



## Practices of Truth

Baudouin Dupret

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*PRACTICES OF TRUTH*  
*An ethnomethodological inquiry into Arab*  
*contexts*

Baudouin Dupret

*A Jean-Noël Ferrié,  
Un maître de la ligne claire*

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## FOREWORD

The function of a foreword is not normally to summarize the book it is prefixed to. It should set the stage, and asks readers to pay attention. The author is like the theater attendant admonishing the audience to turn off their mobile phones – which is exactly what the readers of this book should do. But I cannot explain why, without giving a glimpse of my reading of *Practices of Truth*, even though the potential importance of a work like this should speak for itself, as the issue of truth has been a preoccupation of people for at least the past couple of millennia.

*Practices of Truth* is a remarkable book. At first sight, it sets out to accomplish an impossible task. On the one hand, it deals with truth, a concept burdened with the expectation of universal uniformity. Most of us have been educated with the expectation that something is either true or false, marked with a plus or a minus. The furthest we tend to carry nuance is to say that a proposition may be true in one respect while untrue in another, but in both cases the circumstantial qualifications only mark differences in applicability, without disrupting the clarity of the dichotomy. On the other hand, this book reports on ethnographic and ethnomethodological studies. It is the hallmark of ethnography and ethnomethodology that it deals with the here-and-now, with context-specific phenomena that completely resist duplication, let alone generalization. Should it, therefore, not be a sign of sheer madness (not even just foolhardiness) to imagine that matters of truth can be subjected to ethnographic scrutiny? Baudouin Dupret shows clearly – and here lies his fundamental contribution – that it is not. Through the analysis of a series of contextually divergent interactional episodes, he demonstrates that truth is not simply given, but that it emerges or is collaboratively produced in public, shared, institutional practices. Such practices, though recognizable as belonging to ‘types’, are not simply tokens but rather constitutive moments in the creation of their types.

Dupret’s first case study, from the religious schooling context of an Egyptian *kuttâb*, immediately brings home his main point. Far from pretending ignorance of the wider social and historical background, he consciously and carefully avoids imposing the socially and historically constituted abstract framework of ‘the’ *kuttâb* on the practices that can be seen to unfold one afternoon in May 2002 in a small Upper Egypt village. What really matters to the participants in the observed activities – and therefore to the analyst – is not so much an abstract and generalizing conceptualization of what happens, but rather every participant’s local positioning in a unique, multi-layered and multi-functional, physically situated social microcosm, constraining and enabling the accomplishment of a central – but by no means exclusive – task, the learning of religious Truth. While this is not made explicit in the text, this case study underscores the fundamental connection between truth and practice-related habits of thinking. The literal memorization of a religious text, which is so strongly internalized that a teacher can hear a child’s mistakes even while attending to completely different activities, is only an extreme and highly institutionalized example. But just as a pupil in the *kuttâb* does not question the Koran, it is important to realize that what we tend to consider the truth in other fields of experience is simply what we have learned not to question.

The second case study returns to the issue of the wider background to local practices. In order to competently participate in the locally relevant context of a given practice, participants must share background knowledge which must also be understood by a researcher who wants to be a competent analyst. Dupret argues for a conceptual distinction between *a priori* background knowledge and locally relevant and procedurally consequential context. While the former is a precondition for participating in as well as researching an activity, the latter is a constitutive part of the real object of ethnographic or ethnomethodological scrutiny. Conflating the two, whether by positing their unity in relation to social-structural or historical continuity, or by placing them under the umbrella of an abstract cognitive or mental model, takes the punch out of the analysis. Keeping this in mind, Dupret embarks on an analysis of what is publicly available and empirically

observable in a Syrian parliamentary debate on an issue of family law, in particular custodianship, in October 2003. As a legislative body, parliament deals with 'truth' in two different ways. First of all, it established the norms by which a court can in the future decide what is or is not a violation of the law. But in the dialogical context of the legislative process, it must evaluate arguments based on interpretations of outside bodies of discourse, whether real or virtual (as in the form of assumed truths – in this particular case in relation to, e.g., a child's interests and aspects of modernity) or just potentially present within an audience that can be expected to judge the legislators' work. The analysis shows how the development of the debate creatively exploits aspects of contextual constraints related to audiences, politically and legally relevant positions, and rules of formal procedure.

The third chapter remains in the legal sphere, not on the legislative side this time, but on the side of the application of the law in the courtroom, where an interactional process must lead to a decision. An Egyptian case of personal-status law is chosen in which one can observe – far from any theoretical discussions and preconceived ideas about Islamic law – what people do, and how, when they refer to Islamic law or the *shâri'a* in current legal contexts. Also here, it is actual practices that Dupret is interested in, rather than the essentialist question of what *is* Islamic law. The question of what is Islamic, even in the practices surrounding personal-status law, rarely seems to enter those practices. Dupret demonstrates how decisions are reached within the constraints of an orientation towards procedural correctness and against the backdrop of what is considered right in relation to the norms enshrined in law texts, whether or not proceedings take place in close affinity with religious institutions. The main discursive pursuit is the true characterization of facts in relation to formalized sets of norms. The truth of a characterization is not given in advance, but established by the judge's ruling which is the intertextually anchored outcome of a dialogical process referring not only to texts but also to testimony and ways of witnesses' credibility ascertainment.

Chapters four and five switch from the legal context to the media. If there is a single area of public discourse which is always evaluated in terms of truth (both normatively expected to tell the truth and permanently under suspicion of bending it) it is the twin domain of politics and media. Dupret addresses two distinct issues, one related to self-presentation, the other to the depiction of terror, both in the globalized context of the Arab media landscape. As to self-presentation, three video spots with which the television news networks Al-Jazeera, Al-Manar, and Al-Hurra define themselves are analyzed and compared with the self-descriptions found on their English and Arabic websites. Clearly, all three channels aspire to objective and professional reporting of the truth. But Dupret shows how a diversity of communicative resources are employed reflecting the channels' positioning and the intended types of audiences in such a way that a competent viewer can 'read' the different shadings of the truth to be expected in the news programs. The title of this chapter, "The truth about oneself", could have been given an extra layer: the truth about one's way of telling the truth. The practice that is under scrutiny here is a truth-related effort at community building – a matter of both corporate and societal identity construction.

Against this background, the fifth chapter explores truth-telling narratives about terrorism, as manifested in one-minute clips produced by Al-Arabiya and Al-Manar denouncing terror and terrorism. While the previous chapter was already concerned with the competent 'reading' ability of an audience of ordinary television viewers, the processes that are mobilized for the actual reading of complex, but – as it were – naturally intelligible, stretches of pictures, text, sound and music, are the real focus here. Dupret shows how a grammar of shots, sequences, narrative structure and accompanying sound, produces the specific intelligibility of categories of people, places and activities which are thus interactionally created rather than to be taken from a pre-existent stock of categories that would then be applied to an independent reality. The two analyzed clips use similar surface categories (mainly victims and perpetrators of violence), even with similar moral

connotations, but the master narratives that are produced contrast in such a way that the categorial content changes drastically, thus normalizing different versions of the truth.

In his sixth chapter, Dupret again addresses audio-visual materials, but this time a longer Algerian documentary film pertaining to a completely different strand of people's preoccupation with truth, the truth that is narratively achieved in relation to an individual's personal orientation to the world as revealed in psychiatric encounters. His analysis necessarily addresses two levels of discursive practice. First, there is the level of the film, as composed by the director. At that level, sequencing, transitions, and juxtaposition are described in their capacity as powerful tools for sense-making. Second, there is the level of the embedded narratives told by the people whose life is documented. One interaction between a patient, her father, and a doctor, is discussed, demonstrating especially the patient's and the doctor's orientations to different kinds of truths, the patient being engaged in self-presentation, the doctor using and further stimulating this narrative as a basis for diagnosis. Thus all participants are collaboratively, yet differently, engaged in making sense of a local context.

Clearly, the reader will have to go through the details of different chapters to absorb Dupret's overall, well-documented, conclusion that truth is a matter of language games and practical achievements. However, it should be pointed out that the concluding chapter is not just a summing up of what has already been said. It is a strong plea against yielding to the temptation to relegate truth to the dark depths of a mental black box. But it also argues against a strict social constructionist point of view that ends up in cultural relativism, against a philosophical definition in terms of a correspondence between what is said and the 'facts', and even against some pragmatic theories leading to an evaluation of truth in terms of optimal efficiency in people's interaction with the world. These content-oriented perspectives are replaced by a truly performative theory of truth: something is achieved when its truth is claimed; hence the chapter's title, "A matter of language games and practical achievement". This formulation draws heavily on Wittgenstein's later philosophy. Instead of defining truth conditions, we should be concerned with the way in which truth-related concepts are mobilized in specific contexts of language use, which are highly variable, but still intelligible as a result of their being conceptually clustered around family resemblances. This is by no means an a-theoretical perspective, but rather a sound theoretical basis for looking at truth-related practices as community-based member phenomena, not in the abstract, but in the here-and-now of mundane activities as carried out and understood by the participants. Thus different descriptions of the same event or state of affairs may be equally true in the abstract, but they accomplish different practical tasks, so that they are not interchangeable: they are different language games, producing different truth accounts. In other words, a praxiological approach is called for.

Let me conclude by advocating the importance of this book for quite divergent groups of readers.

First of all, *Practices of Truth* is essential reading for philosophers. The idea is not that philosophers should abandon their armchair attempts at abstract understanding. Rather, their own efforts at theorizing can only benefit from familiarity with what ethnography can reveal about what happens with 'truth' in real-life situations. Philosophical theories of truth already take into account various 'practical' considerations, such as the relation between truth and interpersonal agreement (e.g. J. Habermas' consensus theory), between truth and speech acts (e.g. P.F. Strawson), or between truth and the putting of one's concepts into practice (e.g. C.S. Peirce's pragmatism). But Dupret's praxiological studies show that a radical orientation to practice turns truth into an empirical issue: data do not obey preconceived ideas.

Second, the book is a major contribution to the study of language use. A praxiological or practice-oriented approach is closely affiliated with a type of (linguistic) pragmatics which puts forward the notion of variability as a key issue. In the scientific study of language use, a capital

error is to ignore the extent to which language users occupy individual positions along a wide range of variables, in terms of sets of available structural resources and habits of linking structures with functions, as well as in terms of contextual positioning in an interactional realm. This principle is fully respected when speech events are ethnographically or ethnomethodologically approached as here-and-now local performances. An important consideration which Dupret adds, and which pragmatics should pay attention to, is the importance of trying to distinguish conceptually between the 'situated' character of speech events in terms of the background knowledge shared by participants (and by competent researchers) as distinct from what is of immediate 'contextual' relevance and consequence in the local generation of meanings. It may be a purely terminological issue to decide whether one wants to capture this entire range of phenomena under the label of 'context'. But an awareness of the distinction may often be necessary to keep the parameters of an analysis clear. Unrestrained recourse to background knowledge, without close scrutiny of what it is that interactants are actively orienting to, leads to fuzzy, if not speculative, interpretations.

Third, all areas of the humanities and social sciences that are somehow confronted with issues of an ideological nature – from history to sociology and political science – must take into account two lessons to be drawn from Dupret's work. On the one hand, habits of thinking and habitual contents of thought, which are often community-based and publicly shared, enter day-to-day practices in the form of 'memorized' or internalized truth, resistant to easy questioning and therefore influential in individual and collective decision-making. On the other hand, suspected ideological patterns (as, e.g., in relation to the functioning of so-called Islamic law) sometimes play a minor role in actual practice. Both sides of this coin require attention to local detail for a proper assessment.

Fourth, anthropologies of specific domains such as the law and the media must take into account, as they often do but sometimes forget, the importance of people's awareness of what they are doing, their forms of commonsense or mundane reasoning, their reflexive sense of normativity, in order to reach a proper understanding of the phenomena they are exploring. Also in this respect, *Practices of Truth* is an excellent guide. Finally, if what Dupret offers is relevant to students of teaching, law, media, and therapy – restricting the enumeration to the four domains of practice that are approached in this book – it must be all the more relevant to practitioners in these domains.

Jef Verschuere  
Paris, 7 March 2010



## INTRODUCTION

*Seduced by the scholarly reputation of Nasr Eddin, a student comes from Konya to ask him many questions.*

*He asks about the names of God, the divine transcendence, the plurality of the universes and the star Sirius, and about so many other issues, one more complex than the other. Yet, every time, Nasr Eddin answers that he does not know. Eventually, the young man thinks he has lost his time with an impostor.*

*By God All-Knowing! Shame on you! I see that your renown is grounded on*

*nothing.*

*What do you know about it, answers the Hodja? I'm famous for what I know and not for what I don't know.*

This book is about a question that has bothered humankind from the dawn of time: truth. However, it offers an alternative to classical inquiries into what truth is made of. Instead of inquiring into what it is, it explores its practical ways, that is, the conditions of its enunciation, of its unfolding, and of its felicity. In other words, this book is about truth as a phenomenon that lies open to view. Rather than looking for it in the depth of philosophy or cognitive science, it proposes to seek it where it can be seen operating before our very eyes:

*Actually, Hodja, if I understand your system properly, one can never be sure that something is true or false.*

*Not at all, my friend, this is not what I claim.*

*Can you then give me an example?*

*The other day, I was walking in the street when I heard a passer-by telling somebody else I was dead. Well! I immediately knew it was wrong.*

Truth is ubiquitous. To take but a couple of examples, we observe that, in the media, news reports and informs. In criminal prosecution, attorneys collect evidence in order to establish what happened. In archaeology, scholars look for traces as documents of the past. Within courtrooms, the judge determines the facts and characterizes them according to the law. In religious schools, pupils learn to recite the divine Truth. Scientists struggle to discover the scientific truth and blood tests reveal a person's DNA identity.

The claim of this book is that truth is a matter of language games and practical achievements. It is what we call a member phenomenon. To document this statement, we shall proceed piecemeal.

In the following chapters, we proceed to the investigation of many instances of truth-related practices in various contexts. Specifically, we explore the practice of learning God's Truth in Koran schools in Upper Egypt, the debates about the true nature of Islamic law in Arab parliaments, the search for scientific truth in the process of adjudication within courtrooms in Egypt, three Arab TV channels' self-presentations and the corollary claim they make to be the ones who tell the truth, the production of truth statements about who the terrorists are on two contrasted satellite channels, and the documentary ways to account for truth or reality disjunctions within an Algerian psychiatric hospital. We might have proposed other domains of inquiry, among which archaeology, where scientists are looking for evidence of historical truth; sports, where referees have to decide the truth of what happened on the spot; or even fiction movies, where producers organize the scenario so as to propose a plausible, that is, a truth-oriented narrative, unless they construct the film upon the deliberate breach of truth conditions, as is the case in surrealism.

For present purposes, we just concentrate on a couple of remarks that can be made from the close observation of these settings and that turn around a threefold conviction: first, the words of

truth vary from one place to another and their grammar is accessible only if taking into account the practical conditions of their utterance; second, these words depend on techniques which have been learned or inculcated; third, these words are often associated with institutions specialized in the production of truth.

If we have a look at the presentation of the news of the day on a TV channel, for instance, we can see how it is the outcome of an embedded operation of fact production. The very concept of a “production of facts” is suggestive of the manufactured character of the activity and its product. As Searle expresses it, we are confronted here with the production of an epistemic objectivity, where by “epistemic” we mean that which is the result of a subjective activity of the production of meaning, and by “objectivity” we signify that it is a question of “news” toward which viewers orient themselves as toward any factual truths. The very fact that the truth of certain televised news broadcasts becomes the subject of intense debate demonstrates that, in the absence of contradictory proof, the objective, factual character of the raw information is taken for granted by the person watching. To be sure, the interpretation of this information is often controversial; at the very least, it causes reactions, disagreements, affiliations, and disaffiliation. However, in the great majority of cases, it is not the primary factual source of the information, its denotative level, which is called into question, but simply the way of presenting it and drawing inferences from it. In other words, it is not the question of whether such an event has occurred or not that generates controversy, but the moral and normative character of its presentation, that is, its connotative level.

Focusing on Koran schooling has a purely pragmatic interest. Instead of looking for the content of truth, that is, in this case, Truth with a capital T, the Truth as revealed by God, we concentrate on the practical learning of such Truth. If truth is, among many things, an issue of learning, the description of what happens within a *kuttâb*, a Koranic school, permits to re-specify the issue of disciplining practices. Such practices may have some relationship with textual reference, yet, learning is achieved in a complex way, where the practice never fully follows formal norms nor incarnates discursive master plans. Actually, instead of looking, *à la* Foucault, for congruencies between different systems and orders, like prison, madness, school, sexuality, we engage with the detailed study of local, situated, contingent practices of different language games. Whereas a Foucault-type approach to Koranic schools would seek to achieve a diachronic archaeology of historical discourses, our own method consists instead of conducting a detailed analysis of material architectures, machineries, bodily techniques and disciplinary routines which are constitutive of the phenomenal world of a specific *kuttâb*, from within the multiplicity of practices and language games that locally take place and not in the production of any retrospective historical narrative. In this singular context, the study of one afternoon session of Koran learning precisely shows us, in this singular moment and place, how the members of the group of children and adults engaged in this activity practically orient to the practical purpose of learning the Koran, with all that can be observed in terms of attention focusing and waning, deployment of disciplinary practices and emotions, performance of gestures and techniques, types of knowledge and mistakes.

Exploring the law and, in particular, adjudication in criminal cases is another attempt at describing the practical functioning of human reasoning oriented toward the establishment of truth. Focusing on causal concepts as actually used in specific settings constitutes, therefore, one way to engage in the inquiry into the practical grammar of truth in a legal context. For that purpose, analysis must focus upon causal reasoning as a kind of social praxis in its own right. Causal reasoning is a public phenomenon mainly directed at establishing a relationship between an “action” and its “author,” and the nature of such relationship. Thus, the description of an action and the characterization of its causes as deliberate, hazardous, accidental, fortunate, negligent, and the like, have direct and major consequences in terms of responsibility ascription. It is always necessary to resituate the practical, contextual and situated dimension of causal reasoning and the production of truth to which it is geared. Legal and commonsense reasoning is practically and contextually articulated on notions like cause, reason, motive, intention, excuse, justification or circumstances,

all notions toward which people orient all along the judicial sequence. These orientations are articulated on underlying schemes of normality and naturalness from which multiple inferences are drawn, and they are closely dependent on their positioning in the judicial sequence and on the interactional tasks they seek to achieve.

Such a varied set of questions, bearing on the constitution of actions and events, on what is factual or objective, on predictability, consequentiality, intentionality, causality, and on the many ways people orient to them, such a varied set of questions appears thoroughly moral. The praxeological respecification we undertake in this book leads to important considerations regarding the question of morality in ordinary reasoning, and the categories and categorizations on which that morality is based. First, moral values are publicly available, in the sense that they do not reside in some secret place of the mind or subjective perception; rather, they are given, made visible, laid out, and imputed on the basis of people's discourses and actions. Second, morality has a modal logic, which means that, even if one had general principles, conventions, and rules, these would not provide their own applications in advance for different action contexts; even if they are given conventionally, they must be explained situationally. Third, moral values and conventions have an open texture: their uses and applications are determined by multiple criteria, which is not evidence of disorder, but rather the indication of a practical order made up of multiple options, which are constantly being realized, contradicted, made relevant, or transformed. Fourth, objectivity is a practical achievement carried out by members of society. This does not mean that it is relative, but rather that it emerges from a shared world, in which the dimension everyone shares is at one and the same time presumed and discovered. Finally, fifth, the moral order is an omnipresent, constitutive characteristic of social practice; it is always available both as a resource and a topic of investigation, as a foundation and a project; it is not a locus of investigation restricted to moral philosophers alone. As Heritage (1984) emphasizes, "the normative accountability of action is thus a seamless web, an endless metric in terms of which conduct is unavoidably intelligible, describable and assessable."

To close this introduction, we can turn back to Nasr Eddin:

*Nasr Eddin is walking on a long dirt road; he is most hungry. He meets a man, who is bearded, wears rags, seems haggard, and walks looking in the sky.*

*He is probably one of these rambling dervishes, one of these fools of God, who wander around the country in endless prayer. His admiration notwithstanding, Nasr Eddin sees that the man has a loaf of bread under his arm.*

*Our Hodja takes his stand firmly in the middle of the road and greets him in these terms:*

*- Hello, ye slave of God, ye rambling prophet!*

*But the other bluntly cuts in and shouts, his eyes red of fatigue or heavenly visions:*

*- I'm not the slave of God, I'm not a rambling prophet!*

*- I beg your pardon, ye saint dervish...*

*- I'm not a saint dervish, says the fool, as vehemently as ever.*

*- Indeed, indeed, yet, you're a believer, as am I, and among believers...*

*- I'm not like you, I'm not a believer! Who I am, I shall tell you...*

*But Nasr Eddin cuts him short:*

*- Oh! No, no! Please, don't! Because you will show me right after, that what you have under your arm is not what it looks like, that it is not a loaf of bread.*

Obviously, Nasr Eddin has a very pragmatic conception of truth, one which is deeply grounded in commonsense, one which can clearly delineate between sense and non-sense.

In a somehow more refined way, Wittgenstein is also calling for the delineation of the border between sense and nonsense. This is not a purely empirical matter, as it is not what comes from actual cases that will tell us all what potentially can or cannot make sense. Empiricism has no

explicating power. However, closely describing actual cases in which the production of truth is at stake, participates in the writing of that practical grammar which itself draws the map of sense and nonsense. Engaging in the exploration of such practical grammar as it enfold in context is therefore worth the journey, even though this is a journey which has a start but no end.



## CHAPTER ONE

### LEARNING THE TRUTH

#### Memorizing the Koran in an Egyptian *Kuttâb*<sup>1</sup>



Koranic schools are traditionally presented as places where bodily coercion is used for pedagogical purposes. The picture of the sheikh birching his pupils' soles belongs to these commonplace prejudices concerning Islam. As for the school institution in general, Foucault made it one of the loci *par excellence* of totalitarian disciplining of bodies and souls. Just like asylums and prisons, schools would have the function of denaturalizing the body through its instrumental coding.

In this chapter, we do not seek to support or contest any Foucault-inspired theory on Koranic schools, but to praxiologically respecify it. Through the detailed analysis of gesture, language, and courses of action engaging, within the context of a Koranic school (*kuttâb*) of Upper-Egypt, the master (*shaykh*; we transcribe it in its English form “*sheikh*”), the children who attend the class, and the other people present on the spot at the time of the video recording, we just intend to describe the practical unfolding of a pedagogical interaction relating bodies, objects and words in a frame oriented toward the practical purpose of learning the Koran. Such a description will show that the *kuttâb* does not aim at disciplining bodies, but at learning an assonance-organized prose through the practical modeling of learning along the features of the prose. Learning, therefore, does not correspond to the inculcating of an order aimed at mastering bodies, but to the acquisition of knowledge according to practical means which are contextualized and oriented to such an end and which are much too contingent to be considered a totalizing practice. In that sense, notwithstanding the controversial character of this issue, we claim that Foucault's perspective is deterministic in a twofold way: historically, since it sheds a retrospective light on something like a prison or sexuality and identifies its tendencies (e.g. its “discursive framing”) and moments (e.g. its installing and transformation); normatively, since it looks at practices as the product of rules or the outcome of some discursive framing.

The detailed analysis of many interactions that took place, one afternoon of May 2002, within the specific *kuttâb* of Kôm al-Buhayra, in Upper-Egypt, will permit to observe in action a series of phenomena specific to learning practices taken for what they are, and not, contrary to any Geertz-inspired anthropology, as explanatory resources for an interpretive theory of Islam. Among the many activities, we intend to describe the phenomenal properties of the following: instruction, its content, and its modalities; the relationship between bodily positioning and learning; the relationship between bodies and various instruments (e.g. stick, slate, chalk, reed pen, ink, book); the development of a body-instrument; the relations between various forms of rhythm (bodily, vocal, scriptural) and learning; the practical geography of pedagogical action; the production of context (the *kuttâb*) and its local and specific relevance.

#### *Remarks on Foucault and the school institution*

According to Foucault, the school is an instance of what he calls “total institutions.” A parallel is drawn with asylums and prisons, that is, with these inventions of the late classical age that tend to secure mastering of bodies through the building of knowledge and disciplining. Power and knowledge are therefore mutually implicative: establishing a power relationship has its corollary in the constitution of a field of knowledge, while all knowledge presupposes and constitutes power relationships. The knowing subject, the knowledge object and modalities for knowing, all are elements of these relations linking power and knowledge, and their historical transformation into

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Nicolas de Lavergne who made the writing of this chapter possible.

inculcating institutions. Thus, the prison is, following Bentham's pattern of the Panopticon, an institution that works, through the permanent watching of its convicts and the constant regulating action on their life, as a knowledge device oriented to the production of docile and useful bodies. As for the army, it is elevated to the status of the paradigm of disciplinary power, something that is achieved by its building of a productive body through military drill and the automation of instructed movement.

Foucault's scheme was devised to explain the evolution to modernity and its propensity to body counting and disciplining. Roughly, it concerns the transition from modern to contemporary time, in the West, through "discursiveness", in a journey leading to the emergence and the ascendancy of a dominating discourse characteristic of an historical episteme. As for the Middle East, different scholars, drawing on *Surveiller et punir*, examined how bodies were counted and surveyed, spaces created and organized, activities monitored and classified (Mitchell 1988). Accordingly, whereas institutions preceding the introduction of modern reforms, like Koranic schools, remained free from any such dynamics, Egyptian "modern" schools were refashioned along the lines of new schooling systems. In his study of the development of a modern army in nineteenth-century Egypt, Khaled Fahmy, although he much values Foucault and Mitchell, points to the gap that often existed between "the rationale behind the new schooling system" and "the actual implementation of that system in its new locale" (Fahmy 1997: 30). While Mitchell tends to conceive of the application of modernization plans as automatic and to attribute eventual discrepancies to Egyptian officials' misreadings of Western master plans, Fahmy attributes these discrepancies to "resistance by those on whom the law was applied" (Fahmy 1997: 31). Despite these nuances, both Mitchell and Fahmy produce an evolutionary scheme in the sense that they speak of a modernization process, which, instead of being considered in terms of humanist and progressive reform, must be taken as both corporal and disciplinary, in the ways it is conceived of, implemented, and opposed to all together.

The problem with body disciplining *à la Foucault* is twofold: it stems, on the one hand, from its determinist gaze, both retrospective and diachronic, on a period of time, a context and a type of production considered in a very broad way; it is related, on the other hand, to its non-phenomenological account of practices. To put it in a nutshell, what is missing is a praxiological approach, which neither leans on documentary sources as a platform for historical generalizations nor duplicates traditional dichotomies opposing normative texts and their implementation. Evolutionary schemes and epistemic dichotomies confound the analysis. Instead, we suggest concentrating on historically and locally situated practices of the norms. Adopting such a perspective presents a twofold advantage: on the side of history, it allows us to disentangle the link between modernity and disciplining, while, on the side of educational systems, it makes it possible to re-specify discipline as a practical issue.

This paper re-specifies the issue of disciplining practices oriented to the teaching in a very specific and singular context. Such practices may have some relationship with textual reference, yet, it is achieved in a complex way where the practice never fully follows formal norms nor incarnates discursive master plans. Actually, instead of looking, as Foucault does, for congruencies between different systems and orders – prison, madness, school, sexuality –, we engage in the detailed study of local, situated, contingent practices of different language games (Lynch 1993). Whereas a Foucault-type approach to Koranic schools (*kuttâb*) would seek to achieve a diachronic archaeology of historical discourses, our own method consists instead of conducting a detailed analysis of material architectures, machineries, bodily techniques and disciplinary routines which are constitutive of the phenomenal world of a specific *kuttâb*, from within the multiplicity of practices and language games that locally take place and not in the production of any retrospective historical narrative (Lynch & Bogen 1996: 31). In this singular context, the study of one afternoon session of Koran learning precisely shows us, at this singular moment and place, how the members of the group of children and adults engaged in this activity practically orient to that practical purpose, i.e. learning the Koran, with all that can be observed in terms of attention focusing and waning, the

deployment of disciplinary practices and emotions (laughs, fear, cries, annoyance), the performance of gestures and techniques (swings, scansion, rhythms), types of knowledge and mistakes.

## Frame and context

No “ironic” remark will be made concerning Koranic schools in general. These remarks belong to what Kenneth Liberman justly characterized as the adorning of myopia with the appearance of cultural adequacy (Liberman 2004: 4); in place of attending to actual religious practices, they compose a highly selective and idealized Islam. Instead, we promote “a real empiricism” (Liberman 2004: 19), which involves studying Muslims learning to recite the Text.

That specific afternoon in the Kôm al-Buhayra’s *kuttâb*, we observed many people coming and going, most of them oriented to the practical purpose of the place, i.e. Koran learning (but some to purposes that seemed external or accessory to it).

### *The kuttâb’s members*

1.1.



1.2.



1.3.



1.4.



Endogenously speaking, the sheikh is attended to as the main figure of the *kuttâb*. This is reflected in his centrality, explicitly acknowledged by the members of this congregation, whose attention immediately orients to the sheikh when they address him, but also in the frequent moves of the sheikh, who passes from one group to another, intervenes, directs, corrects, and orders according to what the situation seems to him to require. One could ascribe to him the title of “panoptical sheikh”, following the ideal of universal control which Foucault erected as a symbol of modern disciplining institutions; but one could also regard him as a counterpoint to this symbol, inasmuch as the attention vanishes once he walks away; or even as a re-specification of this ideal, since this panoptical capacity must be described from within the practices of inculcating, disciplining and controlling, which incarnate in the phenomenal this-ness of the specific time and place.

2.1.



2.2.



2.3.



2.4.



The sheikh is sometimes seconded by an assistant, the *‘ârif*, who takes charge of the group of youngsters. In the Kôm al-Buhayra *kuttâb*’s context, this person appears in a static way, essentially seated on his bench, without the sheikh’s characteristic mobility. He somehow supervises the activities of a stage-of-life group and regularly gives a chiding to those children he summons by administering blows on the palms with a long thin wand. However, this person is not systematically present and participates in the *kuttâb* work in a sporadic manner. He seems in a certain way fungible and other people can substitute and accomplish his work.

Children also assist the sheikh in his work. Two girls were actively taking turns that afternoon and had the group of youngsters repeat the alphabet and Koran *sûrât*. Generally, they were

simultaneously or alternately wandering among the rows, declaiming one strophe of a ritornello reviewing the letters of the alphabet or part of a verse the group was singing in chorus afterwards. When the 'ârif was present, their job was also to guarantee the discipline among the children and to refer to him those they judged at fault. A boy participated also to organize the end of the session, progressively designating with the same long thin wand the children who were authorized to leave.

3.1.



3.2.



3.3.



3.4.



The children who were present that afternoon were approximately between four and twelve years old. They were all (or nearly all) sitting on the floor and divided into three groups, without any ostensible rigid definition of those groups. Firstly, there was the group of the youngsters, where boys and girls were sitting together, who shared their time between alphabetization and Koran *sûrât* memorization. Their work organized itself in a dialogic way, the two girls we described in the previous section taking turns to enunciate a strophe or the first part of a verse and the children repeating in chorus after them. This work was always done in common, with moments of varying intensity: one of the two young assistants' functions was also to regularly reactivate the children whose attention tended to quickly evaporate.

Older children were divided into two distinct groups, according to gender. Every group worked in an autonomous way, without any assistant, and each of its members proceeded in an individual manner, independently from each other, although they were all engaged at the same time in the same work (e.g. loud reading for memorization purposes or ink writing of Koran verses on a writing slate). Children of this age group, but especially boys in the episodes we could directly observe, were presenting themselves in front of the sheikh and were rehearsing the *sûra* they had memorized, standing at his side while he himself was wandering in the *kuttâb* or was sitting on one of the benches close to the middle-aged group of boys.

4.1.



4.2.



4.3.



4.4.



The *kuttâb* had been installed in new quarters still under construction. Note that the school being under construction at the time of the recording clearly testifies to the fact that it is the activity which takes place in this precinct that makes it a school and not the place itself. In other words, it is not an abstract denomination that characterizes a place and its function, but rather the continuous practice of those who orient to that place as such. The activities that occur in that place instate it as a Koran school. In this sense, a Koran school is a continuous achievement.

Its being under construction also explains the presence of an electrician within the precinct. Beside his work, this man participated actively in the *kuttâb* activity and he was interpellated at least one time by the sheikh about a boy's faulty answer, which pointed to the fact that he was considered a learned man, able to capture the absurd nature of the child's answer. This means that any pedagogical resource available could be exploited at any moment for the practical purposes of

the ongoing activity. Someone who is categorized in one way could therefore be re-categorized in another way according to circumstances.

There was also an adult woman that afternoon. She was not directly associated with the work of one group of children, although she was sitting on the girls' side. She spent her time copying verses on a slate, with a Koran open on her knees. Her peculiar status was reflected e.g. by the fact that she was on a bench and that the sheikh addressed her directly, independently of the ongoing activity.

Other persons circulated in the quarters. The sheikh's and the 'arif's children who were not of schooling age in the *kuttâb* were coming and leaving, and were entrusted to them or to girls, amongst whom the two who were also assisting with the youngsters' group.

Finally, we also saw a couple with two children who came to solicit the sheikh about the elder. The child must have been sick or the victim of an accident, and the sheikh wrote a formula on a notebook before reciting a prayer or a *sûra* with his hand on the head of the boy who was sitting at his side.

### *The production of context*

If the *kuttâb* is embedded within history, this is not, however, the outcome of a determinist process that would make it the mere product of history. The Kôm al-Buhayra's *kuttâb*, that afternoon in May 2002, is a place where a number of people gather, engaged in activities mainly oriented to the learning of the Koran. It constitutes the context of this learning for the children who go there for that purpose, the teaching context for the sheikh, the 'arif and the many assistants, but also the context in which the electrician installs fans and the sheikh relieves the pain of a suffering child. Through their many actions, the members of this context manifest its relevance and meaning for them: reciting children orient in various ways to this setting as that of Koran-text memorization; the sheikh and his assistants orient in contrasting ways to this setting as the one in which their pedagogical roles unfold; third parties also manifest the specific relevance of this place. Therefore, this pertinence is complex, embedded in multiple purposes, coordinated (teaching and learning), complementary (installing the new *kuttâb*) or parallel (the sheikh as teacher and the sheikh as healer). All these different practices produce the particular context of the Kôm al-Buhayra *kuttâb* that very afternoon. In that sense, the context is contextualizing: activities that are taking place make of this place a particular *kuttâb*, unparalleled.

There is no need to know the history of *kuttâb* in Islam and in Egypt or the sociology of the population of the Kôm al-Buhayra hamlet to be a competent member of this congregational place. The *kuttâb* context presents itself in a transparent and directly accessible and intelligible way. The child who goes there to learn the Koran has no need to master the genealogy of the *kuttâb* institution to understand what one does in this place. Whoever is used to going there is embedded in a routine way in a series of activities with regard to which s/he adjusts in a conscious way. Someone who comes for the first time adapts the background knowledge s/he has to what can be observed *in situ*, that is, to the relevances of the place as they emerge from all that s/he sees and hears. What the child must do in the *kuttâb* proceeds e.g. from the understanding s/he can acquire of what is done over there through his/her alignment with the activities of those s/he perceives as his/her equals. In other words, it is not the *kuttâb* which dictates in a rigid way what people do within it, but it is what the people do in that place which manifests their participation in the production of the "*kuttâb* activity" at one specific place and time. There is no model of the *kuttâb* of which the one of Kôm al-Buhayra would be an instance, but a set of people who, through their activities in that place and at that time, accomplish in a punctual and local way the "*kuttâb* activity" in Kôm al-Buhayra. Relevance is autochthonous; it is the outcome of the activities of the members of this group of people in that place and at that time; it does not represent a general and abstract institution, but it

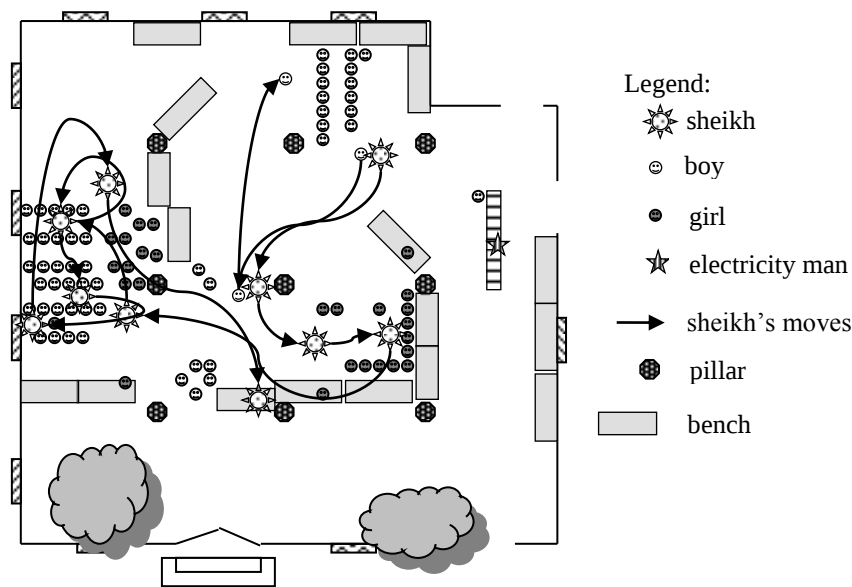
specifically accomplishes an activity recognized by members or competent observers as that of the *kuttâb*.

The *kuttâb*'s context is thoroughly ordered, in a specific way; it is endowed with autochthonous order properties which make empirically observable the collaborative work of producing Koran teaching as a social fact (Garfinkel, 2002: 245). It is a collaborative work defining the participants as members of the group of those who practice the *kuttâb* just because of the activities they accomplish. In that sense, the *kuttâb* context is contextualizing, that is, it is the set of activities taking place there which make of this locus the Kôm al-Buhayra's *kuttâb*. As we already remarked, relevances in this locus are emerging: they proceed from the unmediated and situated understanding anybody can have of the activities s/he must accomplish there and from his/her aligning with other people's activities. It does not mean that this context is therefore unspecified. To the contrary, it is obvious that this context is constrained in various ways, although the nature and meaning of these constraints do not escape the people who are engaged in activities bound to the *kuttâb* locus. The *kuttâb* and what takes place within it are constrained materially, temporally, and teleologically. Materially, first, since the nature of the building itself (the room as fenced by a concrete frame and marked out by pillars sustaining the cellar), the benches (rudimentary, wooden) and the school materials (limited to a minimum: metal slates, reed or cane stilettos, black ink, copies of the Koran or *sûrât*) define a structure of affordances from which members cannot free themselves. Temporally, second, since activities are necessarily punctual; they are what happened one afternoon in May 2002 within the building under construction of the new *kuttâb* of a little Upper-Egypt village, in the adjusting of the temporalities of each member of the "*kuttâb* activity". Teleologically, third, in the sense that this context is closely oriented to the practical purposes of the activities which take place in it, that is, mainly learning the Koran, but also learning the alphabet (which is sometimes applied to the text of the Koran), and accessorially resorting to the competences of a man of religion with a therapeutic goal. As a result, people do not head to this place like to whatever other place; they turn to this particular place the specificities of which are instituted by the activities that are taking place in it and, specifically, by this sheikh's teaching of the Koran. Thus, it is a practice embedded within a particular institutional context, with all the consequences it can have in terms of lexicon, speech turns allocation, asymmetries between the many persons involved, or definition of what is normal according to this place and what is therefore perceived as incongruous.

### **Positioning, moves and activities**

As we can see on the following map, as synthesized from the video stretches recorded in the *kuttâb* of Kôm al-Buhayra, the sheikh constantly moves from one group to another, sometimes accompanied by a child, multiplying the pedagogical and other activities successively or in parallel.

Figure 1: the sheikh's moves



Here follows the ethnographic description we made of this sequence, knowing that the full video recording is not accessible to the reader. This description must therefore be considered as the possibly most trustworthy account of the activity as recorded by the camera:

One hears the sheikh asking questions to a boy, off camera, on the Koran subdivisions. In front of the two rows of boys memorizing, the sheikh holds with his right hand (in which he also holds a wand) the neck of the boy with the striped gown. He asks him questions. The sheikh stresses his questions with head nods and gestures with his left hand in front of the boy's face. He asks: "how many quarters (*rob* ' ) in a general part (*juz* ' *âm*)?", then he moves his hand down to the boy's shoulder, holds him tight, bends toward him and starts walking on his left while taking him aside and keeping on asking him questions. They pass beyond the pillar; more questions on the number of subdivisions in the Koran. They walk together, the sheikh with his left hand at the level of the boy's face. "Thirty times eight? Twenty four", the boy answers. "Thirty times eight, two hundred and forty", the sheikh corrects. The sheikh stops and makes the boy pivot with his left hand so as to face him; he now has his hands on both sides of the boy's neck, thumbs at ear level. With his hands, he orients the boy's face toward himself. He forcibly makes him move to the left side with his hands on both sides of his neck. "In the part, how many quarters?" "Eight", answers the sheikh while hitting the top of the boy's head with the wand he holds in his right hand, without releasing the child. He pulls back his arm to menace hitting him harder. The sheikh rehearses: "In the part, how many quarters?" He explains to him by showing the fingers of his left hand and lifting his hand at the level of his ear, the other hand still on the boy's shoulder. He speaks again and explains, the boy stares at him with his arms along his body. The sheikh asks a question and, facing the boy's incorrect answer, holds the boy's ear with his left hand while bending toward him. He pulls his ear and says: "It's wrong!" Then it is over. He lifts his right hand from his shoulder and sends him back with the other boys while holding him by the ear with his left hand.

Then he addresses the boys angrily. He turns to the black-dressed woman and takes a couple of steps toward her. He stretches himself by placing the wand he holds with his two hands at the back of his neck. The woman asks a question and he answers her. While dropping his arms, he answers a child who raises a question from his right side. He tells him to write. Then he speaks against to his right with the electricity man who stands at the bottom of the ladder on which the '*ârîf*' has climbed. The woman asks him another question; he answers her while going forward to the girls sitting in the middle of the room. The sheikh comes just before the girls sitting cross-legged in front of the bench and he draws a line in the dust with his wand, then he requires them to move by means of two hits on his knees. They get up with the Koran in their hands and sit down again forming a second row beyond those who are already there in the middle. All the girls who were sitting against the bench move into one row or the other. The sheikh walks to his left while talking with the youngsters. He asks a question and then moves toward them. He arrives in front of the youngsters, his hands on his back with the wand. Among them, standing, two girls act as assistants. He starts leading the rehearsal, while circulating among the children, hitting his left hand with the wand he holds with the right. The two assistants, in front of the first row, put the children in order. All the children turn their heads towards the sheikh who stands behind them. The assistants move towards the rear when the sheikh comes close to the first rows. The sheikh keeps on making the

children spell the letters of the alphabet with a long vowel. Then, he makes a remark to a young girl, just in front of the assistants. A couple of seconds of silence, then he starts the rehearsal again, drawing in the palm of his hand the letters in question with the tip of his wand. He then indicates to the two assistants to put everything in order with a little wand hit on the arm of one of them, while keeping on dictating himself. He walks between two rows on his right while half-turning on his heels. The first assistant has left toward the rear of the group, the second toward the front rows. The sheikh walks between the first and the second row and at the end hits a child with his wand. Some of the children of the first row beat their chest in time when repeating the alphabet. The sheikh moves toward the rear, one of the assistants moves her wand and the sheikh hits one child with his wand. The girls take over his dictation for four or five letters; then the sheikh starts again, still at the rear. Several children of the first row do not repeat. The sheikh keeps dictating combinations, sometimes waving his wand in the air. The assistants move among the children. The sheikh lifts his arms and the wand at the back of his neck.

One of the boys sitting on the floor near the bench, who was copying the Koran, gets up. He puts his booklet on the bench. One of the assistants leans toward a youngster. The sheikh keeps dictating. Three other boys who were sitting and copying stand up. Then, it is the turn of the fifth row. The sheikh comes to the children of that row, then turns his back to the children. He turns around for a little while to rail against them. He goes to the boys, while the assistants replace him in the dictation. Surrounded by the boys, he sits on the bench besides a pile of slates. The boys stand around him. The sheikh is sitting with a boy with a green tracksuit on his right, who has a little Koran with a zip on his chest; three other boys stand just in front of him and one taller one slightly to his left, with an abstracted look. The sheikh corrects the first slate, the one of the green-tracksuit boy. A smaller boy, to the sheikh's left, holds his slate and pen and looks anxiously at the correction. The green-tracksuit boy goes toward the rear with his slate in the hand. The sheikh corrects the slate of the taller boy in front of him. The little one on the right reads his slate again; the other, on the left, with an abstracted look, presents his slate to the sheikh. Nine lines have been written on it. He stands in front of the sheikh. The boy whose slate is currently being corrected gazes faraway, to his right. He wipes his face with his gown. He looks at what the sheikh corrects. One hears the youngsters rehearsing the alphabet.

We must notice the sheikh's changes of location, which constantly actualize the many activities, their participants and their localization within the space of the *kuttâb*. The sheikh is central, not because he permanently occupies the geographical centre of the room, but because it is on him, wherever he currently stands, that the attention of the persons engaged in a specific activity converges, according to his movements; and it is towards him that everyone orients who must submit their work for evaluation when completed. The sheikh's "itinerating centrality" re-boots, in turn, the *kuttâb*'s different activities, the intensity of which seems to fluctuate according to his relative proximity. Through the performance of his route, the sheikh maintains the practical geography of the Kôm al-Buhayra *kuttâb*, actualizes its spatial organization, and gives it its specific dimension against the background understanding of what a *kuttâb* is, i.e. a place for getting literate and learning the Koran, and within the constraining framework imposed by the material disposition of the place (size of the room, pillars, benches). The movements do not follow any pre-established scheme; yet, they are not arbitrary. They belong to a specific pedagogic device in action, within which activities are multiple and the places are specialized: the youngsters learn the alphabet in one corner of the hall, sitting on the floor, aligned on many rows, in one group within which boys and girls are nevertheless demarcated; in the older age-group boys and girls occupy two different places in the hall, although they practice similar activities (recitation and memorization); submission to the examination by the sheikh is accomplished while accompanying him during his movements or by presenting oneself to him when he is sitting on one of the benches; there are also older children who transcribe Koran verses on metallic slates, with reed or cane pens dipped in black ink – they present their slates to the sheikh who, at some point along his route, decides to sit down and to correct these writing exercises.

