ARAB MEDIA DISCOURSE
BREAKING TABOOS

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This paper examines the development and change of Arab media discourse since mid-1990s. The paper looks at how the production and consumption of media discourse have changed dramatically in the Arab world over the last decade or so, notably in relation to taboos such as religion, governance and gender. The paper argues that transnational Arab media, particularly al-Jazeera, have contributed to this change by adopting a liberal and critical approach when dealing with Arab taboos. This change is clearly reflected in the new discourse adopted by both the Arab public and Arab media. Such a discourse practice shapes and is shaped by a new Arab social, cultural and political practice.

1. Background

To gain an insight into the scale and nature of the change in both the Arab media discourse and the Arab public discourse, a succinct summary of the media practice since the independence of most Arab countries would set the scene for discussion, and would help us highlight the magnitude of change in the discourse of both Arab media and the Arab public. Arab media has witnessed a rapid expansion after the independence of most of the Arab countries. The proliferation of both print and audio-visual media in the Arab world has created a diverse and multi-lingual media, where Arabic, French and English are the languages widely read after the independence of most of Arab countries. Despite the wide range of media outlets, Arab media in general was geared towards 'safeguarding' Arab culture, unity and loyalty for governments (Amin 2001; Lahlali 2011). Arab media, most of which were state-owned, was mobilised to vilify colonial powers and promote discourse of independence and emancipation. Many Arab audio and print media would use the discourse of fraternity and brotherhood when dealing with issues concomitant to Arab countries. Arab government discourse was centred on preserving national unity based on the common cultural and religious ground (Azzi 1996). The fear of breaking Arab societies into mini states based on ethnicity has led most of Arab governments to cling to the theme and discourse of national unity, or what is often referred to in Arabic '*al-waḥda al-waṭania'*. This notion of national unity was developed when the French government's strategy of 'divide and rule' failed in Morocco (Maddy-Weitzman 2001). In order to subdue Moroccan resistance against French presence in Morocco, French government resorted to the concept of 'divide and rule'. They attempted to create frictions among Moroccan Arabs and Berbers, which would, it was hoped, weaken the resistance. However, Moroccans and Moroccan media used the discourse of Islamic unity to bring all factions together to combat French presence in Morocco. After independence, Arab media focused on the theme of one nation, one religion and one government (Amin 2001). Breaking away from this discursive line would have been regarded as a treachery and both organizations and individuals would face undesirable consequences. The discourse of emancipation, togetherness and resistance of occupiers have strengthened Arab unity and government under the umbrella of protecting Islamic religion, language and culture (Azzi 1996). These thematic discourses, which resonated across the Arab world by Arab state media, have cemented Arab governments' positions and brought the Arab public together to fight a common threat manifested in the foreign occupation of Arab and Muslim lands; To show such a solidarity, some of the Arab media and the Arab public used the discourse of *al-Qawmiyya al-Arabiya* (discourse of Pan- Arabism).

2. Arab media and the discourse of *al-Qawmiyya al-Arabiya* (Pan-Arabism).

Arab media discourse has been later developed to adopt the notion of *al-Qawmiyya* (Pan-Arabism), which moved away from the state controlled boundaries into Arab nationalism, promoting Arab unity and Arab interests. The notion of *al-Qawmiyya al-Arabiya* would unify all Arabs, irrespective of their religion or geographical boundaries (AbuKhalil 1992). The discourse of *al-Qawmiyya* reached its peak during the rule of Gamal Abdel Nasser who came into government after the Egyptian revolution in 1952. Abdel Nasser's vision of Arab unity was epitomised in his discourse; In every speech and address he would use terminologies such as '*al-waḥda al-Arabiya*' (Arab unity) and *al-Qawmiyyah al-Arabiya*. His charismatic nature and his command of Arabic language strengthened his appeal for the Arab masses across the Arab world. Voice of Arabs radio was a potent weapon used by Abdel Nasser to advance his agenda of Arab nationalism. The discourse of '*abṭāl al-Taḥrīr*' (heroes of liberation), *al-Qiyam al-Arabiya*' (Arab values) invaded every home and family in the Arab world. Most of the Arab public would feel as one family, however, Abdel Nasser's discourse of a big Arab family was not welcomed by conservative governments such as Saudi Arabia (James 2006). His Arab nationalism discourse was seen as an attempt to undermine other Arab rulers, and interfere in their domestic affairs. To combat this discourse of one Arab culture and language, Arab governments have created their own media outlets which, contrary to Abdel Nasser's Arab global message, called for a *al-Waṭṭaniya*, a local version of *al-Qawmiyya*.

