



Globalization

of the Media

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Does globalization mean we're being conditioned into thinking only of CNN when disaster strikes and we need detailed news of the event? Yes, very likely, because many of our media in the Arab world fall short of the task of providing good, accurate news that is to the point. That does not mean CNN is the best, it just means it operates in a professional non-sense way, most of the time. The network has had its share of flops over the years, but success seems to outweigh failure.

A maverick on the scene in the Middle East is the relatively new all-news channel Al Jazeera, which many people love to hate. But I know of more people who love, than hate it. It's good, hard-hitting, controversial and calls a spade a spade - *al awar bi aino*. We need more of these media. But we need media that can also understand our cultural background and societal needs - i.e. those that strike a balance between accurate information and understanding of the story's background.

All too often reporters are parachuted into a country to cover a hot story without having any solid grounding in the subject. This applies to the Arabs as well as the Americans and Europeans. I've seen it happen all over the Middle East and in Washington and across the US. Arab Journalists need to learn American English fast and tune in to the nuances of official Washington before presuming to know how to cover the White House, State Department, Pentagon, Capitol Hill (Congress), etc. They also need to understand the intricacies of international finance and lending institutions if they're to cover the World Bank and IMF. They should be well versed in the language of international relations, treaties, history, geography, etc., before tackling the UN and its agencies.

Staying at home and reading the local papers, then regurgitating them to the folks back home in Beirut, Cairo, Riyadh, Amman, etc. won't do. It's cheating. There's a lot of leg work involved. Likewise, US. and European correspondents often arrive on our shores with no notion of what's happening in the country or the region. With little or no knowledge of Arabic (or

French) they expect everyone to understand them. Some don't do their homework and don't read about the background that led to recent conflicts, as if they exist in a vacuum. It's a major failure on their part.

An American reporter I know, who was too scared to enter Tripoli during one of the major battles, took a taxi to the edge of the city, saw some exchanges of fire from a distance, ran back to Beirut, filed the story with a Tripoli dateline and proceeded to detail the raging battle which he never really saw. There are many such stories from all over the world.

That's a great disservice to the readers, viewers, and listeners.

Mastery of languages is very important. They've helped me in many situations - Teheran, Moscow, Washington, Kyrenia, etc. If women are to prove themselves in the field - and many have excelled over the years - they should do their homework, and more. They should keep pushing that executive glass ceiling, by being, experts in areas not considered as "women's issues." I spent many years covering the Pentagon and enjoyed writing on defense and security issues. F- 15 and F- 16 aircraft, Stinger shoulder-held missiles, avionics, Abrams tanks, rapid deployment forces, low intensity warfare, terrorism, and nuclear proliferation.

Yes, men can feel quite insecure when they hear a woman discussing such matters. But so what? Have the facts ready at your fingertips. Ask intelligent questions, be persistent without being obnoxious and keep hammering away. Show inconsistencies in what's being said and done, document everything, be thorough. Kill them with your brilliance and charm. You'd be surprised how far you can go without doing something illegal, immoral or fattening.



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