Different activities associating gestures and talk unfold simultaneously within the context of the Kôm al-Buhayra *kuttâb*. We can observe the boys passing before the sheikh whom they want to listen to the verses they learned by heart (*tasmî'*). They present themselves to him, when he manifests his availability, either standing or sitting on a bench, or when he requires one of them to show the outcome of their work. They stand slightly behind the sheikh or just at his level, in a parallel or perpendicular way. Often, when the sheikh ambulates with a child who recites his lesson, he puts one arm around the boy's shoulder or one hand on his neck. The activity takes place in co-presence and does not exclude physical contact. Sometimes, this contact is a way of disciplining,

either directly (pulling ears) or with an instrument (wand hits). Otherwise, depending on the different situations, such contact testifies to the endorsement of one specific boy's recitation, expresses the attention given to his recitation, or serves to coordinate the joint ambulation. Thus, a hand on the shoulder becomes the tool for the reciprocal adjustment of two bodies which must move without being obstacles to each other.<sup>2</sup>



The recitation in front of the sheikh operates on the mode of the child's continuous-flow enunciation and the sheikh's eventual and occasional synchronic correction:

**Excerpt 1: Koran, surat 57, al-Hadîd, verse 4<sup>3</sup>**

|          |                                                   |                                         |                                                   |
|----------|---------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| 01       | a                                                 | b                                       |                                                   |
| Child :  | wa mâ yakhruju minhâ wa mâ                        |                                         |                                                   |
|          | <i>and what comes out of it and what</i>          |                                         |                                                   |
| 02       | a                                                 | b                                       | c                                                 |
| Child:   | yanzilu                                           | [min al-samâ'i                          | [wa mâ yanzilu min                                |
|          | <i>comes down</i>                                 | <i>from the sky</i>                     | <i>and what comes down from</i>                   |
| Sheikh : |                                                   | wa mâ yanzilu min al-samâ'i [0.2'' ]    |                                                   |
|          |                                                   | <i>and what comes down from the sky</i> |                                                   |
| 03       | a                                                 | b                                       |                                                   |
| Child:   | al-samâ'i wa mâ ya'ruju                           | [fihâ                                   | [wa mâ ya'ruju fihâ wa huwa ma'akum               |
|          | <i>the sky and what climbs</i>                    | <i>into it</i>                          | <i>and what climbs into it and He is with you</i> |
| Sheikh : |                                                   | wa mâ [0.1'' ]                          |                                                   |
|          |                                                   | <i>and what</i>                         |                                                   |
| 04       | a                                                 | b                                       | c                                                 |
| Child:   | ayna ma kuntum wa-llâhu bimâ ta'malûna            |                                         | [basîrun                                          |
|          | <i>wherever you may be and God of what you do</i> |                                         | <i>is Seer</i>                                    |
| Sheikh : |                                                   |                                         | ...                                               |

Legend:

|       |        |       |              |
|-------|--------|-------|--------------|
|       |        |       |              |
| child | sheikh | swing | hand gesture |

The attention paid by the sheikh to the child's recitation is manifested by the orientation of his body as well as the verbal enunciation of the correction. Often, the sheikh listens to the child without looking at him (line 1-a). He also corrects the child and enunciates the passage correctly without looking at him (line 4-b), but he does look straight at the child when he is formulating a specific remark (line 2-c). A correction embedded in the flow of the recitation can thus be formulated only with the voice, without the body or the gaze re-aligning, or only with a slight

<sup>2</sup> On the adjustment of pedestrian walk, see e.g. Livingston, 1987.

<sup>3</sup> The transcription follows a minimalist, literal (and not phonetic) system (only long vowels are indicated by the use of the circumflex accent).

movement (line 4-b), whereas the enunciation of a comment or a more insistent rehearsal of the recitation are emphasized by the reorientation of both body and gaze toward the child, with the hand sometimes accentuating this intervention (line 4-c). In this complex device associating, in the sheikh's activity, body, gaze and speech, one can see that speech is primordial, and that gaze and body are partly autonomous, the former concentrating on various objects in its field of vision and the latter swinging in a more or less continuous way. Sometimes, the gaze can accentuate oral remarks, with the torso participating in this reorientation, and the arms and hands eventually accompanying it.

Performing the *tasmî'* does not preclude the sheikh from participating in other simultaneous interactions, such as sipping tea (photos 5.2 and 5.3), glancing at what takes place elsewhere in his view (line 1-b, photo 5.2) or even speaking with somebody exterior to the pedagogical interaction. These parallel activities do not interrupt the flow of the child's recitation that goes on imperturbably. However, this should not lead us to consider the sheikh's attitude as made of several sequences joined end to end, but rather as his major though not exclusive orientation to the audition of a text of which he is so impregnated that any mistake in the recitation is immediately perceived and repaired with the correct enunciation. As a key in a lock, the child's recitation adjusts itself on the intimate knowledge the sheikh has of the text. The sheikh stops the ongoing performance at the slightest incongruity and audibly provides the adequate form the child rehearses, thus repairing its mistake before going any further. The process is totally synchronic, in the sense that the recitations of the text—made public in a loud way by the child and kept silent by the sheikh (whose lips can move without producing any sound, for instance)—proceed simultaneously, in phase with one another, and consist of one and the same homogenous flow, as if the child's enunciation constituted precisely the audible expression of the sheikh's memory, until the moment when a discrepancy eventually arises. Without falling into the trap of mentalism, one might speak, with regard to the sheikh, of a pre-constituted, ante-predicative, non-reflexive space of reception, which brings to mind the hands of Sudnow's pianist that have acquired internal knowledge of the space they are playing with (Sudnow, 1979). This Koranic-text-recitative-memory is to the sheikh what the hand-that-knows-the-keyboard is to the pianist or to the person who typewrites frequently. It tends to the production of the recitation, and if the expected enunciation does not correspond to the one that is achieved, it is not necessary to come back to the Koranic text in order to know it: the flaw is perceived without any necessity to reflect upon it (Sudnow, 1979: 10).

Regarding conversation analysis and the structure of verbal exchanges it allows identifying in context, the interaction between the reciting child and the listening and correcting sheikh presents a set of specificities linked to sequence delineation, speech-turns apportionment and repairs. Conversational units are constituted in an endogenous manner, e.g. through the work of prefaces and conclusions, that is, through the organization of the initial floor taking and the final speech turn. Within the *kuttâb*, the discursive unit—which is not properly conversational, but rather of the type “make rehearse”—is opened by the selection of one child. It is both an auto-selection (the child presents himself before the sheikh) and an exo-selection (the sheikh validates a call-up order that imposes itself or which he has required). The child has nothing to do or say but present himself to the sheikh. The sheikh usually opens the recitative unit with a gesture, establishing eye and (with the boys) bodily contact, and sometimes with a word, encouraging the pupil to start his recitation. In other words, the recitative unit is introduced by the sheikh's invitation to recite. The same unit is closed by the interruption of the recitation, not because of any flaw or incongruity, but only because it corresponds to the normal and expected completion of the Koranic-text passage whose memorization was required. This passage corresponds to a Koranic-text subdivision: the recitative unit is therefore structured by the text itself and by its internal organization, to which both sheikh and children orient to identify the delineation of the exercise. Inside the recitative unit, speech turns proceed in a pre-structured though non-pre-established way. By pre-structured we mean that the recitation naturally follows the invitation made by the sheikh to the child. The recitative-unit structure, which is former to the specific instance of recitation, is the following: invitation –

recitation – conclusion/dismissal. However, the recitative unit is not pre-established, i.e. it merely supervenes on a mistake in the recitation that calls for the sheikh's corrective intervention. Therefore, the recitative unit functions in the mode of mistake-repair adjacency pairs, but the latter are random (there can be no mistake and thus no correction). Contrary to ordinary conversation, speech allocation is done in a unilateral way (the child is only a priori invited to recite) and the corrective speech turns supervene in the mode of the sheikh's auto-selection following the reciting child's mistake. As for the child's retake of the recitation, at the precise point of the mistake that justified the corrective intervention (marked by the first word uttered by the sheikh), it takes place without specific instruction as the preferred activity at the end of the enunciation of the correct formulation (the end of this enunciation is identified by a short time of latency) (excerpt 1, lines 2-3). Finally, the random character of the supervening of mistake-correction adjacency pairs in the recitative unit makes it comparable to the structure of repairs taking place in ordinary conversations, since flaws, misunderstandings or mistakes trigger a mechanism of "local cleansing" (Sacks, 1995(II): 560): the incongruity that took place in the child's recitation calls for the sheikh's corrective intervention. However, within the *kuttâb*, the sheikh's speech turn supervenes only if the child makes a mistake: whereas in ordinary conversation the speech-turns device incorporates the means to repair its own troubles, in the *kuttâb* it constitutes, in itself and by itself, the means to repair recitation mistakes.

The *kuttâb* is an ordered context. This ordering is the outcome of an ongoing collaborative work of enunciation and implementation of the rules of order. The geographical repartition of children into gender and age collections constitutes one of these rules. The enunciation of verses in front of the sheikh and the corrections he makes constitute another rule, achieved through the adapted positioning of body and voice. The end of afternoon classes operates also according to order procedures. The youngsters, who are more or less aligned, break their rows progressively as the sheikh's assistant (photo 2.4) dismisses them one by one with a little hit on the head or the shoulder (photo. 6.4), or, if they are sitting out of his reach, with a sign he makes with his stick. There is no collective sign or warning signal, but only an individual dismissal.

6.1.



6.2.



6.3.



6.4.



Children's alignment belongs to these order practices, too. The sheikh, when drawing a line on the floor and enjoining the children to use it as the norm for their re-aligning, formulates a rule whose practical understanding will be manifested by the children's action. It constitutes a practical case of instructed action (Livingston, 1997; Garfinkel, 2003; Bjelic, 2003), i.e. a normed practice made of the pair "rule enunciation - rule implementation" whose two parts can not be severed one from the other. The sheikh enunciates the rule by drawing the line on the floor (photo 6.1) and indicating to the girls that they have to relocate along that line (photo 6.2). The girls follow the rule as formulated by the sheikh by standing up, moving, sitting down again and re-aligning (photos 6.2 and 6.3), in a way that manifests their understanding of the rule (see also Wittgenstein, 1953). Order within the *kuttâb* is contingent and situated; it is made of rules whose enunciation and implementation work in a paired way. The girls' alignment attests to their practical understanding of a norm (formulated by the sheikh) which they somehow "substantiate". This understanding is expressed by their bodies and moves; it is manifested in their normed changes of location and adjustments, and in their individual and collective coordination; it is their disciplining in action. The children have to read the sheikh's gesture, react to his injunction, stand up, move, align perpendicular to their initial positions, find a place regarding one another along this line that is more

imaginary than real, push each other, hurry up, and intercalate. As for the sheikh, he uses his stick as the extension of his own body, when drawing the line on the floor or enjoining the girls to re-align by gently hitting the head of the one sitting nearest to him.<sup>4</sup>

Alphabetization is requisite for learning Koran recitation and writing. The youngsters' group rehearses the alphabet in the form of ritornellos and passages from the sacred text generally drawn from the shortest and most assonantic verses. These activities are collective, with the repeaters enunciating the strophe and the children repeating subsequently.

7.1.



7.2.



7.3.



7.4.



In the case under study, children rehearse the alphabet in choir, within a pre-established, kaleidoscope-like scheme in which the repeater enunciates the first part, giving the children the elements necessary for the enunciation of the second part (photos 7.1 and 7.2; excerpt 2). Generally, each verse associates a first part made of a consonant vocalized with a long vowel (e.g. *thâ*, line 03) and a second part setting apart the various elements of the equation “vocalized consonant = consonant + long vowel” (*thâ* = *tha* + *âlef*; line 04). The verses are put together in groups of four. This corresponds to the enunciation of a consonant by the repeater, the reviewing of this consonant as vocalized by each of the three long vowels of the alphabet (*âlef*, *ye*, *waw*), and a kind of a recapitulative verse. For instance, in line 03, the sheikh enunciates the consonant *tha* and vocalizes it with the vowels *â* (line 03), *î* (line 05), *ô* (line 07), to which correspond the choir-like rehearsals in lines 04 (*thâthalef*), 06 (*thîthaye*) and 08 (*thôthawaw*); the sequence is closed with the recapitulative verse where the repeater repeats the vocalized consonant with a short *a* (line 09: *tha*), which the children set apart for the last time (line 10: *thâthalef*). Transitions from one letter to another are marked by a transitional verse (line 11), in which the repeater enunciates the first letter of the alphabet, i.e. the long vowel *âlef*, then the pair *âlef*-chosen consonant (e.g. consonant *sâ*), before starting vocalizing this consonant with each of the three long vowels (lines 12, 14 and 16). The extremely repetitive structure of this alphabet review confers to the exercise the dimension of a non-reflexive catchy tune, securing its mnemonic functionality and the spontaneity of its restitution.

#### Excerpt 2 : Alphabet

|                         |              |                |                 |
|-------------------------|--------------|----------------|-----------------|
| 01 Sheikh :             | â:lef ↑      | <i>a</i>       |                 |
| 02 Children (in choir): |              | âlef bâ: ↓     | <i>a be</i>     |
| 03 Sheikh :             | thâ: ↑       | <i>sa</i>      |                 |
| 04 Children (in choir): |              | thâthâle:f ↓   | <i>sa se a</i>  |
| 05 Sheikh :             | thî: ↑       | <i>se</i>      |                 |
| 06 Children (in choir): |              | thîthâye: ↓    | <i>se se e</i>  |
| 07 Sheikh :             | thô: ↑       | <i>so</i>      |                 |
| 08 Children (in choir): |              | thôthâwa:w ↓   | <i>so se o</i>  |
| 09 Sheikh :             | tha          | <i>sa</i>      |                 |
| 10 Children (in choir): |              | thâthâlef ↓    | <i>sa se a</i>  |
| 11 Sheikh :             | âlef âlefsîn | <i>a a ess</i> |                 |
| 12                      | sâ ↑         | <i>sa</i>      |                 |
| 13 Children (in choir): |              | sâsâle:f ↓     | <i>sa ess a</i> |
| 14 Sheikh :             | sî: ↑        | <i>se</i>      |                 |
| 15 Children (in choir): |              | sîsâye: ↓      | <i>se ess e</i> |
| 16 Sheikh :             | sô: ↑        | <i>so</i>      |                 |

<sup>4</sup> In the youngsters' group, the two girls who circulate keep re-aligning the children with a thin palm stick.

The youngsters group rehearses some Koran verses using the same structure: the enunciation of (part of) a verse (corresponding in the transcript to the number between square brackets) and its rehearsal by the children's choir (photo 7.3 and 7.4; excerpt 3) are associated in a paired way. The intonation in the following excerpt is systematically ascending and descending, either within the same strophe (lines 01 to 04) or within two strophes (lines 05 to 08), or within the same verse (lines 13 to 16) or within two verses (lines 09 to 12). Repeaters read the verses from the booklets (photo 7.3) in which the reading breaks are indicated. These breaks correspond to the verses or to the more or less metric pauses within the verses.

**Excerpt 3: Koran, surat 78, al-Nabâ', verses 22-29<sup>5</sup>**

|                         |                                  |      |                                              |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------|------|----------------------------------------------|
| 01 Repeater:            | littâ:ghî:na ↑ ma'â:ban ↓        | [22] | <i>for the transgressors their abode</i>     |
| 02 Children (in choir): | littâ:ghî:na ↑ ma'â:ban ↓        |      |                                              |
| 03 Repeater:            | lilâbithî:na ↑ fihâ: ahqâ::ban ↓ | [23] | <i>for ages they stay in it</i>              |
| 04 Children (in choir): | lilâbithî:na ↑ fihâ: ahqâ::ban ↓ |      |                                              |
| 05 Repeater:            | lâ yadhûqû:na fî:hâ: ↑           | [24] | <i>they never taste in it</i>                |
| 06 Children (in choir): | lâ yadhûqû:na fî:hâ: ↑           |      |                                              |
| 07 Repeater:            | bardan walâ sharâban ↓           |      | <i>coolness, nor a drink</i>                 |
| 08 Children (in choir): | bardan walâ sharâban ↓           |      |                                              |
| 09 Repeater:            | illâ hamîman wa ghassâqan ↑      | [25] | <i>only an inferno, and bitter food</i>      |
| 10 Children (in choir): | illâ hamîman wa ghassâqan ↑      |      |                                              |
| 11 Repeater:            | jazâ'an wifâqan ↓                | [26] | <i>as a just requital</i>                    |
| 12 Children (in choir): | jazâ'an wifâqan ↓                |      |                                              |
| 13 Repeater:            | innahum kânû ↑                   | [27] | <i>o they</i>                                |
| 14 Children (in choir): | innahum kânû ↑                   |      |                                              |
| 15 Repeater:            | lâ yarjûna hisâban ↓             |      | <i>never expected to be held accountable</i> |
| 16 Children (in choir): | lâ yarjûna hisâban ↓             |      |                                              |
| 17 Repeater:            | wa kadhdhabû ↑                   | [28] | <i>and utterly rejected</i>                  |
| 18 Children (in choir): | wa kadhdhabû ↑                   |      |                                              |
| 19 Repeater:            | bi-âyâtinâ kidhdhâ:ban ↓         |      | <i>our signs as lies</i>                     |
| 20 Children (in choir): | bi-âyâtinâ kidhdhâ:ban ↓         |      |                                              |
| 21 Repeater:            | wa kulla shay'in ↑               | [29] | <i>but we counted everything</i>             |
| 22 Children (in choir): | wa kulla shay'in ↑               |      |                                              |
| 23 Repeater:            | ahsaynâhu kitâban ↓              |      | <i>in a written record</i>                   |
| 24 Children (in choir): | ahsaynâhu kitâban ↓              |      |                                              |

We must stress the importance of intonations and repetitive schemes for these techniques of alphabet and Koran learning. In the alphabet's catchy tune, the sheikh's enunciation proceeds with an ascending intonation, while the children choir's answer is marked by a descending intonation. In the recitation of the Koran *sûra*, the alternation of ascending and descending intonations is systematic, either within the same verse or over two verses. The choir memorization exercises we described show thus to what extent this work is organized in a device of alternate intonations distributed over the verses made of short sequences of a few words, and structured in either a repetitive or a question-answer mode.

The children's attention shows important fluctuations and is periodically re-activated by the repeaters, the sheikh or older children. The pedagogical organization of the *kuttâb* is therefore manifestly and publicly articulated around the children's (age-dependant) capacity for concentration, with the youngsters who can not be left to themselves and those in the older age-group engaging in much more individualized work.

Writing occupies an important place among the *kuttâb*'s activities. The copying activity under study proceeds in two steps. First, the children are asked to copy a Koranic text (photo 8.2), which

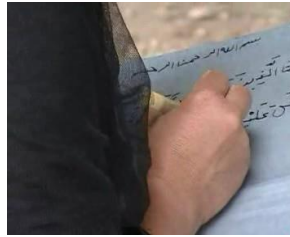
<sup>5</sup> In the Arabic transcript, the bottom-up arrow (↑) marks an ascending intonation and the top-down arrow (↓) a descending intonation.

they proceed to do individually (although they are often more or less gathered) (photo 8.1). Second, they come and submit their copies to the sheikh, who, sitting on a bench, takes the slates that are offered higgledy-piggledy (photo 8.3) and corrects them with annotations (photo 8.4).

8.1.



8.2.



8.3.



8.4.



Copying is done with a reed soaked with ink from a pot within reach onto a rectangular metallic slate placed on one knee and generally held with the left hand. The model to copy is on the side, either on the other knee or held by the same hand that maintains the slate. The writing work consists specifically in the copying of a model and not in the written restitution of some memorized text. Writing therefore participates in the memorizing process. The Koranic text is memorized through its oral and written repetition, i.e. through its auditory and written recording. The corrections made by the sheikh are limited, which can be explained by the fact that the copying is made with a model. However, he systematically reviews the lines of writing, corrects orthographic and graphic mistakes, completes the missing vocalizations and, more importantly, annotates the text with specific marks indicating the breaks in the recitation. The children do not present their slates to the sheikh in any pre-established *tour de role*, but merely flock around him. When he is done correcting a slate and gives it back to its author, each of the other children puts forward its own slate to make him catch it, according to the chance of his gaze and attention. The standing order is not guaranteed by a queuing system; it is achieved by the repetitive selection by the central figure as long as there are candidates.

### Body, gesture, rhythm, and memorization

The different techniques of the Koranic-text learning associate the body to the process of memorization (cf. Kendon, 2004). The use of the body and limbs is extremely variegated: indexical (as it refers to significations), deictic (as it is mobilized for demonstrative purposes), iconic (when it illustrates something which is said), prosodic (as it marks rhythms), and melodic (as it accompanies the musical phrasing of the text recitation).

Hand and arm often accompany the expression of an individualized utterance. They show something specific and go together with a deliberate, intentional and thought-out utterance directed at a specific person. In the *tasmî'* sequence studied above (excerpt 1), the sheikh corrects the boy's flawed enunciation and follows it by a comment (photo 9.1). The comment (excerpt 4) is accompanied by a hand gesture (line 4-c) directly addressed to the boy. Its meaning is explicit and in semantic phase with the utterance.

#### Excerpt 4: Koran, sura 57, al-Hadîd, verse 4

|    |          |                                            |   |  |          |  |
|----|----------|--------------------------------------------|---|--|----------|--|
| 04 | a        |                                            | b |  | c        |  |
|    | Child :  | ayna mâ kuntum wa-llâhu bimâ ta'malûna     |   |  | [basîrun |  |
|    |          | wherever you may be and God of what you do |   |  | is Seer  |  |
|    | Sheikh : |                                            |   |  | ...      |  |

9.1.



9.2.



9.3.



9.4.



9.5.



9.6.



When the sheikh prays for the child's recovery (photo 9.2) he also makes a gesture of placing his hand on the boy's head—one might indeed say that he prays "on" the child. The explicit orientation of the arm accompanies the prayer and the interceding formulae in the designation of the attendee of the process, i.e. the ailing child, and in the establishment of a direct contact line between the addresser of the prayer and its addressee. The hand can also aim to make a non-therapeutic contact, but a repressive or persuasive one. In that case it becomes the instrument of a coercive or corrective intention (photo 9.4). For instance, the sheikh can put his two hands on the child's shoulders to elicit his attention (lines 44-47, line 49); he can pull the dull child's ear, as if this gesture could help opening the blocked orifice of understanding (excerpt 5, lines 68-69); or he can hit the child with the stick he carries in his right hand, as if testing the thickness of its brain's "armor" or inculcating the basic notions (excerpt 5, lines 48-54). The stick becomes the extension of the body in a relationship that can be compared to that of the worker and his working instruments, so that we can speak of the pair "body-instrument".

The hand plays an iconic role when it duplicates and illustrates a speech of a demonstrative or explicative nature. This is how we see the sheikh's hand when it accompanies an interaction with a child concerning the number of parts in the Koran. Speech and iconic hand combine synchronically in the accomplishment of Koranic arithmetic in action. Hand gestures serve as a scansion method and spatial demonstration of an argument made orally. The scansion consists of emphasizing a number of enumerative (each/*kull*; line 52) or interrogative (how many/*kam*; lines 50-51) terms. It seems to mark the passage from one state to another, from a question to the answer that proceeds from it (i.e., a logical inference), something that is even accentuated by open-then-closed fingers (lines 50-51). It generally takes the form of a paired movement that links two points in space (the passing from the question to the answer, from the data of a problem to its logical solution), unifies two gestures of the same limb (open hand and closed hand, question and answer) or simulates the many steps of the same action (the hand that slices, the two halves of a whole). Sometimes, the scansion is not marked fully and the hand stops with the first part of this paired movement (lines 64-67).

The hand also helps to "metaphorize" and "spatialize" the argumentation. By metaphorizing, we mean the gesture simulating the action necessary to reach the desired outcome. So, to speak of a half, the sheikh simulates the slicing in two parts of an imaginary entity (line 58; photo 9.5); to enumerate the number of parts and quarters, he uses his fingers like in a mental-computation operation (line 59; photo 9.3). By spatializing the argumentation, we mean that the sheikh uses his hand and fingers to draw, in a virtual space, a dividing line (that of the middle) and the two sides it defines (line 60). Metaphorizing and spatializing are both techniques specific to ordinary pedagogy

that aims at making visible mathematical properties (Sharrock & Greiffenhagen, 2005) through the use of fingers as units, of the hand edge as a fraction operator, and of a virtual space as a geometric representation of the ongoing operation.

#### Excerpt 5: Koranic mathematics in action

|        |                                                                                                          |                                                                                             |
|--------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 44. sh | al-guz yâ ‘âmm tamant arba‘ yabgâ kâm<br><i>the part is made of eight quarters how much does it make</i> | [holds the child’s shoulders with two hands]                                                |
| 45. wa | [???                                                                                                     | [idem]                                                                                      |
| 46. sh | wa fî-l-qur’ân kam rob‘<br><i>and in the Koran how many quarters</i>                                     | [idem]                                                                                      |
| 47. wa | [???                                                                                                     | [idem]                                                                                      |
| 48. sh | rob‘ tamâniya tamâniya fî talâta<br><i>quarter eight eight times three</i>                               | [hits the child’s head with the stick]                                                      |
| 49.    | èdah mukh al-gazar<br><i>what’s that thickhead</i>                                                       | [holds the child’s shoulders with two hands]                                                |
| 50.    | izâ ‘amm kam rob‘<br><i>so it makes how many quarters</i>                                                | [right hand on the shoulder, left hand going from top (fingers joined) down (fingers open)] |
| 51.    | guz ‘amm kam rob‘<br><i>a part it makes how many quarters</i>                                            | [idem]                                                                                      |
| 52.    | wa kull guz fî al-Qur’ân<br><i>and each part in the Koran</i>                                            | [left hand from top down in a sequence of short jerky gestures]                             |
| 53.    | khalauh rabbunâ min awwal<br><i>our Lord has created since the beginning</i>                             | [idem]                                                                                      |
| 54.    | al-dunyâ kam rob‘<br><i>of the universe it makes how many quarters</i>                                   | [idem]                                                                                      |
| 55. wa | [???                                                                                                     | [idem]                                                                                      |
| 56. sh | tamâniyat arba‘<br><i>eight quarters</i>                                                                 | [left hand rising and showing four fingers]                                                 |
| 57.    | nazzar bi-l-suwar<br><i>compute by suras</i>                                                             | [left hand raised, fingers joined]                                                          |
| 58.    | wa fî-l-sûra [??]<br><i>and in sura [??]</i>                                                             | [open hand moving from top down with the edge, then back to the chin]                       |
| 59.    | khamas agzâ‘ eeh khamas rubû‘<br><i>five parts euh five quarters</i>                                     | [hand at eyes level with each finger raised one after the other]                            |
| 60.    | nus min ‘âm al-nâs<br><i>the half of ‘âm al-nâs</i>                                                      | [left hand index drawing a line, then pointing to each side of it]                          |
| 61.    | al-nus bitâ‘hâ bi-l-zabt<br><i>its half exactly</i>                                                      | [idem]                                                                                      |
| 62.    | arba‘at arba‘<br><i>it’s four quarters</i>                                                               | [idem]                                                                                      |
| 63. wa | [???                                                                                                     | [idem]                                                                                      |
| 64. sh | da bi-l-sûra habîbî<br><i>that it’s by sura my dear</i>                                                  | [left hand open with the palm turned up]                                                    |
| 65. sh | sâme‘<br><i>understand</i>                                                                               | [idem]                                                                                      |
| 66.    | [???] [1.0]                                                                                              | [idem]                                                                                      |
| 67. sh | sâme‘ mish sâme‘<br><i>understand not understand</i>                                                     | [idem]                                                                                      |
| 68.    | fâhim keda mâ yanfa’sh<br><i>understand it’s wrong like that</i>                                         | [left hand catching the boy’s ear and shaking it]                                           |
| 69.    | fî al-sana kâm ente<br><i>you’re in which class</i>                                                      | [left hand holding the ear, right hand dismissing him]                                      |
| 70. wa | [???                                                                                                     |                                                                                             |
| 71. sh | khallas<br><i>it’s enough</i>                                                                            | [idem]                                                                                      |

sh = shaykh (sheikh)

wa = walad (boy)

Besides its iconic, indexical and deictic uses, the body can be used in a prosodic and melodic way. This is how it marks different rhythms in the recitation of the Koranic text and accompanies

the musical phrasing of the recitation. Taken in their duration, sounds produce a musical phrasing whose threading is embodied by the melody. Thus, the body's melodic usage consists of reflecting the general thread of this phrasing without marking its synchronic (or harmonic) details. Within the *kuttâb*, there is an important melodic use of the body, in the form of the swings of the body or torso. The swings are independent of intonation and do not adjust to the Koranic text's short and long periods. However, they correspond to the general tempo of the recitation and accentuate its "mélopée" character, that is, its nature of a recitative in a monotone tone; they tend to accelerate or slow down according to the cadence chosen by the child. So, in excerpt 6, one notices that the rear-to-front swing movement of the torso (lines 2 and 4) is independent of verses 22 and 23 and of the short or long character of the syllables uttered.

**Excerpt 6 : Koran, sura 78, al-Nabâ', verses 22-23<sup>6</sup>**

01 Repeater: littâ:ghî:na ↑ ma'â:ban ↓ [22] *for the transgressors their abode*  
 - - - - / - - - - \

02 Children (in choir): littâ:ghî:na ↑ ma'â:ban ↓  
 - - - - / - - - - \



03 Repeater: lilâbithî:na ↑ fihâ: ahqâ::ban ↓ [23] *for ages they stay in it*  
 - - - - / - - - - \

04 Children (in choir): lilâbithî:na ↑ fihâ: ahqâ::ban ↓  
 - - - - / - - - - \

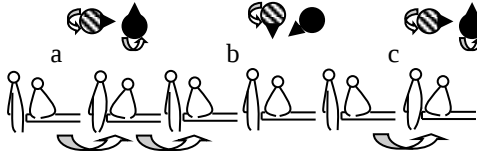


In excerpt 7, we observe that the lateral swings of the sheikh's torso and of the child's body proceed continuously, without any direct relation to the specific words of the recited verse, and regardless of whether the text is correctly recited (lines 1-a, 1-c, 2-a) or requires correction (line 2-b, 2-c). However, this movement stops when the sheikh's attention is drawn toward an incident that takes place elsewhere in the hall and makes him turn around (line 1-b). It also stops at a later (non-transcribed) time, when he is addressing other children.

**Excerpt 7 : Koran, sura 57, al-Nabâ', verse 4**

01

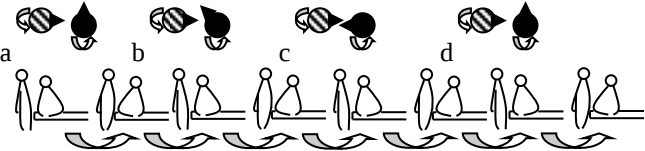
a                      b                      c



Child: wa mâ yakhruju minhâ wa mâ  
*and what comes out of it and what*

02

a                      b                      c                      d



Child: yanzilu                      min al-samâ'i                      [1'']                      wa mâ yanzilu min  
*comes down                      from the sky                      and what comes down from*

Sheikh:                      wa mâ yanzilu min al-samâ'i  
*and what comes down from the sky*

If rhythm is the variation in time of the duration of sounds, a prosodic use of the body consists of marking intonations and accentuations with gestures of the head, arm, hand, torso or foot. From this

<sup>6</sup> In the transcript of syllables, two dashes (--) mark a long syllable and one dash (-) a short syllable, while the slash (/) marks the ascending intonation and the inverted slash (\) a descending intonation.

point of view, it seems that, within the *kuttâb*, the body swinging or the hand hitting the breast (photo 9.6) are more melodic than prosodic. Each verse's specific rhythm is translated in an oral or even written scansion: rhythm belongs to the mnemotechnical tools which facilitate learning. The association of text, rhythm and sound dominance (in the form of rhymes or other types of repetition) contributes to memorization.

10.1.



10.2.



10.3.



10.4.



Because of its oral character and its liturgical function, the Koranic style is characterized by a largely rhymed and assonanced prose. In some short suras and in segments of longer ones, one observes the existence of more or less regular rhymes. However, rhymes and assonances are generally loose and mainly made of grammatical terminations and usual forms. Islamic sciences research has shown that many stylistic and lexical specificities of the Koran are induced by the imposition of the rhyme: although a distinctive and rather regular rhyme is sometimes shaped by words that form a constitutive part of context and meaning, and look like carefully constructed compositions, the rhyme is nevertheless often constituted by formulations loosely added at the end of the verses and with little relation with the context (EÎ<sup>2</sup>, Qur'ân).

#### Excerpt 8: Koran, sura 78, al-Nabâ', verses 22-29

|                         |                                  |                         |                                              |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| 01 Repeater:            | littâ:ghî:na ↑ ma'â:ban ↓        | [22]                    | <i>for the transgressors their abode</i>     |
|                         | [cllcllc]                        | - - - - - / - - - - \   |                                              |
| 02 Children (in choir): | littâ:ghî:na ↑ ma'â:ban ↓        |                         |                                              |
| 03 Repeater:            | lilâbithî:na ↑ fihâ: ahqâ::ban ↓ | [23]                    | <i>for ages they stay in it</i>              |
|                         | [clcllcllc]                      | - - - - - / - - - - - \ |                                              |
| 04 Children (in choir): | lilâbithî:na ↑ fihâ: ahqâ::ban ↓ |                         |                                              |
| 05 Repeater:            | lâ yadhûqû:na fî:hâ: ↑           | [24]                    | <i>they never taste in it</i>                |
|                         | [lcllcll]                        | -- - - - - - - - - /    |                                              |
| 06 Children (in choir): | lâ yadhûqû:na fî:hâ: ↑           |                         |                                              |
| 07 Repeater:            | bardan walâ sharâban ↓           |                         | <i>coolness, nor a drink</i>                 |
|                         | [ccclclc]                        | - - - - - - - - - \     |                                              |
| 08 Children (in choir): | bardan walâ sharâban ↓           |                         |                                              |
| 09 Repeater:            | illâ hamîman wa ghassâqan ↑      | [25]                    | <i>only an inferno, and bitter food</i>      |
|                         | [clclccclc]                      | - - - - - - - - - /     |                                              |
| 10 Children (in choir): | illâ hamîman wa ghassâqan ↑      |                         |                                              |
| 11 Repeater:            | jazâ'an wifâqan ↓                | [26]                    | <i>as a just requital</i>                    |
|                         | [clclclc]                        | - - - - - - - - - \     |                                              |
| 12 Children (in choir): | jazâ'an wifâqan ↓                |                         |                                              |
| 13 Repeater:            | innahum kânû ↑                   | [27]                    | <i>o they</i>                                |
|                         | [cccll]                          | - - - - - - - - /       |                                              |
| 14 Children (in choir): | innahum kânû ↑                   |                         |                                              |
| 15 Repeater:            | lâ yarjûna hisâban ↓             |                         | <i>never expected to be held accountable</i> |
|                         | [lclcllc]                        | -- - - - - - - - - \    |                                              |
| 16 Children (in choir): | lâ yarjûna hisâban ↓             |                         |                                              |
| 17 Repeater:            | wa kadhhabû ↑                    | [89]                    | <i>and utterly rejected</i>                  |
|                         | [cccl]                           | - - - - - - - - /       |                                              |
| 18 Children (in choir): | wa kadhhabû ↑                    |                         |                                              |
| 19 Repeater:            | biâyâtinâ kidhhdhâ:ban ↓         |                         | <i>our signs as lies</i>                     |
|                         | [clclcllc]                       | - - - - - - - - - \     |                                              |
| 20 Children (in choir): | biâyâtinâ kidhhdhâ:ban ↓         |                         |                                              |
| 21 Repeater:            | wa kulla shay'in ↑               | [30]                    | <i>but we counted everything</i>             |
|                         | [ccccc]                          | - - - - - - - - /       |                                              |

- 22 Children (in choir): wa kulla shay'in ↑  
 23 Repeater: ahsaynâhu kitâban ↓ *in a written record*  
 [cclclcl] - - -- - - - \  
 24 Children (in choir): ahsaynâhu kitâban ↓

Within the *kuttâb*, recitation is organized around this rhymed and assonanced structure of the Koranic text. The memorizing work, whether dialogical (a repeater and the choir of children) or monological (the child reciting alone with the text of the Koran before his eyes), is performed through the reproduction of schemes of repetitive intonations and through the insistence on rhymes and assonances. In excerpt 8, we see how the enunciation of a verse (line 1-4) or part of a verse (lines 5-8 and 13-16) makes alternate ascending and descending intonations, either within one single speech turn (lines 1-2 and 3-4) or astride two turns (lines 5-8 and 13-16). In the same way, we observe the cutting of the recitation according to rhymes (âban: lines 1, 3, 7, 15, 19, 23, to which one adds the termination “an” in lines 9 and 11, and “û” in lines 13 and 17) and according to tonal similarities (sometimes due to the identity in grammatical structure) within the same speech turn (littâghîna/lilâbithîna: lines 1 and 3; bardan walâ sharâban/jazâ'an wifâqan: lines 7 and 11). Rhymes can be crossed (innahum kânû/lâ yarjûna hisâban/wa kadhhabû/biâyâtinâ kidhhdhâban: lines 13-19). Finally, the metric can be identical (lâ yadhûqûna fîhâ/bardan walâ sharâban: lines 5 and 7) or similar (innahum kânû/lâ yarjûna hisâban/wa kadhhabû/biâyâtinâ kidhhdhâban: lines 13-19). The same holds true for the schemes of alternating long and short syllables (lines 1 and 19; 3 and 9; 3 and 13; 3 and 17; 5 and 15; 7, 13 and 17).

## Learning and Disciplining in Action

Foucault finds in his concept of body-instrument the best illustration of the percolation of a micro-physics of power and of the meeting point between the discourse on rules and the body (see Bjelic, 2003). The relation body-instrument is an essentially negative power of normalization. So, in this very logic, it is with the body of the soldier or the monk, both defined by their subordination to a code of conduct, that the disciplinary power made its first steps: monastic rules and military drills not only defined the bodies of monks and soldiers, they also crafted their souls. Accordingly, whereas the relation body-instrument remained confined to intuition in pre-modern societies, it later became the object of constant controlling attention. It is here that Foucault introduces the discourse on norms, through which he seeks to show that the specification of the rules of conduct turns the body into a more effective and precise object, and makes it possible for a power identical to these very same rules to govern the body and its identity. Therefore, if we take the example of a military drill, we would observe the denaturalization of the body proceeding from the internalization of the code. The latter would break down the body's total movement into a series of gestures established according to a canonical order articulating the different parts of the body with the different parts of the object acted upon. This articulation, constitutive of the body-instrument, would reflect the emergence of a new form of disciplinary power, much more insidious and powerful than those existing formerly.

The issue of the relationship to norms occupies a central place in the understanding of the re-specification we suggest in the study of teaching and learning practices. In the military drill example, we must stress in this perspective that the code can establish the coercion link with the individual only after having been somehow “intuited” by the latter's body. It does not involve any form of naturalism that would pose the body as an entity exterior to the control of discourse or norms. Rather, as Bjelic has shown (2003: 84ss), the intuition of marching rules involves the interaction of various informal sets of schemes which are not adequately rendered by the code discourse. Every step of the marching is embedded within a “texture of relevance” which the soldier must perceive in order to maintain the coherence of the code. The intuition of the marching code is neither obvious nor mechanical, but must be learned—and some people never succeed in learning it—and practiced—and some people practice it better than others: “[W]hile every marching soldier

has access to the code, the code has no access to any body” (Bjelic, 2003: 84). In other words, the code is not inscribed in the body. Following Bjelic, one can add that, “Obviously, the soldier and Foucault understand the code of marching in very different ways, the former with the body and the latter with words”. In this respect, Foucault’s position is anti-phenomenological: it captures objects without contexts; it collapses the rationality of the code of marching and the practice of marching, as if such marching would be only a “citation” of the code, that is, an instance of a model. However, this action is not natural but instructed: learning is a practical process and the textual coherence of the norm does not allow prejudging its contextual application.

Discipline is not simply an outcome of power. To consider it that way reveals a “missing-what” in the analysis, i.e., the phenomenon of disciplining itself. Although the body follows rules, these are not the rules of the code and its discourse, but the rules as practiced by the body and serving as guide marks regarding its performance. Wittgenstein’s story about a peasant girl he tried to teach mathematics illustrates our argument. The girl could not follow his instructions, so he smacked her, but she kept on failing. His attempts at imposing these rules on his pupil remained external to the understanding of the rules of mathematical reasoning: physical brutality did not manage to make the pupil follow the rules of mathematics (as if it was a code to impose), while patient and endless exercises might have succeeded. As Wittgenstein pointed out, there are no rules permitting to know how to follow a rule. Understanding is an achievement, and it cannot take place but in and through action. However, in the case of Foucault, rules are only the product of power (not necessarily brutal force) and not of practice. Instead of studying the history of discipline, we must embark upon the study of the pedagogy of normed practices (Bjelic, 2003: 85). In the limited context of an Upper-Egypt *kuttâb*, this is what this article hopes to achieve.

Thus, the norm is a contextual—and therefore multiple—practice, always renewed, contingent, but also constrained by the purposes from which it proceeds and to which members of a given context orient, as well as by the materiality of a certain number of objects to which it must accommodate (bodies, instruments, places, etc.). The relation to the norm is not a given, but a concrete achievement made up of the moments of relevance and time-outs, blind enforcements and accommodations, ignorance, by-passing and implementation, competence and incapacity, and concentration and absent-mindedness, in a contextual, material and corporal context offering a texture of possibilities and impossibilities in which every action is both unique and similar to those that preceded it. The study of normed practices of situated learning of the Koranic text showed us that pedagogy is a multiple practice, ongoingly renewed and constrained by its purpose and materiality. To stop short of its disciplinary dimension is to run the risk of missing the particular details of the unfolding of this specific pedagogy.



شكل (٣٦) ينقل اللوح من المصحف  
وهما على ركبتيه

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE CONTEXT OF TRUTH PRACTICES Legislating the *Shari'a* at the Shopfloor Level<sup>7</sup>



The issue of context has fuelled much debate in the social sciences in general and in the field of talk-in-action in particular. Schematically, it stretches from those who, on the one side of the spectrum, favour a broad conception (including macro, meso, and micro determinants) to those who, on the other side, stick to a narrow conception (the context being restricted to what is publicly relevant and procedurally consequential for members). In between, there are many intermediate and compromise positions. It is our contention that ethnomethodology's unique adequacy requirement furnishes a sound solution, providing we qualify it by a conception of feasibility. This type of reasonable adequacy requirement can be found in what is known as

ethnographic ethnomethodology or ethnomethodological studies of work.

Within parliaments, the relevant context is both emerging and publicly available. A distinction must be drawn between the dialogical site of parliamentary debates and their embedment within the broader dialogical network of public debates, e.g. via the media. On the dialogical site, parliamentary debates are organized in contextually dependent though institutionally constrained ways. Within dialogical networks, parliamentary debates are publicly and explicitly oriented to their social out-of-the-parliamentary-precinct dimension. In other words, parliamentary debates are both contextualizing and contextualized: they make utterances formulated within the room of the parliament part of a parliamentary debate; they belong to the larger unit of the social and political debate at large, which is explicitly identified as the ongoing debate by its many participants. While legislating society, MPs are also legislating within society; their performance is socially, intertextually and dialogically embedded.

In this chapter, we shall first introduce the various ways in which the issue of context was tackled by the social sciences and re-specified by conversation analysis, arguing that a strong conception of context tends to ignore that it is itself grounded on a tacit background knowledge that must be accounted for. We will therefore draw a distinction between background knowledge and context, and stress that there is no way to describe participants' orientations to the features of the context without being adequately knowledgeable regarding its background. Second, we shall turn to parliamentary contexts and argue that, contrary to mentalistic, historical, or model-oriented theories of parliamentary discourse, there is no context to hypothesize outside what is publicly available and empirically observable in the course of the discursive and non-discursive exchanges constituting and embodying parliamentary activities. Here, we shall describe how parliamentary contexts are constrained by their being dialogical sites, where any action is situated in a way that permits to describe it in its very specificity, and their being embedded within dialogical networks, that is contextualized within a framework of longer sequences and background expectancies. Third, drawing from the empirical material of one specific parliamentary debate that took place in Syria on the issue of family and family law,<sup>8</sup> we shall argue that, whereas proper background understanding of parliamentary debates cannot be achieved but by meeting the requirement of an adequate *a priori* knowledge of the local features, their proper context is made of the constraints exerted on its participants' public activities. We shall then demonstrate that legislative activities within a

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<sup>7</sup> I am grateful to Souhaïl Belhadj with whom I conducted this research on the Syrian People's Assembly.

<sup>8</sup> There is no particular reason for choosing the Syrian parliamentary context other than the authors' scholarly and linguistic competencies, and their conviction that there is no reason to assume the cultural specificity of any context. This issue is nicely addressed in Moerman's (1987), Liberman's (2004), and Sidnell's (2005) non-ethnocentric studies.