After the Egyptian revolution, 1952, Gamal Abdel Nasser launched his radio Voice of the Arabs (VOA) which sought to promote his ideas of Arab nationlism (Lahlali 2011). The radio was also used as a potent tool of communication to mobilise the Arab public to rise againt imperialism, airing anti-colonial messages (James 2006). Freedom and independence have been the main discourse which sought to galvanize the Arab public. However, some pro-western Arab governments could not escape the wrath of Nasser's new radio, which gathered momentum and started broadcasting for 18 hours per day (James 2006).

As the first Arab transnational radio, VOA was used as the main channel through which the discourse of Arab nationalism and unity is transferred. In an interview about Transnational Broadcasting in the Arab world, Douglas Boyd (1998) asserted that transnational broadcasting is always interpreted to be politically oriented and carried out political messages and agendas. Governments in the region, as any other governments across the globe, broadcast messages promoting their policies. Because of the fierce competition from big channels, local and national televisions tend to loose out, as the number of their viewers shrinks out (Nasser 1998).

Satellite channels, such as *al-Jazeera* do not only provide news and talk shows, but do also provide platforms to viewers to contribute to discussions and debates by calling in to express their opinions (Zayani 2005). This platform or window of opportunity granted to viewers is often denied to them by their local media.

The death of Abdel Nasser in 1970s marked the demise of his discourse of *al-Qawmiyya*. Instead of focusing on the Arab global culture and language, Arab media adopted a more localised discourse approach, which has often been in line with national governments. *al-Qawmiyya al-Arabiya* was replaced with *al-Waṭṭaniya* discourse (national discourse). Saudi Arabia was one of the Gulf states to use its media for this purpose. It should be mentioned here that despite the localised discourse most of Arab media discourse was built on the notion of protecting Arab culture and Islamic holy places such as "*Al-Quds*" (Jerusalem).

Criticising Islam or governments was prohibited in most of Arab media. Any action such as this would constitute a deviation from the Arab media code of ethics (Lahlali 2011). One would argue here that Arab media discourse was in line with the government political discourse, if not supporting it. However, the discourse of safeguarding Islamic religion and Arab culture did not last long. The emergence of new transnational Arab media by the mid 1990s has given way to a new discourse; a discourse based on the notion of freedom of expression and speech. In the following section I shall argue that the launch of *al-Jazeera* Arabic has changed Arab media discourse by adopting a critical approach to all aspects of Arabic culture and religion. The new discourse is based on the channel's motto "the opinion and other opinion". I will argue in the subsequent section that *al-Jazeera* has broken these taboos by

shifting away from the notion of safeguarding the Arabic culture and religion into critically debating them.

3. Data analysis

In order to support the above argument that a change of discourse has occurred in both Arab media and Arab public, data has been selected and analysed for this purpose. For the analysis of the change of media discourse, samples of *al-Jazeera*'s broadcasting have been selected from its programme *Al-Ittijāh al-Muᶜākis* (the opposite direction). The selected data consists of a debate on the clash of civilizations aired on 24 February 2006. For the analysis of the change of public discourse, samples are taken from *al-Jazeera*. Net. The selected samples are in a form of comments or entries submitted by different readers on a published story on the channel's website. These comments have been published on 6 April 2009 on *al-Jazeera*'s website. Also, the data consists of the analysis of some of the recent chanted slogans during the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions. These slogans have been collected from *al-Jazeera*'s different programmes.

