

Extractivism and its discontents: Al Jazeera English coverage of Latin America

Abstract:

Al Jazeera English has attracted much academic interest as the channel sought to set itself apart from global news behemoths such as the BBC and CNN, by hailing the notion of a journalism from and on the 'global south' as a founding journalistic principle.

Communication scholars have hailed Al Jazeera news as an example of a "contraflow": increasingly globalized telecommunications have allowed for media around the world to contest the monopoly of Western-dominated global TV news journalism. In this article I opt for 'extractivism' as a more fitting conceptual lens through which to compare Al Jazeera's journalism to other news production from the global north. Usually applied to the exploitation of natural resources in the global south, the notion also allows for a critical understanding of foreign news production itself. This article asks if AJE's coverage on Latin America can be seen as an antidote to the extractivist dynamics of foreign media coverage of the continent. I begin by showing how news output manages to disrupt certain trappings of foreign journalism in important ways but that it has never veered radically beyond mainstream formats. I then argue that other types of programming such as documentary strands, discussion shows and magazine shows on the channel, rarely included in scholarship on AJE, perform a series of critical operations to counter the homogenizing field of news representation on the region by producing intellectual and interpretative labor be it through local journalists, academics, analysts, from the 'global south'.

"Our world is reduced to an immutable essence, a superficially marvelous essence which is also backward and even sometimes fearsome, but which can prosper if it

follows the advice of its civilised, powerful mentors.” (Natalia Vinelli, journalist, founder of Barricada TV Argentina, 2018)

“Extractivism has been a constant in the economic, social and political life of many countries in the global South. Thus, with differing degrees of intensity, every country in Latin America is affected by these practices. Dependency on the metropolitan centers via the extraction and export of raw materials has remained practically unaltered to this day.” (Acosta, 2013)

“The East is a career” (Benjamin Disraeli, Tancred, quoted by Edward Said, Orientalism, 1979)

Al-Jazeera English launched in 2006 as the first English-language satellite news channel broadcasting from the Middle East. Since its birth, AJE has played a useful role as foil to western mainstream media coverage of conflicts waged in Arab countries, from Libya to Lebanon, Iraq, and, most consistently, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. During the so-called ‘Arab Spring’ uprisings around the region, scholarly discussions centered around how the channel reported events. But what has also generated much discussion over recent years is how the channel is to be understood geopolitically, as a function of Qatari soft power as AJE has continued to report regional affairs all while being bound up in them. For example, in 2017, when a Saudi-led GCC coalition broke off ties with Qatar for 3 years, one of the 14 conditions they laid out for the blockade to be lifted was that Al Jazeera be shut down.

More broadly, the channel, funded by the Qatari state, has attracted much academic interest as it sought to set itself apart from global news behemoths such as the BBC and CNN, by hailing the notion of a journalism from and on the ‘global south’ as a founding journalistic principle. This has been read as part branding strategy from a rich Gulf state whose leaders were seeking to extend their influence throughout the world through soft power initiatives. But there is consensus that to reduce the Al Jazeera ‘global south’ battle-cry to a mere press

release for the Qatari state is to sell it short. Instead, communication scholars have hailed Al Jazeera news as an example of a “contraflow”: due to increasingly globalized telecommunications, it has been characterized as a de-centred locus of enunciation which has been able to contest the monopoly of Western-dominated global TV news journalism. The concept has been privileged as a welcome alternative to theories of anti-imperialism structured around center/periphery, north/south metaphors, instead imagining a multidirectional traffic system that eludes the binaries of dependency theory. However, I would argue that this kind of framework, which hails the democratizing power of globalized telecommunications, obfuscates a more politically charged anti-colonialist, anti-capitalist genealogy of which AJE is part.

In this article I opt for ‘extractivism’ as a more fitting conceptual lens through which to compare Al Jazeera’s journalism to other news production from the global north. Usually applied to the exploitation of natural resources in the global south, the notion also allows for a critical understanding of foreign news production itself.