Parliament are constrained by the MPs' orientation to audiences, search for legislative relevance, and reference to, and use of, procedural rules.

### **Background knowledge, context and reasonable adequacy requirement**

Theories and conceptions of context are many. There is obviously a consensus on the necessity to consider the context as primordial, although there is little agreement on the meaning to give to such an assumption. On the one side of the spectrum, one finds a broad and all-encompassing conception of context that tends to include many layers and determinants. The context is here assimilated to the *social structure*. This attitude is what Pierre Bourdieu calls structuralist constructivism. Obviously, social structures are primordial: agents' subjective representations are grounded on, and interactions constrained by, these objective structures. It is the role of the social scientist to abstract the latter from agents' subjective representations. In other words, the context of action is primarily made of these structural features that constrain the agent's behavior while escaping his/her consciousness. Anthony Giddens' structuration theory is another example of this all-encompassing, multi-layered conception of context. It aims at explaining the constitution of the social system considered as the formation of regulated models of social relations conceived as reproduced practices. In such a social system, agents' daily activities are considered within a whole that necessarily imposes itself on them: the micro has been re-absorbed by the macro (Corcuff, 1995: 53).

On the other side of the spectrum of approaches to context, there is a wholly different conception which, instead of seeing it as a structure that constrains and/or permits agents' actions, restricts it to what is *publicly relevant* and *procedurally consequential* for members. According to this conception, an analyst is not free to invoke whatever variables s/he feels appropriate as dimensions of context, but must demonstrate in the events being examined that the participants themselves are organizing their behaviour in terms of the features being described by the analyst (Duranti and Goodwin, 1992: 192). It practically means that, in examining any phenomenon, two questions must be asked in order to know whether something belongs to the context of that phenomenon: (1) whether such categories are relevant to participants; and (2) whether they are procedurally consequential, i.e. whether participants orient to them in the course of their action (Schegloff, 1987). Thus, when investigating an action and determining its context, the analyst must be careful to ground the analysis in participants' actual orientations to the performance and understanding of their actions.

This strong conception of the context, although very appealing methodologically and epistemologically, raises many questions regarding the extent to which other features deemed by Schegloff external to the participants' situated talk can be included as resources for analysis. Various answers are given, stretching from a principle of mutual affinity between "real time" and unmediated data and other ethnographic resources, to a principle of limited affinity between these two types of empirical material (Maynard, 2003: 64-87). For instance, in his research on talk-in-action in American and Thai contexts, Michael Moerman advocates a *culturally contexted conversation analysis*: "Ethnography must be provided with explicit methods for testing conclusions against uninterrupted and public data. Conversation analysis must aspire to bring us into touch with the lives of strangers and with our own lives; to resonate with culture's meaning; to acknowledge that talk is placed in a society" (Moerman, 1988: 87). Contrary to Clifford Geertz's interpretive anthropology, which, in a mentalistic way, posits culture as "an invisible, inaudible, impalpable, single, homogenized, idealized script-like entity that somehow underlies and accounts for the variety actually experienced" (Moerman, 1988: 91), contexted conversation analysis seeks to duly take into account "the sense and resonances of words" and "the social organization that gives them meaning" (Moerman, 1988: 99). As Sidnell (2005: 138) puts it: "What Moerman is arguing for here is greater attention to the situated particulars of talk-in-interaction".

This critique of the strong conception of the context mainly says that, in order to be competent participants in an interaction, people must share some common theoretical and practical knowledge about their environment, which has to be known by the analyst in order to make sense of what happens in this setting and what makes people act in a relevant way. However, according to Maynard, although there is a strong impulse to grasp a wider social backdrop to any activity, the precise direction to which this would lead us remains unclear. While espousing Schegloff's strong position, Maynard also promotes the notion of *limited affinity* between conversation analysis and ethnography, which takes three possible directions: the ethnographic description of settings and identities of parties; the ethnographic explication of taken-for-granted terms, phrases, or courses of action unfamiliar to the investigator; ethnography as a post-hoc way of explaining the existence of interactional practices (Maynard, 2003: 73).

However, when arguing in favor of a limited affinity between ethnography and conversation analysis, Maynard displaces the issue of relevant context, but does not solve it. The difference between what he calls an unclear impulse to grasp a broader social backdrop and his controlled way of using ethnography as a complement to conversation analysis appears not as a difference of nature, but only of degree. According to his standards, it remains utterly difficult to know when and how the investigator is allowed to complement the analytic description of an interaction by the ethnographic assessment of the background necessary for its understanding. While it is true that all-encompassing conceptions of social structures, cultures and contexts escape any control and assume unverifiable features of interaction, it is equally true that the conversation-analytic conception of context (as that which is relevant and procedurally consequential for participants) is necessarily grounded on the tacit background knowledge of the whereabouts of the setting, its members and the resources on which they draw to competently act and make sense of their environment. In other words, while the former have no proper conception of the context, drowning empirical data in non-falsifiable assumptions about mind and culture as surreptitious acting factors, the latter have a conception of context that avowedly puts it in a self-containing vacuum and implicitly makes it dependent on unacknowledged background understanding. One way out of this conundrum is to *stop conflating the relevant context of an action and the background of its understanding*. In other words, we propose to resolve the vexing question of the context by considering that, although the context is, following Schegloff's strong conception, what is relevant and procedurally consequential for participants, there is no access to the understanding of this emerging context outside the sharing of background knowledge, first, among participants, and second, between participants and analysts. Only such knowledge makes of participants competent members and of investigators, adequate analysts.

Ethnomethodology requires from its practitioners to be competent in the social phenomena they are studying. It is an ideal requirement referred to by Garfinkel as unique adequacy:

(... A) phenomenon of order is only available in the *lived* in-courseness of its local production and natural accountability. (1) In its weak use the unique adequacy requirement of methods is identical with the requirement that for the analyst to recognize, or identify, or follow the development of, or describe phenomena of order in local production of coherent detail the analyst must be *vulgarly* competent to the local production and reflexively natural accountability of the phenomenon of order he is "studying." (...) (2) In its strong use the unique adequacy requirement of methods is identical with the following corpus-specific finding of EM studies. Available to EM research, the finding is used and administered locally as an instruction: *Just in any actual case* a phenomenon of order already possesses whatever as methods methods could be of [finding it] if [methods for finding it] are at issue. (...) Ethnomethodology is concerned to locate and examine the concerted vulgar uniquely adequate competencies of order production. (Garfinkel, 2002: 175-176)

Garfinkel's *unique adequacy requirement of methods* is a call for a way to approach social phenomena, not a mere set of methodological instructions to catch them. It differs from traditional ethnographic policies in its injunction to master the practical knowledge of competent members of any activity under study. As Michael Lynch puts it, Garfinkel seems "to have devised a program for

‘going native,’ disappearing into the field without delivering social scientific accounts of the ‘field experience’” (Lynch, 1993: 274). In other words, it is neither about observing people at work and coming back with a narrative glossing their activities, nor about going into the practices studied in order to come back with a cognitive map or other representation of the culture; it is about acquiring the knowledge associated to any kind of work in order to be able to competently practice it and therefore to adequately describe it. The requirement has to do with “a method for demonstrating what a description says about a practice by enabling readers to see what is said by entering into the phenomenal field of that practice” (Lynch, 1993: 302). It seeks to gain access to the way in which members observe, describe, explain, represent or otherwise engage in practical actions. In Wittgenstein’s terms (1963: § 126), it is an urge to reorient away from explanatory models towards a concern with what “lies open to view.” To put it in a nutshell, it requires an epistemic attitude which does not involve finding a new epistemic vantage point from which to get inside the singular essences of every speciality, but is made of a kind of empathic familiarity with a characteristic “form of life” (*id.*: § 19) and its specific “grammars” (*id.*: § 90) that, first, repatriates the objects of social-sciences discoveries into members’ seen and practiced routine social phenomena and, second, permits to transform the “seen but unnoticed” of such routine phenomena into noticeable practices open to ethnomethodological description.

Garfinkel’s unique adequacy requirement furnishes a sound solution, providing we qualify it by a conception of feasibility. It is indeed impracticable to engage in any study of social practices with the aim or precondition to be totally uniquely adequate to the social phenomenon under scrutiny: every practice being singular, it would require to be uniquely adequate to any singular phenomenon one purposes to describe. It would result in a solipsist deadlock since it is only to oneself (and even then!) that one can be fully and uniquely adequate. Garfinkel’s requirement should not be understood as a call for self-empathic introspective description. Instead, it can and should be taken as urging the analyst to take seriously the practices he or she aims to describe, that is, to secure an access to these practices that gets as close as possible to that of an ordinary practitioner.

### **Institutional and parliamentary context and background knowledge**

Without proper background knowledge, it is impossible to identify the aspects of institutional context relevant to participants and procedurally consequential for the ongoing activity. How do we know this setting is a courtroom or a parliament? How do we know this language is English or Arabic? How do we know this action is instructed by the code of judicial procedures or by the parliament’s by-laws? Although this is something that emerges from participants’ orientations and is procedurally consequential in the unfolding course of action, it cannot be identified and described by either the practitioner or the analyst without proper background and *a priori* knowledge.

Institutional discourse analysis tried to address this issue. According to Van Dijk, “there is of course no *a priori* limit to the scope and level of what counts as relevant context” (1997: 14, quoted in Miller 2004: 275). In the case of parliamentary debates, “rather than for instance by their topics, style or turn-taking, parliamentary debates are primarily (and rather trivially) defined by the fact that the people engaging in these debates are Members of Parliament (MPs), that the debates take place in the political institution of Parliament, and that the MPs are ‘doing politics’ or ‘doing legislation’ among other contextual features” (Van Dijk, 2004: 339). It leads him to claim that “contexts should not be defined in terms of some kind of social situation in which discourse takes place, but rather as a mental representation, or *model*, constructed by the speech participants *of* or *about* such a situation” (p. 349). He goes on to say that, “Without a conception of the communicative event as represented by a context model, participants are unable to adequately contribute to ongoing discourse. They would be unable to produce and understand speech acts, would be unable to adapt topics, lexical items, style and rhetoric to the current social event, and they would not even be able to tell what the recipients already know, so that they do not even know

what ‘content’ to express in the first place. Indeed, without context models, adequate, contextually sensitive discourse is impossible” (p. 350).

However, as Van Dijk self-avowedly remarks, “we can only guess what contexts (i.e. context models) look like” (p. 351). Actually, one can wonder whether “doing politics” or “doing legislation” can be understood in terms of the Parliament’s contextual features. Doing politics and doing legislation is an activity, a *practice*, and MPs’ activities can hardly be considered as the context of their activities; rather, in Garfinkelian terms, it is the “just-thisness” of their activities. Instead of considering the just-thisness of MPs’ activities, Van Dijk conflates context and background knowledge, which he further seeks to cognitively modelize. While it is absolutely necessary to meet some adequacy requirement in order to make sense of what happens within Parliaments, it is equally necessary not to assimilate participants’ or members’ background knowledge and competence with the specific context of any occurrence. Moreover, Van Dijk’s approach is deeply mentalistic, displacing the black box from social structures to people’s minds. What people have in mind cannot be caught through analysts’ hypothetical assumptions about what links situations and discourses, but only through participants’ actual actions. The context is not made of mental models floating in some cognitive vacuum and “forcing a particular application on us” (Wittgenstein, 1963: § 140). To the contrary, what people like MPs have in mind takes the shape of practical achievements within contexts where their actions partly embody their background expectations and partly unfold in a contingent way. Only practice tells us about people’s mind (§ 140). In that sense, context models do not shape participants’ contextual relevancies; on the contrary, participants’ orientations situationally and specifically foreground what is relevant for them in the course of their activities. In his context model theory, Van Dijk confounds context, background knowledge and competence: what is necessary knowledge in order to be an ordinarily competent MP does not necessarily belong to the context, that is, to what is made publicly relevant within the course of action.

We find the same type of conflation between context and background knowledge in Teresa Carbó’s work on the Mexican Parliament: “It is indispensable to understand context in a fittingly complex way along time [...] and to show] how analytic work on the present from the point of view of the past avoids the risk of assuming a flat context, since the past is always in a dialectical relationship with a multidimensional present” (Carbó, 2004: 310). Although the mind is replaced by the past, the same assumptions concerning the need for (mental or historical) depth lead to a similar ascription of non-falsifiable features to any singular context. “Also in parliamentary discourse analysis, there seems to be a minimal depth that is required to detect the different forces that support and criss-cross the scene at a given point in time, a perspective which can only be provided by history, but only insofar as those historical circumstances are ‘wired’ or ingrained into the (micro) analyses” (p. 311). However, once again, there is no heuristic ground for confounding the background and the context, the former being the condition that is required for understanding the latter, as a participant as well as an analyst. We would otherwise be committing some kind of *God or History fallacy*, according to which there is an external and all-encompassing point of view that allows understanding what takes place within some specific setting beyond the participants’ practical orientations to it. Whereas the historical/theoretical fallacy assumes that the setting is some disordered place on which only external, either historical or theoretical, analysis and reordering can shed rationalizing light, we believe that there are intrinsic rationality and endogenous order proceeding from the people’s orientations to the site and actions in which they participate.

Contrary to mentalistic or historical, rational choice or communicative-action model-oriented theories of parliamentary discourse, we claim that there is no context to hypothesise outside what is publicly available and empirically observable in the course of the discursive (and sometimes non-discursive) exchanges constituting and embodying parliamentary activities. In that sense, models provide only retrospective rationalisations erasing the phenomenal properties of the situations they were deemed to analyse. However, no publicly available context would be understandable without

the proper background knowledge allowing the analyst to make sense of what happens within such context as a competent member. It means that even the most restrictive conception of context relies upon competences like language and cultural familiarity. Whereas background knowledge and member's competence are not part of the context, they do constitute *conditions for its intelligibility*. This is well exemplified in Lynch and Bogen's study of the Iran-Contra hearings (Lynch and Bogen, 1996). The close scrutiny of the moment-by-moment unfolding of the "spectacle of history" and the "truth engine" in the production of a master narrative in hearings questioning state policies and individual agency within these policies is made possible by, first, the authors' linguistic competence, second, their knowledge of American politics, and third, their scientific expertise in the fields of commonsense and professional reasoning. However, the context of their analysis, that is, the context which is relevant for the participants whose actions they focus on, is strictly limited to what is made available on the videotape material on which their work is grounded.

We do not intend to discuss at length the various implications of a proper understanding of the notion of context in the ethnomethodological tradition, such as Ten Have and Psathas' "situated order" (1995), Drew and Heritage's "context shaped and context renewing" (1992), and Pollner's "self-explicating settings". We will just mention briefly the main features Drew and Heritage identify as characteristic of (but not exclusive to) *talk in institutional contexts*: its orientation to goals pre-defined by their institutional embedment; its shaping by constraints proceeding from this context and its functionality; its organization along inferential frames and procedures specific to such context. These features have important consequences in terms of turn-taking organization, structural organization of the interaction, turn design, lexical choice and interactional asymmetries (Drew and Heritage, 1992). Drew and Heritage add to this list the specific nature of sequential organization of institutional talk.

As Arminen (2005: 42) puts it, "Institutional interaction is a site in which the prevailing set of beliefs and mode of organization are made relevant and procedurally consequential for interactants". This site is a *dialogical site*: although parliamentary discourse is made up of monologues addressing related questions, "the nature of the discourse is not monologic but dialogic" (Bayley, 2004: 25). The many activities that take place within one and the same place are largely constrained by this situated embedment. This site is dialogical because speeches and discourse are conceived as exchanges between authorized participants, i.e. Members of Parliament. Parliamentary debates are partly organized speech exchanges taking place within such a dialogical site, which are regulated by rules that are textually catalogued in the Assembly's by-laws and largely inspired by ordinary practices specific to institutional discourse, argumentative processes, political debates, and other local features.

Parliamentary activities are embedded within a *dialogical network*. Originally, this notion is used to describe how media events, like TV and radio programs, press conferences and newspaper articles work within a network, in the sense that they are interactionally, thematically and argumentatively connected, although this dialogical interconnection is separated in time and space, that is, without the participants' co-presence (Nekvapil and Leudar 2002 ; Leudar, Marsland, Nekvapil 2004). This notion of a dialogical network was extended to cover institutional activities, such as legal cases, which function within a network articulated around the "file" (Dupret, 2006). Leudar and Nekvapil (forthcoming) also explored dialogical networks that integrated parliamentary debates related to the 9/11 events. However, the authors were not interested in parliamentary debates *per se*, but in the re-taking by other actors and the media of the statements parliamentary speakers made at that time. In the forthcoming studies we explore in depth the ways of conducting politics and legislating in Syrian and Egyptian parliaments, as well as how these dialogical sites articulate with the dialogical network to which they apparently, though not necessarily, belong (Dupret, Belhadj, Ferrié, 2007; Dupret, Klaus, Ferrié, 2008).

With regard to what we said about dialogical networks and our critique of mentalist approaches, we stress the necessity to consider, not what is in the mind of speakers that accompanies their uttering something, but what *surrounds* it, what happens before and afterwards that expresses what they mean (Wittgenstein, 1963: § 20). Our understanding of sequential organization of institutional talk cannot be reduced to limited stretches of recorded speeches. Pollner (1979), for instance, shows that numerous explicative transactions take place when the rules of a game one starts playing are more or less ambiguous, open to interpretation and indeterminate. Not taking into account the full sequence of the process would make us run the risk to over-speculate on the off-the-record preliminaries (Bogen, 1999: 108). Action, interaction and discourse must therefore be resituated within their *full sequential context*. To put it in a nutshell, we claim that the context is both contextualizing (any action is situated in a way that permits to describe it in its very specificity) and contextualized, that is, it is integrated within a framework of longer sequences and background expectancies. Paraphrasing Paul Drew (1992), who speaks of an *overhearing audience* to designate the silent public which parties address beyond their direct verbal exchanges, we speak of an *overreading audience* to designate the absent reader, hearer or spectator whom speakers address, i.e. an addressee whose interest in the case is differed in time and space.

There are numerous items of background knowledge that are necessary in order to identify and make sense of participants' orientations and procedural consequentialities within the course of parliamentary activities. This is the case with the provisions of the Parliament's by-laws, the various parliamentary commissions' reports, MPs' individual partisanship, etc. The lack of knowledge of these items makes it impossible to catch their contextual relevance. In other words, contextual relevance is conditional upon institutional competence or adequacy.

### **Context as constraint**

The legislating process takes place on a dialogical site, i.e. the parliamentary precinct, and is embedded in a dialogical network made of e.g. the many government and media agencies that put the subject on the agenda and are already engaged in direct or indirect arguments with regard to it. In that sense, the Parliament, while it is legislating society (which is the implicit addressee of its work and which the assembly is deemed to represent), is also legislating within society through a dialogically and intertextually embedded performance. In the unfolding course of such performance, members orient to the relevant features of the context. Of course, there is a background knowledge (necessary for the understanding of the way the Parliament functions and the way its members orient to the context of their performance) consisting of both the participants' and the analysts' familiarity with the characteristic *form of parliamentary life* and a specific *grammar* (e.g. the grammar of legislating activities).

As for the context, drawing from excerpts of a parliamentary debate that took place in Syria on the 19<sup>th</sup> of October, 2003, on the issue of family law, we can now demonstrate that it is made of the constraints that surround the respective parts of the debate and directly contribute to their shaping: (1) the orientation to material and virtual audiences; (2) the alignment on political and legislative relevancies; (3) and the reference to institutional and procedural requirements. Throughout the debate on whether to raise the age of custody of children, these constraining contextual features to which participants orient are manifested, made explicit and used for all practical legislative purposes: the work of law-drafting is taking place at the shop floor level.

#### *Orienting to audiences*

In their respective speech turns, speakers address audiences. The latter can be material (the people present in the precinct) or virtual (the public in the broad sense). Discourse analysis sought to draw a typology of participants in parliamentary debates. In this perspective, a first distinction was made between participants and non-participants. Within the category "participants", we find the

speaker, the direct addressees of his discourse and all those who participate in the debate but are not immediate addressees of this specific speech turn. The other people fall in the category “non-participants”. These are the persons openly co-present but external to the debate (the bystanders) or those who listen without the speaker being conscious of it (the eavesdroppers), with many intermediate categories (Ilie, 2003: 46). This typology, coherent as it may seem, is nevertheless problematic in many ways, since it does not proceed from the endogenous expression of everyone’s status, but from the exogenous ascription of identity by an external observer. It presumes of everybody’s activity independent of people’s *empirical and endogenous orientation* to its relevance, mixing formal categories (MPs, secretaries, press correspondents, public) and commonsense considerations (those who hear without being seen, prying eyes, eavesdroppers). However, everybody’s status is an emerging property, a status that is claimed, ascribed and oriented to in the course of the debate, independently of any a priori categorization. Hence, the speaker is the object of an explicit speech-turn allocation by the President (“[Our] colleague... has the floor”), while the President validates his own status through various moves, like speech-turn self-allocation. His status is also confirmed publicly, by the respect manifested to his position as the speech-turn allocating party and by the address terms used by the speakers (“Mister President – Esteemed colleagues”). The same holds for the secretary, who is asked to intervene in his capacity and who publicly exhibits his status by performing the action that is required of him:

**Excerpt 1, 19 October 2003**

The President –

- 5 [...] canceled the required delays. This is why we will undertake the study of the draft law
- 6 and the report. I request that the secretary read the Commission’s report out loud.
- 7 **Mister President of the People’s Assembly**
- 8 The Commission for Constitutional and Legislative affairs held its session at 11:00...

It is the explicit orientations of the participants to the interaction that make everybody’s status, functions and roles emerge, as well as these orientations are constitutive of the audiences MPs address. The audience is no more made up of the people hearing and participating from the overhanging and putative point of view of an all-knowing analyst, but of the *addressees* of the people engaged in a specific course of action (e.g. the Assembly, its President, the colleagues, the Commission, the Commission’s President, the MPs nominally designated) and/or the people claiming for themselves such status in the same course of action (e.g. the Assembly’s President, MPs on their own behalf, the Commission’s President in his capacity, the Commission’s reporter in his capacity). Many audiences are in turn manifesting or being designated, including virtual audiences (audiences absent from the precinct), be it the public, to which the television and the press make debates accessible, or instances to which the MP is accountable for his election or designation, and therefore accountable for his parliamentary activity (e.g. constituency, political authorities, partisan leadership). In the debate under scrutiny, such a political instance does not appear explicitly, contrary to another debate at the People’s Assembly concerning the creation of the Syrian Organization for Family Affairs, during which there were frequent references to the President of the Republic:

**Excerpt 2, 14 December 2003**

Mr Muhammad Najâtî –

- 99 The national conference on women and education in Damascus convened in Damascus
- 100 under Mr. President’s enlightened aegis (*ri`âya `aqliyya*) All this is situated in
- 101 line with the modernization and development led by His Excellency,
- 102 the president of the republic, President Bashar al-Asad, who’s, in this
- 103 pursuing the path of the eternal leader, Hafiz al-Asad, who said : A stable family is the
- 104 cornerstone of the social construction.

The orientation toward a virtual audience, although not frequent in our debate, takes two forms. One form it can take is that of an invocation of “society” in its broad sense:

### Excerpt 3, 19 October 2003

Mr Faysal Kulthûm –

274 Mister President – Esteemed colleagues.  
275 It is only logical that I sum up for you the debates that took place within this Commission  
279 [...]The debate was manifestly free. We arrived at  
280 the [conclusion] that the project presented by the government was not compatible with  
281 what is required for social and family life, although the government's  
282 project appeared, in the general discussion, to be clearly compatible with other legislation  
283 with regard to the son's criminal liability [...]

Alternatively, it can take the form of an invocation of “democracy” (implying therefore the prominence of the majority and the respect for minority opinions):

### Excerpt 4, 19 October 2003

Mr Muhî al-Dîn Habbûsh –

259 Mister President – Esteemed colleagues.  
260 We are pro-democracy, even though we closed the debate on an  
261 important subject, which has repercussions on all society. I would like [...]

Depending on their orientation to these audiences, speakers mobilize multiple argumentative and categorization devices. Following Jon Elster (2005: 59), we observe a distinction between argumentation (formulation of statements pretending to their validity) and negotiation (formulation of menaces and promises pretending to their credibility). Subsequently, we discern a *strategic usage of argumentation*, that is, the formulation in an argumentative way of stakes specific to negotiation and partisan and personal interests. In this debate, MPs act, in front of a multiple audience and according to parliamentary rules, for all practical purposes: they “perform” their quality of elected people, of legislating people, of people charged with the role of debating public good, of politicians, or even of people acting in their own interests.

A complete examination of the grammar of this specific parliamentary debate would further document how discursive performances on this site are closely constrained by their embedment within a dialogical network made of MPs' retakes of themes and issues formerly raised in or outside the parliamentary precinct, and of the direct, co-present, overhearing, and virtual audiences to which they orient and address themselves when taking the floor.

### *Looking for political and legislative relevance*

We shall now seek to describe the forms speech turns can take and how argumentative repertoires and discursive strategies are closely intertwined.

### Excerpt 5, 19 October 2003

Mrs Wa'd Khaddâm –

54 Mister President – Esteemed colleagues (*al-sâda al-zumalâ*).  
55 Custody is among the rights of the child, and was legislated in their interests. This is the  
56 fundamental principle established by jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and law. Interpretation is made  
57 in favor of the [child] in custody in all fields. Because children's education  
58 is not the same in modern societies as [it was] in older societies, and because it  
59 imposes a change in those societies' infrastructures, we are requested that the duration  
60 of custody be prolonged. [...]  
68 This is why we consider that the proposed amendment safeguards these interests and I ask that  
69 the judge be [granted] the power to determine the child's best interests on a  
70 case-by-case basis.  
71 There is also the question of an increase in alimony payments for each child, and a guaranteed  
72 residence for each [child] held in custody. [...]  
76 This question has been resolved in Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Yemen, and Kuwait.  
77 For all these [reasons], I am in favor of the draft law and its speedy promulgation.  
78 Thank you.

When taking the floor, Wa'd Khaddâm obviously appears as a woman. It is manifested physically as well as through gender indexing, when the Assembly's President allocates the turn by mentioning her forename ("Wa'd") and feminizing the address term "colleague" (*zamîla*). This categorization opens the door, logically though not necessarily, for the use of a *membership categorization device* organized around the "child". The latter is presented as having interests and rights (her needs in terms of breeding, education, maintenance, custody) that must be protected. The speaker's reasoning proceeds from the following syllogism: (a) the child's interest is to be guarded according to her specific needs; (b) in modern society, the child needs to be guarded longer by her mother; (c) Syrian law protects the child's interest in modern society through the extension of her custody by her mother. The idea of modernity plays a pivotal role in this syllogism. The reasoning rests on the implication that education in modern society requires entrusting the child to her mother for a longer period of time. In other words, the membership categorization device working here is a device linking the child to her mother for the needs of education, the length of which augments with society's modernity.

The same reasoning is followed by Ghâlib 'Anîz, except for the fact that here (and this difference is highly implicative) it is the father who is presented as better placed to prepare the child to confront the difficulties of modern life:

**Excerpt 6, 19 October 2003**

Mr Ghâlib 'Anîz –

205 Mister President – Ladies and gentlemen, esteemed colleagues (*al-zamîlât wa 'l-zumalâ*).  
 206 God granted women tremendous qualities and merits and raised her to a  
 207 prominent place in society. Good results and success can only happen with the agreement of both  
 208 parents, the mother and the father.  
 209 Women constitute half of society, men the other half. A proverb says: 'Man  
 210 is a shield and the woman is a garden.' Who could deprive women of their rights?  
 211 She is the artisan of men, she is the mother, the sister, the wife. Without her, they cannot  
 212 prosper. The Prophet – God's blessings and peace upon him! – said: "Women are men's  
 213 companions. Woman is this who is loving and affectionate; she is the basis and  
 214 the solid ground of families' success, development and well-being."  
 215 Woman's happiness reflects positively on family's happiness.  
 216 But their ardent affection and tremendous fondness make women incapable – I don't say  
 217 always but most often – of controlling young boys when they reach their teen years, as well as girls  
 218 when they get older. [...]  
 222 The age established by the proposal, after extensive study, may be the most adequate and  
 223 the closest to reason, to all opinions, to their directions and their aims. I am in favor of the  
 224 Commission's amendment, but I [wish] that this extension be such that no room be left to  
 225 judicial dispute and antagonism, that the extension the Commission has proposed be optional  
 226 and be decided in camera, so that neither of the two spouses will be forced to present a  
 227 petition and drag it on. [...]

Here, we observe a specific configuration of the debate, i.e. its functioning in a mode of *solidarity without consensus*: solidarity on its basic terms (modernity, law, child's interest) and dissensus on the consequences to draw (mother's rights vs. father's rights). In a way, we are watching a competition over the definition of the elements of a membership categorization device. This is the family device, with its collection of elements (parents, children), some of which are paired (father-mother, children-parents, brother/sister-brother/sister). Activities are bound to this device's categorizations: to marry, to divorce, to live together, to educate, to guard, to breed, etc. The relationships between the many paired elements and the activities which are bound to the device and its elements constitute the object of the competition, but this is not a conflict of categorization, but a conflict of apportioning the rights and duties bound to the device's elements. We see how commonsense categorizations unfold in a cleft way, on the ground of the same components and belonging mechanisms, always pretending to the normality/naturalness of the relationship configurations they establish. When looking for legislative relevance, MPs are engaged in two symmetrical types of conflicts: *conflicts of categorizations* (e.g. the characterization as

“father”, “dad”, or “head of family”) and *conflicts of apportionment* (the category is not the issue, but the determination of normal/natural rights and duties which are bound to it, e.g. the father is “responsible”, the mother is “loving”).

Meaning is not a mental state, but a practice embedded within characteristic forms of life. MPs’ production of political and legislative relevance belongs to those practices of meaning that surround the activity of doing politics and crafting the law within the parliamentary precinct. Relevance does not take place privately. Rather, it is a performance that unfolds publicly, within the language-games that MPs are used to and in tune with what is considered retrospectively and prospectively meaningful. Parliamentary debates take shape, at least partly, from the constraints that the grammar of relevance exerts on the ways in which MPs fulfill their function.

### *Procedural rules as constraints and resources*

MPs frequently orient to the Parliament’s by-laws as the set of provisions organizing and regulating debates and voting. We shall observe it at two levels: first, in the performance of the function of the People’s Assembly President; and second, in the use of procedural rules as a creative and opening device.

The President exerts prerogatives which are textually formulated in the provisions of the Parliament’s by-laws. If we present in a synoptic manner the two segments of the pair constitutive of the (parliamentary debate), that is, the [provisions of the by-laws] on the one hand and the <implementation of the provisions of the by-laws> on the other, we observe how the phenomenon of the parliamentary debate proceeds from what Livingston (1995) and Garfinkel (2002) call “instructed action”. Through a synoptic table, we can see how a set of instructions “can be read alternatively so that the reading provides for a phenomenon in two constituent segments of a pair: (a) the-first-segment-of-a-pair that consists of a collection of instructions; and (b) the work, just in any actual case of following which somehow turns the first segment into a description of the pair” (Garfinkel, 2002: 105-106). This pair can be designated as an “instructed action”. The (parliamentary debate), as a practice endowed with phenomenological properties, must be read, in this case and in every singular case, as a pair whose two segments, the [provisions of the by-laws] and the <implementation of the provisions> are irremediably linked:

**Table 1**  
**(parliamentary debate)**

| [provisions of the by-laws]                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                               | <implementation of the provisions>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Art.39 –<br>A. Nobody is allowed to speak without the President’s permission. If somebody speaks without permission the President must forbid him from doing so.                                                                                        | 47<br>48<br>49<br>50<br>51<br>52<br>53        | The President<br>You have heard the report. The report and the draft law are presented for general discussion. These who wish to speak may show it by raising their hand. While Mr Secretary records the names of those who wish to speak, I have the pleasure of greeting [our] colleague Mr Nizâr al-‘Assasî, Minister of Justice, who emerged from our ranks and now occupies the third power’s seat. We wish him success in his work. We hope that the judicial power will be immaculate, pearl-white. Now, I give the floor to [our] colleague Wa’d Khaddâm.             |
| Art.42 –<br>A. Every member has the right to introduce a proposal asking that the discussion be confined or adjourned.<br>B. The President presents the proposal and may give the floor to the author of the proposal, to someone who supports it or to | 238<br>239<br>240<br>241<br>242<br>243<br>244 | Mr Ahmad Ghuzayl<br>– Mister President – Esteemed members [of Parliament] ( <i>al-sâda al-a`dâ`</i> ).<br>I presented a written proposal to the President’s office, on the basis of Article 42 of the by-laws, in order to close the debate and to proceed to discussion of the draft law’s provisions. I stress that all the proposals presented by the colleagues are worthy proposals, but they all concern the amendment of one provision or another. I believe it would be more appropriate to undertake discussion of the draft law proposal by proposal.<br>Thank you. |

|                                                                                                                                                                  |     |                                                                                           |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| one of its opponents. Then, he puts it to the vote.                                                                                                              |     | The President                                                                             |
| C. The acceptance of the proposal is conditional upon the agreement of the majority of present members.                                                          | 245 | Those in favour of [our] colleague Ahmad Ghuzayl's proposal show it                       |
|                                                                                                                                                                  | 246 | by raising their hand / hands were raised / majority, accepted, we                        |
|                                                                                                                                                                  | 247 | close the debate.                                                                         |
|                                                                                                                                                                  | 248 | Now, those in favour of proceeding to the discussion of the draft law provision by        |
|                                                                                                                                                                  | 249 | provision show it by raising their hand / hands were raised / majority,                   |
|                                                                                                                                                                  | 250 | Mister Secretary reads Article one out loud.                                              |
| Art.43 –                                                                                                                                                         |     |                                                                                           |
| A. One can address nobody but the President or the Assembly.                                                                                                     |     | Mr `Abd al-Qâdir Hins                                                                     |
| B. [...]                                                                                                                                                         | 458 | Carrying on – All my thinking turns around this issue, because the non-contradiction      |
| C. The speaker is never interrupted. One cannot speak of an issue more than three times, contingent on the provisions of section B of Article 40 of the by-laws. | 459 | between the law we are going to promulgate and other laws, it is the Assembly's duty, and |
|                                                                                                                                                                  | 460 | yet today's law contradicts one of the provisions of Personal Status Code.                |
|                                                                                                                                                                  |     | The President                                                                             |
|                                                                                                                                                                  | 461 | Interrupting – [Dear] colleague, to my mind – but I'm not a lawyer, I understand the      |
|                                                                                                                                                                  | 462 | [question which is] raised as numerical. The provision states: Custody ends in such a     |
|                                                                                                                                                                  | 463 | way and in precise, presumed conditions. In any case, if you want to include this text in |
|                                                                                                                                                                  | 464 | your proposal, include it.                                                                |
|                                                                                                                                                                  |     | Mr `Abd al-Qâdir Hins                                                                     |
|                                                                                                                                                                  | 465 | Carrying on – I'll merely read my proposal out loud, because [...]                        |

On the basis of this table, we can assess the instructed character of the President's action. We see to what extent it takes place in the course of action constrained and normed by the by-laws. This is not to say that it is completely determined by their provisions, as can be seen in lines 461-465, where the President interrupts the speaker despite the express stipulation to the contrary in Article 43-C. In other words, the by-laws function as a guide for action, even when not explicitly invoked. The President's action and the whole debate take place within a procedural and sequential context whose relevance is made explicit by the participants' orientations to it. The action is constrained and the context is contextualized (see above), since it is embedded within a broad referential and procedural device that pre-exists it and influences its configuration. But this action is also instructing and the context is contextualizing. It means that every new move within the debate actualizes it, makes it a new instance of the type "parliamentary debate", and contextualizes any action taking place in its further course. Moreover, any development, as the second segment of the pair ([rule]-<practice of the rule>), will in turn instruct further practices that will lean on the recurring feature of this way of doing to produce and reproduce the procedurally correct use of the by-laws. Normed by the by-laws and past practices, the debate becomes normative with regard to its future practices.

Far from being a mere norm strictly determining action, the by-laws are used as a resource and a means to intervene in the course of the debate. As an argument of order, legitimate and legal, it works as a room for manoeuvre within which participants can penetrate so as to accomplish the task their mandate assigns to them and which they intend to perform, that is, "acting-as-an-MP". Among the many resources the by-laws offer, the closing rule seems prominent in the Syrian debate under scrutiny. This technique permits to cut short the general discussion and to directly proceed to the discussion provision by provision. It presents the practical advantage of orienting the debate in a direction favourable to the majority. In normal times, in the Syrian parliamentary system, it represents a most efficient weapon in the hands of the regime, since the latter always has an overwhelming majority in the Assembly. However, in situations where political affiliations are less decisive and where other types of membership, like gender and religious affiliation, come to the fore, the closing rule creates the possibility to consider alternative proposals.

#### Excerpt 7, 19 October 2003

The President –

590 [Dear] colleagues, there is a second proposal to close the debate. Those who agree with this  
591 proposal [show] it by raising their hands – hands are raised – majority in favour of the proposal.  
592 [Dear] colleagues, the by-laws stipulate that we put [to the vote] the provision as  
593 amended by the Commission. If it fails to secure a majority, we'll put [to the vote] the  
594 other proposals. Those who agree with the provision as presented in the Commission's

595 report show [it] by raising their hands – hands are raised – minority. [Our]  
 596 colleague Muhammad Habash has the floor.  
 597 Mr Muhammad Habash – Mister President – Esteemed colleagues.  
 598 I want to ask a question: Custom prescribes, as I understand from my colleagues, that we  
 599 proceed to the vote on the provision as proposed by the Commission. If it fails, we return  
 600 to the provision as proposed by the Government. If it fails, we return to the  
 601 MPs' proposals. I have presented a written proposal. Thank you.  
 The President –  
 602 [Dear] colleague, what you say is correct. We put [to the vote] the provision as  
 603 presented by the Commission and it did not secure a majority. Now, we will carry on as you  
 604 mentioned.

There are many other procedural rules which are used by the MPs to intervene within the debate. This is something we have called orientation toward procedural correctness (Dupret, 2006). Indeed, many of these interventions are motivated by the wish to show that parliamentary duty is accomplished according to the rules of the art. The interventions show the MP's understanding of their function vis-à-vis their material audience (their colleagues) or their virtual audience (their constituencies). However, in our debate, this kind of care for the form is omni-relevant, so much that one can wonder whether this orientation to procedural correctness does not also reflect a sort of quibbling overbidding, aimed at asserting an oppositional perspective from within a unanimity-type system. In a way, it menaces the whole engine of paralysis on the ground of its own functioning rules, not in order to challenge the rules themselves, but because they constitute the last possible resort when the substance of the debate and its outcome are largely prejudged. The orientation to procedural correctness does not only correspond, in such a case, to the care for the normal and normed accomplishment of the task of "acting as an MP", but it also becomes a means of acting from within and affecting the ordinary parliamentary process.

#### **Excerpt 8, 19 October 2003**

Mr Khidr al-Nâ'im –

695 Mister President, esteemed colleagues.  
 696 I've a question concerning the number of [MPs] registered as present  
 697 at the beginning of the session. If the number of those who agree is  
 698 less than half the total, the proposal can't be considered to have passed. That is  
 699 why I ask that the number of [MPs] registered as present at the beginning  
 700 of the session. Thank you.

The President –

701 [Our] colleague Ghâlib `Unayz has the floor.

Mr Khidr al-Nâ'im –

702 Mister President, esteemed colleagues.  
 703 According to the by-laws, when an agreement is reached on a draft  
 704 law or on a provision, it is necessary that the number of [members]  
 705 present be evaluated and that voters in favour correspond to  
 706 half plus one to reach the majority. Any vote contradicting this is  
 707 considered as a breach to the by-laws and will expose us to  
 708 problems in future. I request that we verify that text and be  
 709 informed in a clear and complete way, so that we do not expose  
 710 ourselves to legal problems with regard to the by-laws and the  
 711 constitutional character of this law when it is promulgated in the  
 712 future. Thank you.

The President –

713 [Our] colleague `Âdil Jâmûs has the floor.

Mr `Âdil Jâmûs –

714 Mister President, esteemed colleagues.  
 715 The session is deemed regular when half the total number of the  
 716 members plus one, that is 126 members, [is reached]. [This means] that  
 717 87 members were counted out of 126, not on 250. Thank you.

The President –

718 [Dear] colleague Ahmad, I asked are there were comments on the draft  
 719 law, not that the minister be interrogated. For that reason, I hope that  
 720 you will postpone your commentary. [Dear] colleague Khidr, the

721 number of members agreeing is 87 and the number of members  
722 disagreeing is 75. Nobody opposes but you. And, [dear] colleague  
723 `Âdil et [dear] colleague Ghâlib, each of you is presenting a different  
724 opinion without any objection. [Our] colleague Khidr  
725 al-Nâ`im has the floor. [...]

Texts are part of the procedural context of legislative activities. While they do not represent an actual account of the many steps that lead to their use, they form the constraining horizon to which the many parties orient within the course of their legal and judicial activities. In other words, texts provide the parties with the frame within which they move and according to which they embed their action. They also serve as prospective guidebooks or milestones for action. To put it in a nutshell, by-laws and procedural provisions appear as a powerful means at the MPs' disposal, a means that can be used to frame actions as well as to make room for manoeuvre and contest, something Jon Elster calls a circuitous use of resources established by the political system itself (Elster 2005: 60).

Rules do not force a particular use upon the people who resort to them in the course of their procedurally framed or their purposefully procedural action. On the contrary, it is the use they make of these rules that shows what MPs mean by them. The connection between the rule and its application is grounded in the practice of using the rule. Actually, the rule is nothing but the practice of the rule in the many ways of its formulation, obeying, implementation, dodging, contesting, application, etc., that is, the many grammars of the rule which correspond to the characteristic form of life of parliamentary activities.

## Conclusion

This chapter addresses the issue of context within parliamentary debates. Contrary to cognitivist/mentalistic, rational choice and communicational model-oriented theories of parliamentary discourse, we claim that there is no context to hypothesise outside what is publicly available and empirically observable in the course of the discursive (and sometimes non-discursive) exchanges constituting and embodying the legislating process. In that sense, models provide only retrospective rationalisations erasing the phenomenological properties of the situations they are deemed to analyse. However, no publicly available context would be understandable without the proper background knowledge allowing the analyst to make sense, as a competent member, of what happens within such context. It means that even the most restrictive conception of context relies upon competences like language and cultural familiarity. Nevertheless, background knowledge and member's competence are not part of the context, but only conditions for its intelligibility.

The background knowledge necessary for the understanding of the way the Parliament functions and its members orient to the context of their performance is made of both the participants' and the analysts' familiarity with the characteristic form of parliamentary life and its specific language-games. As for the context of parliamentary debates, the detailed study of the practical grammar of one specific case shows, firstly, how discursive performance on this site is closely constrained by its embedment within a dialogical network made of members' retakes of themes and issues external to the parliamentary precinct and orientation to the many audiences they address. Secondly, it also shows that debates are constrained by the search for political and legislative relevance, the production of which is a performance that unfolds publicly within the language-games MPs are used to, according to what is retrospectively and prospectively meaningful. Thirdly, it makes possible to observe how MPs' discursive performance is constrained by the procedural rules, the meaning of which becomes apparent from the use the MPs make of them. In sum, it appears that the relevant context of this parliamentary debate is equivalent to the constraints surrounding it.



## CHAPTER THREE

### TELLING THE TRUTH

#### The Judge and the Law in Family Matters



In this chapter, we first criticize commonly held assumptions about what Islamic law is. We suggest that it is at best useless and at worst wrong to start with a label like ‘Islamic law’ to describe something that is presumed to be an instance of such a label. We identify the source of confusion, i.e. the postulate that there must be a kind of genealogical continuity between what people refer to as Islamic law and Islamic law as it is found in the heterogeneous legacy of *shari‘a* and *fiqh* treatises.<sup>9</sup> Our contention is that Islamic law is what people consider as Islamic law, nothing more, nothing less, and that it is up to theologians, believers and citizens, not social scientists, to decide whether something does conform or not to some ‘grand tradition’. Second, we argue that instead of looking at the hypothetical Islamic-law model, which Egyptian personal status law would be an instance of, the task of social scientists is, rather, to describe the situations, mechanisms and processes through which people orient themselves to something they call ‘Islamic law.’ This position is grounded on a principle of indifference that seeks to avoid any normative and evaluative engagement: the focus is on the description of practices, not on their evaluation. Moreover, this position is based upon the refusal of any ironical standpoint. In other words, it denies that social scientists occupy any kind of overhanging position vis-à-vis the social that would allow them to ‘reveal’ to ‘self-deceived people’ the truth that is concealed from them because of their ‘lack of critical distance’, ‘ignorance’ and/or ‘bad faith’. Third, we ground this praxiological re-specification in examples drawn from Egyptian judicial activity in the field of personal status.

#### The Nature of Islamic Law

Neither law nor religion is endowed with intrinsic, substantial and natural authority. There are only punctual situations where people orient to something which they identify as being religious law and the authority of which they publicly acknowledge. Consequently, there is no way to examine the reference to Islamic law outside its circumstantial and situated uses, outside practices of referring to an object explicitly characterized as Islamically legal in various contexts, each one having its own constraints.