3.1. Al-Jazeera Arabic: A new discourse

Before dwelingl on the analysis of a*l-Jazeera*'s new media discourse, it would be useful to contextualise the channel's new discourse by providing a succinct background on *al-Jazeera* and its development since its launch in 1996. In 1995, Qatar has decided to abolish its Ministry of Information and Culture and put an end to all kind of censorship on freedom of the press. Liberating the press code in Qatar was unprecedented move, and was applauded by the international community. Benefiting from these liberal moves was *al-Jazeera*, which was launched in 1996 (al-Hail 2001). *Al-Jazeera* emerged after the Orbit-funded BBC Arabic TV service was closed down due to differences with its sponsor, Saudi Arabia. Fortunate enough, *al-Jazeera* recruited all BBC professional journalists who have brought with them experience and professionalism.

Being used to one system of broadcasting, and being regarded as recipients, Arab viewers found themselves contributing to the debate on domestic and regional issues, either through calling in or faxing. *Al-Jazeera* adopted a liberal discourse approach and has opened the gates for the silent majority to air their voices. It has become a high "profile platform for political dissidents many of whom live abroad" (Zayani 2005: 2). Its programmes such as *Al-Ittijāh al-Muᶜākis* (the opposite direction) is one of the most "popular and controversial political shows in the history of Arab television" (Bahry 2001: 92). The programme, which is hosted by Faisal Al-Qasim, is designed to maximize the debate and discussion. Knowing no limits and borders, *al-Jazeera*'s controversial broadcasting and debates, which are more often aired live, have put the channel under severe criticism from Arab governments and western governments alike (El-Nawawy and Iskandar 2002). Its practice has moved away from the idea of respecting Arab governments into criticising them; its critical approach of both governments and Arab culture has given way to the rise of new discourse founded on western concepts of transparency, accountability and fairness. A few years back, these terminologies were considered irrelevant to the Arabic culture. *Al-Jazeera* has used the discourse of empowerment to give a voice to those denied one. Voices that would debate the most taboos in the Arab world. Programmes on matters pertaining to women and their liberty were aired live to raise awareness of Arab women's rights in the Arab world. Women's right and freedom were often debated live on programmes such as "*li nissā'i faqṭ*" (for women only). However, this is considered a minor issue when debate is centred on more sacred issues such as Islamic religion and the Prophet Muhammed. As mentioned above, Arab media was mobilised to protect Islamic religion and not to criticise it. However, on one of *al-Jazeera*'s programmes even sacred issues could not escape debate and criticism.

On 24 February 2006, *al-Jazeera*'s controversial programme *Al-Ittijāh al-Muᶜākis* hosted a live debate on the issue of clash of civilisations. The programme hosted two guests to debate this issue. The first guest is an Arab-American of a Syrian descent, and the second is an Egyptian Professor of Islamic Studies.

The debate, which was designed to discuss the notion of clash of civilisations, has spiralled into a debate on the Islamic religion and its teaching. Despite the moderator's attempt to deviate away from the discussion of the religion and the Prophet Mohammed, the Arab-American guest did not shy away from discussing these taboos live. This is unprecendented in the Arab media history. To allow the Islamic

religion and the Prophet Muhammed to be criticised live on air is a new direction in the Arab media broadcast. Most Muslims consider the Prophet Muhammed an examplinary leader. The reaction of Muslims to the Swedish cartoons, which deminised the Prophet Muhammed, is a clear example of the status of the Prophet Muhammed among Muslims, however to have him criticised on an Arab channel, and, this time, by an Arab Muslim guest, is something unprecendented in the Arab media practice. Yet, the channel has allowed the programme to take its course without interruption. In fact, the guest was given ample time and liberty to express her views. This has come as a chock to most Arab viewers, yet for Faysal Al-Qasim, the programme presenter, this is part of freedom of expression, which al-Jazeera strives to promote. However, al-Jazeera's practices were not to the liking of the Arab viewers. Judging by the entries on the channel's website, the vast majority of the Arab viewers were outraged by the fact that their religion and Prophet were humiliated on an Arabic channel.