Moreover, while there has already been extensive literature on how the outlet’s coverage on and reach in the Middle East, and to lesser extents Africa and Asia, scholarship on AJE’s coverage of Latin America has been scant, and no mention has been made of lived journalistic experience there.

This article asks if AJE’s coverage on Latin America can be seen as an antidote to the extractivist dynamics of foreign media coverage of the continent. I begin by showing how news output manages to disrupt certain trappings of foreign journalism in important ways but that it has never veered radically beyond mainstream formats. I then argue that other types of programming on the channel (rarely included in scholarship on AJE) are doing something more critical.

The chapter draws mostly on 6 loosely structured interviews with journalists, mostly who work or worked for Al Jazeera in Latin America, Washington DC and Doha. It also relies heavily on my own lived experience at the channel as a producer, reporter and programme-maker for 16 years, on news, documentaries, current affairs and the media critique show, 'The Listening Post'.

News from/on Latin America

Traditionally, news outlets of record in the Global North have to a large extent determined foreign news coverage on Latin America according to their own countries' foreign policies and geopolitical considerations. During the Cold War, at worst, the production of "Latin America" in US mainstream media discourse echoed national interests, relied on stereotypical notions of political backwardness, essentialist notions of exotic Latin temperament as the media there often played their role in justifying U.S covert military actions in the hemisphere at the time.

In recent decades, international news attention has moved elsewhere reflecting political realignments and new conflict zones, depleting coverage and interest on Latin America. One seasoned BBC reporter was once told by the London newsdesk that the number of dead in floods in Bolivia had to surpass 100 before they'd consider taking a story. "I suspected that many of my London-based colleagues simply didn't have a concept of Latin America beyond a few stereotyped images - sequined dancers at the Rio carnival or old American cars in Cuba, for instance - and therefore, probably subconsciously, viewed catastrophe there as somehow less important and the victims as less worthy." (Schweimler, 2022) What Schweimler's account tells us is that news on Latin America tends towards the sporadic, the superficial and the spectacular: carnivals, natural disasters, football events. This coupled with competition for ever-shrinking news budgets has often reduced coverage on Latin America to a cliché.

If we were to list the anecdotal evidence of the fetishizing gaze of English speaking news journalism on Latin America, the pile up would not look pretty. In 2018, I invited Argentinian journalist and academic Natalia Vinelli, co-founder of cooperative news channel Barricada TV (Frontline TV) to read foreign news coverage on the region through the lens of Edward Said's Orientalism. This was an attempt on my part to stage a south/south dialogue and bridge theory and journalistic practice.

Vinelli took CNN Espanol as an example of a corporate vision of "the perfect Latin American" which consisted of "a competitive, charming businessman, open to western modernity – servile to the rules and regulations of our globalised world, apologetic about his country's underdevelopment and who feels part of a regional elite who are ultimately aligned with US interests – or at least with the globalizing hegemony of free trade agreements."

Vinelli compared this to another stereotype, "the authentic Latin American", and mapped out how cultural industries produce an image of emotional nations wedded to the whims of authoritarian and populist leaders.

"They condemn us to a permanent child-like status which prevents us from making decisions about our future. These pre-conceived 'Latin Americans' are seen as children or noble savages in countries destined by their nature to live off farming and the extraction of natural resources."

Vinelli's account details how foreign news coverage has consistently imagined Latin America as a site of extraction and points to journalism's complicity in this process. But one could go one step further by proposing that foreign news' complicity is more embedded still, as it enacts the very same extractivist dynamics in its own production line.

Scholars across disciplines have described ‘extractivism’ as profit-driven operations programmed to remove and process natural resources, turning them into commodities with the aim of generating profit. Alberto Acosta (not a communication scholar, but a Latin Americanist working in the field of development) characterizes extractivism as a mode of production which is intrinsically linked to 500 years of conquest and colonization of the Americas, Africa, and Asia. Tellingly, Acosta refers to this mode of accumulation as ‘those activities which remove large quantities of natural resources – not limited to minerals or oil – that are unprocessed (or processed only to a limited degree), especially for export’.