#### *Searching for Law in Islam*

Literature on norms and law in societies referred to as Muslim has, as a whole, an essentialist attitude. According to interpretive theory, law is a cultural code of meanings for interpreting the world. In this hermeneutic project, words are the keys to understanding societies and cultures and to giving them a meaning. Geertz gives the example of the Arabic word ‘*haqq*’, which is supposed to come from a specific moral world and to connect to a distinctive legal sensibility. (Geertz, 1983: 185) This word would carry along with it all the specific meanings which are co-substantial with something that is called ‘Islamic law.’ In situations where many cultural systems are described as interacting, law would produce a ‘polyglot discourse.’ (Geertz, 1983: 226) Interpretive theory fundamentally conceives of law in holistic terms, that is, as one of the many reverberations of a larger explaining principle: culture (cf. also Rosen, 1989). Accordingly, the laws that characterize societies carry along with them throughout history the same basic tenets. However, cultural

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<sup>9</sup> Usually, *shari‘a* is understood as Islamic law as revealed by God (*Qur‘an* or Koran) through His Prophet Muhammad (*Sunna* or Prophetic Tradition), whereas *fiqh* is the knowledge of this Law and the body of jurisprudence that originates in it.

interpretivists fail to consider that law is not necessarily and integrally part of culture and that culture is not a set of permanent pre-existing assumptions but something which is permanently produced, reproduced, negotiated, and oriented to by members of various social settings.

The same pattern of argument holds true when the culturalist attitude is combined with text analysis. Messick (1993), for instance, associates the shape of Islamic cities with Yemeni Islamic lawyers' calligraphic style to demonstrate that Muslim societies were embedded in a system of textual domination. The text, here, is the *sharī'a*, something described as much more than Islamic law, a 'textual polity' including 'a conception of an authoritative text' and 'a pattern of textual authority.' (Messick, 1993: 6) Although texts are important in the study of law in literate societies, Messick, by focusing his attention on disengaged documents, loses the phenomenon of law practice and its production of formalized records.

Most research considers human beings as rule-driven creatures, particularly in societies dubbed Muslim. Oussama Arabi (2001), for instance, states that Islamic law still determines the daily behavior of people in Muslim societies and constitutes a living reality in contemporary societies where it is implemented as the State's positive law. With regard to sexuality, for instance, Arabi seems to implicate that provisions identifiable in *fiqh* treatises keep influencing today's commonsense and legal conceptions. Empirically speaking, it would be utterly hard to demonstrate this. Actually, according to the author, common sense considers that sexual relationships exceeding simple flirts belong to the category '*harām*' (the forbidden) if they are not validated by a religious contract. The point is to know whether the observation of the use of a contractual form can serve as a basis for the claim that some kind of internalized religious normativity still frames and determines the social.

Unlike incorporation theories, a praxiological approach shows that it is impossible to open the 'black box' of rule authority by substituting for it the other black box that makes of people mere individual receptacles of cultural principles that would be somehow consubstantial to them. Authority must be understood as the modality of an action (one acts with authority), a person's feature (someone has authority over others) or the quality specific to a norm (the authority of rules). It is always the predicate of something that somehow it accompanies. In Arabi's approach, rules are independent of practice. They are endowed with a clear meaning and determine people's behavior in a univocal way. They are invested with some intrinsic authority that proceeds from their belonging to the religious repertoire. Accordingly, there is no need for hermeneutics. Whereas legal norms have an 'open texture' (Hart, 1961), religious norms are rigid and a-temporal objects escaping contingency by virtue of their divine inspiration. We, on the contrary, consider the rules to be practical accomplishments and their authority a modality linked to people's public orientation to the power they recognize to them. Rules do not pre-exist their practice and their authority is not an intrinsic feature.

Most literature on Islamic law tends to impose on legal phenomena and activities their structure instead of looking at their operating process. For instance, Layish and Shaham (EI<sup>2</sup>) give the Arabic word *tashrī'* a religious signification on the ground of its etymology, ignoring the fact it is used today to designate the notion of legislation in its most general sense. Starting from their pre-established knowledge of the etymological trajectory of the word, they impose to the legislative phenomenon a dimension that cannot be documented. Moreover, in their attempt to evaluate the transformations of *tashrī'*, they posit a distinction between legal orthodoxy and deviance that places the scholar in the situation of telling which rules are orthodox and of adopting an ironical stance vis-à-vis the many ways in which people deceive themselves when adhering to one or another conception of Islamic law. All this places the debate on a normative ground, while dodging the central question of how and what people do when they refer to the *sharī'a* in current contexts.

Islamic law can be the mere reference to Islam in a legal setting or it can be a legal system identified with the classical body of *fiqh*. In the latter case, there must be a substantial definition of Islamic law the criteria of which are satisfied by the specific law on which we concentrate, so that it can be taken as a particular instance of a general model. This raises several questions about constitutive criteria, paradigmatic model, relevant instances, and authority certifying the model. Literature on this issue drifts between different positions. Sometimes it claims that we must stick to people's utterances. However, while Islamic law is what people refer to as Islamic law, we should not think that the use of the same word at different times necessarily means that the word refers to the same meaning and technical definition. Sometimes literature claims that people deceive themselves. It is sometimes said, for instance, that, although Egyptian judges no longer use the word '*dhimma*,' the *dhimma* system<sup>10</sup> is still in force in Egyptian law (Berger, 2001). This is an ironic stance that assumes that scholars know better than the people engaged in practice. It also contradicts the first assertion that we must stick to the words people use. Moreover, this is a metaphysical and deterministic position that claims that structures are permanent, even though people are no longer aware of them, and that people are determined by external constraints and neither produce nor transform anything, but only reproduce the past. The combination of these two positions makes the argument non-falsifiable.

### *Rephrasing the question*

There is no reason to assume that what people refer to as Islamic law is identical to, or different from, the set of technical provisions that form the idealized model of Islamic law. The question is not relevant, because it is totally divorced from actual practices. It also fails to address the phenomenon itself, i.e., the practice of referring to Islamic law. The question, 'What is Islamic law?' should be substituted with the question, 'What do people do when they refer to Islamic law?'

Legal actions, like all social actions, are irreducibly events or actions in a social order (Sharrock & Button, 1991: 157). In law, like in any social activity, concepts, like words, are parts of what Wittgenstein calls 'language-games' (Wittgenstein, 1967: pars. 7-24 *et seq.*). Wittgenstein specifically targets 'big concepts' that are often constructed as floating entities, totally decontextualized, and then projected back into the world as its inner nature, as 'something that lies *beneath* the surface' (Wittgenstein, 1967: par. 92), independent of any instantiation or context of use. These remarks hold true with regard to concepts like 'Islamic law.'

There is no case to make something 'an instance of' something else (e.g. to make personal status in Egypt an instance of the larger 'model' of Islamic law). The main problem with any model construction lies in the idea of correspondence between the model and the data it is supposed to aggregate, between the general and the particular, between an abstract proposition and its concrete instances. In our court case, Egyptian personal status law is supposedly an instance of an abstract Islamic legal system. Model building requires that the different instances of the model share some common characteristics that satisfy the postulates of identity and equivalence, so that they can be measured accurately and ascribed to the general model. For instance, the characteristics of Egyptian personal status law may be measured so as to establish whether they belong to the general Islamic law model or not. However, when referring to local situations as instances of a general model, researchers use implicit assumptions about both and hide the fundamental fact that the same word 'Islamic law' means very different things in various contexts. The result is that we know little about the properties of the underlying phenomena and take for granted the very basis of what we propose to explain.

Rather, we should ask how the members of any social group conduct the activities by which they identify and characterize something as an instance of something else (cf. Lynch, 1991: 86 sq.). In

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<sup>10</sup> The system of minority subjection and protection under classical Islamic law.

terms of Islamic law, this means to focus on how *people*, in their many settings, orient themselves to something they call 'Islamic law' and how *they* refer personal-status questions to the Islamic-law model. Such attitude suggests that we focus on the methods people use locally to produce the truth and intelligibility that allow them to cooperate and interact in a more or less ordered way.

Egyptian personal status law can be categorized variously—as an instance of Islamic law, Egyptian law, civil law, or heterodox codified *shari'a*. Rather than asking to which abstract category it actually belongs, we should ask what is the purpose and the mechanism of the categorization itself (cf. Sacks, 1974, 1995; Jayyusi, 1984; Watson, 1994; Hester & Eglin, 1997). Attention must shift to the description of the phenomena and the properties they display. The consequence for social scientists is that their task is to observe and describe the methods used by the members of society (the ethno-methods) in their everyday life—including their professional life—to produce intelligibility, communicability, and the capacity to be acted upon.

### **Re-specifying the sociological study of Islamic law**

The study of Islamic law needs to focus much more on living phenomena and actual practices. Anthropological research has shown its willingness to engage in that direction. It turned away from scholastic conceptions of law, which would only be the law on the books, and turned to law as something encountered and lived by flesh-and-blood people (Mir-Hosseini, 1993). It sometimes even attempted to capture the language of law in action in an Islamic setting (Hirsch, 1998) and sought to find out the practical ways of legal reasoning (Bowen, 2003). However, by concentrating on issues like power and gender or by abstracting factual information from its context, it missed part of the phenomenon it set out to analyze. Our contention is that the whole issue of Islamic law needs a praxiological re-specification that can be argued around three central themes: the opposition between law in action and law on the books; the 'missing what' of law-and-society and statistical legal studies; and the opposition between 'hyper-explanations' and description of situated activities.

#### *Law on the books and law in action*

In *Marriage on Trial*, Mir-Hosseini states that 'from its inception, Islam has been both a political and a social order' (Mir-Hosseini, 1993: 3-4) and Islamic law, 'the divine law', has constituted 'the backbone of Muslim society [...] ever since' (Mir-Hosseini, 1993: 4). With reference to modern times, she describes *shari'a* as still forming 'the basis of family law, though reformed, codified and applied by a modern legal apparatus' (Mir-Hosseini, 1993: 8). Opposing the theory of Islamic law to its practice, she adds that 'what characterizes the Shari'a perhaps more than anything else is the distance between the ideal and the reality' (Mir-Hosseini, 1993: 8). She concludes that 'it is precisely because this Divine Will needs to be discerned by human intellectual activity, and, more importantly, because it is enforced by human courts, that it is bound to bear the influence of the time and environment in which it operates' (Mir-Hosseini, 1993: 10).

By looking for the nature of law, Mir-Hosseini misses the phenomenon of practice. In the core of the book, theory takes the form of a synthesis of applicable legal provisions, whereas practice is represented by twenty cases, duly summarized, and statistical data that supposedly provide the necessary basis for understanding the underlying patriarchal ideology of the *shari'a* model. However, even though she gives *shari'a* a meaning, a content, and an ideological orientation, people do not seem to address it directly in the cases summarized by Mir-Hosseini. In other words, we suffer from a double bind: social actors remain external to the fundamental significance of the law they are practicing; researchers who claim to have access to the meaning of the law have little grasp of its practicalities. This double bind is in part the result of the scholarly construction of a dichotomy between theory and practice.

Hirsch does not look for any substantial description of what Islamic law is and does not attempt to give it any trans- or an-historical meaning. When she uses the expression, it is generally to refer to *kadhis'* conception or representation of it, not to ascribe it an essentialist meaning. Actually, her bias stems from the marginal dimension of the legal setting in the design of her argument. Her analysis is neither about law nor about legal practices. It is about gender as observed from the vantage point of the Kadhi court. Law is not a topic in its own right, it is 'a symbol of both Muslim governance and its vulnerability in the postcolonial era' (Hirsch, 1998: 136). But some things are lost in this process: the coherence of the legal setting in which all this happens, its recognizability for the participants, and the ways in which this recognizable coherence is produced.

Law as a social phenomenon cannot be reduced merely to the provisions of a legal code (law on the books). However, it would be misleading not to consider law on the books as an integral part of the practice of law. We must give credit to the natural attitude of people who do not experience reality as purely subjective and law on the books as purely formal. By merely opposing theory to practice and legal provisions to the 'living law', we fail to understand fully what, for instance, Egyptian personal status law is. We are more likely to gain such an understanding through the close description of people's orientation to, and reification of, legal categories as they emerge from their actual encounter with legal matters.

### *The 'Missing What' of Law-and-Society and Legal-Statistical Research on Law*

Describing her personal research experience in Iranian Courts, Mir-Hosseini (1993: 18) says:

One judge [...] assigned me the task of drafting court notes, the usual duty of the court clerk. This helped me a great deal to see the case from the court's viewpoint (or, more accurately, his), and we learned how to construct 'legal facts', how to translate the petitioners' grievances into court language, and how to discern the principles upon which the court operates.

From a praxiological point of view, this statement sounds most promising. Indeed, praxiology advocates precisely that scholars pay closer attention to, and better describe, the modalities of the construction of legal facts and people's orientation to, and manifestation of, their understanding of the judicial setting, its constraints, and its structure. However, Mir-Hosseini continues, '[L]ater this duty became cumbersome as it prevented me from paying full attention while following the disputes during that session' (Mir-Hosseini, 1993: 18).

Hirsch's approach suffers from the same kind of bias, which is related to her focus on law as one strategic device among others through which power relationships are negotiated. In the sequence of her book, gender and power come first, language, as their vehicle, second. And law has an ancillary role—it is considered an arena where conflicting narratives oppose each other. But law and the practice of law are not merely a bunch of narratives competing with other narratives. Law is also an activity accomplished on a daily basis, of an overwhelmingly routine character, the place of production and reproduction of professional practices which are oriented to nothing but the accomplishment of the law.

Mir-Hosseini's use of the techniques of judicial statistics and case reports and Hirsch's focus on discourse content and strategic uses eschew addressing law as a practical activity. This is the 'missing what' problem in the study of work. With regard to legal professions, this means that 'sociologists tend to describe various 'social' influences on the growth and development of legal institutions while taking for granted that lawyers write briefs, present cases, interrogate witnesses, and engage in legal reasoning.' (Lynch, 1993: 114)

The problem with statistical data is that they largely erase the 'here and now' dimension of every case, i.e. they obscure the necessarily situated character of every activity. The correspondence between statistical entries and the social reality they codify so as to make it statistically relevant is,

however, far from obvious. As a result, we fail to understand the two operations that are at the core of law: formulating legal categories and providing legal characterizations of facts. To paraphrase Michael Moerman (1974: 68), socio-legal scientists should describe and analyze the ways in which legal categories are used and not merely take them as self-evident explanations.

With regard to case reports, the problem is of a different nature.<sup>11</sup> Many studies have tried to capture some aspects of court activities through ethnographic observation, but very few attend closely to what is really done within this institutional setting. This is particularly true in studies that rely on participant observation and interviews. There is a real descriptive failure, which leads researchers to advance only those worldviews that are alternative to those of the actors, or which makes them remain insensitive to legal work as it is understood by its daily practitioners. Travers (1997) speaks of a descriptive gap. In order to bridge the descriptive gap and to fill the ‘missing what’, we must re-orient ourselves to the content of legal work, to its mainly practical character, and thus to its technicalities, situated character, and specific modes of reasoning.

### *Hyper-explanation vs. description of situated activities*

This last consideration leads us to the question of macro- and dualistic explanations, what we call ‘hyper-explanations’. Mir-Hosseini produces a historical sketch of Islamic law that allows her to examine the characteristics of *shari’a* that are relevant to her study. She states that ‘a historical perspective is essential to appreciate the current place of law in Muslim societies, and in particular to explore the dynamics of the changing relationship of law and society’ (Mir-Hosseini, 1993: 3). Although she claims that ‘those who ardently argue for the rule of the Shari’a (...) tend to hold an idealized and totally ahistorical version of the development of the Islamic faith and its institutions’, she asserts at the same time that ‘Islamic law’ has a ‘nature’ that is related to the ‘nature’ of ‘Islamic civilization’ (Mir-Hosseini, 1993: 3). This paradox is strengthened when Mir-Hosseini claims that modernization ended in ‘the creation of a hybrid family law, which is neither the Shari’a nor Western’ (Mir-Hosseini, 1993: 11). In conclusion, she (Mir-Hosseini, 1993: 191 sq.) argues that there is a ‘Shari’a model’ according to which actual patterns of marriage and family structures can be evaluated and that is based on a patriarchal ideology. Yet, one wonders what models, patterns of marriage or ideologies look like outside their embodying practices. More important, we can also raise the issue of the explicative capacity of notions like patriarchy.

The same remark holds true for Hirsch. Although she seems clearly reluctant to engage in generalizations taking the form of cultural explanations, she advocates the substitution of other hyper-explanations like history, power, legitimizing, ideology, and globalization. This is in particular reflected in her dealing with language as a medium that contributes to, and shapes, ‘the gender-patterned production of accounts of conflict in relation to ideologies that link women to storytelling and men to authoritative speech.’ (Hirsch, 1998: 222) Although concentrating on actual verbal interactions within Swahili Kadhi courts, her focus is on discourse content rather than on the discourse sensitivity to the context of its production and the constraints which result from its institutional embedment and organization. The result is an overstatement of the strategic, reflexive and ideological dimensions of court interactions and an understatement of their institutional, conversational, contextual, procedural, technical, and legal constraints.

### **The praxiological study of Islamic law: Egyptian cases**

We turn now to actual Egyptian cases to show how the reference to Islam is practically achieved. In these contexts, the many people engaged in the production of a legally relevant description of facts to which legally relevant consequences are attached pay little attention to the question of

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<sup>11</sup> Case report has also become a common method in political sciences (see, for instance, concerning the Middle East, Brown, 1997).

‘Islamic law.’ This does not mean that this or that legal provision has no history. Rather, it means that so long as a legal concept is used in a stable, unproblematic and unquestioned manner, any account of its theoretical and historical basis has no special relevance to its current uses. Conversely, exclusive attention to the theoretical and historical genesis of the concept leads to the disappearance of its contingent and situated character.

Personal status matters are organized in Egypt by e.g. Law No. 25 of 1920 and Law No. 25 of 1929, both amended by Law No. 100 of 1985, and Law No. 1 of 2000. In the absence of any statutory provision, Law No. 1 of 2000 stipulates that the judge must refer to ‘the opinions which are prevalent in the school of imam Abû Hanîfa.’<sup>12</sup> In practice, many judges still make use of unofficial codifications compiling Hanafite-inspired legal provisions. Personal status has been subject to procedural rules that are common to all civil and commercial matters. Cases are adjudicated by specialized circuits within the courts. The personal-status circuit of the courts is competent with regard to financial (*wilâya ‘alâ al-mâl*) and non-financial (*wilâya ‘alâ al-nafs*) matters, including the granting of judicial divorce on the ground of harm, with regard to which Article 6 of the Law No. 25 of 1929 states: ‘If the wife alleges that the husband mistreated her in such a way as to make it impossible between people of their social standing to continue the marriage relationship, she may request that the judge separate them, whereupon the judge shall grant her an irrevocable divorce if the harm is established and conciliation seems impossible between them. If, however, he [viz., the husband] refuses the petition and she subsequently repeats the complaint without establishing the harm, the judge shall appoint two arbitrators and he shall judge according to the provisions of Articles 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11.’

In the following example, we can observe the form taken by a ruling in personal status matters:

**Excerpt 1 (Case No 858, 1998)**

‘In the name of God the clement, the merciful’

In the name of the people  
Gîza Court of First Instance  
for the Personal Status – Persons / First Circuit *shar‘î*  
Ruling

At the *shar‘î* session held publicly at the palace of the court on Tuesday 25/12/2000 m.<sup>13</sup>  
Under the presidency of His Excellency Mr. ..., President of the Court  
And the membership of MM. ... and ..., judges  
In the presence of Mr. ..., deputy of the prosecution  
In the presence of Mr. ..., clerk

The following ruling was issued:

In the petition submitted by Mrs. ...

Against

Mr. ...  
Registered on the public roll as No. 858 of the year 1998 m., P.S., plenary of Gîza  
The Court

After the hearing of the plea, the examination of the documents and the Prosecution’s opinion, and the deliberation according to the law:

Considering that [it appears] from the facts of the case that the female petitioner introduced her petition in pursuance of a form deposited at the office of the clerk of this court [...] about which the defendant was legally notified, in conclusion of which she asked for a ruling [that would] divorce her, asking that it would be required from him not to oppose to her in her marital affairs and compelling him to [pay] the expenses [1]

In support of this, it is said that she is the wife of the defendant [...] He kept on inflicting on her bad treatments [...] by assaulting her, insulting her and abandoning the marital domicile [...] She asked her the divorce [...] but he did not accept [...] [2] [‘considering’ 1 and 2 = petition]

Considering that... [ ‘considering’ 3 to ‘considering’ 7 = procedures followed by the court ]

Considering that... [‘considering’ 8 to ‘considering’ 15 = examination of the legal grounds]

<sup>12</sup> Sunni Islam is divided into four legal schools (*madhhab*): Hanafites (after its eponyme Abû Hanîfa), Malikites (after Mâlik b. Anas), Shafî‘ites (after al-Shâfi‘î), and Hanbalites (after Ibn Hanbal).

<sup>13</sup> « *Milâdî* », i.e. A.D.

Considering that... ['considering' 16 = application of the law to the facts of the case]

Considering that... ['considering' 17 = expenses and accessory demands]

For all these reasons

The court rules the judicial divorce of the petitioner [...] from the defendant [...] in the form of an irrevocable divorce on [the ground of] harm, requires him not to oppose to her in her marital affairs and compels the defendant to [pay] the expenses and to [pay] 10 pounds for the attorney's retainer.

Clerk

President of the Court

This structure reflects the actual procedural constraint under which the judge operates. One of his major tasks, as a professional routinely engaged in his occupation, is to publicly manifest the correct accomplishment of his job. At this procedural level, it is obvious that the judge orients himself exclusively to the technicalities of Egyptian procedural law. These technicalities may include some reference to provisions explicitly relating to Hanafite or Malikite law, but this is always through the provisions of Egyptian law, as eventually interpreted by the Court of Cassation:

#### Excerpt 2 (Case No 858, 1998)

Harm is established through the testimony of two men or one man and two women, in pursuance of the prevailing opinion of the doctrine of Abû Hanîfa and in application of Article 280 of the By-law [organizing the courts] of the *shari'a*<sup>14</sup>: 'Evidence belongs to two men or to one man and two women.' (Cass., Civil, 28/2/1960 m., 11<sup>th</sup> judicial year, p. 181)

Most of the documents in any judicial file show this orientation of judges and other professionals to procedural correctness. This orientation proceeds from the general sequence of the trial in which every participant addresses in turn people who, at certain times, are not physically present in the courtroom, although they constitute silent auditors to whom the members of the trial turn beyond their direct and immediate verbal exchanges. This notion of 'over-hearing' audience (Drew, 1992) can be extended to absent people to whom a document, like the ruling, is addressed (Dupret, 2004). The potential overruling that such an appeal might eventually produce is directly taken into consideration by the participants and translates in the very careful attitude they adopt vis-à-vis the procedures they are required to follow. These procedural constraints must not be considered as elements imported from a foreign, ancient or external legal system. Rather, they represent the direct, obvious, real and practical dimensions of a daily, bureaucratic routine of people engaged, in today's Egypt, in various legal, professional activities.

To illustrate the point, we reproduce a conciliation report written by the Arbitration and Conciliation Committee of Gîza in a case of unilateral divorce at the wife's request (*khul'*). This conciliation attempt is imposed by virtue of the new procedure settled by Article 20 of law No. 1 of 2000. This document reflects the mainly bureaucratic and routinized nature of the practice of personal status, even though it originates from an explicitly religious institution, al-Azhar.<sup>15</sup>

#### Excerpt 3 (Case No. 180, 2000)

In the name of God the clement, the merciful

al-Azhar al-sharîf

Department of Islamic Research

General Office of Preaching and Religious Information

Preaching Area of Gîza, Arbitration and Conciliation Committee

Report

His Excellency Mr. Counsellor [...], Court of North Gîza, First *shar'i* Circuit, Plenary, North

Peace upon you, God's clemency and His benediction

The honourable court has appointed us to arbitrate in the petition No. 180 of the year 2000 introduced by Mrs. [...] against [...]

Execution of the warrant

<sup>14</sup> Law No. 1 of 2000 integrally reiterates this provision.

<sup>15</sup> Old and famous mosque in Cairo that hosts one of the most prestigious universities of the Muslim world.

1- The wife appeared before the Arbitration and Conciliation Office of the Preaching Area of Gîza and it was proceeded to record her words in writing and orally and to hear her. Many sessions were held concerning her. It appears from them that an agreement and a conciliation between her and her husband is impossible, given that her husband did not appear despite his knowledge of these sessions. The wife reported through her words that she had faced humiliation, slander, insult and assault to her honour from her abovementioned husband. He so pronounced calumniating words, that led to psychologically cause harm to the children and to her hating him and her wanting to divorce in a unilateral way (*mukhâla'a*) in order to preserve the future of the children. She said: we fear not to respect God's limits with him (*allâ uqîm hudûd allâhi ma'ahu*).

2- We proceeded to send telegrams to the husband and he did not appear on the premises of the Arbitration and Conciliation Committee of the Preaching Area of Gîza until the writing of this report.

Opinion of the two arbitrators

After the examination of the documents of the case, the accompanying documents, the wife's words and what is asked from the husband, the impossibility of cohabitation and marital life between them appeared manifest. We bring this forward to your Excellency. It belongs to the justice of the court to adjudicate in the manner that is deemed adequate.

Peace upon you, God's clemency and His benediction

First arbitrator

Second arbitrator

Beyond the attempt to conciliate the spouses, to which this report testifies, the structure of the document reveals at least two things. First, the report is an accomplishment in itself, in which the arbitrators produce all the features that manifest their acting in their capacity and their mastery of the procedural and technical aspects that make it possible to produce a report from the *ad hoc* office of al-Azhar. Second, this report is part of a global procedure. It mentions that it belongs to the more encompassing procedure that is followed in the trial of a case submitted to the arbitrators by the court, asking them to perform the action required by the law.

Besides the constraining effect of procedural rules, legal issues must be addressed by the many people engaged in the judicial process. These issues mainly consist in giving a factual substance to some formal legal definitions. In the case of judicial divorce on the ground of harm, two questions must be dealt with: What counts as harm? What is the cause of this harm? The two questions appear to be closely related to each other, and all the participants in the judicial process orient to them.

As for the harm itself, the statutory provision defines it broadly. Article 6 regulates the case of a wife alleging that her husband mistreated her in such a way as to make it impossible for people of their social standing to continue the marriage relationship. It is up to the judge to characterize the facts under review so that they satisfy the definition of Article 6. Here, the judge is constrained by the definitions given by the Court of Cassation, as appears explicitly in the following excerpt of the ruling:

**Excerpt 4 (Case No. 701, 1983)**

Considering that, as it emerges from the text of Article 6 of Decree-Law No. 25 of 1929 concerning certain provisions on repudiation, the Egyptian legislature requires, in order for the judge to rule for judicial divorce on the ground of harm, that the harm or the prejudice comes from the husband, to the exception of the wife, and that life together has become impossible. The harm here is the wrong done by the husband to his wife by the means of speech or action or both, in a manner that is not acceptable to people of same status, and it constitutes something shameful and wrongful that cannot be endured (Cassation, Personal Status, Appeal No. 50, 52<sup>d</sup> Judicial Year, session of 28 June 1983; its standard is here the non-material standard of a person, which varies according to environment, culture, and the wife's status in the society: Cassation, Personal Status, Appeal No. 5, 46<sup>th</sup> Judicial Year, session of 9 November 1977, p. 1644). The harm also has to be a specific harm resulting from their dispute, necessary, not susceptible of extinction; the wife cannot continue marital life; it must be in the capacity of her husband to stop it and to relieve her from it if he wishes, but he continues to inflict it, or he has resumed it (Cassation, Personal Status, Appeal No. 5, 47<sup>th</sup> Judicial Year, session of 14 March 1979, p. 798; Cassation, Personal Status, Appeal No. 51, 50<sup>th</sup> Judicial Year, session of 26 January 1982).

Here again, the Court's formal definition does not totally eliminate the uncertainty the judge faces when characterizing the facts. This does not mean, however, that the judge's work is problematic or arbitrary. On the contrary, the categories to which the judge refers have, for him, an

objective nature, even though it is his characterization that objectifies them. Moreover, the legal process of characterization is thoroughly supported by the sociological process of normalization, that is, the operations through which the judge routinely selects some of the features of a case resembling a common, normal, usual type of case. It is to these 'normal' categories, which have, beyond their legal definition, a common-sense dimension, that the judge, as well as the prosecutor, the attorney, the victim, the offender, and the witnesses orient themselves.

In the 1983 case, the wife substantiated her allegation on two grounds: (1) the husband's alleged impotence and, (2) the violence from which she allegedly suffered. Neither impotence nor violence is explicitly mentioned in Egyptian law. However, on the one hand, impotence is traditionally assimilated with either permanent illness (Article 9 of the 1920 Law) or harm (Article 6 of the 1929 Law), while violence is considered as the exemplary type of harm; on the other hand, Hanafite law recognizes impotence as a ground for marriage dissolution (Shaham, 1997: 125), and this is in our court case confirmed by the judge:

**Excerpt 5 (Case No. 701, 1983)**

Abû Hanîfa and Abû Yûsuf permitted separation on the ground of a permanent defect that impedes intercourse between the man and the woman, if he is impotent, emasculated, or disabled, because the goal of marriage is the protection of procreation, so that, if the man is not capable of this, it becomes impossible to implement the provision of the contract and there is no good in upholding it. Its upholding despite this [constitutes] a harm for the woman the prolongation of which cannot be accepted and which can only be resolved by separation (The Personal Status of imam Abû Zahra, p. 414, par. 297, ed. 1957).

However, this reference to Islamic law is made so as to substantiate a positive-law provision, i.e., Article 6 of the 1929 Law. Impotence and violence are not presented as Islamic-law provisions that must be directly implemented by the judge, but as two forms of the harm from which the wife suffered and on the basis of which the judge grants a judicial divorce according to Article 6 of the 1929 Law. The judge seeks to substantiate the legal category of harm, and what counts as harm for him is not totally dependent on statutorily-defined<sup>16</sup> or Islamically-defined<sup>17</sup> provisions, even though they can play an important role. What counts as harm varies also according to the judge's conception of 'normal harm', i.e., the manner in which he typically characterizes a certain type of behavior he encounters in the performance of his routine activities. As mentioned above, what counts as harm for the judge includes, e.g., his knowledge of the typical manner in which a wife may suffer prejudice, the social characteristics of given classes of male offenders and female victims, the social and physical features of the settings in which such a situation can take place. The judge's conception of harm functions reflexively: he orients to a conception which he thinks he shares with, and which will be confirmed by, other people participating in the judicial process, while those other people bear on the judge's conception, which they are asked to confirm, and produce reports that in turn serve as the basis for the judge's final ruling.

**Excerpt 6 (Case No. 858, 1998)**

It is established in the [Court of] cassation's jurisprudence that 'the harm committed by the husband is either positive or negative. Positive harm consists in the evil inflicted by the husband toward his wife by [means of] blows and insults, which is not authorized by Islamic *shari'a* and from which the wife suffers. As for negative harm, it consists in the husband's neglect of his wife. This is the most severe harm, the harm that dishonours the wife. It suffices that it happens because of the husband, against the wife, only once, to entitle her to ask for a divorce on the ground of harm (Cass., 31/3/1984 m., p.287, Majallat al-qadâ', 1984 m.).

The criterion for harm in the sense of Article 6 of Law 25/1929 m. is personal, not material, and its assessment is what makes the prolongation of marital life impossible. [Its criterion] is objective, left to [the discretion of] the judge [adjudicating on] the substance, and it varies according to the environment of the two spouses, their cultural level, and their social milieu (Cass, 1/11/1978 m., p.1174).

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<sup>16</sup> The 1920 and 1929 laws.

<sup>17</sup> The abovementioned stipulations of Abû Hanîfa and Abû Yûsuf.

Harm is established through the testimony of two men or one man and two women, in pursuance of the prevailing opinion of the doctrine of Abû Hanîfa and in application of Article 280 of the By-law [organizing the courts] of the *shari'a*: 'Evidence belongs to two men or to one man and two women.' (Cass., Civil, 28/2/1960 m., 11<sup>th</sup> judicial year, p. 181)

Article 6, although it makes judicial divorce on the ground of harm conditional upon the judge's inability to conciliate the spouses, does not design any precise way [to follow] for the conciliation attempt between the two spouses. The court henceforth proposed conciliation to the two parties. The husband accepted and the wife refused. This is considered an [expression of] the inability of the court to conciliate the two spouses as required by Article 6 (Cass., 14/47, 30<sup>th</sup> judicial year [sic !]<sup>18</sup>, p.906).

In the 1983 case, two evidentiary techniques are mobilized in order to establish the harm. With regard to the husband's impotence, a forensic physician is asked to submit a medical report, while the husband's violence is established through the oral testimony of witnesses. The latter technique is one of the few sections of the ruling in which reference is made to Islamic law, although here again it is mediated by positive-law mechanisms, i.e. the Court of Cassation's jurisprudence:

#### Excerpt 7 (Case No. 701, 1983)

Considering that Hanafî doctrine requires, in order to accept the testimony (*shahâda*) regarding the rights of believers, that it be congruent (*muwâfaqa*) with the petition (*da'wâ*) with regard to what is stipulated in it (*fî-mâ tushtarit fîhi*). The contradiction [of the petition by the testimony] is not acceptable. The congruence is complete when what the witnesses testify to is exactly what the petitioner has claimed; the congruence is implicit when he has testified to part of the case. This is accepted as an agreement. The judge considers what the witnesses testified to as evidence of what the petitioner claimed. The congruence need not be literal; congruence in meaning and intention suffices, whether the expressions are the same or different (Cassation, Personal Status, session of 23 November 1982, published in the Judges' Review; Appeal No. 2, 53<sup>d</sup> Judicial Year, session of 20 December 1983).

Accordingly, the court decided to collect the testimonies of the witnesses designated by the petitioner and the defendant. Although these testimonies are written documents,<sup>19</sup> they tend to reproduce *verbatim* the parties' exact wording and they allow us to get closer to the interactional details of the practice of judging. These read as follows:

#### Excerpt 8 (Case No. 701, 1983)

[1]

1- The court called the petitioner's first witness and he said:

2- My name is ... **oath**

3- Question: What's your relationship to the two parties

4- Answer: My workplace is close to the post office in which the petitioner works

5- Q: What are you testifying to

6- A: The petitioner is the defendant's wife by virtue of a legal marriage contract there were disputes between them and we saw the petitioner's husband whom we know although we don't know the place of his residence he was addressing to her words in front of the post office in which she works calling her we heard him addressing her as you bitch you filthy and other words of this kind for nearly two years and one month ago he called the police against her because there was between them something we don't know

7- Q: For how long have you known the petitioner's husband

8- A: For nearly two years

9- Q: Does he live in your neighborhood

10- A: I don't know

11- Q: For how long has the defendant addressed bad words to the petitioner

12- A: For nearly two years

13- Q: What are the words he's addressed to her

14- A: He told her you bitch you filthy and words of this kind and this was in front of the post office

15- Q: Did any harm affect the petitioner because of this

16- A: Yes she broke down while working at the post office

17- Q: Anything else to say

18- A: No [...]

[3]

<sup>18</sup> The 30<sup>th</sup> judicial year corresponds to 1962 and 1947 corresponds to the 15<sup>th</sup> judicial year.

<sup>19</sup> Legally, testimonies made in front of the court are considered written testimonies.

35- The defendant's first witness was called. He said:

36- My name is ... **oath**

37- Q: What's your relationship to the two parties

38- A: The defendant lives with me at home

39- Q: What are you testifying to

40- A: The petitioner is the defendant's wife by virtue of a legal marriage contract and the defendant lives with me and he's lived in my home for one year and eight months and nothing like a misunderstanding happened between them and he didn't assault her and he didn't hit her and he didn't insult her and the policeman came and took the defendant and locked him in the station

41- Q: Did you see the defendant assaulting the petitioner

42- A: No

43- Q: Did you hear the defendant insulting the petitioner

44- A: No

45- Q: The petitioner's two witnesses reported that he insulted her and hit her in front of her workplace

46- A: No it didn't happen

47- Q: Anything else to say

48- A: No [...]

Even though testimonies are supposed to be transcribed in the witnesses' own words, they clearly appear to have been at least partly reformulated by the judge (and his clerk). This is why the witness is always reported to have begun his testimony by stating that the petitioner and the defendant are spouses 'by virtue of a legal marriage contract.' In addition to this re-writing or editing process, the overall stereotypical nature of the organization of the testimony and the pre-allocated sequence of turns in the production of the testimony are noteworthy. Both depend on the institutional context in which these testimonies are given. As noted in a seminal study of courtroom interactions, 'the talk in each stage of court hearings shares the feature that although it occurs in a multi-party setting (...), the parties who may participate are limited and predetermined.' (Atkinson & Drew, 1979: 35) Moreover, whatever is done in this context is necessarily managed by the participants within the constraining framework of this pre-allocated turn-taking organization. In other words, unlike ordinary conversations, turn order in judicial settings is fixed, as is the type of each speaker's turn.

Within this system of turn allocation, both the judge and the witnesses are oriented to the production of information that may be legally relevant and to the credibility of this information. On the judge's side, the credibility of the information provided by each witness is verified by questions testing the credibility of the witness himself. This is why the interrogation always begins with a question about the witness's 'relationship to the two parties' (turns 3, 37). This credibility can be further investigated by asking the witness to produce a first account of his testimony (turns 5, 39) and then assessing the reliability of this global narrative by asking the same witness to confirm his statements piecemeal (turns 7-14, 41-44). Some of the judge's questions are clearly directed at challenging the witness's version of the facts by confronting him with another witness's testimony (turn 45: 'The petitioner's two witnesses reported that the defendant had hit her and insulted her'). Clearly, the judge also seeks to extract information pertaining to the nature of the demeanor (insulting and hitting: turns 41, 43), temporal dimension of the demeanor (for how long?: turn 11), content of the demeanor (words used by the husband: turns 13, 16), responsibility (who did it?: turns 11, 41, 43), prejudicial nature of the demeanor (what effect on the wife?: turn 15), all of which are the constituting elements of the legal category of harm. Indeed the judge's questions are meant to establish the elements of harm defined, in the ruling and according to the Court of Cassation, as 'the wrong done by the husband to his wife in the form of speech or action, or both, in a manner that is not acceptable for people of same status, and which constitutes something shameful and wrongful that cannot be endured.'

At the same time, the witness attempts to establish his credibility by offering information that can reasonably be considered to qualify him as a reliable witness: the nature of his perspective (turn 4: workplace; turn 38: neighborhood), duration of his witnessing (turns 8, 12: nearly two years), exact wording of the insults (turn 14: 'bitch' and 'filthy') (this can make him seem plausible) and

effects of these insults (turn 16: her breaking down at the post office). With regard to the content of his testimony, the witness clearly orients to what appears to him as the constitutive element of the harm, either denying or confirming that it has occurred. Interestingly, the witness who denies the existence of any harm directly orients his first global narrative, the elements of which were not elicited by the judge, to the husband's having neither insulted nor hit her. Accordingly, one may conclude that the normal conception of harm is that harm consists of either blows or insults or both, in a manner largely independent of any formal legal definition.

If we turn now to the practical ways in which members of the judicial setting orient to the issue of causation and agency in the production of harm, we observe that, although Article 6 of the 1929 Law deals with harm for which the husband is deemed responsible, and Article 9 of the 1920 Law with harm resulting from the husband's permanent defect for which he cannot be deemed responsible, in the case examined here, the judge merges the two sources of harm and mentions only the statutory reference of Article 6. Moreover, we see that, for the people engaged in judicial procedures, causation takes many forms that are directly linked to commonsense conceptions. These conceptions depend on commonly shared assumptions and vary according to the position people occupy within the judicial procedure. In the case under scrutiny, people orient to an institution like marriage in terms of its normal goals. This teleological approach to marriage is clearly manifested in the petitioner's request and in the judge's ruling:

**Excerpt 9 (Case No. 701, 1983)**

Petitioner: The petitioner is the wife of the defendant in pursuance of a valid legal marriage contract; she was married to him and discovered suddenly that her husband the defendant had a constitutional defect, that is, he was totally incapable of having marital relations with her, which therefore made it impossible for her to procreate and this put her life in trouble and made her psychologically sensitive, and her life became deeply sad as it became clear that this kind of marriage would not realize the aims of marriage.

Ruling: Considering that [...] the forensic physician has established that the defendant [...] is affected by psychological impotence [...]. Abû Hanîfa and Abû Yûsuf permitted separation on the ground of a permanent defect that impedes intercourse between the man and the woman if he is impotent, emasculated, or disabled, because the goal of marriage is the preservation of procreation, so that, if the man is not capable of this, it becomes impossible to implement the provision of the contract and there is no good in upholding it. Its upholding despite this [constitutes] a harm for the woman the lasting of which cannot be accepted and which can only be resolved by separation. [...]

The many parties to the case commonly consider the absence of marital relationships and the inability to procreate an incongruity that disturbs the normal course of a marriage. This is precisely what must be accounted for. A causal factor—impotence in this case—is invoked so as to remedy this incongruity. Impotence is elevated to the rank of the main causal source, from which all other factors are derived.

Besides this teleological conception—the cause of harm is the element that forecloses the realization of the goals of marriage—harm causation is considered in terms of successive integrated factors. This means that events are presented as necessarily following each other. In our court case, the argument proceeds as follows: the wife risks committing infidelity, because of antipathy between her and her husband, because marital life has become unbearable, because the wife is compelled to live under moral duress, because of the blows, insults, and false accusations that she must suffer, because of her husband's bitterness, because of his impotence. In this causal argument, Islam and Islamic law may play a role, but it is only one among the many different reasons why people abide by the rule. In our court case this is reflected in the presentation of the petitioner's request, in which her motives are revealed:

**Excerpt 10 (Case No. 701, 1983)**

For the same above mentioned reason the defendant's reproductive impotence and his inability to realize the aims of marriage led him to express his anger in revenge and hostility against the petitioner, by insulting and hitting her and

finally by accusing her of dishonesty and telling the police that the petitioner, who is his wife, had stolen one thousand five hundred pounds and jewels (a golden bracelet, a necklace and a ring), falsely, aggressively and wrongly, so as to compel her to live with him under moral duress. Then, he denounced her for asking him to give back her marital belongings. The pursuance of marital life has become impossible, for there is antipathy and dislike between them and she is still a young person and she fears infidelity for herself and she fears God Almighty.

Explicitly ‘Islamic’ considerations are few. Moreover, they are generally mediated by reference to law books and case-law. In that respect, we must be concerned only with the way in which the judge (as well as the Public Prosecutor, the forensic physician, and the attorney) orient to the provisions of Egyptian law, including those rules that originate in classical Islamic *fiqh*. In our court cases, impotence and violence are not characterized by the parties as Islamic-law provisions *per se*<sup>20</sup>. Rather, the ways in which the parties refer to impotence exhibit the workshop level of their practices, which are publicly and accountably made up of considerations for institutional setting, procedural correctness and legal relevance.

## Conclusion

Many scholars claim that, despite major transformations in law and adjudication in Egypt during the last two centuries, it is still an Islamic judge who issues Islamic rulings in the field of personal status law, the last stronghold of Islamic law. We argued that such claims must be challenged on two different levels. On the first level, these claims fall short of any satisfactory definition of what is specifically Islamic that would make this law an Islamic law and its provisions something better characterized by their Islamic and not their national Egyptian dimension. On the second and more fundamental level, our contention is that these claims are sociologically irrelevant, for they eschew the praxiological dimension of adjudication. Instead of assuming that there exists something called an Islamic personal status law to which judges necessarily conform, it would be better to examine and describe judges’ actual daily activities and practices, through which they manifest their legal knowledge, their formal and practical legal training, and the routinized nature of their activity in the field of personal status law. Thus scholars should not presume the Islamic nature of rulings on the basis of their genealogical connection to the provisions of an earlier legal system, for this would be to adopt an ironic position by which scholars tell judges what is Islamic and what is not in their daily judicial activities. Instead, any ascription of an Islamic dimension and authority to rulings should proceed from the judges’ personal characterizations and orientations, to which only a close scrutiny of actual interactions and utterances bears witness. In other words, there is no valid preconceived model to the yardstick of which one can evaluate actual judicial practices. The Islamic nature of rulings is something that is instantiated and realized by the actual written and oral performances of judges.

At the very place where it is supposed to be massive and overwhelming, i.e., in personal status law, references to Islamic law are conspicuous for their paucity. This suggests that the issue of Islamic law in contemporary Egyptian law does not proceed from what the scholarly tradition generally claims. The reference to Islam is occasional. Moreover, it is always mediated through the use of Egyptian law’s primary sources, that is, legislation and case-law. Henceforth, this reference takes place in the banality and the routine of judge’s activity, which consists mainly in legally characterizing the facts submitted to him. By so doing, the judge is obviously more interested in manifesting his ability to adjudicate correctly—according to the standards of his profession, the formal constraints that apply to its exercise, the legal sources on which he relies and the norms of the interpretive work his activity supposes—than he is in reiterating the Islamic primacy of the law he implements. There is no doubt that, if asked, the same judge would underscore the conformity of his activity and the law he applies with Islamic law. However, such an attitude would only be retrospective, *a posteriori*, and justificatory. In the course of his work, the judge does not orient

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<sup>20</sup> This assumption can be justified only because scholars know in advance that these are grounds for divorce in classical Islamic *fiqh*.

himself to the necessity to assess the Islamic dimension of any object, even in this domain of law where the Islamic genealogy of rules seems most evident. The close description of the modes of usage of, and reference to, legal rules, some of which have an Islamic genealogy, shows us the extent to which law is a practical accomplishment, and not an archaeological search for the Islamic pedigree of the norm.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE TRUTH ABOUT ONESELF

#### Three Arab Channels and Their “Self-Presentation”



The landscape of Arab media was dominated for a long time by the monopoly of the national television channels. It is not our task here to reconstruct its history, and it will suffice simply to underscore that this era has passed. The national borders have been erased, first to the profit of satellite channels broadcasting in English and in French and, later, to those modeled after al-Jazeera--a television channel based in Qatar--which have begun broadcasting in Arabic. Thus, members of

the Arabic-speaking public who have a satellite connection at their disposal have begun to gain access to a pluralistic and transnational media world.