The Arab American guest was very vocal and critical of the Islamic religion. She considers it a religion of 'the Middle ages' and called for changing it. She has also considered some Muslims as 'irrational and patronized by one book'. She blamed today's conflicts on the 'followers of the Islamic religion'. As if this is not enough, she goes on to say that Muslims 'need to liberate themselves from the mentality of medieval ages'. These criticisms of Muslims live on *al-Jazeera* have marked a new era in the history of Arab media discourse. The exchange between the two guests shows a clear shift in the Arab media discourse. Despite its many pitfalls and shortcomings, which are not the scope of this paper, the fact that *al-Jazeera* has allowed a sensitive issue like religion to be discussed critically and in a harsh tone is very revealing indeed about Arab media of today. The above examples demonstrated quite clearly that the "triangle of taboos" – religion, gender and politics- are outdated in the transnational Arab media. One would argue here that transnational Arab media has contributed to the rise of a new discourse phenomenon based on freedom of expression and speech, irrespective of the genre of issues discussed.

A closer inspection of *al-Jazeera*'s new discourse reveals that its critical approach of Arab governments and their policies, a taboo no Arab media would dare to take on or discuss a few years back, has created a new Arab media discourse and a new culture; A discourse of accountability, where governments and ministers are criticised and often rebuked for their practices; A culture of open discussion and debate, where opposition and dissidents are given platforms to express their opinions. The old Arab cliché never talk about politics or government is changing by the day. This change of order of discourse, as Habermas calls it, has changed the attitude of the Arab public perception towards taboos such as culture, governance, religion and Arab unity. This change is also reflected in the Arab media and the way it has been operating since September 11, 2001. Arab media methods of collection of information and news have changed dramatically. Not a while ago, a text will not reach the public domain until it is checked, edited and reviewed. According to Fairclough, this is a "a collective process, involving journalists, producers, and various categories of editorial staff" (Fairclough 2005: 48). This is no longer the case in some of *al-Jazeera*'s programmes. Live programmes such as *Al-Ittijāh al-Muᶜākis* made it difficult for programme presenters to review and control the flow of information.

One would also argue here that Arab media has moved from a discourse of exclusion of political groups, who were seen as a threat to the government and the state, to an inclusive discourse, where dissidents and opposition are given platforms to express their views and air their concerns.

3.2. New Arab public discourse

The most striking element of the Arab media discourse is that the change of discourse has not only been confined to the production phase, but the consumption of the Arab media text has also witnessed some changes. Arab consumers of media texts are no longer passive consumers who receive information without commenting on it. The Arab public become very engaged with the published literature. This takes several forms in expressing their views. The most popular platform for expressing their views has been through call-in shows, and here I would like to refer to some of the Arab public discourse, which clearly demonstrates a break away from the Arabic taboos, long before the eruption of the uprisings that have swept the Arab world since December 2010. Criticising Arab rulers becomes a norm rather than the exception. The following examples from *al-Jazeera*'s website demonstrate Arab readers' criticim of Arab regimes. It should be mentioned here that despite some grammatical and spelling mistakes in the source text no amendments have been made to the Arabic text in the following extracts.

1.

أتمنى أن لم يكن هذا العام هو نهاية الظلم والطغيان أن نخطط بكل قوة حتى يكون6 أبريل 2010 هويوم الثورة القادمة لأسقاط هذا النظام البشع الذى أرجعنا للخلف خطوات وخطوات(التعليم الصحة الجيش الزراعة الصناعة)

I hope the 6th April will be the historical day which will mark the downfall of this tyrannic regime, who has taken us years back in all domains: education, military, agriculture and industry.