It would not be a stretch to argue that the production of news on developing countries follows the same logic: raw material (stories, voices, information on the ground) processed by the global north commercial news machine, refined by its reporters, pundits, analysts to generate profit (through awards, ratings and through advertising).

Al Jazeera English, with varying degrees of success, has represented something different to this system of commodification and representational capture. In its coverage of Latin America, the channel has offered another vision of the region. In 2013, Marwan Bishara, the host of Empire, the then flagship current affairs show on AJE said this in his introduction to a programme on Latin America:

“A continent reshaped, America’s playground no longer, developing and deepening South-South relations, what shape will intra-continental shape take? A decade of a natural resource boom, millions lifted out of poverty, a transformed Latin America emerges.” (Empire, AJE, 2013)

Again, the mention of natural resources emerges but this time framed as a continent processing its own for the benefit of its own population. This notion of an anti-extractivism can be applied to AJE’s own journalism, serving to disrupt the broader extractivist imaginary on Latin America produced in the global north.

Bishara's use of 'south-south relations' is also a useful geographical metaphor to describe *AJE itself* as a journalistic experiment that imagined its audiences in the developing world. When *AJE* launched, it was available on TV in more than 80 million households worldwide. By early 2012, that number was closer to 250 million households, according to the network – which puts its distribution in close reach of CNN and the BBC. It can be seen on television sets in more than 100 countries and on six continents. The channel is viewed widely in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. These are communities who share similar histories when it comes to the legacies of colonialism, migration, and political resistance as well as a public hungry for coverage about a continent other channels have failed to provide.

News on/from 'Latin America'

One of the reasons *AJE* has been able to provide unprecedented coverage from the region is down to the channel's hefty budget. Perversely, covering the disenfranchised also costs a lot of money. *AJE* began with an initial budget of over US\$1 billion. They dedicated some of those resources to covering the region from several key cities in Latin America – Buenos Aires, Mexico City and Sao Paulo – and also had freelance journalists working out of Bogota, Lima, Guatemala City and Caracas. While in recent years budgets have been tightened, at least for the first decade, resources seemed endless, and pitches were rarely turned down. (Galiano-Rios, 2022) The channel was never subject to economic pressures akin to those faced by commercial competitors hungry for ratings (CNN) or depleted of funds (BBC), so teams in Latin America have enjoyed considerable freedom. In this media ecosystem, *AJE* had more time and funding than its competitors to dedicate to coverage, both in quantity and quality. (Galiano-Rios, 2022).

For example, live reporting is an expensive logistical endeavor, but *AJE* committed to broadcasting not just from cities but also from remote areas that usually go underrepresented. During the 2019 Amazon fires, *AJE* had three teams on the ground reporting live, while the BBC had one and the Chinese English speaking channel CGTN

covered it mostly using agency pictures. (Schweimler, 2022) Sometimes, the expensive practice of anchoring on location instead of the studio, such as presidential elections, revealed how much importance was afforded to the region.

AJE has covered the huge swathes of land referred to as “Latin America” by traveling to places which other outlets could only dream of, sometimes hiring light aircrafts, boats, canoes, to get to the remotest of communities and to stay for days on end. (Chavez, 2022) Budget also mattered when it came to security, for example, in the favelas of Rio or in cities like Caracas. (Pieroni, 2022) Budget buys time which allows a story to grow organically instead of being pre-scripted, allowing for an authenticity that the quick soundbyte filmed by a team parachuted cannot capture. Budget also buys you time needed to win a subjects’ trust - be it a community organizing against a transnational mining firm, or a guerrilla group traditionally maligned and demonized by local outlets. And a budget that buys you time, also renders the journalism less mercenary. When an earthquake hit Haiti in 2009, while most foreign news outlets packed up after the initial breaking news story had waned, AJE teams remained on the ground there for a year after the earthquake dealing with the less spectacular elements of Haitian reality.