The extreme reticence of the satellite television channels broadcasting in Arabic concerning the identity of their silent partners, their moneylenders, and their financial backers is equaled only by their verbosity concerning the profile they aim to give themselves and, therefore, the type of audience that they aim to attract by very reason of this profile. In this chapter, we describe the practical deployment of this self-production and the production of the virtual audience to which these three channels picked up by the satellite “Arabsat” are delivered. This production operates mainly through membership categorization of the audience these channels aim to reach, but also through the affiliations that supposedly characterize them. In other words, the spots in which these different channels present themselves participate in the production of an ongoing typology of their own identity and the identity of their supposed viewers. This chapter analyzes in detail three advertising spots, each transmitted during the month of April, 2004, by one of the satellite channels broadcasting in Arabic: al-Jazeera, al-Manar, and al-Hurra. Our purpose here is not to explain or interpret what these channels do, but rather to adopt, insofar as we are able, the position of ordinary television viewers, “channel-surfing” in search of programs and coming upon the spots in question during their search. Obviously, our approach will be more analytical than would be natural to these viewers, but at least it has the merit of not being so much a demonstration of a pre-established theory as the uncovering of the inductive work carried out by these channels.

In examining carefully the constitutive elements of the spots broadcasted by al-Jazeera, al-Manar and al-Hurra, we will show how a televised image is the vehicle of a limited number of logical options. Having at our disposal only these spots, we will try to make explicit the possibilities for reading them which are open to their potential viewers. The analysis of their structural organization will permit a grasp of the range of possibilities resulting from the interaction of the spot, the background affiliations of its producers and intended viewers and the attitudes which result from them. The goal, then, is to draw an accurate picture of the structures and systems of intelligibility associated with these spots as well as the background affiliations which interact with these structures and systems in a way that generates a certain comprehension and appreciation of them.

#### Al-Jazeera: testimonial voices

The al-Jazeera spot consists of a series of images and of voices, seeming to be testimonies and personal reflections and converging towards the logo of the channel and its tagline: “one opinion and the other opinion.” Here is a transcription of the words of the various speakers.

- 1- anâ 'admâ dâ'at biyya 'd-dinyâ anâ lessa mihâgiran  
min al-'Irâq
- 2- lâ yûjad hunâlik ay ard mumkin an asta'id 'an baladî  
wa 'an ardî

life really has never given me anything for free I  
have just emigrated from Iraq  
there is no land whatsoever out there that I could  
substitute for my country and my land

- 3- anâ yawmiyyan as'al nafsi hâdhâ al-su'âl lêsh 'arabî  
 4- walâkin lâ tafsîr li-hâdhâ al-jawâb  
 5- lâ raqâba 'alâ harakât jasadî lâ raqâba 'alâ harakât  
 kitâbî lâ raqâba 'alâ khiyâlî  
 6- zikriyâtî bi-l-fatra dî alîma bes li-ennî anâ ma-  
 'amaltesh ellî kunt 'â'iz a'malu bi-masr  
 7- watanî al-haqîqî hiya lughatî ma ba'â a'dar ashûf  
 hudûd aktar min-hâ  
 8- *al-jazîra* al-ra'y wa'l-ra'y al-âkhar (x2)

me every day I ask myself this question why Arab  
 but there is no explanation in answer  
 no control over the actions of my body no control over  
 the actions of my writing no control over my imagination  
 (my memories of this period are painful only because  
 me I did not do what I wanted to do in Egypt  
 my true native land is my language and I cannot  
 see any other borders but that  
*al-jazeera* the opinion and the other opinion

The sequence of this spot breaks down into eight segments whose content we analyze as follows:

- |    |                                                                                   |                                                                                 |                                                                                       |                                                                                   |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1) |  | Moon, boat, birds in<br>flight<br>Image of a man<br>expressing his<br>suffering | anâ 'admâ dâ'at biyya<br>'d-dinyâ anâ lessa<br>mihâgiran min al-'Irâq<br>[male voice] | life really has never<br>given me any gifts I<br>have just emigrated from<br>Iraq |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

The first segment shows the rising moon on a background of pastel-hued water crossed by birds in flight, upon which is superimposed the image of a man who is clearly suffering. Right away one picks up the contrast between the “postcard” effect of the first images and that of the suffering individual. The voice is that of a man telling a personal story, and he speaks in an Egyptian dialect, noticeable in the pronunciation and the use of certain expressions. The narration refers specifically to emigration to the oil-producing countries and to the recent events which have forced this man to leave Iraq. This testimony deploys various membership categories: Egypt--evoked through the dialect--alludes to the poverty of this country, the most populous of the Arab world; the emigration of numerous Egyptians to the oil-producing countries (thus the richest in the Gulf); the precariousness of this experience; and the vicissitudes of the politics and regional conflicts which transform individuals into the playthings of events. If the first images serve as an aesthetic introduction to the spot, the image of the person relates directly to the verbal testimony and serves as a direct entry to its drama.

- |    |                                                                                     |                                               |                                                                                        |                                                                                                   |
|----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2) |  | Jerusalem<br>Pleasure port<br>Pharaonic Egypt | lâ yûjad hunâlik ay ard<br>mumkin an asta'id 'an<br>baladî wa 'an ardî<br>[male voice] | there is no land<br>whatsoever out there that<br>I could substitute for my<br>country and my land |
|----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

The second segment opens with a view of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, on which images are superimposed--first of a pleasure port, then of Pharaonic ruins. A man's voice comes in, speaking in the manner of an existential witness.

The words are pronounced in standard Arabic and refer explicitly to the theme of land and country. The membership categorizations are many: the Dome of the Rock alludes to Palestine; Pharaonic Egypt, to the illustrious ancient history of the Egyptian nation; the vocabulary referring to land and country, to the unshakeable anchoring of identity in the land. With the exception of the pleasure port, images and words converge appropriately in the idea of symbols of territorial identity. On the whole, this segment continues the theme of the first “strophe”, that of the place of identity (here, the land). On the other hand, in spite of the linking of images, there is no dialogic relation between the first two strophes.

- 3)  Pharaonic Egypt  
A building of modern  
architecture (Emirates)  
Writing in Arabic
- anâ yawmiyyan as'al  
nafsî hâdhâ al-su'âl  
lêsh 'arabî  
[female voice]
- me every day I ask  
myself the question  
why Arab

The strophe opens with the same Pharaonic image which ends the preceding one, thus providing visual continuity in the sequence. Then comes the image of a building which, with its avant-garde architecture, symbolizes the modernity of Dubai, in the Gulf; this is overlaid with a page of Arabic calligraphy. The strophe is narrated by the only female voice of the sequence; it is the voice of an older woman suffused with a tone of existential questioning. The woman speaks in standard Arabic which does not exclude occasional recourse to a dialectal word (*lêsh*). She explicitly introduces the theme of “Arab,” without making clear whether it is an ethnic or linguistic reference, even though the superimposed calligraphy introduces the theme of language. In the logic of the sequence, the strophe seems to continue the preceding one, with the theme of Arab identity following that of attachment to the land. One notes also the formulation of the question, the first part of a pair directing attention to the second part--the answer.

- 4)  Text in Arabic  
A building of modern  
architecture (Emirates)  
Panoramic view of a  
modern city (New  
York?)
- walâkin lâ tafsîr li-  
hâdhâ al-jawâb  
[male voice]
- but there is no  
explanation in answer

This return to a male voice comes in over a background of the images of the preceding strophe, to which is now added the view of New York, which connects these Arab referents to a more global one. Generally, this strophe seems to constitute a transition. Narrated in standard Arabic, the strophe is suggestive of a set of questions and answers-- and of questions without answers. In this sense, it forms the second part of the pair introduced by the previous strophe. The images and the words evolve independently of each other. The text, on its part, indicates that the question, even though it finds its response (whose exact nature we do not know), remains in the nature of the ineffable and inexpressible and is felt rather than articulated.

- 5)  Scene of repression and  
fighting  
Writing of a text in  
Arabic  
Backlit image of a man
- lâ raqâba 'alâ harakât  
jasadî lâ raqâba 'alâ  
harakât kitâbî lâ  
raqâba 'alâ khiyâlî  
[male voice]
- no control over the  
actions of my body no  
control over the actions  
of my writing no control  
over my imagination

This 5<sup>th</sup> strophe, narrated by a man, in standard Arabic, in a manner suggestive of a “phenomenological metaphysics,” opens on a background of images mingling a repressive scene of fighting, an Arabic text appearing on the screen, and a masculine silhouette evocative of testimony under cover of anonymity as well as the daydreams of a solitary walker. This strophe activates numerous categories: liberty, control, censorship; the power of writing and of the imagination; and the pre-eminence of thought over force (which could be read as a reference to a famous quote of Ibn Khaldun). Images and words are thus in direct relation to each other. In the sequence as a whole, this strophe joins the continuation of the subject of language introduced in the third strophe. One observes a progression of the question of identity which begins with the land, passes to language, and ends provisionally with thought. We should also note that, from the point of view of semantics,

this strophe alludes as well to the repressive climate of the Arab world, which has the force of thought expressed through language as the place of identity and of resistance.

6)



Commercial port  
Pharaonic Egypt  
Train

zikriyâtî bi-l-fatra dî  
alîma bes li-ennî anâ  
ma-'amaltesh ellî kunt  
'â'iz a'malu bi-masr  
[male voice]

my memories of this  
period are painful only  
because me I did not do  
what I wanted to do in  
Egypt

Narrated by a man in Arabic, in an Egyptian dialect, in an autobiographical mode, the words of this strophe are spoken over a background of images of a commercial port, of Pharaonic ruins and of a train passing at great speed. Reference is made to memory and to nostalgia, to Egypt and the frustration of the wish for personal achievement. Indirectly, the theme of emigration is also suggested. It is difficult to determine the logical place of this strophe in the sequence as a whole. Clearly, further testimony (that of businessmen of the diaspora) is being articulated here, and a transition, perhaps through the image of the train, is being made with the following strophe and the conclusion of the advertising spot.

7)



Figure of a man with an  
umbrella  
Text in Arabic calligraphy  
Flower and face

watanî al-haqîqî hiya  
lughatî ma ba'â  
a'dar ashûf hudûd  
aktar min-hâ  
[male voice]

my true native land is  
my language and I  
cannot see any other  
borders but that

The voice of a man speaking a Middle-Eastern dialect, and whose tone suggests an existential commentary, comes in over an image showing the silhouette of a man carrying an umbrella and crossing the screen, on which is quickly superimposed a work of calligraphic art, then an image of flowers and a face. The words suggest the theme of identity, associating native land, language, and non-geographic borders. The speaker gives the impression of belonging to the diaspora, of formulating his commentary from outside the Arab territorial space, with the language functioning as an anchorage of identity. In the whole sequence, this strophe constitutes a return to, and the culmination of, the principal theme which has emerged as a thread throughout the various testimonies. It seems clearly to announce the approaching conclusion.

8)



Calligraphic logo of al-  
Jazeera  
Candle, geometric  
figures  
Tagline superimposed

al-jazîra al-ra'y wa'l-  
ra'y al-âkhar (x2)

al-jazîra the opinion  
and the other opinion

After the testimonies, the moment of synthesis and conclusion has arrived and it is composed of a combination of geometric figures, a lighted candle, the calligraphic logo of the station and its tagline, literally, "the opinion and the other opinion." After the diversity of the various testimonies, this conclusion is apparent in all its logic: the station is promoting a pluralistic "Arabicity."

### Al-Manar: fiction and news reporting in support of a militant text

The spot from al-Manar consists, on its part, of a sort of quatrain (four-line verse) juxtaposing printed text and images and leading to an affirmation of the militant presence of a channel which is at the very heart of the important questions of the moment.

1- min kibd [al-Umma]  
 2- min nabd al-abtâl  
 3- min qalb Filastîn  
 4- ma'akum qanât al-Manâr

from the heart (liver, side) of [the Umma]  
 from the pulse of heroes  
 from the heart of Palestine  
 the channel al-Manar is with you

The sequence of this spot thus breaks down into 4 segments, the first three forming a list repetitive in morphology, vocabulary and semantics and imparting a quasi-poetic rhythm to the whole; the fourth segment brings the culmination of this crescendo and the unveiling of the enigma. Here is the analysis strophe by strophe.

- 1)  Text being printed on a blue background min kibd [al-Umma] from the heart (liver, side) of [the Umma]  
 Image of a procession bearing the portrait of Sheikh Yasin  
 [music « adventure »]

Appearing on-screen on a blue background and preceding the images, the text of the first strophe is organized around a body-related metaphor (the liver) which itself is suggestive of the centrality of life. Images follow of demonstrators brandishing the portrait of sheikh Yasin, a direct allusion to the actual event that occurred in the days following the assassination of the spiritual leader of Hamas. The text and images correspond directly, the physical body of Sheikh Yasin representing the political and religious body of the Muslim Community (the Umma) and casting Palestine as the center of these themes. The first part of a list of three starting with the preposition *min* (from) followed by a noun referring to a part of the human body (here, *kibd*, that is to say, the liver) belonging to a whole that revolves around the identity of the channel and of its listeners (the Umma), this strophe functions as an introduction to a small dramatic plot.

- 2)  Text being printed on a blue background min nabd al-abtâl from the pulse of heroes  
 Images of youths throwing stones at soldiers  
 [music « adventure »]

The second strophe begins with text appearing on a blue background and is followed by images of young men (whom one takes immediately for Palestinians) throwing stones at soldiers (whom one takes immediately for Israelis). The text and images are in clear relation to each other, the stone throwers being the heroes of a revolt which follows the rhythm of their hearts and of the blood which they shed in sacrifice, with Palestine always the backdrop. As the second element of the list, this strophe evokes the body (and the emotions linked to it) through the word *nabd* and the centrality of the Palestinian cause through the reference to heroes (*abtâl*) which is read and seen as meaning the Intifada.

- 3)  Text being printed on a blue background min qalb Filastîn from the heart of Palestine  
 View of al-Aqsa mosque  
 [music: "adventure"]

The third strophe also appears onscreen over a blue background. It continues the metaphor of the body and emotions through use of the word *qalb* (heart) and places Palestine squarely at the center of the drama. The images of al-Aqsa mosque are also explicit, this being at once the most sacred

place of Palestinian Islam and the symbol of the beginning of the second Intifada. This strophe forms beside the third element of the repeated list organized around the preposition *min* (from) and a noun evoking the body and the emotions (*qalb*, heart) and the centrality of Palestine. The metaphor of the body and emotions may be read at this moment as a sort of equation: Palestine is the cause *par excellence* of the Muslim Community.

The list is one of the most effective techniques of communication and is widely utilized (Atkinson, 1984). To quote Matoesian (2001:92), "Lists are expansive techniques for producing family resemblances, for creating a conceptual unity between otherwise diverse elements in a perceptual field, and for classifying actions through a rhythmically textured and progressively expanded litany of similar items." Lists used in this way often are composed of three items. Their effectiveness lies in their production of a sense of unity and wholeness and in the mounting power of their poetic rhythm. At the same time, they avoid the danger of wordiness and lead naturally to a conclusion which occurs as a real *denouement* of the drama built up by the morphological and semantic repetition. The list constituted by the first three strophes of the al-Manar spot leads naturally to the following conclusion:

4)



Calligraphic logo of  
the channel  
Text superimposed  
[music "adventure"]

ma'akum qanât al-  
Manâr

the channel al-  
Manar is with you

The fourth and last strophe consists of an image of the channel's logo, to which is appended a phrase which is presented as the culmination, and the conclusion, of the preceding list. The narrative framework of the spot, then, may now be understood as the association of the Muslim Community, of Palestine, and of the TV station, in a unity at once physical and metaphorical.

### Al-Hurra: the model of the advertising clip

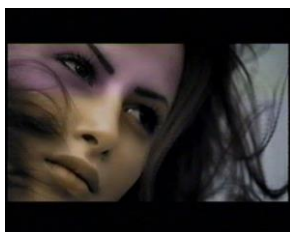
The spot from al-Hurra is presented like an advertising clip; it combines scripted images and text directly interpellating the individuality of the viewer. Here is the complete text:

1- anta tufakkir  
2- anta tatmah  
3- anta takhtâr  
4- anta tu'abbir  
5- anta hurr  
6- al-Hurra  
7- kamâ anta

you think  
you have ambitions  
you choose  
you express  
you are free  
al-Hurra/the Free  
like you

The sequence of this spot may be broken down into 7 segments, the first five in the form of a repeated list, the sixth and the seventh as a summarizing conclusion.

1)



jetty in the sea alternating  
with a woman's  
face/Text superimposed  
[generic music]

anta tufakkir

you think

The first strophe begins with alternating views of the seashore (a pier at the end of which a figure stands and looks at the horizon) and the face of a woman, to which is then added a text that directly appeals to the viewer by being formulated in the second person. The text and images

correspond precisely, the people adopting poses that are evidently reflective. The viewer is, for his part, immediately interpellated by the positive description of person-hood in terms of thoughtful individuality. The text can just as well be read as a conditional of the sort “if-then”. It functions as an introduction to a sort of enigma built around the viewer of al-Hurra being revealed in his singularity.

- 2)  Skyscraper                      anta tatmah                      you have ambitions  
Figure of a young man  
The man directs his gaze  
to the horizon  
Text superimposed  
[generic music]

The second strophe shows a skyscraper. At its foot is a young man wearing a suit, whose gaze once again is directed to the horizon. The text then follows and is superimposed, appealing to the viewer in the same way as in the first strophe. Here also text and images correspond. The modernity of the scene and the clothing clearly allude to the idea of ambition. As the second element of the list, this strophe expands upon the positive description of an individualized spectator to whom it is addressed, likewise, as an enigma of the type “if-then”.

- 3)  Man walking against the                      anta takhtâr                      you choose  
flow of a crowd  
Superimposed text  
[generic music]

In the third strophe, one sees a man walking--first alone, then parting a dense crowd like Moses parting the waters of the Red Sea. The power of individual freedom is thus opposed to the human tide, an idea confirmed by the text that, once again directly addressing the viewer, emphasizes the free will of the individual. The image is tailored to the message of the text which it supports and illustrates. The little enigma of the type “if-then” continues, with its portrayal of the viewer as more and more set apart in an individuality that wins out over the mass.

- 4)  A man shouts excitedly                      anta tu‘abbir                      you express  
Superimposed text  
[generic music]

In the 4<sup>th</sup> strophe, a man, likewise young and wearing a suit, tie loose, shouts with boundless enthusiasm. Superimposed text follows which, addressing the viewer, establishes in advance the necessary and positive nature of individual expression. The purposely scripted image and the text singling out the individual spectator continue the list begun in the first strophes and therefore, also the enigma of the conditional “if-then”. The repetition of the formula of designation and the actions linked to it produces in addition a sort of categorization leading logically to a first conclusion:

- 5)  Two eyes are opening                      anta hurr                      you are free  
Superimposed text  
[generic music]

Singling out the viewer, but designating him in a predicate (“to be free”) and not through action, the 5<sup>th</sup> strophe seems to be the provisional conclusion of the list: you reflect + you have ambitions + you choose + you express = you are free. The enigma of the type “if-then” finds its resolution: “if” the viewer conforms--according to the set of directions--to this thinking, enterprising, decisive, and expressive individual, “then” he can be nothing else but free. The text appears onscreen and is superimposed over the image of two opening eyes, symbolic of the individualized gaze, free and critical, naturally asserting itself.

6)



Two open eyes  
Logo superimposed  
[generic music]

al-Hurra

al-Hurra/the Free

The spot does not end, however, with the conclusion of the list. On a background of the same eyes which are opening anew, the logo of the station is printed--al-Hurra, meaning “the free person” in Arabic, repeating, in a sense, the previous strophe which is directed to the viewer as a “free” individual. By juxtaposition, the viewer and the channel are aligned with, and assimilated to each other through the symbolism of the eye, which embodies freedom as well as the act of watching television. This strophe draws a parallel between the list and its conclusion and the second part of the equation: “you are free//the Free Person” (“anta Hurr//al-Hurra”).

7)



Two open eyes  
Superimposed logo  
[generic music]

kamâ anta

like you (yourself)

The 7<sup>th</sup> and final strophe constitutes a sort of postscript. Once again taking up the image of the opening eyes with text superimposed, this strophe lays out clearly, for those who may not have already grasped it, the parallel established by the spot between the viewer, newly-validated in his individuality, and the channel. It recapitulates the equation: “you are free//The Free Person ⇒ [The Free (Person) is free] as you yourself are.” In addition, by doing so, it permits the spot to come full circle stylistically through the quasi-rhythmical repetition of its identical first and last words.

### Choosing channels, identifying spots: the work of data collection

This chapter is the product of a method which consists of not imparting any information about the satellite channels studied beyond what may be inferred from the advertising spots they produce in order to present themselves to their audience and impute an identity to that audience. In a way, the undertaking consists of evaluating the description of naturally accessible empirical data and limiting the reflexivity of the researcher, inasmuch as it would be “an academic virtue and a source of privileged knowledge” (Lynch, 2000).

For all that, we would never claim that the choice of channels and their respective spots was completely unpremeditated and spontaneous. First, it is evident that the collection of data bears the hallmark of what legal experts might call an “insider dealings offence”--the analyst having, in fact, at his disposal, a certain prior knowledge of the Arab media landscape, the ideological orientations of the channels, their sources of financing, and the sociological characteristics of their public. The viewer should not, in any case, be taken for a “media idiot”—an expression inspired by Garfinkel’s “cultural idiot” (1967). In fact, one might reasonably assume that a male or female viewer who

turns on the television and chooses one channel rather than another is not ignorant of its general character. Above all, he also has background knowledge to rely upon in determining his preferences and is not simply a passive agent of media communication, ignorant of that of which he is, moreover, the destined object. He is, in this regard, by no means a stranger to himself and the cognitive stakes of telecommunication. To be sure, his way of knowing is not necessarily reflective, which does not automatically imply that it is exterior-- the product of manipulation of an unthinking person by the grand masters of the media. In other words, our adoption of the natural attitude of the viewer looking at these spots should not obscure the fact that the said viewer generally knows what to expect when she views one channel or another and that it is often this knowledge which determines his choice. Thus, even if the collecting of these facts has not been completely blind, the fact that we do not precede the descriptions of the spots with an analysis of the channels should save us from the trap of hyper-reflexivity--that is, determining before the fact the identity of each channel and taking these spots merely as confirmation of a theory already formed through those analyses.

That said, there is no problem in identifying some of the criteria that have implicitly guided our choice of channels and of spots. The first is that of contrast. Reading the three spots clearly shows that the respective styles of al-Jazeera, al-Manar and al-Hurra are very specific and distinct from one another. The reading of these spots, besides, permits easy access to that which we might call the "natural attitude" of the viewer. Far from placing the researcher in an ironic and intrusive position, the selection and description of these sequences places him, above all, in the ordinary position of a viewer relying on common sense to read that which is given to him and that which he allows himself to see. And, we should add, because they are media products constructed intentionally for the purpose of self-promotion, the spots are relatively simple to read. And because they aim for their own intelligibility, they have recourse to obvious stereotypes--though the spot from al-Jazeera is more complex than the two others.

### **Anthropology of televised reading: words and images for an endogenous categorization**

Rather than to produce an exogenous and a priori typology, which would make these spots seem to be only particular instances of a general model, with everything that implies with respect to the effects of redundancy and ratification of what has already been determined, our purpose here is to render a descriptive account of typologies and categorizations both emerging and endogenous.

The production of identity undertaken in this way rests upon sets of membership categories--that is, of classifications or social types which can be used to describe people, communities, or objects. When these categories are deployed, they form what is called natural collections or categorical systems (Sacks, 1974). One of the chief characteristics of categorical systems of membership resides in the fact that some categories may have qualities or affiliations conventionally imputed to them, which include activities, rights, expectations, obligations, fields of knowledge, attributes and competencies related to the category. In other words, the categorical work is morally and normatively organized. That is, it is organized according to membership categories of, on the one hand, ontological order (being Arab, Muslim) and, on the other hand, of axiological order (being moral, free, professional, employed).

The spot from al-Jazeera is organized as a sort of nimbus of words and images easily recognizable by an Arab audience. Within a system of juxtaposition of multiple personal testimonies is a categorical environment--varied and contrasting, yet intelligible--which is proposed to the viewer. Associating the denotative registers (land, native country, language, borders, writing, thought, body) and the connotative (speech: dialectal, educated, poetic; voice: young, old, working-class, distinguished), the sequence tends to produce an effect of diversity within unity. This aggregation of multiplicity points towards the tagline of the station, and to pluralism, but specifically to pluralism in the context of a single underlying identity--namely, the Arab identity. In

a kaleidoscopic movement, the channel and the viewer find themselves linked to various figures whose experiences of life and feelings of identity allow the gathering up of threads that unify individuals, their community of membership, and the world in which they move.

The spot from al-Manar has a simpler structure. A militant text followed by symbolically strong images leads, by means of a repetitive list of three strophes, to the affirmation of engagement and the presence of the channel at the heart of the Palestinian--and thus the Muslim--cause. The categories deployed in this spot are simple and readable, the metaphorical language is very strong and makes a direct appeal to feelings of identity; the ideology of resistance is projected on the forefront of the scene. No diversity here, but rather support of militant engagement. No complexity, either, but the production of an unmistakable message. Consistent with the symbolism of its name ("al-Manar" means "the beacon"), the station presents itself as the beacon of the Muslim Arab consciousness, standing firm in the storm of events in the region, lighting the way to resistance. It is also a landmark for those engaged in the struggle.

The al-Hurra spot is presented like an advertisement. With images directed with evident attention to aesthetics, with alternating female and male figures (the first symbolizing the channel to a certain extent), interpellating the viewer very directly and constructed in such a way that the channel seems like his eye and the world or the prism of his gaze, the spot is presented as entertainment in the service of an obvious but implicit ideology. It is not concerned with great questions of current affairs or communal identity, but of a modern individual acting alone, independently of majority trends. It is not so much diversity that is being promoted here, but liberalism and individualism. The community of membership is even presented as an obstacle, the herd instinct against which one must march resolutely. The accessible narrative is simple and directly understandable, seeking to convince by the force of the self-evident (how can one refuse to think, to choose, to express oneself--in short, to be free?). The entertaining pleasure of the image allows one to be carried away by the action. There is no argument, in the strict sense of the word, but an enterprise of seduction which grows out of the accord between the entertaining nature of the spectacle and the validation of the viewer.

Such is the natural intelligibility of these spots that we can account for. As Metz (1974:145) underscores, "what must be understood is that films are understood." Therefore from this evidence (which has, in any case, the merit of having been articulated) we may assume that we are watching a filmed sequence from within a natural attitude, that of everyday life, and we understand it with the resources and means identical to those which we use to understand the order and characteristics of the social and natural world (Jayyusi, 1988:289). Watching television, if we limit ourselves to that aspect of visual sociology which concerns us in this chapter, is not done in a vacuum, but in a contextual and situated manner. By contextual, we mean that the activity is not independent of the moment and of the place in which it is inscribed; by "situated", we mean that it relies upon the shared background knowledge of the viewers, that which one might call their culture. The coherence of the spots depends on our "resources of (tele)visual intelligibility," among which are our capacity for identification, for categorization and for inference. The competent viewer recognizes the Dome of the Rock, associates the stonethrower with the Palestinian Intifada, and infers the power of the free actor from the march against the flow of the crowd. The coherence of the televisual text "is not then a formal analytic coherence, but rather an organization of practical objectivities found in scenic recognizability of things like courses of action, visible relationships, familiar routines, etc." (Macbeth, 1999:148). It is then not at all the result of coded operations, but of scenes and activities recognized and understood for what they are by an ordinarily competent viewer. They are reflexively available in our descriptions and accounts, they are the recognizable characteristics of the daily life as it is lived, they are embedded in our ways of seeing and acting. Jayyusi (1988:273) speaks, in this regard, of the "scenic transparency" of the social world and of the images we have of it. That does not mean that no problems of comprehension could remain, but that these very problems form an integral part of the recognizability of the world. Thus, contrary to the

commonly-held view, images do not possess an infinite number of meanings. The action possesses its visual coherence and the image is not radically abstract from its viewing context. As Jayyusi (1991:149) likewise shows, one may see in the street a picture of a birthday party and find, in its scenic organization, a “proto-narration” of who these people are, how the scene has come to be what it is, and how it has come to be that for us. The scene offers a limited number of possible interpretations which the viewer will seize upon in relying on resources available to an ordinary member of the usual society of people who might be drawn to look at this type of scene.

We should emphasize here the sequential organization of these televised spots. Far from being only juxtapositions of images operating separately and independently of each other, they form unities made of images, texts and sounds, of complementarities and contrasts, of logical and dialogic successions and of linear or fragmented projections of propositions of identity. These lead to a single interpretation (al-Manar and al-Hurra) or are suggestive of multiple interpretations (al-Jazeera) in the service of the identity which the channel intends to give itself and to assign to its audience.

Watching a television program is not done as an analytical process, but in a natural attitude grasping the flux of images and of sounds in their continuity and in the unity that they seek to produce (Livingston, 1995). The viewer does not deconstruct each of the strophes of the spots they are watching as an interlude to other programs, but takes them as a whole whose various elements form the basis of intelligibility. Various scenic and contextual clues converge towards the production of this texture of intelligibility of the televised object. These clues and their mutual dependence do not proceed from a single spot, but from the activity consisting of watching the spot. These signs are at once present in the spot and discovered and assembled by the viewer. In other words, the work consisting of watching the spot is a work of searching for the organization of this glance which the spot describes. It is not, on the one hand, the spot, and, on the other, its viewing, in a correspondence more or less total, but one and the same thing--watching-the-spot--that one may conceive as a pair unifying the text and its interpretation (the pair: spot/viewing of the spot). The spot is always embedded within the work of viewing the spot and, at the very centre of this work, it furnishes the elements indicating how it should be interpreted. At the same time, the work of viewing the spot is irremediably embedded in the spot, and it resides in the work consisting of discovering how the spot prescribes the reading it should have. “In this way, a text provides an ‘account’ of its own reading; the text is a ‘reading account,’ a story about how its own reading should be done” (Livingston, 1995:15). The work of reading manifests itself as an activity in the transparency, intelligence, ambiguity or the grammatical non-sense of the text and the extent to which the text is read in this manner. This work is manifested also, practically, in the fact that reading finds, in the text, the reasons to continue in the line of the first steps that are always placed with that in mind. Reading of the spot is a continuing work which relies upon prerequisite competencies, but not on prerequisite knowledge, and it is continuously accomplished within the essential relation of the spot and its watching by the viewer. The reading of televised spots that we have analyzed operates as a search by the viewer for the inductive enterprise of its designer. The texture of the spot induces a direction in the gaze of the viewer and this gaze retrospectively activates the induction operative in the spot. We are able to reach this conclusion from the perspective of the natural and ordinary viewing attitude of every competent reader.

The competent viewer will not have any problem at all in identifying the *genre* to which these spots belong and, moreover, what differentiates them from other programs such as news, video clips, ads, or sports broadcasts. The distinction which he makes results from the “attitudinal” (*Gestalt*) texture of the work of reading. Following Livingston (1995), we shall say that each text provides not only the semantic elements of comprehension, but also the contextual indications of its *genre* and thus of the reading that it should have. Thus, children’s literature may deploy multiple contextual indicators and does not avoid repetition, because it is addressed to a reader who is in the process of developing his reading competencies. One may say, in this case, that it “overdetermines”

its interpretation. A technical text, for its part, will also use multiple contextual indicators, but it will avoid repetition; it will seem “proportional” to its interpretation. Lastly, a poem, while likewise multiplying its indicators, will have the tendency to fragment, to scatter them, to obscure their relationship to each other. We may say then that it “underdetermines” its reading. The televised spot itself, like children’s literature, tends to overdetermine the reading that can be made of it. It multiplies the contextual clues (the images of symbolic places, the types of voices, the themes), it does not avoid repetition (the “*min* + part of the body” in the al-Manar spot, le “*anta* + verb” in that of al-Hurra, the theme of language in that of al-Jazeera). It proposes a form of argumentation that, by the abundance of elements pointing in one direction, leads to an over-determined conclusion. This being said, the spot provides as well the elements that enable the spectator to distinguish it (and, by the way, to distinguish its designer) from the next one. As we have seen, it would be difficult to confuse the spots from al-Jazeera, al-Manar, and al-Hurra. This has nothing to do with the fact that one knows which channel one is watching, or with the fact that one will have categorized the channels in this or that way, but certainly with the overdetermination in these spots of the channel’s membership categories and of the audience it aims to reach. By the production of sequences linking images and voices--or a text and its many contexts--to the frameworks of experience and to finalities (Barthelemy, 2003) the spot tends to produce an intersubjective feeling of belonging to a group, with the rights and duties which such belonging entail.

### **Natural reading and instructed reading: when the channels represent themselves on the web**

We have stated that, rather than prejudging the nature of the self-presentation which the three Arabic channels are engaged in, we have preferred to respect, as far as possible, the natural attitude of the viewer engaged in reading the programs offered to him. The trajectory which would consist of first being instructed about the channels in order to then analyze the work is, then, the opposite to this process. For example, we could have begun by navigating the Web and searching the sites of the different channels, sites on which, assuredly, they must be presenting themselves and telling about themselves. In any case, the discourses that these stations might have about themselves constitute, in relation to the natural reading which one might have of the spots they produce, so many “instructed readings” (Livingston, 1995).

In situations of interpersonal observation (Sudnow, 1972), when our gaze operates naturally, in action, we seize upon a series of elements produced that can be seen and understood for what they are, and we orient ourselves towards these elements and act according to them. On the other hand, when we take a photograph we orient ourselves in such a way as to select a moment to preserve. What is more, the people we photograph are attentive to the final result of the operation and thus to the appearance which will be there at the moment it is taken. In other words, looking at a situation captured by a photograph (for example, six photos breaking down the stride of an athlete) does not amount to looking at the natural unfolding of this situation (the athlete who is running, in our example). To look at the photographs is to look at a description of the action of running (Livingston, 1995:78). The photographs are a fixed moment of continuing actions, they represent them, they take the place of them. One could say that, in the case of photographs, we are dealing with an instructed gaze, that is to say a gaze for which the total of possible readings is limited and channelled by the considered and organized intention of the photograph. If we turn now to the written text, we may make the same sort of argument. For an ordinarily competent reader, reading any text whatsoever is accomplished starting from the elements of analysis emerging naturally from the text being read. Literary critique, on its part, proposes an informed reading of the same text, which we have called instructed reading (Livingston, 1995).

The pages on which these three channels present themselves on their respective websites suggest, with respect to the spots we have analyzed, an instructed reading of that which the viewer may seize upon when she views them in a natural process. These pages give us a reflexive definition of the identity of the channel, of its project, and of the public to which it is addressed.

These pages function as representatives, interpreters and decoders of the undertaking in which the channel they present is engaged. They serve as a *proxy* for the channel.

In other words, there is a great difference between the impression a televised spot may have upon the viewer engaged in a natural reading of the show which has been offered to him and that produced by the reflexive attitude which the editing and reading of a web page assumes. It is important for the analyst to account in every possible way for the mechanisms operative in the inductive work of these spots. But this accounting must be done in such a way that what is revealed has more to do with what the viewer may grasp in watching the spot than what the researcher is able to find out in investigating--here, there, and everywhere--the immediate and spontaneous understanding that an ordinary audience might have of it.

We should add that the choice of language of presentation on the web is not neutral. In effect, the fact that the use of English makes the object of a page more or less specific and that the content of this page differs to some degree from that of its Arabic equivalent clearly indicates that, for the designers of this site, the people likely to surf the Web and to consult the site correspond to different audiences and may feel a different need to see an explanation of what the channel is. The English page on the Website is addressed then to visitors seeking information in English, the Arabic page to different visitors doubtless corresponding more to the actual audience of the channel. Though the spots themselves are intended for the audience of the channel who, in the expectation of the broadcasting of programs (to which the spots form a sort of interlude), may enjoy a form of entertainment which reinforces what the channel itself wants to say about itself, repeats what the said public knows about the channel (or at least what the designer of the spots think they know about the channel) and ratifies the viewer's choice of this channel rather than another.

- 1)  Independence, pluralism and professionalism

The al-Jazeera site targets Arabic-speaking as well as English-speaking audiences. Two different pages are thus dedicated to the presentation of the channel. The more detailed one is formulated in English--another, more succinct, in Arabic. Here is what we may read on the latter:

**The satellite channel al-Jazeera: the vision and the project**

Al-Jazeera is an audiovisual service of Arab affiliation and global orientation whose slogan is one opinion and the other opinion. It is a pluralist forum which aspires to truth and respects professional principles within an institutional framework.

If al-Jazeera is active in arousing public consciousness to matters which interest the whole world, it aspires to be a bridge between peoples and cultures which promotes human rights and the knowledge and values of tolerance, democracy, of respect for freedom and for human rights.

The themes of pluralism, truth and professionalism are explicitly mentioned in this text. In addition, there is the promotion of humanist values. It is good to note that following this summary presentation, the Arabic site proposes a “pact of professional honor” (*mîthâq al-sharaf al-mihanî*) and a “guide for professional behaviour” (*dalîl al-sulûk al-mihanî*).

The English page is organized, for its part, around several central topics. First of all it is the history of the channel, presented as the first of its kind in the Arab world, which has put itself forward as a source of pride, greatness and legitimacy. Al-Jazeera presents itself as at once independent and unable to be ignored.

Aljazeera has come a long way since it was launched in November 1996.

Today the channel that sent shockwaves through the whole Arab world from its very first day on air has become a global name which people, governments, and decision-makers cannot afford to ignore.

With more than 30 bureaus and dozens of correspondents covering the four corners of the world Aljazeera has given millions of people a refreshing new perspective on global events.

It is an English-speaking Arab audience targeted here, which is presented as having the right to benefit from information independent not only of the censorship of the United States, but also with of the stereotypes conveyed outside of the Arab world.

Free from the shackles of censorship and government control Aljazeera has offered its audiences in the Arab world much needed freedom of thought, independence, and room for debate. In the rest of the world, often dominated by the stereotypical thinking of news «heavyweights», Aljazeera offers a different and a new perspective.

The inverse of those media dominated by prejudices, al-Jazeera aims to offer coverage of the news which is balanced and objective, but also bears the mark of professionalism. The means necessary to this end have been mobilized, which has sometimes allowed the channel to outclass its competitors.

Aljazeera's correspondents opened a window for the world on the millennium's first two wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Our expanded coverage competed with and sometimes outperformed our competitors bringing into the spotlight the war's devastating impact on the lives of ordinary people.

We continue to cover all viewpoints with objectivity integrity and balance.  
So now when Aljazeera speaks, the world listens and «reads».

Freedom of speech is intrinsic to the philosophy of the channel. And it is the pluralism of ideas and opinions that the channel aims to encourage, echoing its tagline, “one opinion and the other opinion.”

Aljazeera.net is the online version of the same Aljazeera.

The website promises to raise traditionally sidelined questions and issues. It upholds the same philosophy of the mother organisation: “The right to speak up”. This translates into allowing everyone to express their opinion freely, encouraging debates, viewpoints and counter viewpoints.

Finally, the channel emphasizes its engagement with a program of truth. A multiplicity of sources and the pluralism of opinion and truth are presented as the two faces of an objective that is declined in the singular: *the* truth.

Our team of dedicated journalists with their multi-national education and diversified backgrounds share a common set of attributes: **objectivity**, **accuracy**, and a **passion for truth**.

Truth will be the force that will drive us to raise thorny issues, to seize every opportunity for exclusive reporting, to take hold of unforgettable moments in history and to rekindle the willpower within every human being who strives for truth.

It is possible to argue that, if the English page is more detailed than the Arabic page, it is doubtless because, for the website designers, the non Arabic-speaking public is more likely to feel the need to see explained what al-Jazeera is.

2)



The Islamic beacon of  
resistance and moral revival

The site of al-Manar likewise intends to target the Arabic- and English-speaking audiences. Each of the two versions offers a page dedicated to the presentation of the channel. Their content is, in part, different. Here is what one may read on the Arabic page:

#### Who are we?

Al-Manar is an audiovisual channel which began to broadcast over the airwaves in 1991 and by means of satellite in 2000. The station is addressed to Arabs and to Muslims in all the regions of the world, in an open, consensual discourse. It pursues political objectives. What moves it toward that, is a great ambition for cooperative construction--construction of a better future for Arab and Islamic generations and societies throughout the world, by means of reorientation around conciliatory religious values and the development of the culture of dialogue, of meeting and cooperation among the faithful of revealed religions and human civilizations. The channel is centered on the very remarkable worth of man and this centering serves as an axis for the revelations which aim to protect his dignity, his liberty and the development of the spiritual and moral dimensions of his personality. The station avoids dealing with events and subjects of a vulgar

type in order to concentrate with objectivity on the construction of valid questions and of greatest interest for the whole Community of believers, all the while placing emphasis in the broadcasting of its news programs on the ethical criteria of the journalistic profession recognized by internationally established laws and traditions. In this way it has been able, in a short time, to occupy a central place in the space of Arab media and to polarize a very large mass of Arab viewers within the country as well as outside it; in this way it has appeared as the most accurate expression of Arab and Muslim life. Al-Manar is a member of the Union of Broadcasters of the Arab countries of the League of Arab States.

We notice first that the Arabic text identifies the audience of the channel as “Arabs and Muslims of the whole world.” Furthermore it emphasizes its work of promoting religious and ethical values. Finally, it emphasizes its professionalism and its concern for objectivity.

On its English page, al-Manar presents itself as a voice that, in the name of God, will be a distinctive one in the Lebanese media landscape.

### **In His Name Be He Exalted**

June 3, 1991 was not an ordinary date at all, for it witnessed the birthday of an extraordinary TV station that has promised to be different, compared to the general visual media in Lebanon.

This alternative voice is justified, the text of the page continues, by the weakness of other media faced with the Israeli occupation of Lebanese and the Palestinian territories, and with the suffering which accompanies the legitimate resistance which they give rise to.

There have been a lot of visual media in that country that had just emerged from a destructive civil war and that has a detested Israeli occupation on 20% of its small soil (10452 Km) ; none of these TV networks, however, really shouldered the concern of the occupied parts in the South and West Bekaa whether in giving the resistance activity its right in the media or in true sympathy with the suffering of the occupied territories ; therefore, it has not been strange for the South and Bekaa to be inflaming with the fire of Israeli aggression while singers chant on numerous TV channels simultaneously. There had to be a TV that committed itself to put in images the suffering of our people in the occupied territories, the victims of Israeli arrogance, and that of those living in areas bordering the occupation who suffer its semi-daily aggressions, besides focusing on the Resistance activity and establishing its role, hoping to formulate a resistance-nation governed by justice and equality; thus Manar saw the light of day.

This being the case, the channel presents itself also as the place of the spiritual movement against western decadence, depraved customs and apology for violence, of which other Lebanese media would make themselves the champions and propagators.

Despite its huge burden on every Lebanese, the occupation was not the one and only concern. Lebanese TV channels have been overwhelmed by a trend of movies and programs that can only be described as immoral. At the time when the Lebanese - such as any people coming out of a devastating civil war - needed what could erase the effects of that conflict and work on building the personality of good citizenship, numerous TV channels have been broadcasting programs that would decay one's ethics and provoke his or her instincts in addition to instigating violence and identifying with western living patterns which are quite remote from our Islamic and Eastern values and culture. Here, once again, there was a desperate need for a channel that parents would be reassured when they knew their children were watching; then Manar was there

The agenda of al-Manar is presented, then, on both exterior and interior fronts at once. In this respect, the theme of social justice occupies an important place.

In addition to that, Manar has not stayed aloof from the suffering of the Lebanese throughout the country ; on the contrary, it has involved in public affair information, brought out the suffering and deprivation of our people and spoken out for solving their social, economical and educational problems. It has also criticized injustice and corruption in the country, demanding the achievement of the justice and equality state.

Besides, the channel also wishes to see itself as a source of ethical entertainment

In addition to that, Manar has not stayed aloof from the suffering of the Lebanese throughout the country [...] Furthermore, Manar TV observes the cultural activity [...] without forgetting the youth and their interests, focusing on constructive entertainment programs for them in addition to many sports programs [...] - away from moral decay and direct them towards formulating better personality.

Al-Manar does not hide its religious engagement--quite the contrary. Its intent is to be a militant channel serving as a guide inspired by religious Law, *shari'a*.

Manar stays, as its name, a guide and usher that draws its principles and laws from the magnanimous Sharia to come out every day and be seen by those who are eager to know the truth and entertain themselves with something that would not draw the anger of the Almighty or contribute to corrupting them and their children. A vow taken and will be kept, inshAllah.

The fact that these pages on which al-Manar presents itself differ somewhat according to the language of expression shows only that the intent of the designers varies according to the public that it aims to address. Whereas, in Arabic, this audience is principally mobilized around religious and national values, it is resistance and religious and moral values that the English page promotes. It is, then, not the channel's usual audience that is targeted on the English page, but certainly those who would be searching for information concerning it.

3) **WELCOME TO ALHURRA** **الحرّة ترحب بكم** When the American people offer free choice

The webpage of al-Hurra on which the channel presents itself is the only one of the three pages to be published simultaneously in the two languages--English and Arabic. The al-Hurra site is very little developed. Essentially, it aims to publish the programs. The English and Arabic texts are identical. The designers of the page also feel the need to explain the nature of their enterprise to the Arabic-speaking audience of the channel and to those searching for information in English.

The channel presents itself as focused mainly on the production of news and of information, at the same time not neglecting broadcasts of entertainment.