2.

ثوره مبارك Blessed revolution

ثوره ضد مبارك ليكن هذا هو الشعار ان مبارك لا يقل عن احتلال الانجليز لمصر فلتكن ثوره ضد مبارك

A revolution against Mubarak", this should be the slogan for the revolution. He is no different to the past occupation of the English to Egypt.

3.

الحرية تنادي فلبي النداء Answer the call for liberty

أخرج فإن الفساد ظهر في البر والبحر، اللهم وفق كل حر على تحرير هذا البلد المنكوب

Take to the street to demonstrate against the corruption, which has plagued the nation. We should liberate this afflicted society.

4.

..وهو اسـوا نظام في التاريخ وربما اسـوا من فرعون لقد كان لفرعون كرامه لكن هذا الرجل وازلامه لا كرامه لهم من ابو الغيظ ل عمر سـليمان كل اركان حكمه .. ياشعب مصر ملحمه التاريخ والله معكم

...is the worst regime in the history of Egypt, it is worst than Pharaoh. At least, Pharaoh had some dignity. The current regime has none.

5.

أعلق وأقول يجب كنس هذا النظام الفاسد لأنه اذا فسد الرأس تبعه الجسد

I say oust this corrupt regime because when the top of the government is corrupt, the remainder will follow suit.

6.

اضراب 6 ابريل 2009 حقنا وهناخده ضد الاستبداد ضد الاحكتار ضد الرشوه ضد توريث السلطه

The 6th April 2009 is our right to protest against oppression, monopoly, corruption, bribery and inheriting power.

(Al-Jazeera net: April 6th, 2009)

On 6th April 2009, *al-Jazeera* net published an article on a demonstration that was planned to take place on that day in Egypt. The article highlighted that the soaring prices, scarcity of jobs and corruption are the main reasons why thounsands of Egyptians will take to the street. As a response to this article, several Arab readers have made the above comments on the article, expressing their support for the action to be taken by the Egyptian public. The entries, as shown above, strongly criticised the Egyptian regime, maintaing that standards of social life are deteriorating and the level of unemployment is skyrocketing. The main consensus among the Arab readers of this article is that the current regime is 'corrupt and should be ousted'. Criticising Arab regimes and calling for their removal is unprecended. This new discourse of accountability and challenge of rulers indicates a shift away from the traditional discourse, which has often been full of praise for Arab government and regimes, into a discourse of reprimand and criticism. What is intriguing here is that the Arab public is not alone in breaking these taboos, Arab media has played a crucial role in providing a platform for these voices to be expressed and heard. This supports the view that Arab media is shifting away from its traditional

discourse of honoring, praising and supporting governments and regimes into questioning their practices. These changes signal a new shift in the Arab media discourse; A discourse of challenge and accountability. However, this genre of discourse is still in its infancy and will require some time to mature. According to Ibrahim Nawar, the current "media discourse in most Arab countries mirrors the aspirations of the ruler at the expense of the people's, who in most cases fall victims to the political discourse delivered by the media"[1].