The channel’s headquarters also yielded a sense of editorial independence. “We are free to report on events or trends on their own merit, and not just because they have an impact on Qatar’s geo-political interests. I find that CNN and BBC are much more U.S or Euro centric, which means a story must “matter” to their specific audience for it to be considered worthy of reporting.” (Lucia Newman, Latin American editor, AJE, 2022)

Over the years, news teams have concentrated on stories that add a different kind of information to global behemoths by focusing more on the people who bear the consequences of government policies, investment projects, agricultural management and the catastrophes that sometimes emerge from those policies. Those living in shanty towns, indigenous people battling for land rights, the victims of crop spraying, remote communities

fighting deforestation, women calling for better protection in the face of abuse, racism when government and police forces say there is none.

“Those who implement these policies already have ample coverage in the media in their own countries and in the likes of the Financial Times, Bloomberg, The Economist. AJE engaged with official sources too in the interests of balance. But the emphasis is different.” (Schweimler, 2022)

That editorial independence has also provided a kind of watchdog journalism that *regional* media frequently fail to do. Without overstating the channel’s impact across the continent given that it broadcasts in English, it has nevertheless produced independent, critical news coverage that has frequently ruffled government feathers across the ideological spectrum. Bypassing restrictions faced by domestic media, be they commercial interests, political alignments, censorship or budgetary constraints, AJE coverage has often provided a more agile form of journalism from the outside.

This means the channel has not only interrupted the north-south flow, but also a critical alternative to regional domestic news coverage. AJE provided an antidote to the hugely powerful privately owned right wing media conglomerates in Latin America, albeit in English. Examples are plentiful. In Argentina, in a divisive political battlefield where the Clarin network became President Kirchner’s *bête noir* after sustained assaults on his presidency, AJE afforded the story nuance and an interest in understanding the Kirchner phenomenon as part of an emerging left wing populism in the region. In Colombia, the 6 decades-old conflict with the guerilla group FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and the ELN was narrated by the mainstream outlets RCN, Caracol and NTN24 within the constraints of the ‘war on terror’ narrative. Instead, as it has done around the world, AJE often got to sit down with the guerilla leaders to provide the public with an insight into the armed insurgency and its historical context. A subject worthy of another study might be how a

channel like AJE was able to bypass the trappings of Manichean storylines and the lure of conflict narratives instead playing an active role in the peace and reconciliation process. In Brazil, 70% of the 80 million population gets its news from TV, most of which comes from the biggest media conglomerate in Latin America, Rede Globo who in 2016 publicly encouraged Brazilians to take to the streets to unseat left wing President Dilma Roussef and who later unquestioningly reported on the President Ignacio Lula da Silva downfall even as it emerged that he was wrongly accused of corruption for which he served time. On both counts, Al Jazeera English provided circumspection and critical distance from the garish headlines. On the other side of the political scale, in Nicaragua, where the government of Daniel Ortega has progressively encroached on all critical media, for years, Al Jazeera covered the story for years therefore gaining access to key news makers and providing nuance. In Venezuela, while much of the global media has consistently sided with numerous attempts to unseat the country's president Nicolas Maduro, AJE has presented a less dismissive, more complex picture of the president's political survival.

Global news, local journalists

While much global news coverage in English on Latin America comes from foreign reporters flown in for a few days, Al Jazeera English made it their aim to hire locally. This produced journalistic knowledge born of expertise and deeper cultural understanding. On the day of AJE's launch on November 15, 2006, bureaus across the world were given the choice of where to begin the channel's own narrative. Latin America's chief correspondent, Lucia Newman, chose to stand outside ESMA, an acronym for the Naval School of Mechanics in Buenos Aires. The building, which had once been the infamous center for torture during Argentina's 1976-1983 Dirty War, was billed to open as a memorial museum. By choosing this space as AJE's first live broadcast from Latin America, Newman harnessed the news channel with a political memory of dictatorial rule, and an implicit reference to a personal trajectory so common in many of those who work on the channel - she herself had had to flee from neighboring Chile during the 70's as military coups spread through the southern cone.