Alhurra (Arabic for "The Free One") is a commercial-free Arabic-language satellite television network for the Middle East devoted primarily to news and information. In addition to reporting on regional and international events, the channel broadcasts discussion programs, current affairs magazines and features on a variety of subjects including health and personal fitness, entertainment, sports, fashion, and science and technology

Engaged in the production of accurate and balanced information, al-Hurra assigns itself the mission of broadening the horizons of the viewers and thus giving them the possibility of making informed choices.

The channel is dedicated to presenting accurate, balanced and comprehensive news. Alhurra endeavors to broaden its viewers' perspectives, enabling them to make more informed decisions.

Finally, the al-Hurra page mentions briefly its source of financing--namely, the US Congress, which it presents as the agent of the American people. In any case, the text continues, this does not impinge on the independence and the professional integrity of its journalists.

Alhurra is operated by a non-profit corporation called "The Middle East Television Network, Inc." (MTN). MTN is financed by the American people through the U.S. Congress. MTN receives this funding from the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), an independent and autonomous Federal agency. The BBG serves as a firewall to protect the professional independence and integrity of the broadcasters.

## **Conclusion**

The "self-presentations" which these three channels carry out are a projection of their own identity as well as the identity of those whom they claim to address. Relying on different scenes, situations, problems, incidents, news items, investigations, attitudes or events marking the life of every society, to which they strive to give, explicitly or implicitly, a signification, these spots are creators of ontologically subjective, but epistemologically objective identities (Searle, 1995). By "ontologically subjective," we mean that these spots seem to answer the questions, "Who am I?" and "Who are you?" By "epistemologically objective," we mean that these identities so created attain a degree of obviousness outside of individual interpretation. In other words, the channels produce the objectivity of their own identity and that of their public ("we know whom we are addressing and they know whom they are watching").

Analysis of questions of identity, belief, and behaviour is largely dominated by Habermassian inquiries concerning the public sphere. However, far from constituting a sociological tool, these amount to a normative conception of the public space. We, on the other hand, have taken an approach that aims to describe exactly what happens when specific actors orient themselves contextually toward a specific public.

Reality is inescapably mundane (Pollner, 1987), which means that, contrary to what Baudrillard claims, appearances are real (Bjelic, 1999) in the sense that what people say in certain circumstances is certainly what they want to say. But the preference is entirely contingent upon the

circumstances, since no position exists detached from context. This epistemological orientation has the advantage of permitting one to argue that discourses should be considered distinctively as “circumstantialized” discourses intended for certain audiences in specific contexts. In brief, we might argue that discourses are oriented toward *audiences* rather than toward *an* audience and, above all, that they are oriented toward the audience that they ascribe to themselves, which constitutes a virtual community (Livet, 1994). The discourses are real, the audience is virtual: it is the audience which one wishes to address or the audience that one imagines.

We should, in addition, emphasize that identities are closely linked to courses of action and to the orientation of interactants toward a public at once specific and virtual, since it is seen through a self-evident set of categorizations. The public of a mosque is thus composed of “Muslims”, the “Arab” public of “Arabs,” in such a way that it is the referent of the discourse that “modalizes” identity. Taking into account the dialogic and polyphonic nature of discourse, several identities may be put into play in the same sequence: Arab identity, Islamic identity, modernity (in the sense of a discourse based on the rights of man and international law) may follow one another easily from one sentence to the other. These identities become contextually relevant according to the discursive performances in which they are inserted (Matoesian, 2001:108). It is proper then, first of all, to consider referents of identity only from within the discourses oriented toward them rather than to consider them as the clearly identified source of discourses (Moerman, 1974). It is necessary, further, to not consider identities as expressing a global, in effect civilizational position, regarding questions that are themselves globally perceived. Attention brought to bear on the completely contextualized dynamic of discourses, the orientation toward different audiences in the course of each one, and their dialogic and polyphonic character, should thus show clearly the illusory nature of every interpretation. On the other hand, such an investigation should also show the relationship, growing ever closer, among sets of categorizations used, the audience toward which the discourse is oriented, and the media through which it passes--that is to say, the specification of audiences according to contingent and circumstantial criteria.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SPEAKING THE TRUTH Advocacy Video Clips against Terror<sup>21</sup>



TV channels produce a whole range of video-clips, some of them with a political, advocacy tonality. The spectator, in his natural attitude, understands these stories within a practical grammar made of ordinary sense-making practices, shared categorization devices, and background knowledge of issues relevant for the audience he is a member of. Watching Arabic-speaking TV channels, we observed a series of video-clips which, in less than one minute, proposed contrasted narratives denouncing terror and terrorism. In this paper, we address the practical grammar these clips displayed of the specific language game of truth-telling narratives about terror.

Epistemologically, we draw on praxiology and the philosophy of language, pursuing the exploration of the production of media items and especially the relationship it reflects between audio-video techniques and claims to truth-telling (Dupret, Nekvapil, Leudar 2007 & 2008)<sup>22</sup>. In a Wittgensteinian-ethnomethodology inspired way, we claim that these video-clips, which associate pictures, texts, sounds and music in a sequence, have a natural intelligibility. Indeed, these clips create a structure of relevance directly (though perhaps imperfectly) available to an ordinarily competent audience of these media. Such an audience understands these normatively/morally organized video-clips through normatively/morally constituted sense-making practices. Our aim is therefore to analytically describe the audio-video production available to members of the audience and the methods they must mobilize to understand the narrative and its advocacy message. It shows how these video-clips produce, and are produced by, a master narrative whose interpretation method is documentary, that is, retrospectively grounded on what is “known in common” and prospectively oriented to the further inferences it makes possible.

As nicely summarized by Hutchby (2006: 6-10), media studies have long focused on the effects of broadcasts on their audiences. This is where one can locate the debates on the “narcotizing effect” of the mass media, their contribution to the “dumbing down” of culture, or the “desensitization” to violence. The main outcome of effects research was to treat the members of media audiences as “cultural dopes who are conditioned or acted upon by the media outside of their own active awareness” (*id.*: 6). Alternatives to effects studies were no more satisfactory, since, although taking the audiences as active consumers of media products, they were equally considering these audiences in crude behaviouristic terms, i.e. as having “needs” more or less “gratified” by media consumables. As a critique of these many perspectives and their common assumptions, a hermeneutic theory was developed in which media products were seen as “texts” which can be read and interpreted, much like literary artefacts. Ricœur (1981) is famous for his triangle model, where the author’s intention, the text and the reader’s reception are associated to produce textual meaning. In a more functionalist perspective, the media-qua-text model took the shape of an encoding/decoding process, both ends of which being susceptible of empirical inquiry. Studies of broadcast talk developed out of a critique of the relationship the encoding/decoding model establishes between media productions and their audiences. They point to the praxiological “missing-what” of the hermeneutic project, which gives little attention to the circumstances of media production. Taking broadcast talk as a phenomenon in its own right, these studies emphasize

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<sup>21</sup> This chapter was written with Enrique Klaus’s assistance.

<sup>22</sup> See e.g. the papers of Bjelic (2007), Jayyusi (2007) and Dupret & Ferrié (2007 & 2008):  
<http://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/disciplines/sociology/about/events/ethnography/journal/>

that “the structure and the content of messages [cannot be considered] independent of the interactional medium within which they are generated” (Heritage, Clayman, Zimmerman 1988: 79-80).

Although, at some point, some ethnomethodologists used to refer to media material as texts (e.g. Jayyusi 1988, 1991), the text in ethnomethodological studies does not share the meaning it has in most communication theories. Indeed, the text metaphor only serves to designate an audio-visual material product endowed with intelligibility structures and devices. Engaging in the praxiological study of such “texts” means therefore not only attending to their semantic dimensions, but also focusing on the categorization, sequence, and context features within which any reading practice of the text is necessarily embedded. Instead of assuming what the text’s author has in mind when writing or editing it, praxiological studies tangentially adopts the reader’s natural attitude when confronted with the so-called media text. Because texts are meant to be read and understood, their complexity does not imply opacity, but on the contrary accessibility, albeit to competent readers, who read it with the means they use to understand the order and properties of the social and natural world (Jayyusi, 1984: 289).

We proceed in two times: (1) we detail the selected video-clips and describe their socio-logic at the level of singular shots, embedded sequences and global narratives; (2) we concentrate on the categorial and sequential organisation of the narratives. In conclusion, we show how these video-clips are geared toward truth-telling through the documentary production of master narratives which mirror and/or counter each other.

### **The practical grammar of contrasted video-clips about terror**

It is now time to turn to our data, which we take not as samples of anything, but as perspicuous instances of media production. This kind of analysis is praxiological in the sense that it involves the elucidation of meaning structures as made available and understandable in the action of watching the video-clips. It addresses the practical grammar of these clips and the socio-logic against which it functions at many levels, among which category selections, presuppositions and implications, practical inferences, sequential organization, utterance design and narrativization.

These data are made of two video-clips addressing the issue of terrorism in the Middle-East. The first one could be watched on Al-Arabiya News Channel, while the other was available on Al-Manar TV. While many things might be said about each of these satellite channels, we stick to the “natural attitude” perspective we advocate and reduce our introduction to these channels to what they make available about themselves. Concerning Al-Arabiya, which is known for being funded by Saudi sponsors, we can read on the frontpage of its English website<sup>23</sup>:



Al Arabiya News Channel was launched on March 3, 2003 to provide credible, timely and relevant news about the Arab world.

Based in Dubai Media City, Al Arabiya is a 24-hour Arabic-language news channel broadcasting across five continents to millions of viewers. With a global network of correspondents and bureaus in 40 major cities around the world, Al Arabiya has become a leading source of Arabic-language news throughout the world.

The channel has won numerous regional and international awards for its coverage, which caters to the interests of Arab audiences in politics, business, current affairs, sports, science and lifestyle with hourly news bulletins, in-depth documentaries, talk-shows, and educational programs.

Al Arabiya employs highly-qualified experts in the television industry to provide viewers with the best in terms of form and content. It also encourages the work of young Arab directors and promotes their documentaries.

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<sup>23</sup> [http://www.alarabiya.net/en/about\\_aa\\_tv.html](http://www.alarabiya.net/en/about_aa_tv.html)

Al Arabiya is part of MBC Group, the largest news and entertainment broadcaster in the Middle East, reaching an estimated 130 million Arabic-speaking people around the world.

Al Arabiya's reach extends throughout the Middle East, Asia Pacific, South East Asia, North Africa, Europe, the Americas and Australia via the following satellites and cable operators: Arabsat Badr 4, Nilesat 101, HotBird 2, PAS 9, Dish Network.

As for Al-Manar, which is better known as the Lebanese Hezbollah's mouthpiece, we can read on its English homepage<sup>24</sup>:



Al-Manar is a Lebanese TV station, it beamed its first terrestrial signal in 1991 and it began broadcasting via satellite in the year 2000. The Channel approaches Arabs and Muslims all over the world with an open unifying speech.

It assumes objective policy motivated by the ambitions of participation in building better future for the Arab and Muslim generations by focusing on the tolerant values of Islam and promoting the culture of dialogue and cooperation among the followers of the Heavenly religions and

human civilizations. It focuses on highlighting the value of the human being as the center of the Godly messages which endeavor to save his dignity and freedom and develop the spiritual and moral dimensions of his personality.

Al-Manar avoids cheap incitement in dealing with developments and activities, and it stresses objectively on the adoption of the fair and just causes of the whole nation.

Al-Manar was able in a very short period to occupy a leading post among the other Arab satellite stations and to draw a large number of Arab viewers inside the Arab world and in the countries of immigration, and it became the true reflection of what each and every Muslim and Arab thinks and believes in.

Al-Manar is an active member of the Arab states broadcasting union, part of the Arab League.

Both broadcasters offer short narratives in which they condemn terrorism, either explicitly through motos like "terror has no religion" or implicitly through the ascription of the quality of "terrorist" to specifically designated categories of people. They take the form of one-minute clips, often presented in interlude periods, combining images, text, sound and music in order to complete a blame-implicative message. We shall successively review the particulars of selected shots and sequences of both clips, before turning to the production of their global narratives.

### *Shots*

Since we deal in this section with isolate pictures, it seems relevant to start with a couple of remarks about photographs and their representing scenes within the world. Are they to be considered in terms of a paradox between nature (the trace of something) and culture (a social construction)? As L. Jayyusi (1991) puts it: "The major theoretical thrust has been to emphasise the 'cultural' character of photographic objects over and against the illusion of their 'natural' status", and this proved detrimental to the analysis of photographic intelligibility. First, by stressing the picture as a cultural artefact, one risks missing a discrete and obvious feature of photographic "reading", that is, its being grounded on social, natural (mundane) sense-making practices. Second, the theoretically open-ended nature of photo interpretation proves, when taken in its praxiological dimension, far less polysemic; meaning, in many cases, turns to be instructed and overdetermined.

Taken in isolation, actions-within-pictures have both a glance-availability and an independent trajectory. It means that they can be seen for what they are in the picture, as available to any ordinarily competent viewer/watcher; however, and simultaneously, they are embedded in a trajectory which has understandably started before the camera shooting and ended after. In Figure 1, caption NT03/47, of the No Terror video-clip featured by Al-Arabiya (NT hereafter), we see young boys playing football: we understand it for what it is and we also know that their playing football started before the camera set in motion and has eventually ended after it stopped shooting (and this is not made available by the camera). Despite the fact that most of the trajectory of the action-

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<sup>24</sup> <http://www.almanar.com.lb/NewsSite/AboutUs.aspx?language=en>

within-pictures is situated outside what the camera directly makes available, it is not only the picture which is understood for what it is, but the whole trajectory. This *Gestalt* structure of picture reading can be explained by the fact that the picture, in and through itself, triggers categorization devices reaching far beyond direct visual availability (Jayyusi, 1991). In our case, among the many categorization devices which are made available, we can mention those of “sport practice” (playing football), “age of life” (young people), “gender” (boys), “local geography” (street football), “cultural geography” (an Arab popular neighborhood), which all prove ordinarily visible and accessible, indeed “scenically transparent” (*ibid.*). In caption NT19/47, it is rather the single device of “nationhood” (the Iraqi flag) which is mobilized, and its being on the ground infers its downfall and induces the menace of being trampled. In caption NT29/47, we observe the devices of “notabilities” (civil and religious leaders), which is paired collaboratively, and “figures of authority” (wisdom-powered or gun-powered), which is paired oppositionally. Here again, there is a whole trajectory which is made available, although it is not directly accessible in the pictures: there was somebody or some building raising the flag before it was thrown down, and there will be somebody to raise it again despite the enemies and their propensity to look for the downfall of the Iraqi nation; the neighborhood is made of all social layers, including civil and religious notabilities, and their resilience, wisdom and solidarity enable them to counter raw force.

#### Excerpt 1 – No Terror: isolate pictures

NT03/47 boys playing football



NT19/47 Iraqi flag on the ground



NT29/47 notabilities facing gun



This holds equally true for pictures in the al-Manar video-clip (MN hereafter), as excerpted in Figure 2. Caption MN03/19 presents the face of a baby on his coffin during the funerals. This is especially deductive and inductive, in the sense that the scene which is captured necessarily indexes the violence in which his death originates and the massive demonstration accompanying his burial. Caption MN08/19 is the picture of a crowd acclaiming the destruction of a mosque, and this contingently refers to the occupation of Palestinian territories and the abuse committed by the occupier. Finally, Caption MN11/19 shows the rubbles of a house, which is just one frozen instance in the trajectory stretching from the bombing of civilian areas in Palestine to a whole family being deprived of its shelter.

#### Excerpt 2 – Al-Manar: isolate pictures

MN03/19 baby on coffin



MN08/19 the crowd



MN11/19 ruined house



Independent of the place it will occupy in specific sequences and global narratives, these pictures provide for their own direct intelligibility. Caption NT03/47, while staging boys playing football in the street, is self-sufficient for telling the viewer that the scene is that of ordinary people’s daily life in some Iraqi urban environment. We do not know about what happened to the game before and

after this specific shooting, and we do not need to know in order to recognize the scene and understand it. In that sense, we can speak of isolate pictures as autonomous narratives. These “one-shot narratives” have a kind of allusiveness which makes it possible to characterize them as proto-narratives, or better – since this is not only bound to temporal ordering – as alluding, underdetermined narratives: the picture’s intelligibility is given in terms of both the particulars immediately available to the eye and the off-camera particulars which are not visible “but nevertheless praxiologically present”: “the actual naturally-occurring trajectory of the action is invisible yet ‘animates’, and is embodied within, what is visible within the frame, and it is read in terms of the ‘natural history’ of the particulars that are visible” (*ibid.*). There is a narrative of the football game which is made available, although it is not directly visible; and there is a narrative of civilian houses in MN11/47, although we just see the concrete rubbles which remain after the bombing. There is also a narrative of the normalcy of the place, the scene or the people which is alluded to in the picture, although it is never said in so many words: the normalcy of a boyish football game in a popular street (NT03/47) or the normalcy of the people’s dress (NT29/47); or even the normalcy of death (MN03/47) and destruction (MN11/19) in a Palestinian environment, although in this case normalcy is built as a consolidated non-normalcy (what should be the case of exceptional times is just a normal scene in this very context). Note that the expectable trajectory of the normal narrative of an object can turn deluded, as with the flag (NT19/47): in this case, the object is framed in a situation which can be considered as abnormal with regard to the specific values and accordingly the normal activity bound to it.

Familiarity plays a particular role in the process of making praxiologically present trajectories and courses of action which are not explicitly present within the frame of the camera. Places, faces, scenes or dress codes index not only categories of people and locations, but activities which are bound to these categories. In the No Terror pictures, we see how scenes (NT03/47: ordinary boyish football game in a popular street), objects (NT19/47: the Iraqi flag on the ground) or stereotypical dress codes and faces (NT29/47: notabilities in their customary costume) frame the narrative in a way which indexes an ordinary though prototypical Iraqi environment and the many activities of an ordinary day in an ordinary street. In the al-Manar pictures (Figure 2), the familiarity is of a different type, since it uses documentary archives. It is a familiarity with “witness-able”, actually occurring, situations in the Palestinian environment: burial of a baby (MN03/19), crowd shouting support (MN08/19), rubbles of a house (MN11/19). These pictures freeze one specific time in trajectories of actions made praxiologically present though materially invisible: bombing of innocent people, profanation of holy places, destruction of civilian houses. These pictures also index a place, Palestine, although very differently from what is done with No Terror: it is an index of history, i.e. it points to events the history of which cannot be contested (as specifically indicated in the reference to these as non-fiction pictures that come “from the field” through the mention in the left top corner of the word “*mubâshir*”, “live” in Arabic). In other words, while the No Terror pictures induce the context of an Iraqi popular place from the staging of its stereotypical features, the al-Manar pictures deduce the Palestinian context from the reporting of historical-qua-stereotypical events.

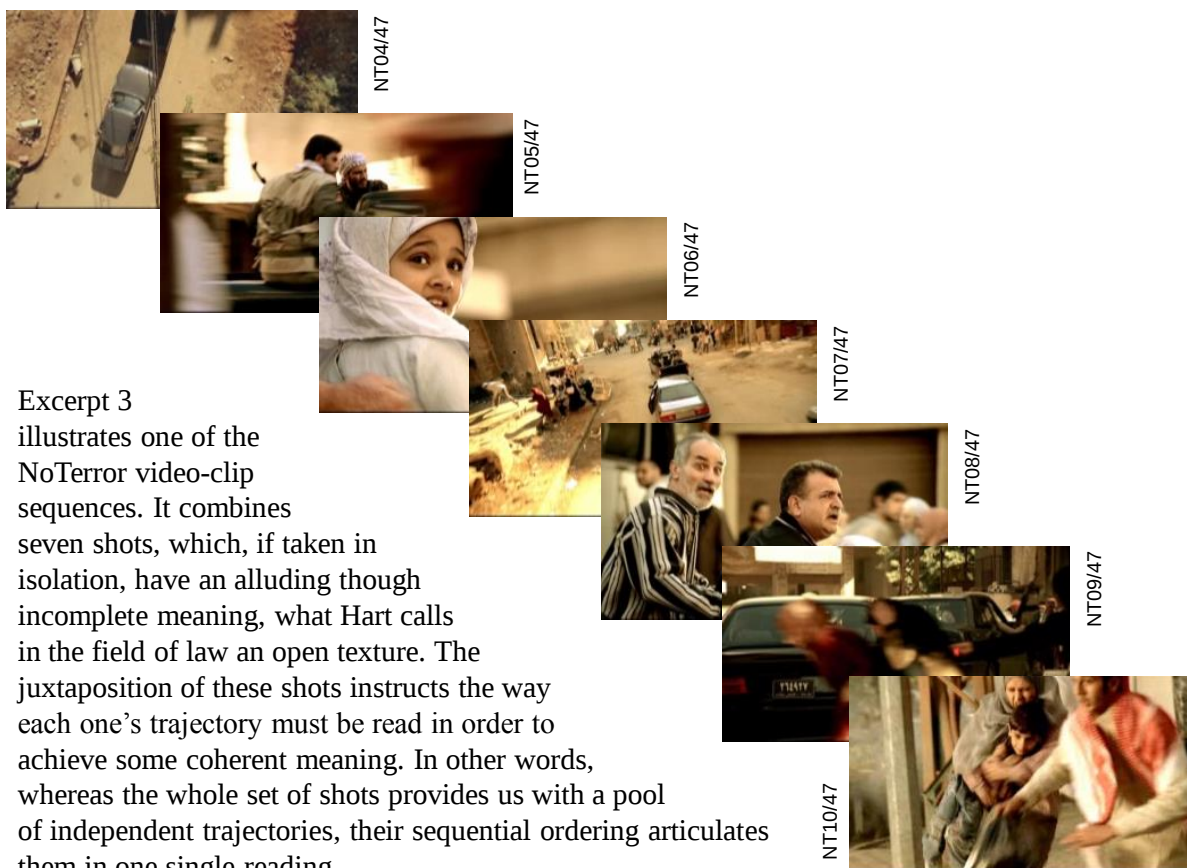
Photographs are not read in a vacuum: “There is always and unavoidably, some context that provides and makes available, if only implicitly, some account of the observability and reportability of the ‘scene’” (*ibid.*). Captions, during or at the end of each video-clip, often play this role of disambiguation: they reflexively account for the picture’s readability/observability/reportability. The TV channel on which the viewer is connected also provides a context to which the clip is accountable and which is itself accountable of the clip’s readability: “It is this context which provides for you what it is that I am holding up to view within and in those photos that are reprinted here” (*ibid.*). However, it is not the context alone, in isolation, which provides this readability, but

both the photograph and the context in which the photograph is made visible: their respective intelligibilities are predicated upon each other. When watching al-Manar's video-clip, I am reminded (e.g. by the channel's logo in the top right corner of the pictures) that I am watching al-Manar TV, i.e. an Arabic-speaking channel whose commitment to resistance against Israel is known in common by quite everybody and made visible throughout the channel's programs. When watching the No Terror video-clip on al-Arabiya, I know that I am watching an Arabic-speaking news channel which often features spots advertising the reconstruction of Iraq. In other words, the selection of the channel on which I watch the video-clip is a constraining feature of my watching the video-clip: it provides for the context of this clip's intelligibility, while at the same time, the clip itself provides for the channel's categorization.

### *Sequences*

Each shot is in itself an alluding narrative. However, in the video-clip, it is also displayed in a sequential way, in juxtaposition with other shots. In that sense it is part of an emerging and unfolding sequence, which is both distinct from and constitutive of the global narrative. It reveals how far the whole product is a laminated object, with the many implicit and explicit trajectories of shots, sequences and global narrative intertwined through the complex grammatical organization of pictures.

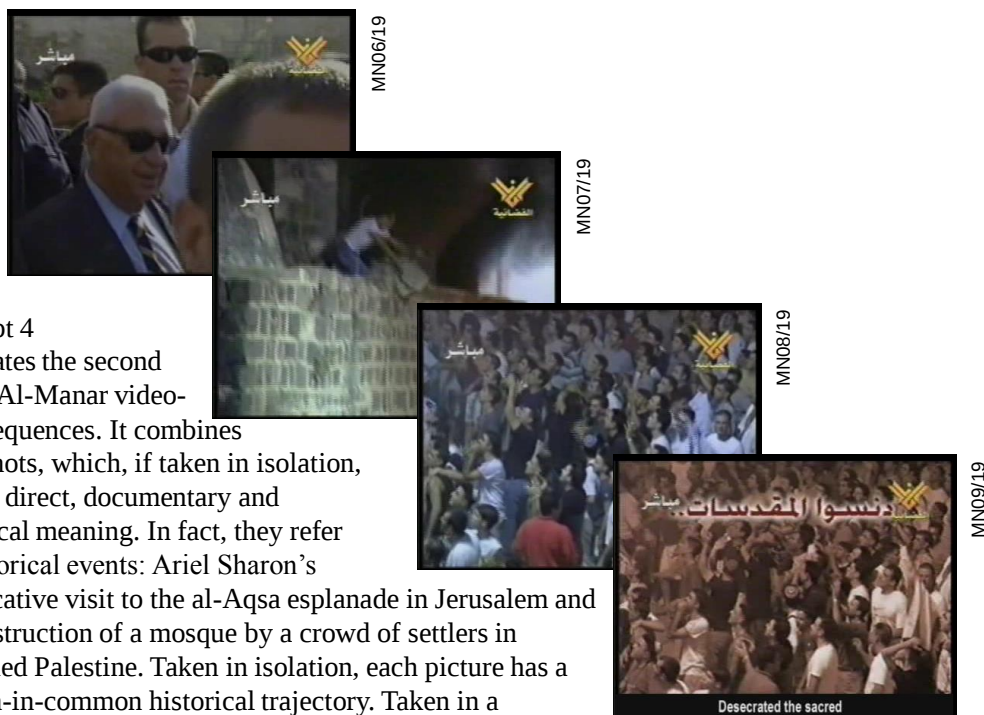
#### **Excerpt 3 – NoTerror: the armed-men-bursting-in-the-square sequence**



One sees a convoy of cars running fast on a dirt road (NT04/47). Armed men are sitting at the rear of a pick-up car (NT05/47), and by virtue of being placed after the former shot this is the picture of armed-men-sitting-at-the-rear-of-the-pick-up-car-in-the-convoy-of-cars-running-fast. In other words, the juxtaposition indexes the car at the rear of which they sit as the car which was pictured in the former shot: juxtaposition has a transitive effect. Then NT06/47 figures a girl's face

which is easily recognized as a frightened face. In isolation, this would beg the question of the causal source of such fear. In a sequence, the attribution of fear to the seeing of armed-men-sitting-at-the-rear-of-the-pick-up-car-in-the-convoy-of-cars-running-fast is done in a natural way. NT05/47 disambiguates NT06/47, while NT06/47 channels the trajectory of NT05/47 by instantiating one possible consequences of the look of armed men: juxtaposition has a causal effect which is achieved in a documentary interpretive way (the picture-in-the-sequence takes its meaning from the emerging narrative and it reflexively gives meaning to it). When back to the cars in convoy in NT07/47, we have no problem to equate these with what we saw in NT04/47, not so much because the cars look the same, but mainly because we are already immersed in a trajectory which we spontaneously accompany instead of looking for weakly plausible alternates. It shows one of Sacks' reader's maxim: if two pictures placed in juxtaposition can be read as the later one following the former one, just read it that way. NT08-10/47 duplicates the fear instantiated in NT06/47. However, another factor contributes to the production of this effect: the audio track (with automatic rifle shooting), which gives some new explanation to the people's attitudes. In this case, causation is produced by the juxtaposition of video and audio, the latter combining live sounds and dramatic music. It shows that, on the one hand, the sequence is organized in a laminated way in which one layer (e.g. audio) can causally produce the other (e.g. video); on the other hand, the whole narrative is dramatically produced so as to progressively reach a foreseen though unknown apex.

#### Excerpt 4 – Al-Manar: they desecrated the sacred places



Excerpt 4 illustrates the second of the Al-Manar video-Clip sequences. It combines four shots, which, if taken in isolation, have a direct, documentary and indexical meaning. In fact, they refer to historical events: Ariel Sharon's provocative visit to the al-Aqsa esplanade in Jerusalem and the destruction of a mosque by a crowd of settlers in occupied Palestine. Taken in isolation, each picture has a known-in-common historical trajectory. Taken in a sequence, these pictures instruct in a very direct way the reading of the written conclusion: "they desecrated the sacred places".

The first picture (MN06/19) identifies the subject of the sequence as *the* archetypal enemy. This picture is made of "wh-" questions: where, when, who, why and what, which all together head toward a foreseen though still unspecified conclusion. For anybody familiar with the Middle-East and its conflicts, this picture indexes the face of Israel's former Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon (the "who"), during his (in)famous parade (the "what") on the al-Aqsa esplanade (the "where") in September 2000 (the "when"), which is perceived by Arabs as having purposefully (the "why")

ignited the second Palestinian uprising. Yet, the shot is not self-sustainable, as nothing directly indexes the place and the time of what it captures. It leans therefore on the viewer's competency to frame it in a horizon of familiarity, recognizability and understanding. This horizon is in this case the historical though hidden (because not on the screen) trajectory of the shot, i.e. what anticipated and followed the precise moment of its capture. The picture opens a series of possible inferences as to what Sharon is doing: parading, desecrating, provoking, igniting, etc. The following shot (MN07/19) reinforces the feeling that it has to do with the breaching of the sacredness of Islamic places, as it pictures somebody (who could contextually be seen as a Jewish settler) on the top of what appears as a mosque (because of the dome and the minaret it partly shows) pulling free and throwing a parpen, with a crowd of Israeli Jewish people (some of them wear a kippa and another brandishes an Israeli flag) applauding the spectacle (MN08/19). Although these two last shots index a historical event that has not the iconic dimension of the former, it nevertheless refers to a series of features making this scene of Jews-rejoicing-at-the-demolition-of-a-mosque eligible to the status of evidences of the sequence caption: "they desecrated the sacred". This caption works as a formulation, that is, something like a summary, a conclusion, a paraphrase of the gist of previous talk and the like, which preserves, deletes, and transforms preceding talk (Heritage & Watson, 1979). The figure of Sharon and the scene of the demolisher acquire the exclusive sense of desecrators, canceling, for the practical purpose of the syllogistic demonstration achieved by the spot, any other possible interpretation. In that sense, the meaning of the sequence is produced prospectively by each shot and retrospectively determined by the formulation, which itself serves as a building block for the global narrative's argument.

### *Narratives*

If shots convey a proper meaning that is embedded in their piecemeal and sequential organization, the sum of these sequences is productive of a global narrative. This idea of a global narrative should be understood in terms of a whole/parts Gestalt production, that is, the unfolding of a story some details of which gain prominence according to their significance in the understanding of the general whole, while other details are confined to the background and actually disappear from the narrative which the spectator is told. In the rabbit-duck drawing (cf. *supra*), we saw how the indentation takes, when placed at the bottom and against the intentioned figure of a typical rabbit head, the singular value of a mouth, while the same indentation was discarded when placed at the right side of the picture and against the background of a typical duck head. In a similar way, details of the many shots and sequences take a particular relevance because of the place they occupy and the function they achieve within the global narrative, while other details do not and are therefore generally discarded.

Figure 5 seeks to detail the many steps through which the No Terror video-clip produces a narrative that can be tentatively summarized as follows: "Against terrorist violence, only steadfastness, courage and communal solidarity can restore the nation and make the enemy withdraw." Note that there might be alternative selections of the relevant shots and sequences which together lead to the production of one and the same narrative. A narrative is a threaded structure that proceeds, from an opening to a closing, through the many steps of a story presenting a surface immediately accessible to any competent reader/viewer. In this case, it starts with the overhanging view of a crossroad in a popular neighborhood where cars and people are engaging in their daily business (NT01-03/47). Suddenly, cars burst into the square (NT04-07/47) and frighten people (NT06/47, 08/47). Armed men step out of these cars (NT08/47) and start shooting around, kicking and hitting elders and youngsters with their rifles (NT11-23/47). Suddenly something happens that obviously puzzles them (NT24/47). There is a man in the middle of the street who stands still on his own and faces the terrorists while the others keep on fleeing (NT26-28/47). Withstanding the threat of rifles, this Arab tribal figure is right after joined by other notabilities, who stand shoulder to

shoulder (NT29-30/47) and are joined by other people (NT31-35/47), among whom a boy raising the Iraqi flag (NT36-38/47). Together, they face the terrorists, who start retreating (NT40-44/47), and the caption reads: “Know your enemy”. The narrative ends with the overhanging picture, turning black and white, of the terrorists surrounded by the crowd, on which the superimposed conclusion reads: “Terrorism has no religion, terrorism has no nationhood” (NT45-47/47).

#### Excerpt 5 – NoTerror: the nationhood-vs-terror narrative

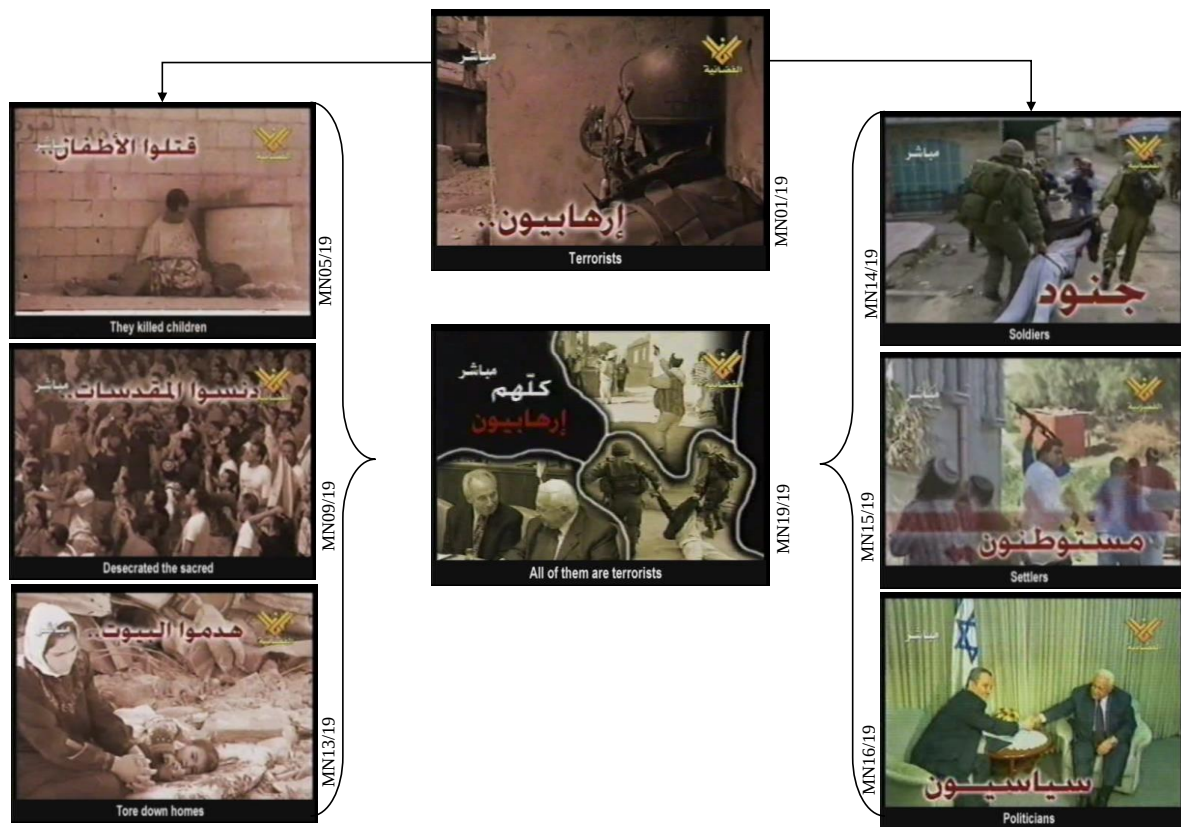


The No Terror video-clip is built as a fiction narrative which is constrained by its one-minute format. In other words, it intentionally stages in a constrained framework the protagonists of an intrigue and grounds its persuasive force in its capacity to present a short and simple though Manichean story. This narrative is scripted and intentioned by the spot's editor who took his/her shots accordingly, i.e., for the specific and practical purpose of producing an advocacy short story. There is a kind of realism in this production in the sense that the film was shot outdoors, in an actual Arab/Iraqi neighborhood, in the environment of a street the particulars of which look “natural”. Yet, the story itself does not aim especially at realism: it is a moral fable. The editor accentuates the characteristic features of each one of the many parties and does not strive for a faithful account of the complexity of psychological figures and situations; to the contrary, s/he contrasts characters, behaviors and situations in order to reach for a conclusion which explicitly carries a moral teaching: courage, solidarity and unity necessarily win over cowardice, factionalism and parochialism.

Figure 6 seeks to detail the global narrative of the al-Manar video-clip. It presents a structure that is totally different from the No Terror one. It starts with a heading showing the back of a soldier's head with a written caption: “terrorists..” (MN01/19). Then, it proceeds with two lists of three items, themselves subdivided into lists of three shots. Note that all these lists are organized in three parts. Three-part lists are one of the most effective techniques of communication and are widely

utilized (Atkinson, 1984). To quote Matoesian (2001:92), “Lists are expansive techniques for producing family resemblances, for creating a conceptual unity between otherwise diverse elements in a perceptual field, and for classifying actions through a rhythmically textured and progressively expanded litany of similar items.” Generally composed of three items, they ground their effectiveness in the production of a sense of unity and wholeness and in the mounting power of their poetic rhythm. At the same time, they avoid the danger of wordiness and lead naturally to a conclusion which occurs as a real *denouement* of the micro-drama built up by the morphological and semantic repetition. In the al-Manar video-clip, there are two main three-part lists of visual (recognizable by the sepia color of the picture) and textual (which reads as the ascription of an evil deed to an anonymous “they”) formulations: the first one is made of activities; the second of categories of people. As for the list of activities, it is itself subdivided into another three-part list made of visual items. It works as follows. Firstly, the succession of a baby bleeding on a hospital bed (MN02/19), another baby exposed in his shroud during the burial ceremony (MN03/19), and a boy seeking shelter behind a man who calls for help (MN04/19) heads toward the formulation “they killed the children” (*qatalû al-atfâl*) (MN05/19). Note that the third picture has an iconic value, since it is immediately recognized by any competent viewer as the dreadful death of Muhammad al-Durra at the beginning of the second Palestinian Intifada. Secondly, the succession of the Sharon visit (cf. supra; MN06/19), the destruction of the mosque (cf. supra; MN07/19), and the crowd rejoicing at the spectacle (cf. supra; MN08/19) heads toward the formulation “they desecrated the sacred places” (*dannasû al-muqaddasât*) (MN09/19). Thirdly, the succession of a bulldozer tearing down a parpen wall (MN10/19), the rubble of a destroyed building (MN11/19), and the scene of a woman beside a child sitting in front of such rubbles (MN12/19) heads toward the formulation “they destroyed the homes” (*dammarû al-buyût*) (MN13/19). As for the list of categories of people, it works in a less piecemeal fashion, since it directly goes to the formulation superimposing text on a live shot. Firstly, battle-suit soldiers dragging a man on the floor, with the caption “soldiers” (*junûd*) (MN14/19). Secondly, kippa- and riffle-wearing people flocking around a building, with the caption “settlers” (*mustawtinûn*) (MN15/19). Thirdly, Ariel Sharon and Ehud Barak shaking hands against the backdrop of the Israeli flag and the same Sharon and his colleagues during a cabinet meeting, with the caption “politicians” (*siyâsiyyûn*) (MN16-17/19). The final shot is made of one picture divided into four parts appearing after one another, with successively the frozen scenes of, in the top right corner, one kippa-wearing settler aiming with his gun at an off-screen target, in the bottom right corner, two soldiers dragging a man on the floor, in the bottom left corner Ariel Sharon and Shimon Perez discussing in a cabinet meeting, and eventually in the top left corner the concluding formulation that reads: “all of them are terrorists” (*kulluhum irhâbiyyûn*) (MN18-19/19).

## Excerpt 6 – Al-Manar: the they-are-all-terrorists narrative



The al-Manar video-clip has a structure that proves totally different from that of No Terror, at the level of both argumentation and documentation. It is based on shots excerpted from the news archives, which already served as supports for information programs and were not in any case taken for the purpose of the video-clip itself. It actually increases their evidentiary power, since they cannot be discarded as a mere staging, but are on the contrary grounded in historically founded events and real-time media coverage. By so doing, the pictures in the spot give the impression of conveying the real, instead of creating a fiction. They lean on the truth-value of documentary images (cf. *infra*). The al-Manar video-clip also presents itself as a puzzle-solution device. Addressing the issue of applause in political conferences, Heritage and Greatbatch devise the many ways in which speakers design their talk so as to generate the audience's alignment:

... the speaker begins by establishing some kind of puzzle or problem in the minds of the listeners and then, shortly afterward, offers as the solution to the puzzle a statement that stands as the core of the message that he or she wishes to get across. The adumbrated message is emphasized by the puzzle, which invites the audience to anticipate or guess at its solution and, by the same token, to listen carefully to the speaker's own solution when it is delivered. Moreover, since the delivery of the solution naturally coincides with the completion of the political message, the audience is normally able to anticipate the point at which applause should properly begin. Speakers normally aid audiences in this process by presenting the solution as a simple, active declarative sentence. (Heritage & Greatbach, 1986: 127)

Although it is not generated in a live environment where a speaker directly addresses an audience from which he seeks to get the vocal approval, the structure of the argument in the video-clip looks exactly the same: by combining the word "terrorists.." with the picture of a regular state-army soldier, the editor establishes a puzzle (i.e. who are they, these terrorists?) in the minds of the viewers. Then, step by step, the editor presents the elements which together provide the solution. These elements are organized in a syllogistic way: (1) terrorists commit evil deeds (they kill, desecrate and destroy); (2) such evil deeds are committed by these categories of people (soldiers,

settlers, politicians); (3) these categories of people are terrorists (“all of them are terrorists”). Of course, applause is not the thing editors are after. However, the structure (e.g. three-part) and the simple character of the message also invite an alignment (though non-pragmatic) from the audience. This is a message that induces a kind of negative solidarity (Ferrié, 2004), that is, the alignment of both editor and audience on the type of narrative they expect from each other, which, once put forward, can hardly be challenged.

Note that the global narrative works also as the reflexive context of the pictures. In other words, meaning functions in two ways. First, it is an emerging and sequentially-organized phenomenon, where a shot gets its sense because of its positioning after former shots and sequences, and where the whole narrative gets its own sense from the chronological and incremental process. Second, and even more important, the video-clip’s particulars get their meaning from the general sense retrospectively produced by the narrative as a whole. Among the range of possible interpretations and trajectories of each shot, there is one and only one which the global narrative allows *ex post facto*. For instance (NT04-05/47), a look can be described as frightened because of its juxtaposition with the preceding shot of bursting cars, but it is only because we eventually know the whole story that indeed that look is perceived as frightened and that fear as caused by the cars (and not, let us say, by the fall of the ball children were playing with). The narrative’s Gestalt provides for the constraining context of the understanding of the clip’s shots and sequences.

### *Sounds and music*

Up to now, we have neglected the audio track of these video-clips. However, it plays a major role in their production. In the following chart (figure 7), we synthesize the combination and correspondence of sounds, music and pictures throughout the whole No Terror’s narrative sequence.

#### **Excerpt 7 – No Terror: the soundtrack**

| <i>Shots Nr</i> | <i>Shots</i>                                                                        | <i>Music</i>                     | <i>Sounds</i>                    |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 01/47           |  | raising music (video games)      | neighborhood hubbub + horns      |
| 02/47           |                                                                                     |                                  | children’s laughter              |
| 03/47           |                                                                                     |                                  | ball shoot                       |
| 04/47           |                                                                                     |                                  | speeding car motors              |
| 05/47           |                                                                                     |                                  | horns                            |
| 06/47           |  | slight background rhythm         | horns                            |
| 07/47           |                                                                                     |                                  | screeching tires                 |
| 08/47           |                                                                                     |                                  | horns                            |
| 09/47           |                                                                                     |                                  | female scream                    |
| 10/47           |                                                                                     |                                  | rifle cocking                    |
| 11/47           |  | drum beats / violins (crescendo) | bullet hail                      |
| 12/47           |                                                                                     |                                  | bullet hail                      |
| 13/47           |                                                                                     |                                  | elder screams + male groan       |
| 14/47           |                                                                                     |                                  | kick                             |
| 15/47           |                                                                                     |                                  | child screams                    |
| 16/47           |                                                                                     |                                  | kick                             |
| 17/47           |                                                                                     |                                  | child screams                    |
| 18/47           |                                                                                     |                                  | flag shaft falling on the ground |
| 19/47           |                                                                                     |                                  |                                  |
| 20/47           |                                                                                     |                                  |                                  |
| ...             |                                                                                     |                                  |                                  |
| 24/47           |  | sudden violin raising note       | rifle cocking                    |
| 25/47           |                                                                                     | violins (crescendo)              |                                  |
| 26/47           |                                                                                     | one drum beat                    | fleeing people’s steps           |
| 27/47           |                                                                                     | slight violin background         |                                  |
| 28/47           |                                                                                     |                                  |                                  |

|       |   |                                                                                   |                        |
|-------|---|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| 29/47 |   | one drum beat                                                                     | joining man's steps    |
| 30/47 |   | slight violin background                                                          |                        |
| 31/47 |   | violins (decrescendo)                                                             | flocking men's steps   |
| ...   |   |                                                                                   |                        |
| 34/47 | → |  | strong drum beat       |
| 35/47 |   |                                                                                   |                        |
| 36/47 |   |                                                                                   | violins (crescendo)    |
| 37/47 |   |                                                                                   |                        |
| 38/47 |   |                                                                                   | flag in the wind       |
| 39/47 |   |                                                                                   | marching crowd's steps |
| 40/47 |   | drum beat                                                                         |                        |
| ...   |   |                                                                                   |                        |
| 44/47 | → |  | roaring crowd + boos   |
| 45/47 |   |                                                                                   | thunder-like beat      |
| 46/47 |   |                                                                                   |                        |
| 47/47 |   |                                                                                   | closing note           |

The No Terror video-clip audio track is organized in a complex way as it mixes diegetic soundings, i.e. the sounds that protagonists hear in real life, with an extradiegetic music, i.e. music that embodies the narrative and is external to the course of action as captured by the film editor. This audio complexity is mainly due to the fictional character of the clip. Indeed, telling a story requires to a certain extent a music that accompanies its unfolding scenario. At the same time, and also because of this artefactual dimension, naturalistic sounds provide the clip with the likeliness it might lack otherwise. In other words, the plausibility of the narrative is reinforced by the production of reality-like sound effects, while the dramatics is itself strengthened by music in tune with the narrative.

