a "bias toward the facts and people at the same time" [34, p. 258]. Its "knowledge enlightenment discourse aims to give the audience access to facts and information as they happen at the scene of the event" [34, p. 246].

The principle of truth in news production does require true and correct information from trusted sources. But this is the immediate phase. Truth as authentic disclosure points to the deeper level of free speech for political and cultural transformation. Noureddine Miladi understands this deeper disclosure correctly: "Whether in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya or Yemen," Al Jazeera organizes "'its media efforts to fight for democracy and free speech in those countries'" [3, p. 84; 49]. To the extent that Al Jazeera sees itself as a platform for people's discourse directed to social change, it is explicitly anti-propagandist. Erraji concludes that Al Jazeera's enlightenment discourse operates in the anti-propaganda mode: "Al Jazeera deconstruct(s) the political scene and reintroduce(s) its figures in the eyes of ordinary viewers….This methodology of dealing with the political scene and its symbols…influences citizens' awareness of politics *and* their ability to initiate political change" [34, p. 239]. The challenge for Al Jazeera is to act out of the ethics-of-truth principle and not because of the visually dramatic when representing "the causes of freedom, justice, and human rights" [34, p. 239].

In aiming toward this double motif of awareness and action, Al Jazeera represents Burman's explanatory model without compromising the foundation of objectivity [29, p. 494]. Establishing its credentials as a

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[3]For a review of the issues and literature on the relationship between propaganda and critical consciousness, see Christians [66].

promoter of free speech that enables citizens to act politically, has made it possible for Al Jazeera to become "an influential media organization on the international scene" [34, p. 238; referencing 44, pp. 13-14].

Counter Flow

One of the aims of Al Jazeera's knowledge production "is to balance the flow of information and to provide another perspective to mainstream news. By paying special attention to the Global South, it seeks to balance and thus enrich the dominant one-dimensional international flow of information and to present discourses that are different from the ones offered by mainstream news organizations like the BBC and CNN and are of interest to a broader international balance" [48, p. 95; 32]. In Figenschou's (2016) analysis of Al Jazeera's official statements and promotional texts—confirmed by interviews with both reporters and management—from its earliest history Al Jazeera saw itself as a global channel which would report "from a distinctive perspective to balance the current typical information flow by reporting from the developing world back to the West and from the southern to the northern hemispheres" [2, 196].

Barkho (2016) confirms that the Burman model is in contrast to international broadcasting where "the focus is 'on the western centers of power and inevitably reflect their own national American and British agendas in their reporting'" [29, p. 495]. "A number of studies of news in Al Jazeera English have documented that the channel has indeed emphasized the Global South (Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East) over the Global North (Europe and North America) in its news coverage—with more news items about and originating from the South, prioritized in the running order and in longer, more in-depth formats" [2, p. 196].

> This explicit southern perspective has been reflected in the channel's editorial strategies: First, the channel has had a complex, decentralized production structure, with an extensive network of bureaus and correspondents in the South…. Secondly, an interrelated key editorial strategy has been to cover global events with local correspondents, particularly in the Global South. … According to interviewees [50, pp. 60-65], local southern correspondents are perceived as better resourced to develop

> alternative independent news stories and news angles [2, pp. 196-197].

"In essence, finding local southern correspondents, producers and editors who meet the professional qualifications perceived necessary in international television (English fluency, training and knowledge in the profession's logic) has proved to be difficult. Consequently [50], positions on the executive level have been held by a closely-knit group of professionals with backgrounds and extensive careers in Anglo-American mainstream television" [2, p. 199].

SUMMARY

These three disclosures help to make Al Jazeera distinctive. They indicate the direction that truth-as-disclosure pushes the media when it is taken seriously as an ethical standard. The evaluative question of this article is whether these features of Burman's explanatory model [29] and Al Jazeera's actual news discourse [34] are consistent with the ethical principle of truth and a contribution to understanding it. The challenges of presenting pluralism, anti-propaganda, and the southern perspective are ongoing and complex. In terms of production, pluralism has Al Jazeera's organizational commitment; in terms of audience, pluralism faces an unrelenting fundamentalism of the opposite mindset [51]. Regarding anti-propaganda, correct information and promotion of free speech are *sine qua non*, but propaganda's opposite is critical consciousness and, as Jacques Ellul demonstrates, that task is more multilayered than simply rejecting totalitarian propagandists [52-54]. As noted earlier, Figenschou describes the institutional struggle to combine a southern perspective with the logic of professional journalism. Wendy Willems (2014) underscores the conceptual problem here: "The Global South continues to be theorized from the vantage point of the Global North." This Eurocentric perspective "has interpreted media systems through the normative lens of the Global North and has emphasized their lack, their deviation from western norms" [55, pp. 1, 4). In its efforts to balance mainstream West-centric news with southern voices, Al Jazeera's mission statements and policies *a priori* may not be a full-scale counter narrative [56].

