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AN INTRODUCTION TO INSTITUTIONAL TRANSPLANTATION

Frame 1: Al-Jazeera, 'the CNN of the Arab World'

In the aftermath of 11 September, Western television publics got to know Al-Jazeera, a satellite television channel based in Doha, Qatar, because national and international television stations broadcasted exclusive images from this Arab channel. It was the only channel with an office in Taliban's Kabul and it took delivery of several video statements by America's most wanted: Osama bin Laden. Long before the attacks on the twin towers of New York's World Trade Center, Al-Jazeera was already famous under the Arab public and students of the Arab World. It owed its reputation to its editorial freedom and its legendary controversial broadcasts, a unique phenomenon in the media landscape of the Arab World. National (state) channels and other pan-Arab (private) channels hardly meet free press criteria. News and politics are reduced to propaganda broadcasts for those in power. In contrast to these practices, Al-Jazeera gives a voice to opponents to the regimes in power and organise round tables and public debates. It is often called 'The Arabic CNN' to underline that Al-Jazeera and CNN share common characteristics: an international audience (although through a different world language, but Al-Jazeera's global audience includes the Arabic speaking diasporas in Europe and North America), a reputation established by the news coverage of a war (the 1991 Gulf War for CNN, the 2001 Afghanistan War for Al-Jazeera) and last but not least similarities in form and presentation. However, if Al-Jazeera can be described as the Arab CNN, the reverse (CNN as the American Al-Jazeera) is not true. This is because CNN has been a model for Al-Jazeera', for example one of the most popular shows 'The opposite direction' was modelled after 'Crossfire', and not the other way around¹.

The Arab channel was created in November 1996 when the emir of Qatar, Hamid bin Khalifa al-Thani, who had overthrown his father with a palace coup the year before to establish democracy from above in his small country, hired most of the former BBC Arabic News Service's editors, reporters and technicians to establish Al-Jazeera in Doha. The BBC, long famed for its Arabic language radio broadcasts, had previously signed a deal with the Saudi-owned Orbit Communications to provide Arabic

language television newscasts for their Middle East channel. The Saudis did not accept the editorial independence claimed by the BBC staff and they pulled out of the deal after the broadcasting of an unwelcome documentary on Saudi-Arabia. As a result, the staff of the Arabic services was laid off (Burns, 1999; Hirst, 2000; Moran, 2001). The Emir of Qatar took over the services but also decided to transplant the redaction to Qatar.

Five years later Al-Jazeera has grown to a 24 hours news channel run by a multinational team from all over the Arab World, with 600 staff from 25 nationalities, 35 permanent correspondents and 27 agencies (Dross, & Ibrahim, 2001). It is characterised as provocative (Abu-Fadil, 1999), the 'most freewheeling station of the Arab World' (Anon., 1999), a 'caso unico di liberta d'informazione' (Adly, 2001), 'l'exception (...) un phénomène médiatique arabe sans précédent' (Dross, & Ibrahim, 2001) that has 'created a revolution in Arab news media and public opinion, emerging as the first independent, professional, pan-Arab news outlet' (Abunimah, & Ibish, 2001), and represents 'a quantum leap forward for unfettered journalism in the Arab World' (Waxman, 2001). It has achieved 'world recognition' (Leiva, 2001) and 'a loyal audience of 40 millions from Washington to Tehran' (Reeves, 2001) explained by the professionalism of the staff (Anon., 1999) and the mediocrity of the alternatives (Ayad, 2001). In other words, 'the tiny sheikhdom of Qatar is now producing a commodity much in demand in the Arab world: freedom' (Ya'ari, 2000) resulting in a series of controversial but influential interviews and roundtables.

While the public seems to appreciate it, Arab regimes hate it. These regimes still don't understand free press, as shown by the numerous official complaints from other Arab states (400 according to Gambill, 2000) filed to Qatar's government, which claims not to control the channel, and the recall of several ambassadors (Shihab, 2001).² States also closed down local agencies (for example Cairo in 1997 and Ramallah in 2001, Dross, & Ibrahim, 2001). Algeria even organised an electricity breakdown to prevent Algerians from seeing a broadcast (Hirst, 2000). To which degree Al-Jazeera meets the standards of a free and objective press remains a much-debated issue (for example Ajami, 2001; Alaff, 2001; Young, 2001; or Waxman, 2001). Issues shift from the matter of state censorship to partisanship in international issues such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and anti-Americanism, and the same is true of its eventual impact on the democratisation of Arab countries (cf. Ayad, 2000).

1. BORROWING INSTITUTIONS

The creation of Al-Jazeera is a great example of an institutional transplantation (see Frame 1): that of free press conventions. Organisational models, broadcast formats, editorial styles, procedures, norms and values were transplanted to Doha, Qatar, together with a core staff formed by the former Arabic television department of the

BBC. There were actually two donors: the British school of journalism of the BBC World Services and the American school of CNN International, the first global news channel which is based in Atlanta, Georgia. As in all cases of transplantations, one may wonder whether the transplant has met the expectations of the initiators.³ How has the Anglo-Saxon model of journalism been implemented? How did it develop in a new societal context? Do the effects and impacts on the host society match with the original objectives of initiators and implementers?

This book deals with institutional transplantations in many domains and in many parts of the world. It explores the borrowing of political institutions, business fashions, management practices and policies from one country to the other. Globalisation impacts on these international borrowings. The speed to which information and experiences are exchanged, ease the process of awareness and emulation of foreign institutions. This is often in a context of a hype and without clear reflection of the possible structural and cultural consequences in the host country.

The present chapter introduces institutional transplantation in a historical perspective before presenting an outline of the book. First, we need to reassess that transplantation is no new phenomenon, although it has clearly changed over time. In the past, institutional transplantation was often imposed on conquered territories and populations. With the democratisation of existing states and the creation of new states in the process of decolonisation of the non-European world, institutional borrowing is more and more often set into motion by the people in the host society. More recently transplants from one model country to countries in need of a model (less developed countries?) have been replaced by multilateral operations in which countries borrow policies from each other in a more *ad hoc* manner and within in multilateral learning settings. These types of borrowing coexist. Coercion occurs when developing countries feel forced by international agencies, such as the IMF and the World Bank, to comply with prescribed economic and financial institutions. Certain institutions are given as models in the media and the professional literature (e.g., the Swedish welfare state, the British privatisations). Exchanges are stimulated by global networks such as the World Economic Forum, the G8 and by regional cooperation (European Union, ASEAN and the like).

1.1 Institutions, innovation and transplantation

Institution is one of these key concepts that pay their popularity with fuzziness. Despite the variety and vagueness of the concept (see for an overview Hendriks, 1996, pp. 89-132), institutions are generally seen as stable patterns in social interactions. Institutions are the rules of the game that structure action and signal rational behaviour (North, 1990). These conventions are sometime enforced by coercion but even more effectively by conviction, that is: a worldview that justifies the institution (Douglas, 1987).

If institutions stand for stability and predictability, social change needs to be explained. Institutions can be transformed during an incremental process of change, but radical adjustments and reforms are common too. The transition to new

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