In the al-Manar's narrative sequence, the archive-excerpted pictures' original soundings have been totally removed. Instead, the viewer hears a martial music similar to the rhythmic scanting of a historical drama that stretches throughout the video-clip, with drum beats that are immediately followed by violins and a choir that joins in later on. Consequently, when reading the corresponding shots, the viewer actually does not hear the crowd cheering and clapping hands, the noise of a bulldozer tearing down a wall, nor the Israeli ministers' voices during the Cabinet meeting. In other words, viewers do not hear the shots' diegetic soundings, as they have been replaced by the extradiegetic martial music. As a whole, music is not indexed on the film thread, although it produces a dramatization effect. The al-Manar clip does not tell us a story, but rather presents us with an argument. Therefore, the music is not needed as a narrative artefact. Neither is the sounding, since the realistic effect is already achieved by the archival pictures. It is the text which plays this role of editing the narrative, explaining it, formulating its title, its building blocks and its conclusion, disambiguating (if really needed!) its meaning, providing the solution to the puzzle it stated in its opening, i.e., explicating the argument and its grammar.

In both clips, the music produces a unity effect. In the No Terror case, it closely participates in the scenario—to the point that, if one were to hear it without seeing the pictures, one would nevertheless have the feeling of being told a story—and partly gives it its extradiegetic, prosodic phrasing. It stresses the key elements of the narrative as they unfold: rising intensity, time suspension, dénouement, etc. In the al-Manar case, the music also accounts for the video-clip's unity, although in a very different way: it stretches from the opening to the closing and works as a kind of wallpaper against which the argument proceeds. It is not an edited/editing artefact, but merely an accompanying device that underscores the drama dimension of the clip.

## The categorial organization of narratives

The two spots are thoroughly structured by the categorizations of people, places and activities. As we already observed, these categorizations are embedded within the narrative sequential organization of the spots. Following Watson (1994), who is himself discussing Harvey Sacks' work, the activity of categorizing is deeply contextual: categories are not semantic deposits of meanings but are social achievements that gain their specific intelligibility from their positioning in a sequential process. In Figure 3, for instance, the girl's glance (NT06/47) can be categorized as scared only because it is juxtaposed to the former picture of armed men sitting at the rear of a pick-up car (NT05/47). Otherwise, the nature of the glance could have remained ambiguous (surprise, astonishment, etc.). Similarly, in the opening of the Al-Manar spot, the dead child wrapped up in a shroud (MN03/19) is recognizable as such (and not, say, as a swaddled infant who is taking a nap), only provided that this shot is preceded by the one of an unconscious child lying on a blood-stained hospital bed (MN02/19) and after the general heading 'terrorists..' (MN01/19); that is, the child gains his status of a victim because of his sequential positioning.

The sequential process of these spots consists of the layout of scenic units for the practical purpose of the production of a global narrative. This narrative proves fully categorial. In the case of al-Manar, it works as a categorial puzzle: the first picture is made of the image of a soldier and a written category-word ("terrorists..") which functions as a heading and calls for its resolution. The whole spot then progressively unfolds under the shape of a syllogistic argument aiming at substantiating the initial category. In the case of No Terror, it works the other way around: no heading, but the progressive unfolding of a narrative that takes the shape of a fable eventually formulated in a multi-fold conclusion ("know your enemy"; "terrorism has no religion"; "terrorism has no nationhood"). In sum, whatever their structural differences, both video-clips are nothing but categorial language games.

The script of the No-Terror spot starts with the displaying of a geographical categorization device. It consists of an overhanging view of a crossroad that turns into a ground-floor view of a popular neighborhood where people are walking and boys are playing football. In an Arab viewer's natural attitude, there is no reason to locate it elsewhere but in a Middle-Eastern environment. This geographical device creates a horizon of familiarity that situates people and activities and opens a certain range of inferences: an ordinary, peaceful, everyday-life place where elders, youngsters, women and men are going about their daily business. It sets the categorial background against which subsequent scenes and events will appear congruous or incongruous. In other words, it creates expectations in terms of normalcy, which are breached by the disrupting cropping-up of speeding cars and armed men: quietness leaves the floor to frenzy. Following Sacks's consistency and economy rules<sup>25</sup>, we can say that the mere portraying of boys playing street football makes it possible to consider the other people of the scene as engaged in the course of their ordinary social activities (e.g. women shopping, elders sipping coffee, workers doing their daily work). In the same way, and because the socio-logic of media productions is necessarily grounded in lay practical epistemology, both the ordinary viewer and the analyst use ordinary inferential mechanisms (what Sacks calls maxims). For instance, when at some point in the spot, we see the Iraqi flag falling down on the floor, we see it—with no reason to see it otherwise—as a breach to a moral norm; then,

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<sup>25</sup> The economy rule reads: "It is not necessary that some multiple of categories from categorization devices be employed for recognition that a person is being referred to, to be made; a single category will do"; the consistency rule holds: "if some population of persons is being categorized, and if a category from some device's collection has being used to categorize a first member of the population, then that category or other categories of the same collection *may* be used to categorize further members of the population." (Sacks, 1974: 219)

at a later point, when it is picked up, raised and waved again, we competently see the norm being repaired.

Whereas the production of the categorization device “Iraqi neighborhood” had constituted the people and the activities as members of the collection “ordinary people”, the outbreak of the incongruous event makes them evolve into the first part of the pair “peaceful citizens/armed militia-members” (NT10-11/47). So far, the pairing has been discontinuous since the two sets of protagonists have appeared separately. Their pairing becomes synchronic with the eruption of violence, which transforms the former pair into another one: “victim/offender”. This is most notably the case in the scenes in which a gunman kicks a boy (NT15/47) or when an elderly person is hit by a rifle butt (NT14/47). We see how the narrative is organized in a categorial way progressively ordered in pairs, which, in this case, appear disjunctive. In other words, the very intelligibility of the spot is not only a categorial issue, but also (and mainly) relies upon the emerging production of a contrast.

The negative implications of this contrast can only be balanced or inverted by the intervention of a third party. In the No Terror spot, it is induced by the suspension of the activities bound to the paired categories “victim/offender”. Such a suspension is somehow embodied by the gunman whose glance seems suddenly captured and puzzled by some hidden spectacle (NT24/47). Then, through a juxtaposition procedure, the viewer comes to realize that the puzzling effect of the suspension originates in a man standing still in the middle of the street (NT26/47), while others keep on fleeing in the background. We see then how the intervention of a third party can disentangle the face-to-face relationship of paired categories. However, while concentrating on the protagonists’ eyes (NT27-28/47), the camera substitutes one pair to another, i.e. the “hero/evildoer” to the “victim/offender”. That which dramaturgically characterizes the hero is his capacity to invert the roles: on the one hand, he stands firm instead of fleeing in front of the threat; on the other, he shows strength but only in the community’s service. This role inversion reverses the parties’ activities: as citizens are coalescing behind the hero and his notable fellows (NT31/47), the enemy retreats and shows its true face (NT40-43/47), i.e. the cowardice of terrorism. The initial pair “citizens/armed men” is restored, although, this time, with different predicates and category-bound activities. Actually, normalcy is found again as the neighborhood seems to go back to ordinary life. In sum, we observe how categories sequentially transform from one to another, to the point that they go full circle. We might call the whole process the modal and circular mutability of categorizations.

The Al-Manar video-clip starts with a heading (MN01/19) that works as a puzzle-solution device (cf. above). This device is organized around an open-ended category made of a word (terrorists) and of two dots (..) which strengthen the impression that more is to come on this topic. Formulated in a general and abstract way, the category ‘terrorists..’ does not specify all its possible instances. It remains up to the spot to provide the viewer with possible substantiations. Of course, the image of the soldier gives a first clue for the interpretation of the heading. Still, this holds ambiguous since the notions of regular-army-soldier and terrorist are commonly taken as disjunctive. Commonsensically, the regular-army-soldier and the terrorist categorizations do share common predicates and, more particularly, common activities such as ‘handling weapons’, ‘taking part in armed conflicts’ or ‘killing people’. Yet, both categorizations are exclusive from one another, as they hold disjunctive rights and duties. This disjunction is thoroughly moral and mainly based on the commonly held assumption that the former is backed up by a State which exerts the “monopoly on legitimate violence”, while the latter is acting on behalf of non-governmental gangs resorting to the unlawful use of force.

The whole following video-clip is syllogistically organized around two sets of categories. The first one identifies three types of offender-category-bound activities (to kill, to desecrate, to destroy) and three types of victims (children, sacred places and homes) (MN02-13/19). The second one points to three genres of force-and-politics personals (soldiers, settlers and politicians) (MN14-17/19). The first three-part list pairs victims and offenders via the activity through which the latter is victimizing the former. The images refer to the three (victims, offenders, activities) while the written formulations only refer to the activities and their perpetrators (the anonymous “they” of the expressions “they killed”, “they desecrated”, “they destroyed”). It must be said that, in Arabic, there is no personal pronoun but only a third-person plural verbal form, marked by the flexional ending *û*. The subjects of these activities refer to the heading and, therefore, remain general and abstract. It is a formulation, since these written captions coming at the end of subsidiary three-part lists are materialized by the freezing of initially in-motion images fading into sepia color, and function as summaries, conclusions or paraphrases of what was formerly shown (MN05/19, 09/19, 13/19). These formulations are used in an attempt to repair the indexical properties of language by substituting “objective” expressions for indexical ones (see Lynch, 1993: 185). As for the second three-part list, it appears in three succeeding flashes synchronizing images of people in action and force-and-politics-personals captions (soldiers, settlers and politicians). This appears as the direct response to the previous anonymous “they”: the offenders constituting the second pair part of the former list come to be identified as specific, generic groups of people. By the same token, they become the subjects of the forthcoming conclusion: “They are all terrorists” (MN18-19/19). This conclusion, which takes the shape of a synthesis montage of the second three-part-list pictures and a caption, works as the explicit linking of the two three-part lists and therefore as the direct indexicalization of the initially non-indexical category of the heading. In other words, the whole spot provides for the solution of an initially set puzzle and functions as an indexicalizing device transforming an anonymous category into specified groups of offenders. The only thing that remains implicit, though more than crystal-clear, is that these offenders all relate to the State of Israel.

In both video-clips, categorizations are organized through the ascription of various predicates. In what follows, we address three types of categories: the terrorists, the victims and the third parties. With regard to the first type (see Excerpt 8), these predicates relate to physical, instrumental and indexical features of people, places and actions. As for the physical predicates, we observe in the No Terror spot that terrorists are mainly recognizable by their wearing beards and turbans, while in the al-Manar spot, although they all have the specific features of the category they refer to (the soldiers’ battling uniform, the settlers’ kippa and the politicians’ suit), they have nothing visible in common but share the known but tacit belonging to the “Zionist entity”<sup>26</sup>. Physical predicates are all the more effective that they are combined with instrumental predicates, e.g. weapons: kippa plus rifle or turban plus rifle work hand in hand to reduce the categorial ambiguity. Indexical categorization is itself related to the iconicity of archival pictures which point to historical events and/or public figures. As we previously saw, the image of Sharon during his visit to the Temple / Mosque Esplanade in Jerusalem or the tragic episode of the Muhammad al-Durra killing end up telling more than just what they represent: they stand for the symbolic protagonists of the second Intifada drama, its iconic igniter and victim. The categorization of terrorists is not only achieved by the predicating of such features, but also by the performance of activities explicitly attributable to them. In the case of the No Terror spot, the kicking of a boy or the butt-rifle hitting of an elderly person are easily seen as activities bound to the category. It is even more explicit in the al-Manar video-clip where written captions tell in so many words the activities the terrorists are presented as the agents of. Eventually, this whole grammar ends up ascribing moral qualities to the category

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<sup>26</sup> On this notion of tacit knowledge and all what it means in terms of Gestalt perception of an object against the background of known though not public elements of intelligibility, see above and Watson, 2006.

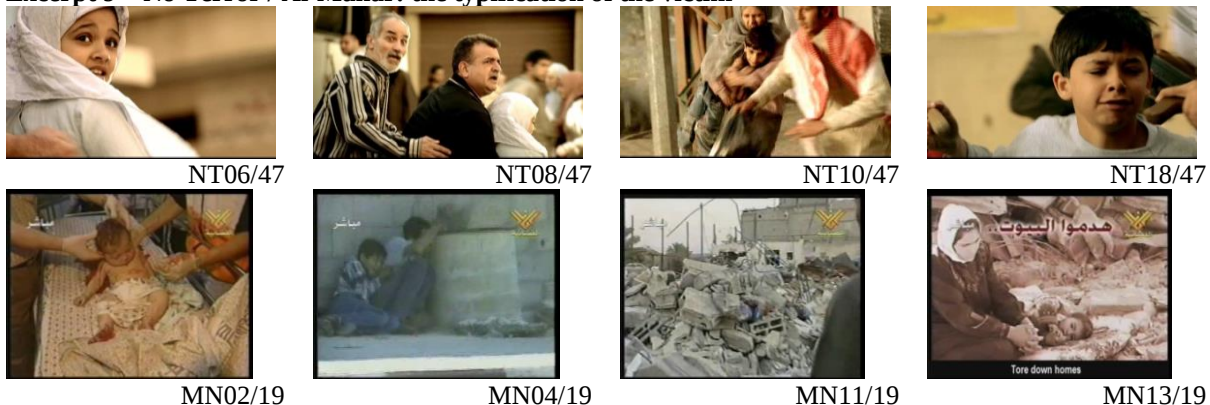
incumbents. The predicates and the category-bound activities attached to the type “terrorists” converge in depicting the latter as coward, unfair, wicked: in sum, evil.

**Excerpt 8 – No Terror / Al-Manar: the typification of the terrorist**



Coming to the second type of categories, the victims (see Excerpt 9), another set of attributes operates: collection of categories organized around different types of personal relationships, psychological predicates and, here again, category-bound activities. In both video-clips, three collections seem to be especially at work, the categories of which are thoroughly intertwined and systematically paired. First, there is the age-of-life collection, and especially the children and the elderly, who are both typically characteristic of the victims’ innocence, weakness and vulnerability, something that directly pairs them disjunctively with the brutal force and aggressiveness of adults-in-the-prime-of-life. Second, we find the gender collection, and in particular, girls and women, who also typically stand for the ideal victims and are paired to the male violent adults-in-the-prime-of-life. Third, there is the family collection associating parents and children, the former being characterized by their protection duty vis-à-vis the latter; such protection is itself oriented to the threat caused by the offender. Psychological predicates characteristically apply to every category of these collections: fear<sup>27</sup>, pain, sorrow and deprivation. Category-bound activities follow consequentially from this process of psychological states ascription, mainly crying, shivering, running away, looking for shelter, hiding, enduring or waiting for the menace to pass.

**Excerpt 9 – No Terror / Al-Manar: the typification of the victim**



As we said, the categorizations “victims” and “offenders” function in a strictly paired manner. Indeed, the mere notion of one of the two would simply not exist without the other. In other words, they are conditional upon each other. In the two video-clips, these two pair parts are either co-present or not. In the former case, the paired organization of the categorization device “offense”

<sup>27</sup> e.g. NT06/47; see above for the sequential character of this categorical achievement.

shows in one and the same shot and in one and the same time and place both the victim and the offender who constitute the visible protagonists of the scene. In the latter case, we mainly see victims who pragmatically induce their victimization and therefore the existence of a victimizer. Although the victimizer does not necessarily appear on the screen, the victim's face, attitude and actions take their intelligibility only insofar as one assumes the presence of the second pair part, i.e. the offender. It stresses the power of categorization and its efficiency in specific media genres where time constrains story-telling: a category can be induced through the mere paired structure of a collection.

This leads us to the last type of categories we want to address: the third party (see Excerpt 10). This categorization operates in a different way as it comes to disentangle the pairing victim / offender. In the No Terror case, it operates through the intervention of a "hero". The latter presents only positive qualities, which turn to be the qualities of both the victims and the offenders (to stand on the right moral side while having the strength to face adversity) and the opposite of both the victims' and the offenders' respective defaults (the courage to stand firm and the rejection of blind violence). In a Robin Hood-like scenario, the hero comes to the rescue of the oppressed and helps him finding the courage, the force and the means to help making ebb the menacing tide. In the Al-Manar case, the hero is no acting protagonist in the scenario. However, the story, which unfolds as a denunciation, is told by a narrator, i.e. the TV channel, which stages itself as "the voice of the voiceless" (see Dupret & Ferrié, 2007).

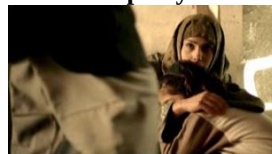
**Excerpt 10 – No Terror / Al-Manar: the typification of the third party**



NT07/47



NT12/47



NT23/47



NT29/47



MN14/19



MN12/19



MN05/19



MN18/19

Actually, the third party's capacity to stand by the victims while inverting the course of action or implicitly calling for its inversion constitutes the core of these two video-clips and of their orientation to advocacy. This advocacy relates to the issue of terrorism, its characterization, the definition of its protagonists, and the ascription of relevant responsibilities. These narratives are nothing but categorizations of the life-world with regard to this very issue. As Jayyusi (1984) emphasized, the categorization process is thoroughly moral. Like other epistemic activities, it is both constituted by and constitutive of the moral order. Among others, categorization is concerned with the production of facticity. Following Pollner (1987), we can remark that people orient to facts as something objective; however, they all consider that fact-finding, fact selection, and fact interpretation are subjectively determined. In the case of the two video-clips, we see how they present terrorism as an objective fact. Yet, because of their different structure, they operate in a totally different manner. Whereas the No Terror clip takes the shape of a parable, the Al-Manar clip uses archival footage to develop a documented argument. In the former case, we deal with a fiction the connection of which to reality is metaphorical: it takes its force from the message it conveys, but this message takes its meaning from the plausibility of the story that tells it. In the latter case, its relation to reality is overdetermined by both the usage of visual news archives and the cumulative effect of their juxtaposition. In sum, facts are not contested as such, but are contested with regard to

the many perspectives from which they are read. In other words, conflicts of categorization of the life-world do not consist in questioning the existence of facts but in ascribing and apportioning blame to the protagonists of facts held in common. Therefore, the narratives are not primarily arguments from which conclusions can be drawn, but the redundant validation of an initial standpoint. In this respect, it is striking to observe that Avi Jorisch's anti-Hizbullah oriented book (from which the Al-Manar video-clip is extracted) offers a description of the content of the media production of Al-Manar, which no Hizbullah supporter would in any way contradict. As indicated in the title, *Beacon of Hatred*, Jorisch's purpose is to state the wicked character of the Lebanese Hizbullah and its mouthpiece television Al-Manar. As can be seen from the subtitle (*Inside Hizbullah's Al-Manar Television*) and the balloon on the cover-page ("includes CD-ROM containing real Al-Manar footage"), he claims to be documenting his statement with excerpts of actual Al-Manar productions. However, the reading of the book can lead to opposite conclusions, i.e. that Hizbullah and Al-Manar have a discourse of either hatred or resistance. Thus, the argument of the book is not something that can be deduced from its reading, but only a redundant confirmation of what was already stated in its title. In other words, it is only because of the ideological perspective initially set by the author that the factual claims documented by the footage can be read in one way rather than the other.

TV-channels ascribe themselves an identity and by the same token sketch the audience they purport to be addressing. They do so by resorting to narratives of the genre we analyzed in this chapter. They struggle to promote one specific narrative, which we call, following Lynch and Bogen (1996), a master-narrative. Imposing one master-narrative is no self-evident undertaking, but a contested process. Of course, there can be many coexisting master-narratives but only in separate spheres of relevance. A master-narrative is established against the background of other preexisting narratives. In a sort of mirror game, a master-narrative is necessarily the counter-narrative of another master-narrative<sup>28</sup>. It does not mean that the scripts of all these master-narratives prove different from one another. Actually, the two video-clips broadly share a similar moral script: terrorism is evil; children, women and the elderly are innocent victims; the use of brutal force is illegitimate. Therefore, it is not the terrorism script which is at stake, but the incumbents of the category and especially that of evildoers. Since virtue and truth are exclusive moral values, it works in a disjunctive manner and there is no middle course: one master-narrative's evildoers are necessarily the alternative's victims or heroes.

## Concluding remarks

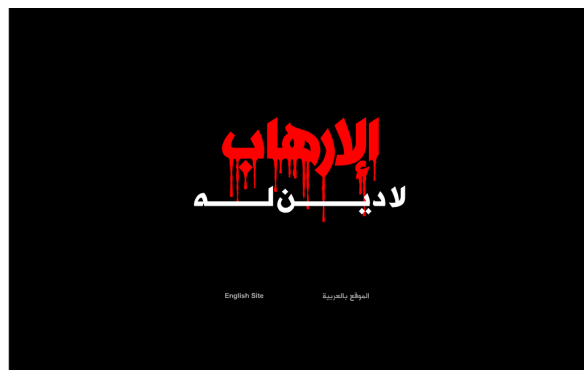
This chapter was concerned with the video-clips' narratives as language games. These narratives, which we eventually described as master-narratives, aim at categorizing the life-world on the issue of terrorism in a way which is deemed to demonstrate the broadcaster's position vis-à-vis this question and to induce its audience's viewpoint. The advocacy video-clip's language game is characterized by the unfolding of a practical grammar, i.e. the display of images, sounds and texts in a complex though structured way, in a threaded structure constrained by and oriented to the specificity of the ongoing activity. Several affordances contribute to the shaping of this grammar: technical affordances specific to audiovisual communication; format affordances specific to the video-clip genre (keeping an ideological argument in less than a minute); structural affordances specific to the chosen narrative type (fictional or documentary). This grammar is the very condition of the shared intelligibility of the narratives by their producers and their audiences. In other words, the audibility of the advocated message is conditional upon such a practical grammar.

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<sup>28</sup> This is close to what Garfinkel (1956) describes as "conditions of successful degradation ceremonies" and what David and Jalbert (2008) insightfully coined "undoing degradation".

Many situated activities accomplish an epistemological task. Such is the case of advocacy video-clips, which aim at presenting a viewpoint on a controversial question. As we saw, they do so in an overdetermined, exclusive and disjunctive manner; they constitute moral narratives, which are by nature truth claims. Instead of looking at the validity of such claims in general, from an overhanging position, we paid attention to them as situated practices, that is, as a contextual achievement of media producers and audiences. In that sense, truth telling was dealt with as an epistopic, i.e., following Lynch (1993), an epistemological theme as actually practiced (e.g. its various expressions, variations, ambiguities, sensibilities) in specific life-world activities and not as a meta-theoretical matter transcending actual usages.

The production of this types of narratives that convey truth claims, e.g. on terrorism, are obviously important political means in the hands of their broadcasters. They seek to normalize one version of truth, that is, to ensure that the promoted narrative become taken for granted. Foregrounding one narrative among many amounts to elevating it to the status of an authoritative argument (Dupret & Drieskens, 2008), something that is strengthened by the iteration potential of video-clips (they can be broadcasted repeatedly). Imposing a master-narrative means therefore substituting one narrative with another; it is what Stetson calls a ‘revolutionary conceptualization’ (1999: 92), and he defines it as a change in the equation. However, in our case, the equation remains the same:  $T = V + O$  (where T stands for terrorism, V for victims and O for offenders); only the O category incumbent changes from one spot to another. All this leads us to conclude that the production of ideological truth narratives is not based on actual argumentation the conclusion of which would be logical, but rather on the foregrounding of a redundant validation of an initially set assumption. In this regard, ideology proves un-falsifiable.



## CHAPTER SIX

### NARRATIVES OF TRUTH

#### Documenting the Mind in a Psychiatric Hospital



The ways people account for their lives and experiences is thoroughly shaped by the context in which they narrate them. This is something Wittgenstein calls the form of life in which these experiences take place and the many language games that are associated to that form. In terms of truth, it means that these narratives must be re-situated in the perspective of their formulation: narratives of truth are constrained by the environment and the purposes of their utterance, which do not constitute external structures determining actors' actions, but epistemic objectivities to which people practically orient in their course. In that sense, alternate versions of identical happenstances do not necessarily reflect true and wrong accounts of one and the same fact, but can also result from perspectival orientations to reality. This holds particularly true in psychiatric encounters, where it is not the retrieval of one certified version of the world that is sought, but rather the unfolding of the perspective in which reality is understood and exposed by the protagonists. Truth is here an achievement of the narrative that does not relate to what actually took place (or not), but to a person's mind in action and its orientation to the world as perceived.

In the documentary film *Aliénations* (*ightirabât* in Arabic), Malek Bensmail, a French Algerian director, brings the spectator in the universe of the psychiatric hospital of Constantine in Algeria. Putting the hospital in the perspective of religion and medicine in the field of mental health, Bensmail presents a series of portraits and scenes from within the psychiatric institution. Adopting a rather neutral stance vis-à-vis psychiatry as such – it must be said at this stage that Bensmail is the son of the founder of the hospital – he builds a narrative in which it seems that individual predicaments are the outcome of Algeria's political and social drift. In other words, he portrays the people's alienations as the mirror of the country's global Alienation. In order to do so, Bensmail juxtaposes the narratives of several patients. In other words, the documentary's narrative is the edited outcome of embedded, non-mediated, real-time sequences in which inmates interact with the medical staff or each other.

We concentrate in this chapter on Bensmail's documentary so as to analyze two interrelated devices. There is, on the one hand, the edited thread of the film, which can be observed in its sequential organization, through which the director produces a narrative, itself based on an edited structure of intelligibility. On the other hand, there are the hospital people's narratives, which are largely unmediated by the director, stand next to each other and constitute as many embedded stories. It is the interrelatedness of these two devices and, more precisely, the encapsulation of the latter in the former that transform this film into something of the genre "documentary" and thereby contribute to give it its truth value.

#### The general script

The general script of *Aliénations* can be summarized as follows:



006. somewhere in Algeria



011. my father's tomb



015. memories



020. visit to the shrine



039. sacrifice



051. trance



060. spirit possession



070. psychiatrists at work



078. male group therapy



111. take your pills



131. cigarettes



152. washing the dead



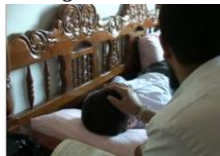
173. female group therapy



189. pills and drugs



212. with the barber



240. Islamic healing



273. anxiety



292. medical staff



301. refectory



310. electrotherapy



324. mother and daughter



336. in the parlour



361. bound to his bed



372. fancy fair



398. dancing

*Aliénations* looks like a documentary film on a psychiatric hospital. Any competent viewer can read it as such. Most of the scenes consist of interactions among the Constantine psychiatric hospital's patients and between them and the medical staff. Some of these interactions include visitors, e.g. parents of the inmates. However, the film does not begin in the hospital. Rather, it starts with a visit to the tomb of the director's father, then with a couple of memories of the latter, then with the scene of a popular gathering including a trance, and finally with a visit to the shrine of a local saint venerated for his ability to relieve people suffering from all sorts of mental problems. A short transition through the streets and the landscapes of Constantine leads to a chair, which specifies a new setting, i.e. the hospital. In other words, it appears from this "introduction" that the filmic narrative is indexed on, first, the director's father, and, second, the "traditional" way to deal with psychic problems.

The core of the film itself juxtaposes a series of scenes within the hospital, with the exception of one single interaction between one of the patients and a religious healer that takes place in some private space. Here again, the hospital is set against the backdrop of "traditional" curing practices. Otherwise, the world is seen from within the hospital. The spectator encounters many characters involved in different types of actions, e.g. interviews with the medical staff, interactions among inmates, and daily life activities.

We know that films are made of many shots, several sequences and a global narrative (Dupret & Klaus, forthcoming; this volume, chapter 4). In other words, the sequential organization of the shots is part of their intelligibility, as the sequential organization of the sequences is part of the global narrative's intelligibility. For instance, the picture of Bensmail's father together with what looks like the staff of a hospital (015) gets its meaning from its positioning after the picture of his father's tomb (011) and before the display of other memories (like what is understood as his office; 017), the visit to the Saint's shrine (as the spot where traditional healing is described as taking place; 020), and the arrival at the hospital itself (as the place founded by his father; 059). In the same way, the scene of the psychiatrist explaining her understanding of devil possession as being normal in a Muslim society though abnormal in the case of her patient (072) gets its intelligibility from its positioning after the patient's account of her experiences (060). The whole intelligibility of the film

is made of the many trajectories which are deduced and projected from what is explicitly shown within a specific sequence and the pictures that compose it.

The sequential character of the film intelligibility is clearly manifested by the juxtaposition of scenes from within and from without the hospital. This is done at least two times during the whole movie. The first, to which we already alluded, is situated at the beginning: after the visit to the shrine, we are transported in Constantine and, through a series of zooming techniques, inside a ceremony that takes progressively the shape of a trance (051); then, after the climax, a couple of shots picture a very quiet city and end, via a travelling effect, at an empty chair and, right afterward, at the scene of a young woman speaking of personal experiences, with an older man in the background (060). The spectator has no doubt as to the identity of the place he was lead into: the hospital.



Through this sequence, we are not only lead from one place to another, but also made to understand that the intelligibility of the psychiatric interview starting in shot 60 is achieved against the background of the popular dealing with mental health (46-55). In other words, psychiatry is presented as one among many forms of mental care. Moreover, it is produced in a very contrastive way, as the effervescence of the trance is followed by the quietness of the city in the morning (aftermath of the feast) and the sobriety of the hospital's site: a chair, a desk, and words. Street and hospital cures are therefore constituted in a paired way. This pair is contrastive, although it remains hard to say whether it is disjunctive, parallel or conjunctive. A disjunctive pair would have presented the two ways of dealing with mental health as antagonistic; a parallel way would have presented them as both occurring and independent; and a conjunctive way would have presented them as complementing each other. The film director refrains from giving the spectator strong interpretive clues. His stance seems neutral, which contributes to the constitution of this movie as a documentary. Of course, it is not neutral at all to produce one way against the background of another, and in that sense Bensmaïl makes obvious his conception of mental health in Algeria as being *necessarily* embedded within popular beliefs and practices; but this is done in a way which at least suspends the director's moral evaluation of the appropriateness and legitimacy of each of two pair parts.

The second juxtaposition of scenes from within and from without the hospital takes place much later in the film. After a long "to the barber" sequence and a short transition in the hospital's courtyard (in which the camera eavesdrops exchanges among inmates; 233) and via the Constantine landscape (234), we start seeing close-up shots of hands and faces (235-239), then Arabic scriptures (241) which look like Koran verses. As the camera zooms out, we see the scene of a bearded man wearing a white gown (both featuring a man of religion) positing his right hand on the forehead of a person, lying on a woodcraft sofa (the latter is an inmate we formerly saw in the movie during the collective-therapy sequence; cf 103). All the contextualizing clues help us understanding the scene

as a “traditional, religious therapy” taking place in some private place. After having been shown performing a procedure of dilution into water of ink-used-to-write-religious-words (238) and its drinking by the patient, the healer is presented explaining the principles on which the ceremony was performed (246). At this specific point, the spectator is drawn back to the shrine filmed at the beginning of the movie and to the specific scene of the chicken sacrifice (251, which refers to 39). This flash-back ends with the picture of Koran verses on the wall (266), which we are made to assume is the wall of the private place where the healing was taking place. Then, we quit the room and, via another transition through the Constantine landscape and the picture of a minaret-shaped building (270), come back to the hospital, first from without (271) and finally from within.



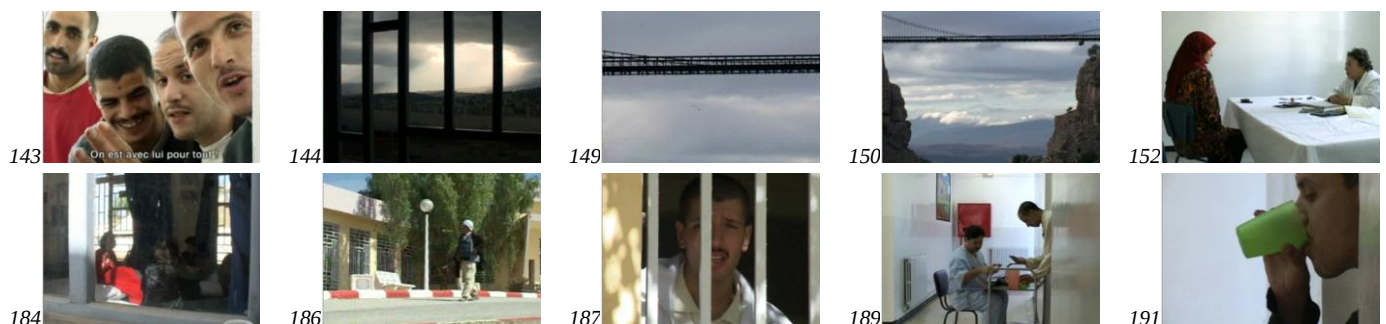
Inserted as it is in the thread of the movie, this specific “traditional healing” sequence plays a hugely contrastive role. Again, Bensmail is careful not to commit himself to any explicit moral judgement, but the whole construction of the sequence is organized so as to relate the issue of mental health to the general, Algerian, outside-of-the hospital, traditional and religious beliefs concerning the mind and its possession by djinns. Pictures of an open Koran and of verses in a frame hanging on the wall, the glimpse of a minaret, the sounds of prayers and incantations, statements made by the “religious healer” as to the principles of his art, and the flash-back to the shrine where a sacrifice ceremony was performed, all these contribute to the production of dichotomy between “religious” and “psychiatric” ways of dealing with the mind. I say religious since, contrary to the former depiction of the shrine and despite the link with related ceremonies taking place in it, there is in this sequence a much more direct reference to the “divine” (texts, words, buildings), its “guardians” (bodily features and costumes), and its specific implication in the care of the minds.

This process of juxtaposition has a powerful inferential capacity. In her seminal work on the socio-logic of the filmic text, Lena Jarryusi (1988) insists on the power of montage to create new relations among objects. She quotes Burch, who writes (1973: 12): “As regards the content of the film image, it may be interesting to know that a close-up of a man’s expressionless face followed by a bowl of soup creates the impression that the man is hungry; but this relationship between the content of the two shots is a *syntactical* one that merely helps determine the *semantic* relationship between them.” Going further in the demonstration, Jarryusi (1988: 280-281) stresses the fact that “it is not that the syntactic relationship between the shots *merely* helps us determine the semantic relationship between them, but that, by virtue of a cultural grammar and logic available to us in common, the logic of object and activity categorizations, it makes available in a *conventional* manner an inference about (or sometimes even a direct grasp/perception of) the man’s hunger.” In other words, juxtaposition is a process through which inferences can be drawn. These inferences can be of a direct, micro, in-the-sequence nature, as in the example of the bowl of soup whose juxtaposition next to the man’s face allows the inference of the bowl as the object of the person’s activity or interest. In our case, juxtaposing the Koran and the therapy is implicative as to the role of

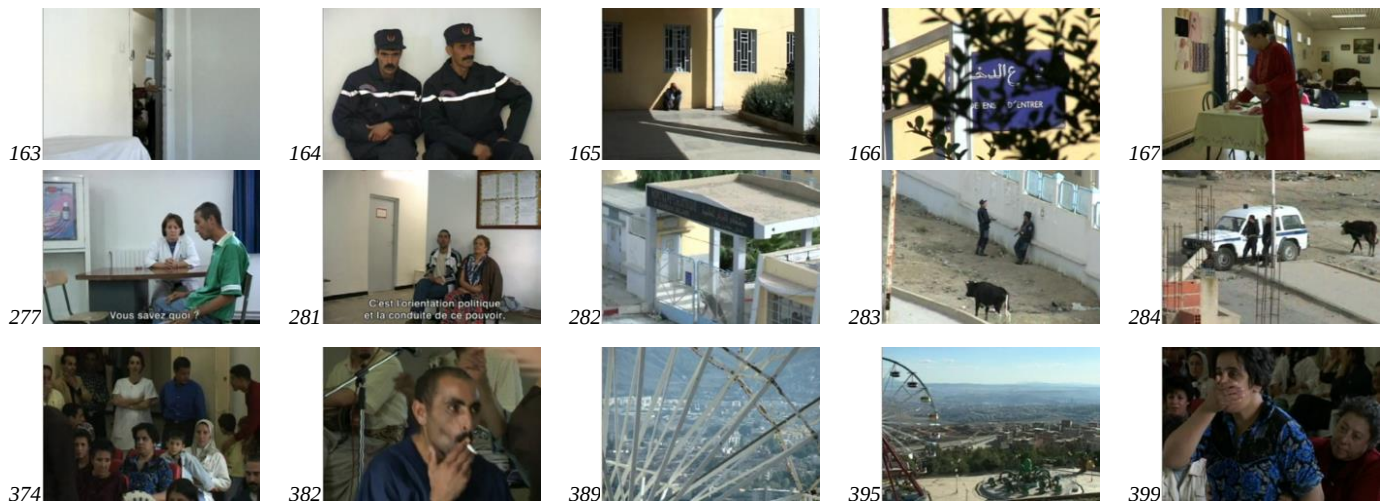
the scriptures in the healing process. These inferences can also be of an indirect, macro, global-narrative nature, as in our case, where “traditional” and “psychiatric” cures are placed next to each other and therefore produce a set of inferential possibilities on e.g. the medical and/or cultural credibility, efficiency, adequacy, reliability, and validity of the respective techniques.

Beyond this set of inferential possibilities, there remains to know whether we are also offered clues as to the option for which the director marks his preference. As I said, Bensmail is careful not to make any explicit statement regarding the techniques themselves. However, from the title to the conclusion, the spectator is invited to consider the many specific cases as instances of the people’s estrangement to their society and themselves in Algeria. In that sense, this is an ethnopsychiatric account: the narrative suggests that the Algerian society’s predicament is reflected in the individuals’; in other words, mental health is an issue of the individual-within-a-culture, with the consequence that cultural anomie reflects on individual alienation. The clues in the documentary which allow the spectator to make such inferences are many. First, the title: it does not speak of alienation in the singular form as a psychiatric diagnosis, but of alienations in the plural as a theme which has to be dealt with in its general social embedment. Second, the selection of inmates’ interviews: within a material which must obviously be much larger, the film director has selected narratives in which issues of power and authority (in and out the family), gender (illegitimate sex), politics (elections) and violence (death, terror) are prominent. And third, the place of religion and tradition: although psychic predicaments must be bound in Constantine as elsewhere to a vast array of causes, the film director has made the choice to privilege these two resources.

Juxtaposition is one among several means to connect parts of the filmic text. Connecting techniques play an important role in the “moral” work at play in film sense-making. I already mentioned transition shots, like the chair (59) between the city and the first psychiatric encounter, or the window (271) when the spectator is drawn back to the hospital after the religious-therapy scene. These shots, as Jayyusi (1988: 280) explains, “exhibit a *visual transition logic* that operates by virtue of cultural knowledge and conventions, enabling film viewers to make specific inferential moves or directly to achieve recognition, and conversely informing the structural choices and transitions made by filmmakers.” In *Aliénations*, many of these transition shots and scenes connect the hospital to the exterior world. For instance, the famous Constantine bridge is filmed several times (e.g. 149-150) to achieve a metaphorical bridge between the hospital’s outer (144-148) and inner (before 143 and after 150) sides. Actually, in approximately the same part of the film, the storm we can hear in the background of the scene showing a group of male inmates in a bedroom becomes the topic of a series of shots (144-148) transporting the spectator out of the hospital, in the darkness and the tormented sky of the tempest. Somewhat later, another excursion to the hospital’s courtyard (185-188) connects two scenes specific to the hospital: a collective-therapy session (167-184) and the drug-delivery session (189-192).

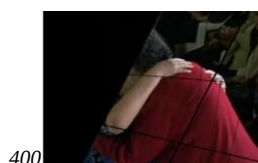


Transition shots and sequences are primarily technical devices which, like punctuation in writing, give the filmic text its rhythm and participate in its grammatical organization, weaving the thread of the narrative and therefore, through their morally implicative potentialities, producing its intelligibility. We can illustrate this point with transitional scenes I call in a gloss “policemen” and “panoramic wheel”.



The police are not present in the film, except on two specific transitional occasions in which we see two policemen-in-the-waiting in the hospital doorway, and policemen and a police wagon positioned out of the hospital's precinct. In the former case (164), the two men are recognizable through their uniform. From their sitting in a rather bored way in a doorway we can infer that they are waiting. This activity is linked to their belonging to the category “policemen”. From their waiting in a setting we know as the hospital (this context emerges from the sequential positioning of the scene next to others which presented the clues contextualizing the hospital) we assume that they are waiting for somebody who was referred to the doctors. This transitional shot follows the psychiatric interview of a woman, which stops with the closure of the door of the consultation room (163). It is the first part of a set of three transitional shots, the second featuring a man sitting outside of the hospital with his back against its wall (165) and the third showing a sign reading “no entry” (166). It precedes the scene of a female collective therapy session within the hospital (167 onward). Nothing in the preceding and subsequent scenes suggests a specific relevance of the police, and we are therefore led to conclude that they belong to the hospital's normal environment as external agents accompanying candidates. However, the three transitional shots are all connected to the idea of confinement (guardians, window bars, forbidden entry). Despite the lack of direct relevance regarding the preceding and subsequent scenes, this set of transitional shots conveys the moral implication that the hospital is a place where control is exerted on the people. As for the second transitional shot featuring policemen (283, 284), despite the absence of direct connection with the preceding and subsequent scenes, it shows a conceptual and semantic relevance since it follows two successive scenes in which the fact of being referred to the psychiatrists is explicitly bound to politics, the State, and the police. In this case, the transitional shot takes the appearance of a formulation, in the sense given to this term by Heritage and Watson (1979), i.e. a version of events which apparently follows directly from other accounts, but actually introduces a transformation: filming policemen guarding the hospital looks like the natural conclusion of the statements that question the role of the State, but it actually ratifies, as reflection of reality, the statements which were made by patients during their conversations with hospital psychiatrists.

Turning now to the “panoramic wheel” transition scene, we face a different situation. Indeed, this wheel has nothing to do with the world of the hospital and is not relevant with regard to what was said in any of the preceding scenes. It is inserted within the final scene of the fancy-fair (374 onward). It conveys the spectator from within the hospital and the feast that takes place in it (374, 382) to the open air, against the background of a city one has all the reasons to see as Constantine, with close-up shots of a building one can eventually interpret as the hospital, and with various shots of a gigantic wheel with nacelles rotating in the sky above the city (389, 395). One may (or may not) ascribe a symbolic interpretation to that scene: the wheel of Fortune, the transient nature of life, the lightness of being, the perspectival dimension of the world, etc. To a certain extent, it remains non-decidable. Inserted as it is in the middle of the hospital’s fancy-fair, it opens the possibility of inferences without specifically instructing the spectator’s reading. It looks as incongruous (against the backdrop of the hospital) as the fancy-fair (against the backdrop of the patients’ problems). Like poetic language, it underdetermines the reading; it gives fewer clues than necessary for a definite interpretation (Livingston, 1995). When back to the hospital (397), we are just left with the impression that “the show must go on,” and this corresponds to the film’s generic end (400, 401, 402).



## Embedded events

We shall now concentrate on the scenes inside the hospital. Such interactions and narratives are occurring naturally, by which I mean that they remain largely unmediated by the film director. These scenes of the hospital’s daily life stand next to each other, although they are sometimes separated by short transitional sequences. Although they constitute the primary material of the documentary, they take the shape of events embedded within the narrative of the film. In other words, these “natural” events constitute the “building blocks” of what the movie purports to say as a whole. In that sense – and this is why I analyse it in a second step – they play an ancillary role. Before turning to the grammatical organization of embedded scenes and global narrative, I propose now to examine in detail one of these natural scenes: a patient-doctor interview. Note that, for present purposes, we shall only consider what the people say as it can be captured by a francophone spectator, i.e. through the transcript of people’s utterances when made in French and the written caption in French when utterances are made in Arabic. The specific and detailed conversation-analytic study of this psychiatric material will be the object of further writings.