The anecdote is an example of Al Jazeera's now oft-quoted pledge to bring local journalists on to the screens was hailed as a welcome departure from the practice of flying in foreign correspondents to cover stories about a region they knew little about - or knew in specific ways that related to their own countries' investments in the story. (Galiano-Rios, 2022) In 2005, when AJE initiated a hiring spree, Lucia Newman was one of many enthusiastic reporters around Latin America suffering varying degrees of disenchantment with their jobs in foreign TV news in the region.

"I heard that AJE was starting a new news channel at a time when I was becoming very frustrated with my job as Latin American correspondent for CNN, based in Havana. The network that had once invested in broad international coverage, including of Latin America, has stopped having interest in global reporting, with the exception of the conflict in Middle East." (Lucia Newman, Latin American editor, AJE, 2022)

As it did elsewhere, Al Jazeera English scooped up journalists who spoke the local language(s) and had a better understanding of their societies and their particularities. (Newman, Schweilmer, Pieroni). Several journalists with whom I spoke were in fact keen to undermine the very notion of 'Latin America' as overly reductive. As Lucia Newman comments:

"Each country has its own unique history, and while the language is predominantly Spanish, culturally each country is different. Some are far more European, others have a predominant indigenous population; others are well educated and industrialized countries; yet others are rural, tropical , or extremely religious, poor (or not), etc. And politically there are huge differences and influences." (Newman, 2022)

Jairo Lugo and Andres Cañizales have usefully characterized this as ‘a romantic view that tends to pursue the idea of a common Latin American public sphere, and by so doing, it imaginatively collapses historical layers and patterns of diversity in order to provide a shared historical space and homogenous identity.’ (Lugo-Ocando & Cañizales, 2008)

From another perspective, one might also say that AJE made relatively risk free investments in their recruitment choices at least when it came to news. In the global market of news journalism, the decision to hire regionally was unprecedented. Yet, notably, many of these hires were educated abroad, have learnt their craft in the English speaking industry, winning their professional stripes at outlets like BBC, CNN and news agencies such as Associated Press and Reuters. On a continent where the most disenfranchised are Black and indigenous people, the sight of cosmopolitan reporters with mostly European ancestry reflected wider socioeconomic and racialised hierarchies.

Beyond news: First person documentary

News may have covered places and stories rarely mentioned in the global news market. But by their own assessment, reporters say the news model itself has never ventured too far from mainstream broadcast conventions. But while news makes up 45% of airtime, a huge 55% is dedicated to programmes where the channel has offered something more radical both in terms of form and content. A glance at programming offers extra layers rich with narrative conventions that have opened up critical spaces of journalistic production and the notion of the ‘global south’. These include talk shows and magazines shows, and documentaries all of which have dedicated significant time to Latin America.

Most noteworthy is AJE’s commitment to observational documentary through its Witness strand which describes itself as ‘An inspiring documentary series that brings world issues into focus through compelling human stories.’ Much of this series has captured different corners of life in Latin America by producing first person, authored films. In a global

documentary film industry resistant to subtitles, accents, and a tendency, despite no end of waxing lyrical to the contrary, for reporter-led storytelling, Witness has rejected the authoritative gesture of omniscient voiceovers or western journalists as tour guides. Instead it committed to producing films in which the voice and the protagonism is given to local filmmakers and the characters they wish to make films about.