The myth that Arab governments are somehow immune from any criticism is changing by the day. The recent protests and revolutions that have swept the Arab world are a testimony that the Arab public has broken all taboos and defied all challenges, including the fear barrier. Such a discourse is tangibly reflected in the discourse we witnessed in the chanted slogans in both recent Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions. The wrath of the discourse of revolution was directed to the Tunisian and Egyptian regimes. Before, we dwell on the analysis of some of these slogans, it should be mentioned here that defaming the president in both Tunisia and Egypt are criminal offences that are punished for severely. According the Egyptian and Tunisian norms, the president is the head of the state and full alegiance should be given to him. However, the new revolutionary discourse seems to defy this by doing just the opposite of that. Chanted slogans such as 'Down with Mubarak', 'down with Ben Ali', 'the public would like to trial the president' are unprecedented in the Arab public discourse. It does not only epitomise the shift of power, but also the breaking of the fear barrier by seemingly fearless young generation. Whilst the content of these slogans is very intriguing, a linguistic examination of these slogans is equally revealing. The most striking chanted slogans is '*irḥal*' (leave) and 'dégage' (leave) in their imperative forms. From a linguistic perspective, the use of imperative is often used to convey order. This, again, shows that Egyptian and Tunisian protesters assumed the power to order their presidents to step down. This change of discourse should be placed in its wider social and cultural context. As far as the social change is concerned, Arab transnational media and the fast-growing social media could be said to have driven this change. Discourse analysts would have noticed that entries upon entries on *al-Jazeera*, for instance, refer to Arab regimes as 'silent', 'puppets', and 'power lovers'. This new discourse phenomenon can only be understood when it is placed within the wider Arab social context. It is palpable from the above analysis that Arab media has transformed Arab social relations and identities. These relations are reflected in the new Arab public discourse. The long-held taboos are broken and that the public discourse of submission and passivity is replaced by a discourse of empowerment and emancipation.
This change is part of a wider wave of change sweeping the Arab world. Since language is a means of reproducing and maintaining social identities, relations and system of knowledge and belief (Fairclough 1995), one would conclude from the above analysis of data that relations between Arab citizens and their governments are changing. We can equally conclude that the new Arab media is contributing to this change.

Another taboo that has been broken by the Arab media is the role of women in the Arab society. The wide range of programmes launched to deal with women's rights and roles is an index of the level of change in the way the new Arab media perceive women. The *al-Jazeera* programmes, "*Rā'idā*t" and "*li nissā'i faqṭ*", are designed to promote the role of women in society as well as their rights and contributions to their society. The programmes discuss issues such as women positions in Arab societies, their liberty and independence. The programmes also discuss issues of domestic violence and women's rights for education and work. Some of the programmes go even further to discuss the taboo of the equality between men and women in the Arab world. These new programmes could be considered as campaining platforms for women to voice their concerns and raise awareness of their status in Arab societies.

The change in the Arab audience discourse is due to the "uniquely influential and formative position" (Fairclough 1995: 126) of contemporary Arab media in Arab societies. Statistics indicate, for instance, that *al-Jazeera* is widely viewed across the Arab world (Zayani 2005). This has strenghtened the channel's relation with the Arab audience. In an attempt to improve its rating and attract a substantial number of the Arab audience, *al-Jazeera* has adopted a new discourse and a new approach in its broadcasting. Its new approach hinges on engaging and creating a partnership with the Arab public. This is

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[1] http://www.waccglobal.org/en/20072-mediating-the-middle-east/452-Arab-media-lagging-behind.html

a clear break away from the traditional approach based on legitimising and respecting existing power relations (Fairclough 1995: 126). The aforementioned extracts serve as a clear evidence that the new Arab media discourse reflects new social relations between media and governments, on one hand, and public and governments on the other hand.

It becomes apparent from the above discussion that Arab transnational media has broken with the past practices of shying away from discussing controversial Arab matters. The culture of fear has been replaced, at least in some parts, by a culture of accountability and responsibility.