Patient : je m’appelle docteur Chimam, je suis médecin biologiste  
je suis également docteur vétérinaire, informaticienne,  
généticienne, euh, licence en droit, licence anglaise et, et  
je parle sept langues

Doctor : vous avez quel âge

Patient : vingt-trois ans

Doctor : vingt-trois ans

Patient : ouais

Doctor : quel niveau scolaire, les études

Patient : mes études (exclamation, rire), bon, j’ai terminé la  
médecine, je suis en première année post-graduation,  
parce que je suis majeure de promo, euh, je suis en  
deuxième année docteur vétérinaire, en première

*my name is dr Shimam, I’m a physician biologist  
I’m also a veterinary doctor, computer scientist  
geneticist, ehh, graduate in law, in English, and  
I speak seven languages*

*how old are you*

*twenty three*

*twenty three*

*yeah*

*what school level, your studies*

*my studies (laugh), well, I’ve completed  
medicine, I’m in first year post-graduation,  
because I’m head of the list, ehh, I’m in my  
second year of veterinary doctor, in first*

année droit, j'ai terminé ma licence anglaise, ehh  
quoi encore  
 Father : (inaudible)  
 Doctor : pourquoi on vous a-t-on amenée ici  
 Patient : pour dépression nerveuse, on m'a insultée, on m'a même frappée, j'ai des bleus partout  
 Doctor : qui est-ce qui vous a frappée  
 Patient : ttt, tentative de viol, deux personnes, une personne au niveau de la fac et l'autre à l'extérieur, tentative de vol, on m'a pris mes bijoux, je m'suis pas énervée pour ça parce que, les bijoux, normal  
 Doctor : vous avez beaucoup d'argent  
 Patient : ouais, grâce à Dieu, ouais, c'qui m'a énervée, c'est les gens, euh, j'suis majeure de promo avec 16 de moyenne, on m'a pris la bourse à l'étranger, elle a été destinée à une personne incompétente, parce que je sais pas c'est la fille de qui, j'ai laissé tomber parce que j'ai les moyens d'aller en Amérique si je veux, quand je veux et où je veux  
 Father : (soupir)  
 Patient : donnez-lui à boire  
 Doctor : pourquoi  
 Patient : parce que il angoisse  
 Doctor : pourquoi il angoisse  
 Patient : il angoisse je sais pas pourquoi  
 Father : parce que je n'ai pas dormi  
 Patient : il n'a pas dormi, oui  
 Doctor : le traitement, tu le prends toujours  
 Patient : oui  
 Doctor : comment tu te sens  
 Patient : très très bien, mmm les gens, ce sont pas des gens, c'sont des diables, ils me foutent pas la paix, hier, j'ai été agressée par trois agents de sécurité de la fac, agressée par une, une dame vulgaire, qui m'a craché au visage dans la rue, dans un taxi, imagine, je prends les taxis pour éviter les problèmes, parce que les bus il y a toujours des problèmes, je prends un taxi, elle s'installe à côté de moi elle veut pas sortir de la porte de son côté, elle veut me sauter dessus, elle m'a demandé de descendre pour sortir, elle m'a cherché, je n'ai pas répondu, je lui ai dit je suis médecin aux urgences, je n'ai pas dormi pendant sept jours et sept nuits successives  
 Doctor : pourquoi  
 Patient : parce que je travaille la nuit, j'ai une puissance supranormale, parce que janvier, février, mars, j'ai pas dormi une heure, trois mois successifs, cent jours, j'ai (approbation du father) j'ai pas dormi avec le Nosilan, Tranxène, les anxios, la Naphranine et le Surmantil, avec tout ça j'ai pas pu dormir, je me comporte très bien, j'étudie, je travaille, je sors, je fais tout, même j'ai une puissance un peu anormale  
 Doctor : d'accord, moi j'ai l'impression qu'il y a un petit surmenage  
 Patient : oui oui  
 Doctor : hein, le surmenage il faut un repos, moi j'pense qu'il faut  
 Patient : arrêter les études  
 Doctor : mais c'est une demande, pour le moment  
 Patient : pour le moment, ouais, parce que ce qui m'agace, c'est pas les études, parce que, regarde, c'est une agression, un traumatisme crânien, le monsieur qui m'a frappée, j'ai des bleus sur tout le corps, regarde, on me cherche là où je vais, c'est pas normal, parce que c'est, euh, c'est paranormal, c'est de la métaphysique  
 Doctor : comment

*law, I've completed my graduate in English, ehh  
 what else  
 (unclear)  
 why were you brought here  
 for nervous depression, I was insulted, I was  
 even hit, I've blows everywhere  
 who did hit you  
 ttt, rape attempt, two people, one within  
 the university, the other outside, theft attempt,  
 my jewels were stolen, I didn't get nervous for  
 that reason because, jewels, it's normal  
 you've a lot of money  
 yeah, thanks God, yeah, what irritated me, it's  
 the people, ehh, I'm head of the list with 16 average  
 they took my scholarship for abroad, it was given to  
 an incompetent person, because she's the daughter of  
 I don't know who, I let it be because I've the means  
 to go to the US if, when and where I want  
 (sigh)  
 give him something to drink  
 why  
 because he's getting anxious  
 why is he getting anxious  
 he's getting anxious, I don't know why  
 because I didn't sleep  
 he didn't sleep, yes  
 the medicine, you still take it  
 yes  
 how do you feel  
 very very well, mmh the people, they aren't people  
 they're devils, they don't leave me in peace,  
 yesterday, I was attacked by two security agents at  
 the university, attacked by one, one vulgar lady,  
 who spat at my face, in the street, in a cab, imagine  
 I take cabs to have no problems, because in buses  
 there're always problems, I take a cab, she sits on  
 on my side, she doesn't want to take the door on  
 her side, she wants to step over me, she asked me to  
 descend to get out, she bothered me, I didn't  
 answer, I told her I'm a doctor in the emergencies,  
 I didn't sleep for 7 days and nights in succession  
 why  
 'cause I work at night, I've a supranormal power,  
 'cause in January, February, March, I didn't sleep  
 one hour, 3 consecutive months, 100 days, I (father  
 nods) didn't sleep with Nosilan, Tranxene, anxios,  
 Naphranine, Surmantil, with all that I couldn't sleep,  
 I'm very fine, I study, I work, I go out, I do  
 everything, I've even a power a little bit supranormal  
 ok, I've the impression there's a little overwork  
 yes yes  
 heh, overwork, there needsto be rest, I think you must  
 stop studies  
 but this's a request, for now  
 for now, yeah, 'cause what bothers me, it isn't  
 your studies, 'cause, look, it's an attack, a skull  
 trauma, the man who hit me, I got blows all over my  
 body, look, people bother me wherever I go, it isn't  
 normal, 'cause it's, ehh paranormal, it's metaphysics  
 how*

Patient : on m'a ensorcelée, le crétin, ce crétin de marabout a envoyé les djinns contre moi, donc comme je suis croyante musulmane et pratiquante, les djinns musulmans, ils me protègent, j'en ai six musulmans

Doctor : tu les vois

Patient : oui

Father : mais l'imam t'a dit qu'ils sont partis

Patient : s'il-vous-plaît

Doctor : vous les voyez

Patient : non, j'les vois pas, je les sens, ils m'aident, je ferme les yeux, je souhaite n'importe quoi, ... je l'aurai, si quelqu'un m'énervé

Doctor : ils vous parlent

Patient : oui

Doctor : qu'est-ce qu'ils vous disent

Patient : l'avenir, j'ai vu des visions, la nuit quand je dors, j'ai des visions et ils se réalisent, j'ai vu même un être humain, par exemple, un malade lorsque j'ai vu, je vois même l'heure il va mourir oui ou non, mais ça j'ai vu pas l'heure

Doctor : d'après toi, pourquoi tu as spécialement tous ces pouvoirs

Patient : c'est Dieu, il m'a donné tout, la beauté, tout, l'argent (remarque inaudible de la doctoresse) Dieu, non

Doctor : pourquoi Dieu vous a choisis

Patient : j'ai vu pas dire

Doctor : non, il faut tout nous dire

Patient : si, il m'a parlé, dans un rêve

Doctor : qu'est-ce qu'il vous a dit

Patient : (rire) j'ai vu pas l'heure, j'ai vu pas le droit

Doctor : il faut nous faire confiance, il faut tout nous dire

Patient : oui, c'est quelque chose de, divine, c'est un peu, c'est de la métaphysique

Doctor : donne-nous un petit signe

Patient : un petit signe, hum, je suis bonne, je suis croyante, j'ai vu plusieurs prophètes, j'ai vu heuh Suleiman, notre seigneur Noé, Noé, qui d'autre, notre seigneur Joseph, donc j'ai vu presque, et j'ai des visions, des visions dans le passé, avant Jésus Christ, par exemple, heuh, il y a deux génies qui sont juifs, un il s'appelle Marchal, il a 5000 ans, c'est un, heuh, israélien, l'autre, je sais pas son nom, il n'a pas dit son nom, c'est un bon

Doctor : bien, moi je vais proposer quelque chose, j'espère que vous allez accepter

Patient : oui oui, pourquoi pas

Doctor : que tu restes un peu ici à l'hôpital

Patient : (rire) je suis venue pour ça

Doctor : bien, tant mieux, on est tous d'accord

Patient : (enthousiaste) j'ai vu rester une année

Doctor : non, pas une année, le temps que vous vous reposiez, personne ne va vous agresser

Patient : inshallah

Doctor : d'accord

Patient : j'espère

Doctor : on va discuter de tout ça lorsque tu seras plus calme

Patient : hah, je suis très calme, je peux vous parler jusqu'à la nuit si vous voulez

Doctor : d'accord

Patient : j'ai pas dormi pendant 100 jours, si si, je travaille, j'étudie, je fais tout normal, même j'ai une force un peu supranormale,

*I've been bewitched, the moron, this idiotic marabout has sent djinns against me, thus 'cause I'm a Muslim practicing believer, Muslim djinns, they protect me, I've six of them Muslims*

*you see them*

*yes*

*but the imam told you they were gone*

*please*

*you see them*

*no, I don't see them, I feel them, they help me, I close my eyes, I wish anything, ... I'll get it, if somebody bothers me*

*they talk to you*

*yes*

*what do they tell you*

*the future, I can see visions, the night when I sleep, I've visions and they realize, I can even see a human being, for instance, a sick person when I see him, I even see the hour when he'll die yes or no, but this, I can't tell you*

*according to you, why to you have especially these powers it's God, he gave me all, beauty, all, money (doctor makes inaudible remark) God, no*

*why did God choose you*

*I can't tell you*

*no, you must tell us everything*

*yes, he talked to me, in a dream*

*what did he tell you*

*(laugh) I can't tell you, I'm not allowed*

*you must trust us, you must tell us everything*

*yes, this's something of, divine, it's a little, it's metaphysics*

*give us a little indication*

*a little indication, I'm good, I'm a believer, I saw several prophets, I saw eh Suleiman, our lord Noah, Noah, who else, our lord Joseph, so I've seen almost, and I've visions, visions in the past, before Jesus Christ, for instance, eh, there're two geniuses who're Jewish, one's called Marshall, he's 5000 years old, he's eh an Israeli, the other, I don't know his name, he didn't tell his name, he's a good one well, I'll propose you something, I hope you're going to accept it*

*yes yes, why not*

*that you stay a little bit here at the hospital*

*(laugh) I came for that purpose*

*well, all the better, we're all agreed*

*(enthusiastic) I want to stay one year*

*no, not one year, the time you need to rest, nobody will attack you*

*insha'llah*

*ok*

*I hope so*

*we'll discuss about all this when you're quieter*

*ahh, I'm quite, I can talk to you until night*

*if you want*

*ok*

*I didn't sleep during 100 days, yes yes, I work, I study, I do everything in a normal way, I even have a*

je ne dors pas, c'est un peu bizarre, parce que je ne pouvais pas dormir

*supranormal power, I don't sleep, it's a little bit bizarre, 'cause I couldn't sleep (takes her tension) keep silent one minute*

Assistant : (prend la tension) taisez-vous une minute

*I took her to an exorcist imam and she was listening to the possessed women, the imam graduated Islamic sciences*

Father : je l'ai emmenée chez un imam exorciste et elle écoutait ce que disaient les autres femmes possédées, l'imam est licencié

*in psychology and Islamic sciences, he's a young intellectual, he suggested her she was possessed, there, she complained my legs shiver, and at the end the imam told her, you've nothing sister, the story of the Israeli, the djinn, they're stories she heard over there, these aren't stories she lived, she record them and she blames herself, and she imagines a movie with others' visions*

Doctor : sciences islamiques

Father : en psychologie et en sciences islamiques, c'est un jeune intellect, il lui a suggéré qu'elle était possédée, là, elle s'est plainte mes jambes tremblent, et à la fin, l'imam lui a affirmé, tu n'as rien ma sœur, l'histoire de l'Israélien, du djinn, c'est des histoires qu'elle a entendues là-bas, ce ne sont pas des histoires qu'elle a vécues, elle enregistre et s'accable de tous les maux, elle se fait des films avec les visions des autres

*your daughter certificated three times*

Doctor : votre fille a eu trois bacs

*three times the general certificate*

Father : trois bacs

*she's fond of studying*

Doctor : c'est une passionnée des études

*ahh, a gift, a gift, all her teachers will confirm it, it's a divine gift*

Father : ah, un don, un don, tous ses enseignants vous le confirmeront, c'est un don divin

*why does she keep on certificating*

Doctor : pourquoi à chaque fois elle refait le bac

*the actual complex, her actual complex, it's to not wear the white gown*

Father : le vrai complexe, son vrai complexe, c'est de ne pas porter la blouse blanche

*she didn't study medicine*

Doctor : elle n'a pas fait médecine

*that's it*

Father : c'est ça

*it's a belief that seems logical, being possessed by a djinn, it's not a disease, it's a reality that can happen to anybody, people believe in it, anyway, if it exists or not (laugh)*

Doctor : c'est une croyance qui paraît logique, être possédée par un djinn, c'est pas une maladie, c'est une réalité qui peut arriver à n'importe qui, les gens y croient (...) en tout cas si ça existe ou non (rire)

*do you ehh believe in it*

Off : est-ce que euh vous y croyez

*wallahi I don't know, as a Muslim ehh*

Doctor : wallahi je n'sais pas, en tant que musulmane euh on y croit et on y croit mais hed la la fréquence, ça n'arrive pas aussi souvent, aussi rapidement, y a y a beaucoup de, c'est pathologique

*one believes in it and one believes but hed frequency, it does not happen as often, as quickly, there're, there're lots of, it's pathological*

Off : de temps en temps vous êtes possédée

*from time to time you're possessed*

Doctor : Non, c'est pas ça (rire), non, de par notre, euh, la culture musulmane, c'est dans la culture musulmane ça existe dans le Coran aussi, bes ça, c'est pathologique, soit que ça rentre dans un cadre de psychose, un cas où il y a, ils voient réellement des choses qu'ils interprètent comme étant une euh possession, soit que c'est culturel, y a des femmes qui accusent leur voisine de les avoir ensorcelées, pour expliquer une querelle ou un malentendu, là elles s'orientent vers la sorcellerie, mais c'est beaucoup plus euh, c'est-à-dire des interprétations personnelles

*no, it isn't that (laugh), no, because of our, ehh, the Muslim culture, it's inside Muslim culture, it exists in the Koran, bes this, it's pathological, either it enters the frame of psychosis, a case where there's, they really see things they interpret as being ehh possession, or it's cultural, there're women who accuse their neighbours of having bewitched them to explain a dispute or a misunderstanding, in this case, they orient to sorcery, but it's much more ehh, that is, personal interpretations*

Off : c'est beaucoup plus culturel en fait

*it's much more cultural actually*

Doctor : c'est beaucoup plus culturel

*it's much more cultural*

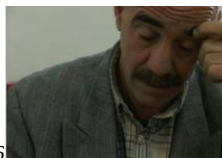
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This interview nicely documents the ways in which this specific patient presents her own experiences, her father produces his own adjunctive explanation, and the psychiatrist tries to make sense of the patient's account. Different themes emerge from the patient's talk, e.g. studies, attacks and metaphysics. As for the first theme, it is part of the patient's self-presentation: before establishing her name, she uses the word "doctor"; then, she proceeds to the listing of the many qualifications she has, and she does it mainly in French (Arabic being always an option in this specific context). For the spectator, it promptly creates a puzzle: what does it mean to be a specialist in so many scientific fields? However, for the patient herself (and we must note that this is not an exogenous characterization, since she admits being at the hospital because of a "nervous depression"), it does not work as such. On the contrary, this self-profiling produces the background against which she sets the interaction. Throughout the interview, it is indeed her "supra-normal" forces – originating in her metaphysical blessing – which step forward, while the environment – which is described as "vulgar", i.e. too normal – proves hostile. We can understand it as the "normal" world not accepting her being endowed with "supra-normal" capacities. In other words, if taking the patient's account for what it purports to be, it is not her personal condition that constitutes the source of the problem, but the other people who "do not leave her in peace" and aggress her (insults, blows, rape attempts, theft, prevarication). In her own words, staying at the hospital has no therapeutic purpose but aims at protecting her from the outside world. The outside world must be distinguished from the metaphysical world, which does not menace the patient but, on the contrary, has blessed her with exceptional scholarly talents and visionary faculties.

The man who participates in the interview, on the patient's side, is not characterized as her father until he is interviewed by the doctor, who asks him to confirm that "[his] daughter certificated three times." However, this status is evident from his status of accompanier, his participation in the interaction, the way the patient addresses him, and his capacity to complement her narrative with factual remarks, e.g. reminding his daughter that the imam said the djinns "were gone". The latter remark prompts her to deny his legitimacy to challenge her version ("please"). The daughter-father interactions are marked (from the faces' expressions) by irony and irritation on her side, and by fatigue and despair on his. At some point, she inverts the scheme by asking that he be given a glass of water because "he's getting anxious," thus making a patient out of her father and claiming that his reasons for getting anxious are unknown (and perhaps even not serious, since she has a rather contemptuous face when asking for water). In the patient's attitude, it seems that her father is there to confirm her version, and the father's attitude during her interview is more supportive than ironic. It is only in a separate discussion with the doctor that his own version comes to the fore, especially on the issue of the djinns: "The story of the Israeli, the djinn, they're stories she heard over there, these aren't stories she lived, she records them and she blames herself [viz. she appropriates these stories], and she imagines a movie with others' visions." In this scene – which is not separated from the former scene in an explicit way – the father confronts her version with his personal experience of what happened, i.e. her story of the imam who bewitched her and his account of her duplicating other women's stories when attending the imam's session.

Last but not least, we can see how the doctor conducts the interview against the background of the patient's own narrative. The doctor does not seek to challenge the patient's account, but rather begs its amplification. In other words, it looks for the most detailed exposition of the patient's self-understanding of her own condition. However, it is clear that the doctor never considers the patient's account as anything else but the basis for diagnosis. If the patient's narrative is taken seriously, it is not for the factual statements it produces, but for the psychiatric-assessment criteria it offers. The doctor's standpoint is not directly ironic, in

the sense that it does not question the factual claims the patient makes; yet, it is structurally ironic, since it proceeds from the assumption that the case is pathological (e.g. when asking: “the medicine, you still take it”), that the patient’s narrative is made of incongruities with regard to what normal people would say (e.g. in the doctor’s later interview by the film director: “it’s inside Muslim culture, it exists in the Koran, besides this, it’s pathological”), and that those incongruities provide for a diagnosis (e.g. “ok, I’ve the impression there’s a little overwork”) which itself indicates appropriate remedies (e.g. “heh, overwork, there needs to be rest, I think you must stop your studies”). Through the transcript, we thus have access to the doctor’s psychiatric reasoning, which functions as the jurist’s incongruity procedure, i.e. pointing to a gap between the case as it is and the case as it should be in normal conditions, then inferring the consequences of the gap so identified in terms of the definition of its cause and the solution for its bridging. This procedure is strikingly evidenced by the doctor’s interview by the film-maker, where she sets the normalcy of beliefs in djinns in Muslim culture (“as a Muslim eh one believes in it”) and, against this backcloth, establishes the incongruous nature of the patient’s claims (“it does not happen as often, as quickly, there’re, there’re lots of, it’s pathological”). Normalcy is presented here as relative to religion and culture, that is, as specific to the local context: it is what is accepted by the majority of the local people. Therefore, according to the doctor, what is normal somewhere can be seen as abnormal elsewhere (she expresses this point of view when laughing after having been asked the question of her own beliefs, refraining first from taking side by claiming her ignorance, and then contextualizing her own belief), but this relativistic perspective does not preclude any local normalcy from having its own inner standards and criteria according to which behaviours and discourse are evaluated as normal or abnormal. In other words, it is not because the patient speaks of djinns that she must be considered psychiatrically sick, but because the ways in which she speaks of djinns contradict the local, normal and standard pattern of such belief.

Narratives are locally produced by the patient, her father and the doctor, in a natural way, for the local and practical purposes at stake. For the patient, it is made so as to justify the protection of the hospital against the aggressions of the outside world. The father is rather achieving the mission of supporting his daughter and testifying to some aspects of a biographical nature (e.g. explaining how she picked up the story of the Israeli djinn from women attending the imam’s session). As for the doctor, she is asking questions and demanding explanations for the practical purpose of establishing a psychiatric diagnosis. The doctor, when interviewed, is also proposing ex-post facto explanations – that is, in a non-natural way, as this narrative is triggered by the film director – for the establishment of her diagnosis. These many factual claims cannot be considered as right or wrong from any overarching standpoint (God’s viewpoint): they are the product of language games closely associated with the practical activities and purposes of the people concerned.

However, these accounts together, as stitched to or encapsulated within each other, as edited, juxtaposed, reproduced or elicited by the film maker, constitute the building blocks of the filmic text whose threaded narrative is an intended achievement. Whereas the patient’s, the father’s and the doctor’s interviews are phenomenologically separate, they are associated in the filmic narrative in one global scene whose successive accounts produce complementing or contrasting effects. In that sense, natural accounts are ancillary to the global story, although they form its raw material: they are embedded within the filmic text in order to contribute to its narrative logic.

## Documentary films as truth-producing engines

A documentary film like *Aliénations* provides us with a twofold praxiological documentation. On one hand, it offers the material that permits documenting psychiatry in action. On the other hand, as a film belonging to the “documentary” genre, it exhibits a specific organization which is a topic of inquiry in itself.

Notwithstanding the biases that any observing stance necessarily produces, documentaries can offer resources for praxiological studies, especially when made of scenes which are more or less “naturally” retrieved. In this case, Bensmail’s film makes available a whole set of situations, actions and interactions that nicely record psychiatric encounters and settings and document “mind in action” (Coulter, 1989). In an anti-mentalist perspective, that is, in a perspective that acknowledges the impossibility of getting access to the mind but through what is made public by the people themselves, we are offered a sample of mundane reasoning in the context of psychiatry, with all the practical epistemology which members of the encounter unfold in order to understand each other and to make sense of the local situation. In other words, the documentary provides us with instances of language-in-use in psychiatry and therefore makes it possible to analyse the practical grammar of mind-related concepts in this environment. What we observed so far supports a praxiological approach to insanity through which we can see that the application of psychiatric labels is a pragmatic affair: “When jurors, psychiatrists, kinsmen, and all ordinary members decide the sanity of another, their decisions are ultimately based on a socially accredited body of knowledge that they methodically use” (Blum, 1970: 38). In other words, psychiatric ascriptive practices are contingent to both a cultural and a local environment, by which we mean that they are not only context-bound and variable, but also that they partake of culturally furnished knowledge and belief and presuppose describable sorts of reasoning and inferential work (Coulter, 1973).

As I mentioned in the Introduction, this chapter is a preliminary step in a more thorough exploration of psychiatry in action. Actually, it does not concentrate as much on psychiatry as it does on the documentary genre. If the latter receives special attention, this is mainly to highlight that it constitutes a very efficient truth-producing engine. Despite its edited nature, the documentary film puts forward claims regarding the way it reflects reality. This is achieved by embedding scenes which have been “naturally” captured, i.e. without direct and explicit elicitation by the film director. Because of our sense that truth and reality largely overlap, the production of shots taken in and from the real life transitively conveys some truth value. As we saw, these “natural” scenes are assembled so as to build a narrative which does not correspond to this specific site’s self-exposure but to the film maker’s editing and storytelling work. In other words, natural shots and scenes are intentionally organized to say something about that which was ascribed to the film as its topic. To put it in a nutshell, the documentary film is made of a pair associating, on one side, evidences of what really takes place in this very setting, and, on the other side, the film director’s interpretive assemblage of these evidences. In that sense, the documentary film is an evidential fiction/story. This remark is in no way ironic, nor does it make the film more or less valuable. It just points to the inner grammar of this genre and emphasizes its capacity to produce intelligibility in an organized way and with the specific persuasiveness of narratives naturally based on reality.



## CONCLUSION

### TRUTH

#### A Matter of Language Game and Practical Achievement

Truth is a ubiquitous member phenomenon. To document this statement, we shall proceed piecemeal.

First, we must emphasize that truth has always been the object of much debate and controversy in the field of the humanities. Looking for a way to proceed to the neurophysiologic reduction of mind-related issues, cognitive sciences relegate the question of truth to the black-box of the “mental”. Rational-choice theory, which closely associates itself with cognitivism, considers truth as the outcome of a cognitive evaluation and a utilitarian calculus based on the search for an optimum. Cognitive sociology makes a difference between good reasons to act and objective reasons for action, and sometimes shifts from the epistemically objective character of values to their intrinsic objectivity. Social constructivism tends to consider that truth is a social and possibly interactional achievement. In that sense, truth is constructed by social processes, is historically and culturally specific, and is in part shaped through the power struggles within a community. Our knowledge is “constructed,” because it does not reflect any external “transcendent” realities. Such is the position of cultural anthropology, in which the notion of truth is diluted in some kind of relativistic culturalism. We can also mention the [consensus theory](#), which holds that truth is whatever is agreed upon, or in some versions, might come to be agreed upon, by some specified group. According to one of its main representatives, Jürgen [Habermas](#), truth is what would be agreed upon in an [ideal speech situation](#).

Let's now turn to philosophy. It was often considered as the discipline looking for truth and its nature. The correspondence theory of truth could be said to be the “default theory” of truth in philosophy. According to the correspondence theory, a claim is true if it corresponds to what is so, if it corresponds to the “facts” or “reality”, and it is false if it does not correspond to what is so. Most scientists and many philosophers hold some version of the correspondence theory of truth. So, for instance, the statement “The opera *Aida* had its first performance in Cairo” is true just in case the opera *Aida* had its first performance in Cairo, and false otherwise. As for the statement “Snow is white”, it is true just in case snow is white.

However, the correspondence theory is not without generating a couple of vexing questions, like the following: Is the correspondence theory itself true? If so, what does it correspond to? And how do we figure out what is so? The latter question belongs to metaphysics. A metaphysical realist will hold that the reality that “corresponds” is objective and mind-independent, whereas an idealist may hold that it is objective, yet not mind-independent.

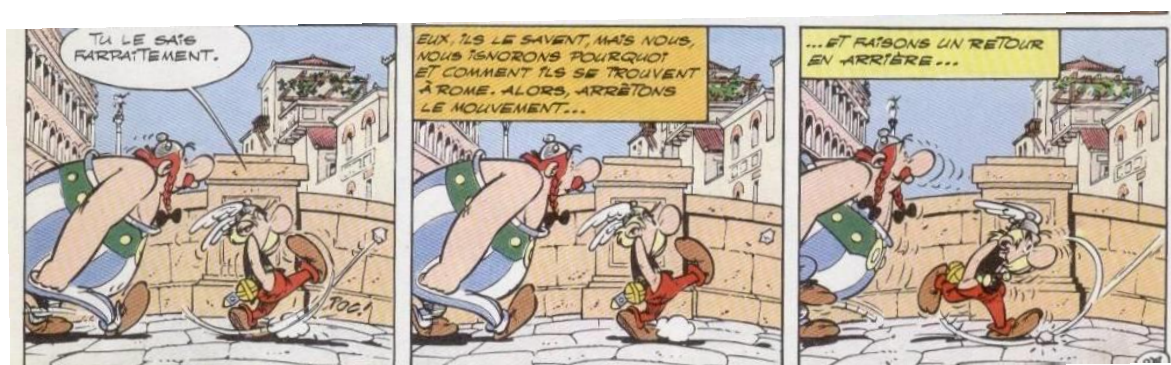
Pragmatic theory sought to tackle this issue of truth by assessing it in terms of efficiency vis-à-vis the real. According to this theory, a statement is true if it allows you to interact effectively and efficiently with the cosmos; the less true a belief is, the less it facilitates such interaction; and a belief is false if it facilitates no interaction. For instance, I am true to believe that inanimate objects do not spontaneously get up and move about, because this belief is effectively contributing to make my world more predictable and thus easier to live in: it works!

However, it happens that unreasonable beliefs “work”: they are thought to be efficient and people act accordingly. When participating in a lottery, I can believe in the power of choosing the numbers according to some idiosyncratic scheme. When uttering words like *bi-idhni-llâh* (God permitting), I can believe that the outcome of my action is depending on God’s goodwill. And this can prove neither right nor wrong, it is somehow unfalsifiable: someone might effectively think that God helped him without anybody being able to prove the contrary. In other words, this notion of “more effective and efficient interaction with the cosmos” is objectionably vague. It also invites a kind of relativism, since it considers that there are degrees of truth, and thus invites us to reject the law of non-contradiction according to which “a claim is either true or false”.

There are many other theories to which we might refer. For our present concern, we shall just stress the fact that all these theories share, despite their deep and major differences, a strong definitional concern for what truth actually is. This is what minimalist or deflationary theories challenge. Their proponents reject the thesis that the concept or term *truth* refers to a real property of sentences or propositions. On the contrary, they hold in common that the predicate ‘true’ is an expressive convenience, not the name of a property requiring deep analysis. But what does it express? And what is it convenient for?

It is on the side of the philosophy of language that we propose to search for the building blocks of our contention that truth is not an issue of content as much as a matter of language games through which something is achieved when claiming that it is true. According to the performative theory of truth, claiming that it is true to say *snow is white* is to perform the speech act of marking one’s agreement with the claim that snow is white. It is much like nodding one’s head in agreement. In other words, some statements are more actions than communicative statements: they are speech acts. When the mayor says *I name you Princess Diana* at the appropriate time in a ceremony of launching a ship, he is performing the act of giving the boat the name that will identify it onward. He is not *describing* anything, but actually doing so. Such performative conception can be extended beyond the realm of speech acts. For instance, to say a statement is true is not to make a statement about a statement, but rather to perform the act of agreeing with or endorsing a statement. When one says *It’s true that it’s raining*, one asserts no more than *It’s raining*. The function of the statement *It’s true that* is to agree with, accept, or endorse the statement that *it’s raining*.

Figure 1: Astérix



Let us briefly pause and examine how our language can be seen to function. As a way of illustration, we draw on the rules and techniques of comics. If you have a look at the excerpt of the famous Astérix series, you can observe how time and temporality are specifically produced and readily made available, at least for people familiar with this type of language

game. Pictorial details are conventionally used to produce the impression of movement. Put together, they constitute a sort of language the functioning of which we can describe. Movement is understood in a sequence, which is time-oriented, stretching from its beginning, that is, from the conventional origin of the movement, like the feathers of an arrow, to its end, the arrow's head, via the many stages of its completion. Our natural attitude makes us expect the ordinary performance of the normal scheme. When the details expressing movement are erased or inverted, there is a breach in our expectations, and this must be accounted for. In our example, erasing the details expressing movement produces a suspension effect, while inverting the details expressing movement produces a flash-back effect. This is why we understand what follows the third vignette as a narrative which is historically situated sometime before the first vignette. In order to bracket this flash-back and somehow to repair the breach to the expected unfolding of time, another vignette is needed, which marks that time is found again, that is, that we are back to the ordinary chronological formulation of action.

Figure 2 : Astérix

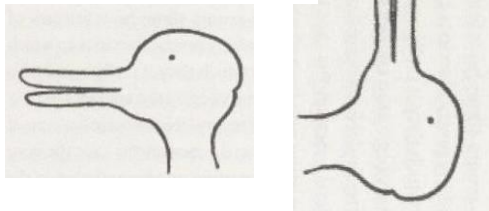


Note, however, that this is all done in a spatial perspective, vignettes succeeding each other from left to right and from top to bottom in a conventional reading manner. In other words, time, within the specific language of comics, is pictorial and spatially sequential.

It is on Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* that we mainly draw in order to ground the respecification of the question of truth as an issue of language practice. Against the deification of criteria for what was to count as Truth and against the amnesia which affected ordinary language and practical, commonsense reasoning, he came to argue intensely in his later work. Wittgenstein's position vis-à-vis Truth is akin to his position vis-à-vis formal Logic: any preconceived idea of crystalline purity must be removed "by turning our whole examination around. We are talking about the spatial and temporal phenomenon of language, not about some non-spatial, non-temporal phantasm. But we talk about it as we do about the pieces in chess when we are stating the rules of the game, not describing their physical properties" (§108). Wittgenstein calls the object of his second philosophy "language-games", that is, the ways in which language in use and practical conducts are closely interwoven. Contexts of practice become therefore central in the analysis of how the language unfolds, and so do the language practitioners' forms of life. With this latter notion, Wittgenstein means all the social practices a language community has, which are so deeply rooted that the speakers do not even think about them, these sets of practices in the course of which particular language combinations are specifically developed in order to produce meaning against some background horizon of understanding. Sometimes, language games share some kind of resemblance with each other. Wittgenstein uses the example of the word "game" to show that all its instances, such as chess, soccer, cards, computer and hazard, refer to very different sets of functions, rules and practices, and yet share important similarities.

This is what he calls “family resemblances.” In this way, Wittgenstein undermines the ‘craving’ of formal logicians for a description of the ‘essence’ of truth, where ‘essence’ is construed independently of actual standards sustained and enforceable within practical domains of language-use. Instead of looking for the criteria determining the conditions of truth or falsity, he thus suggests that it is the practical grammar of our use of truth-related concepts which must become the object of our descriptive analysis. It is in the *Lebenswelt*, in the life world, in the domain of ordinary, practical, social affairs that rules for devising the truth are to be revealed in operation. Does this mean that logical relations between concepts become repudiated, that everything becomes pure contingency and random conventionalism? Definitely not: as Peter Winch puts it, social actions and social relations may be investigated as logical relations between concepts, since the rules and criteria governing the use of the concepts of human conduct and social behaviour are the rules which accord intelligibility or meaning to human behaviour. In other words, logic depends on social relations between men, and not the other way around. The criteria for truth are essentially language-game- and purpose-dependent, which does not argue for their non-existence nor for their arbitrariness or unconstrained variability of meaning.

**Figure 3: duck-rabbit**



Truth is therefore a phenomenon closely associated to speech practices or language games. According to the forms of life from which it proceeds, it can take various shapes which nevertheless show family resemblances. The organization of such language games, Wittgenstein calls practical grammar, that is, “the manifold connections between words and other words, phrases and expressions as these are used by ‘masters of natural language’, and the manifold connections between kinds of expression and sorts of circumstance within which and about which they may be used.” (Coulter, 1989: 49) Examining the grammar of truth consists thus of the examination of the detailed workings of this area of our language-in-use that has become a focal point for myth and confusion. It reveals both similarities and differences in the usage of the concept of truth in the various forms of our life and regions of our language. It repudiates any theorizing attitude in favour of a theory-informed description of practices related to truth. It does not involve any attempt at disclosing what lies “beyond the surface”, but rather adopting an ordinary attitude that allows us to see what “lies open to view”. This is something of an experience made of noticing aspects, what is referred to in the phenomenological tradition as a noetic process: any capture of an object is construed through the prime recognition of a whole and through the “dawning” of aspects according to their relationship to this whole. If, for whatever reason, this relation of aspects to a whole is undermined, we might face a crisis, something of a breach, which in turn will call for some kind of repair, that is, an account for the causes of the breach or the identification of another type of aspects-whole relationship, like in the famous Gestalt theory-inspired “duck-rabbit” example.

Up to now, we have shown that truth is a phenomenon. However, it is not only a phenomenon, it is a member phenomenon. By this we mean that the use of truth-related concepts is a phenomenon endogenous to the society and its members, one among the many

methods of reasoning used by groups of people through time and space. In other words, truth belongs to these themes which are constantly used by everybody, at a very practical level, in order to make sense of one's environment, to express oneself, to communicate among each other, to produce and reproduce the world's orderliness so necessary in the conduct of mundane business. Social facts are practical achievements. In that perspective, Durkheim's statement that social facts constitute an objective reality must be read as follows: the objective reality of social facts corresponds to all these themes that can be linked, in each concrete case, to an indigenous production of order, carried out locally, generated through collaboration, and describable through natural language. This sort of concern for the way in which people conduct their methodical activities, establishing pragmatically what may be considered adequate, precise, appropriate or true, supposes that the analysis rejects the search for external criteria in the establishment of truth and intelligibility and focuses only on the ordinary modes of practical sociological reasoning.

What do people do in action and through the action of accounting for something? Rather than speaking in terms of incorporation, habitus, self-mystification, lies, or double-standard speech, we should better consider that people are generally able to know and describe their daily business in a competent and adequate manner. Far from being idiots or dopes, people, very generally act and speak in and of their world in an informed way. In so doing, they describe it and orient intersubjectively towards this description, its relevance, and its intercomprehension. Accounts made by the members of a given social group are irreducibly contextual, in the sense that they are loosely adapted to the events they describe, are subject to ad hoc adjustments, and are understood by reference to a mass of postulates which are not made explicit. The fact that accounts point toward the context in which they are made can be called their indexicality: "the intelligibility of what is said rests upon the hearer's ability to make out what is meant from what is said according to *methods* which are tacitly relied on by both speaker and hearer. These methods involve the continual invocation of commonsense knowledge and of context as resources with which to make definite sense of indefinite descriptive terms." (Heritage, 1984: 144)

With classical social sciences research, we often face something missing, a "missing-what," which somehow blurs the analysis of what is actually done in ordinary practices, the "just-this-ness" of mundane activities. Advocating the adoption of a practice-oriented stance is thus an invitation to observe and describe what practitioners do and how they understand what they do as they carry out an ordinary task. As Michael Lynch emphasizes, there is a vast gap between the methods used to study activities and the methods that make up the "what" of the activities themselves. A good example of this is a particular type of legal sociology: the type that is more concerned with denouncing the injustice and inequality of law, than with describing how it is put into practice. This attention given to the "what" of mundane practice is in line with the analytical study we devised earlier of the practical grammar of contextualized saying and doing. Researching the practical grammar of a concept like truth allows us to problematize epistemology, by showing, in the daily use of related "epistemological" expressions, variations, systematic ambiguities, and manifest sensibilities. The description of situated activities that accomplish an epistemological task, like telling the truth, makes it possible to see the relevance the concept takes on in certain activity contexts. Starting from the description of the situated uses of epistemic themes, we then seek to follow their trail in various real cases of deployment, using ordinary words of observation, description, comparison, and reading.

In our perspective, the social order is a moral phenomenon produced by the methods of practical reasoning of the members of a given social group. This practical ethics and

epistemology are expressed in ordinary, “mundane” reasoning and its various hypotheses regarding the objectivity and intersubjectivity of the social reality we experience every day. It is possible to examine precisely how these ordinary hypotheses are produced and maintained, as well as the solutions that ordinary reasoning provides when it is faced with conflicting versions or experiences of reality. Such approach is inspired by phenomenology. It starts from the observation that, in ordinary reasoning, the world is dealt with as an object. This objectivity is neither examined nor challenged: it is taken for granted and it works as an underlying interpretive scheme that makes it possible for ordinary inferences and interpretations to be understood, described, and justified.

Mundane reasoning most frequently deals with truth-related issues, which are closely associated with the question of reality and the ways to deal with it. Melvin Pollner identifies a number of mundane-reason idealizations that bear upon the coherent, determined, and non-contradictory character of reality. These idealizations function as constraints which the mundane determinations of reality must satisfy insofar as it is to be counted as intelligible and rational. All these presuppositions regarding the determined, non-contradictory, internally consistent, and coherent nature of the world are beyond the possibility of invalidation. If contradictory observations on reality present themselves, they will not pose a challenge to these presuppositions; rather, it is the nature of the observations and the competence of those making them that will be in question. Thus, one will say that what observers saw was correct, but corresponded to two different moments in reality; or one will say that one of the observers could not have seen what he said he saw, because the conditions for correct observation were not present. Mundane reasoning, therefore, does not perceive multiple realities, but rather a single reality, of which the description may be faulty and patchy, which leaves it the task of filling in the gaps and empty spaces. Mundane reasoning anticipates a number of things with regard to the continuity, complementarity, and conformity of the various aspects of an object under observation. The fact that one expects accounts of an event to be harmonious, complementary, and coherent is behind the remarkable and remarked-upon character of the gaps that are noticed. The task of ordinary reasoning then becomes that of reconciling contradictory accounts by affirming or discrediting various versions of reality. By that very token, suppositions that relate *a priori* to reality are invariably confirmed.

The capacity of mundane reason to preserve itself is largely due to its intersubjective character and its insertion in a system of mutual perspectives that are translated in two other idealizations: the interchangeable nature of points of view and the congruence of systems of relevance. To illustrate this point, Pollner cites Evans-Pritchard’s description of the Azande oracle. The incongruous revelations of the oracle are repaired in such a way as to preserve the basic beliefs and so-called contradictions are thus explained in terms of interference with the normal functioning of the oracle. In the same way, suppositions with regard to the objective nature of the world and the intersubjectivity of knowledge are incorrigible theses on which mundane reasoning bases itself as it searches for explanations to abnormal situations. We may note that this incorrigibility, which is presupposed, is at one and the same time produced, reproduced, and realized each time people refer and orient to it. As for abnormal situations and disjunctions that arise from narrative accounts, they are explained, described, and justified by emphasizing the abnormal quality of the situation in which one or several observers could be found at the time of the event in question. The hypothesis is that, all else being equal, a single event can only produce identical descriptions. Mundane reasoning can only explain the incongruity of these descriptions by emphasizing the condition of normal observation that remained unfulfilled: each explanation preserves the world as an objective and shared order of events by showing how unanimity would have been forthcoming had it not been for the

absence, failure or violation of one of the presupposed but previously unformulated conditions necessary for unanimity.

Descriptions, explanations and categorizations are closely linked. The description and categorization effected by narratives contribute directly to the production of causal explanations, whether they are oriented to an object, like the search for material causes or objective reasons, or to a subject, like the search for agency, motives or intentions. The individualization of action provides a good example in this respect. Let us take the example of a person who pulls the trigger, fires a gun, wounds a man with the gunshot, and kills him. The philosophical response will be to consider either that four different actions have taken place, or that four different descriptions of the same action have been provided. At first sight, one may agree with the former, but it is more fruitful to follow Lena Jayyusi and to remark that these are four different types of description of a single action. Although these four descriptions are formally accurate, they do not take on interchangeable meanings and relevance. Each type of description refers to a particular type of context that justifies, describes, and attributes action; each type of description is used to accomplish specific practical tasks. These descriptions do not simply paraphrase each other; they are a paraphrase *and also* other things at the same time. They correspond to different language games, are inscribed in different courses of action, and orient to different objectives. These descriptions are not equivalent from a praxeological point of view, because each points to different characteristics of the action context. In that sense, each description accomplishes a different causation effect and produces a different truth account. Whether the result was intended or a product of chance, negligence, or evil intent, whether or not knowledge of normal consequences was available, whether a person is considered as a direct agent or an indirect contributor, all this is organized in a routine and contextual manner by descriptive activity, which highlights, avoids, presumes, or raises specific consequential characteristics of the action described, in a way that may be accounted for.

In the teaser of the Arab TV channel al-Hurra, it is plainly said there is but one truth providing one opens one's eyes. In a similar way, we must observe, in the mundane-reason process of looking for and establishing the truth, the central role which is played by a certain ideal of the normal or natural state of things and, therefore, of that which constitutes abnormality. Common sense considers that things have a "nature," and that they remain in their "natural" state as long as they have not been subjected to an intervention that interferes with their "normal" course. The cause of something is then an element that breaks the natural course of events and an abnormality is that which differentiates an accident from things following their customary course or, by extension, that which arises from the failure to do something that should or could normally have been done. In other words, the "normal" and the "natural" are categorizations against which mundane reason, comparing expectation of normality and perceived situations, assess the truthful nature of, for instance, a statement. Gregory Matoesian, analyzing a rape sentence passed in the United States, shows how the fact of invoking a category, like "rapist", somehow naturalizes the normative challenges linked to that category: "it is normal to be frightened of a rapist". This is done in such a way that any departure from these normative expectations violates "normalcy" and indeed leads to undermining the category that has been invoked: "he is not a rapist since you were not afraid when you met him". In great detail, Matoesian shows how the use of a multitude of linguistic and sequential resources allows for a disjunction to be created between the activities and attitudes one might expect from the member of a category, on one hand, and that very category, on the other. In other words, a lawyer's argument revolves around the idea that it is impossible that the witness would do 'normal' things with someone who is supposed to be 'abnormal'. (Matoesian, 1999)

In general, we therefore observe that the evaluation of facts, objects, and persons is carried out on the basis of the typicality of routinized situations, and truth is constructed on the basis of typical characteristics attributed to and expected of these situations. Truth, normalcy or reality cover situations that appear familiar, and are expected to reproduce typical characteristics. These ideas are the reference point of practical reason, which is thoroughly normative. Ascribing categories is a circumstantial operation, aimed at orienting a debate by attributing to the categorized object a set of rights and obligations that are related not to the essence of the category but to the configuration of relations that it sets up. For example, to describe a woman as modest, because she wears a headscarf, is not related to the fact that her clothing conforms to religious, legal, natural, or social norms that have been dictated by God, Nature, or Society. On the contrary, this description entails inserting her clothing in a precise categorization device: that of female morality, which implies that all the activities carried out by a woman are evaluated according to the standard of rights and obligations that have been circumstantially attached to the members of the category. Inserting something in a category device, and the conventional imputations that result from such an operation, are based on a set of beliefs that are commonly accepted as true in a given social context. Reflexively, of course, the mobilization of a category device with the aim of describing a person or a thing reinforces conventional acceptance of that device as the Truth. It is perhaps this reflexive interplay that explains why a norm appears permanent: truth provides a basis for the mobilization of a norm, and the mobilization of a norm contributes to the construction of truth. In this way, truth proceeds from truth, through a continuous or fragmented series of rearrangements, and it would be pointless to search for the origins of this dynamic.

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