Specifically on the region, in 2014 Witness launched a project in partnership with DocMontevideo to help develop newer filmmakers in Latin America who would otherwise struggle to reach the bigger platforms. Viewfinder produced 22 films ranging from environmental films (Garbage Homes was about a woman in Bolivia who combats the housing crisis but building homes from old plastic bottles) to social activism (an ex-prostitute who leads a theater group to help others face their trauma as abused women) Indigenous cultures (a couple traveling across the region teaching indigenous youth about astronomy and the connection their communities have to the cosmos) art (In My Dancing Heart three Mexican women facing aging and loneliness take up dance). In that season, the stage was given to the subject of art as a tool for social change in different communities across Latin America. Another, Hard Road Back, spotlight ex-FARC fighters and the struggle to integrate into society after years operating as guerrillas. It is highly unlikely that these would have found a home on another channel and certainly the filmmakers would not have had the opportunity to collaborate on the in-depth level that Viewfinder provided.

The production of these documentaries over the years reflect an attempt to privilege the so-called 'voice of the voiceless', rendering their experiences visible, be it in the developing world or in the increasingly stratified global north. These stories gave the channel a distinguishing factor which echoed a postcolonial sensibility aligned to critiques of western master discourses in news, a commitment to stories of political resistance, anti-racism, migration, the legacies of empire and the effects of capitalism in the developing world. In Latin America and elsewhere, the structure of the films and the thought behind their production signaled an attempt to rethink what might more generally be theorized as the

extractivist dynamics upon which much of the foreign news industry is built: media outlets of the global north producing content about the south, in a production line that ‘refines’ ‘raw material’ with the authoritative seal of the global news brand, all while paying derisory sums for labor on the ground. (The figure of the ‘fixer’ describes this relationship well: journalists on the ground recast as lowly assistants, paid low rates despite being employed for their local knowledge, to research stories, find sources and get access.)

From the journalism of peace to the journalism of solidarity

Academics studying Al Jazeera English in the context of US attitudes to the Middle East have usefully framed AJE as a *journalism of peace* (El-Nawawy) and *intercultural dialogue* (Khamis). This attention to the conciliatory nature of journalism came in the context of academic discussions on media representations of the Middle East in the US in the wake of 9/11.

On AJE, films on Latin America have produced what I would call a *journalism of solidarity* which focuses on the experiences of exploitation around the continent - and shares its histories with former colonized countries around the world. It would be salutary then to understand the channel as part of a radical tradition that has its roots in concepts of Third World people oppressed by class structures. This kind of production can be read in dialogue with much Black intellectual history which reconnects class politics with anti-capitalism and anti-imperialism at a time when such connections have been diluted by the onslaught of atomised identity politics. Al Jazeera production on Latin America, whether Qatari bosses like it or not, created a narrative based on an global anti-capitalist common struggle. Indeed, it would be interesting to explore how the channel might be read alongside Black intellectual A. Sivanandan’s unifying notion of Political Blackness (Sivanandan, 1985), a notion worthy of evoking decades later given it lost its currency in post 9/11.

“The Third World has been lost to view in the last 15 or 20 years - lost to view in the deliberations of the Left because in today’s global factories, the low

paid workers who do the dirty jobs are literally out there in the Third World and not her in the public view or, if here, only as invisible migrant sweatshop and service workers. The left in the West has failed to understand the changes going on in terms of the qualitative leap in the level of the productive forces, they fail to see that our standard of living depends upon the exploitation of an international working class.” (Sivanandan, 1985)

While it would be a gross exaggeration to suggest that all journalists shared the same political leanings at AJE (quite the contrary), some journalists who otherwise felt politically and professionally homeless elsewhere, carved out a space there that forms part of a historic Leftist internationalism and a transnational understanding of global inequality. Of course, let us not ignore the irony here: this kind of critical production happened in a contradictory space. The Qatari state hailed global south journalism from its position as a key player in transnational capitalism, having embedded their own labor system along racialised hierarchies and extractivist logics of its own due to its own gas reserves that have catapulted the nation onto the global arena. The story of the channel itself emerges as a field of competing political narratives, consistently in conflict with each other, as the view from the top tiers of the organization often have little to do with some of the journalistic visions of those on the ground.