 The aforementioned examples serve as a clear index to the changes that have been taking place in Arab media discourse. The mobilisation of the Arab audience by transnational Arab media has contributed to breaking the existing social and cultural boundaries, which often limit freedom of expression in the region. Since discourse and society are inextricably linked (Fairclough 1995), one would argue here that the change of discourse is an index of the change in the cultural norms of the Arab society. One particular change in the Arabic culture is the proliferation of satellite channels and their desire to push for change. The mushrooming of the Arab media has led to the inception of a new discourse. The transnational Arab media, as aformentioned, adopted a bold critical approach to issues of great importance to the Arab public. During the Iraq war, for instance, most of the Arab media have changed their policies, so that they can compete more effectively with *al-Jazeera* who has enjoyed a wide support among the Arab public. Abu Dhabi channel, for instance, adopted a 24/7 news format. In 2003, *al-Arabiya* was launched to rival *al-Jazeera*. Despite having different agendas, one of the main objectives of Arab media is to win the hearts and minds of the Arab audience. This change of culture has subsequently led to a change in discourse, where taboos are discussed openly and without fear or apprehension. The desire of some Arab media outlets to gain grounds on the Arab media market has led some of them to adopt a critical approach towards Arab governments. As some of these media outlets started cementing their positions across the Arab world, the Arab audience adopted a regional discourse formed by regional cultural, political and social issues. A discourse of empowerment, emancipation and liberalism.

The widely available technologies meant that the Arab audience has now access to a wide range of news sources. They are now able to shop around for news, either through western media or Arab media. Having access to different sources of news has strenghtened the Arab audience and widened their perspective. As a result of the proliferation of Arab media, transnational Arab media is "preferred over the more parochial national television stations" (Seib 2005: p.605).

The most recent events in the Middle East, Iraq war, the Gaza conflict, and the uprising in both Tunisia and Egypt, have granted "Arab media the opportunity to engage in critical reporting and to cover events in the Arab world in the broader context of global politics" (Seib 2005: 606). Arab media discourse of the war reflects its critical approach towards Arab governments and 'foreign occupiers'. To borrow el-Nawawy & Iskandar's words, *al-Jazeera* challenged all barriers by airing "the hard, often harsh truth of Arab life, culture, and politics" (el-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003, p. 29). The channel tackled sensitive issues that have been considered taboos, "like sex, poligamy, apostasy in Islam, banned political groups, torture and corruption of Arab officials" (el-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003, p. 29).

This new genre of discourse has been suddenly emulated by the Arab audience who have become very vocal in their response to events. Their discourse is full of praise for the resistance, but reprimand and criticism for the Arab governments who are often accused of 'collision with foreigners'. What is striking here is the palpable influence of the media on the Arab audience. The Arab public change of discourse is a clear indication of such an impact. The discourse of loyalty to the Arab government has been replaced with a discourse of accountability and reprimand.

The power satellite Arab media have come to wield in the Arab society is desirable. "There is no subject on which they cannot comment and no individuals or institutions immune to their criticism. The media can make and unmake individuals and institutions, including government" (Sawant 2003:17). Sawant's quotation fits well in the Arab media context. The change in the Arab media discourse practices culminated in a liberal public discourse based on the concept of accountability and responsibility. Although transnational Arab media have contributed to this change, these media have been widely criticised for its 'irrational reporting' and lack of professionalism (Zayani 2007).

4. Conclusion

This paper has argued that both Arab media and Arab public discourse have changed dramatically over the last decade or so. The proliferation of transnational Arab media and its desire to attract Arab viewers and readers across the Arab world have encouraged these media to break away from the traditional method of broadcasting, and adopt a new approach that value the audience and challenge governments and regimes in the region. This change in broadcasting has been reflected in the genre of discourse Arab media have adopted. A discourse of criticism and reprimand for Arab regimes and governments. This type of discourse has broken Arab taboos - culture, religion, women and governance- and paved the way for a new Arab public discourse. The change of Arab media discourse should be contextualised within the wider social and cultural changes that Arab societies are undergoing. Breaking taboos is a new phenomenon in the Arab world, and this marks a new era in the production and consumption of Arab media discourse. As a result of this, a new discourse of challenge, accountability and reprimand start surfacing in Arab societies. The recent unprecedented uprisings and revolutions and their demands are clearly manifested in the chanted slogans that resonate across the Arab world. Clearly, one would conclude that the new discourse of empowerment and emancipation mark a new era in the Arab social, political and cultural sphere.

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