Is there a shared mindset in Al Jazeera documents, mission statements, and reports that reflects the internationalism of the ethics of truth-as-disclosure? In Figenschou's assessment of Al Jazeera English's

"editorial mission and production strategies, "the channel questions and sets out to counter the professional practices of Anglo-American global news networks" [2, p. 191]. That represents a focus on the organization's professionalism, not in itself a struggle with the ethics of truth. For Al Jazeera's journalism to reject the Eurocentric worldview is a first phase only. Truth-as-disclosure also rejects hierarchical and abstract prescriptions. The ethics of truth-as-disclosure is a substantive theory that reconcepualizes truth away from its mainstream tradition, and in doing so renders it universal as a global ethical principle. The challenge for Al Jazeera is also to take the second, constructive step and further theorize its global perspective in terms of truth-as-disclosure. For Al Jazeera, the continuing question is whether the principle of truth is anchored in and flows out of universal human solidarity. Can Al Jazeera's professional practices of truthtelling be restructured as a truly global phenomenon for a global media ethics?

Using the vocabulary of the current debates over universals in media ethics, is Al Jazeera's understanding of truth cosmopolitan? Our educational task in teaching and research, and the requirement of professional theory and practice, is cosmopolitanism (*kosmos* the world and *politēs* citizen). Professionals and researchers without borders, at this historic shift to global digital technology, are best understood as competent specialists with a world mind [57-58].

Cosmopolitanism is the social imagination at work. As Arjun Appadurai [59, p. 22] has argued, the imagination is not a trifling fantasy but a "social fact," a "staging ground for action" [57, p. 321]. The Egyptian people, rebelling against the Mubarak regime, in 2011 "filled Cairo's Tahrir Square and overthrew the dictator, imagining a new nation" [60, p. 322; 61]. Two million Syrians have flooded Jordan and Europe and the world, imagining a home of safety. In the 1960s, Marshall McLuhan anticipated a new electronic planet, the global village; a neighborly mediated utopia was imagined and believed. The global imaginary in terms of authentic disclosure is a productive framing structure for reporting policies and for research in education.

This cosmopolitan version of the global imaginary changes the self-conception of researchers and professionals from parochials serving clients to that of global citizens serving humanity [62]. Mohamed Zayani (2016) sees the beginnings in Al Jazeera of that cosmopolitan vision extending beyond geography: "With a real global outlook rather than merely global

reach, Al Jazeera English proclaims to offer an alternative form of journalism." [44, p. 96].

CONCLUSION

Burman's explanatory model indicates that Al Jazeera defines itself in the interpretive terms of truth-as-disclosure, contrary to western objectivism [29]. Erraji's [34] discourse paradigm reflects truth's disclosure of the deeper meanng in Al Jazeera's commitment to pluralism, anti-propaganda, and the southern perspective. Ensuring that these policies and actions actually measure up to the new definition of truth requires ongoing and sophisticated work as noted.

In its crisis reporting does Al Jazeera reflect and contribute to a global media ethics of truth? That is the question of this article. At this early stage of Al Jazeera's history, the answer to it is ambiguous. The ethics of truth of this article is a cosmopolitan truth that requires a reversal. The history of internationalism is from local to the world. Cosmopolitanism is a new way of knowing in the opposite direction [63]. In cosmopolitanism, our research agenda and organizational policies are not just extended doggedly into the transnational, but the media as a field is radically turned on its head, so that the world is center and our educational and professional venues the periphery.

Cosmopolitanism inverts the trajectory of scholarship in media ethics—from universal human solidarity to media networks and academic research instead of the traditional opposite. That inversion requires precision historically and sophistication ethically for a theory of global media ethics; likewise for global media institutions. Achieving this inversion theoretically and professionally, even when it is explicitly established as an organizational goal, is a long-term and complicated project. Al Jazeera is positioned in international news as a likely venue to accomplish it.

ACKNOWLLDGEMENT

APPENDIX

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