AJE: Latin American history and media archive

News and observational documentaries deal with **current** events. But Al Jazeera English has also dedicated its air time to the **past**, in the shape of hundreds of archive-based documentaries. In Latin America, the channel has covered a whole gamut of countries adding temporal layers and a political memory of the global south which, as a whole, established connections with other regions in ways never conceived of in other English speaking media outlets. The attention paid to Latin America’s history invites another reading of the channel as a growing archive of global south memory. Indeed, the channel has not

just produced history on the region, it has produced history of *media* on the region - and among that production, it has dedicated time and money to chronicling the history of Latin American *revolutionary* media.

Much of this work was done at the Listening Post, the only media critique show of its kind in global broadcast and where I worked for 10 years on media stories from around the world. In 2016, a historic rapprochement unfolded between the US and Cuba, I went to Havana to cover the media side of the story. I wanted to concentrate on one cultural institution and its role in constructing the very notion of the revolution: the much maligned, much ridiculed newspaper Granma, official voice of the Communist Party, founded by President Fidel Castro in the early years of the Cuban Revolution. There we interviewed journalists, readers and historians all surprised but confident that our project was born out of genuine interest. During my stay, we were given access to film the paper's printing press - the first time in history the foreign media had been allowed in to film the old Soviet machines, still printing out their daily print run of good news stories (a sign that AJE has garnered considerable trust in the most suspicious of countries). During the shoot, I remember that after interviewing a staunchly pro-Castro Granma reader, my Cuban producer remarked how the man had used the plural 'we' throughout. Had I been with a foreign news team, would they have picked up on such a small but significant detail - that many Cubans, to this day, refuse to use the first person singular?

The interest in Cuba's media history accrued another critical edge when I returned in 2018. At that time, I had gone back to make a film on an old newsreel that was gathering mould in the national film institute (ICAIC). 'Noticiero ICAIC Latinoamericano' was a series of cinematic newsreels produced from 1960 to 1990 by the Cuban film Institute ICAIC. Many of those 1,493 newsreels formed a central pillar in what some might call the revolution's 'propaganda' machine and what others might simply refer to as the government's political communications. I wanted to capture a mode of representation on the verge of extinction, (these may be common academic pursuits, they are not usually tolerated in western journalism) but what I

found was something more: an alternative 20th century western history from the Cuban perspective. The reels covered police brutality and the US civil rights movement in the 60s, they framed The Troubles in Northern Ireland as the result of colonial history (unheard of on the BBC to this day). A critical perspective on the Vietnam war way before the story made it on to the news in the US; the independence movements around Africa and the Middle East. All of these stories were covered from a non-aligned Third World perspective invisible on mainstream western media.

The news archive's *content* was one thing. Its *form* was another. The Noticiero had been directed by Santiago Alvarez and a group of avant-garde filmmakers who had gathered around the film institute. During much of that time, they mixed agitprop with animation, references to French new wave cinema with news from the ground. Often, their target was the convention of news itself, using different forms of irony and derision to undermine the very notion of the truth and unmediated reality.

By showcasing the history of this weekly news programme in our own weekly programmes *about* the news, we were making connections with media history that bypassed the cosmopolitan centers but that reflected a critical image back to it, via an English speaking global news channel.

Anti-extractivism: rethinking foreign news

Some of the questions I have explored here are to what extent has Al Jazeera English made good on its pledge to elaborate a journalism of the 'global south' in Latin America? In contrast to other channels, has it provided more coverage on the region? Is it more in-depth in its analysis? Does the politics of its representation echo the rhetorical positioning of the channel's brand? Are the stories really told by voices on the ground: does interpretative agency shift to those subjects in situ - be that the reporters or the subjects of those stories

or is the production of journalism analogous to the exploitation of narrative raw material 'refined' by media organizations in the global north?

I have argued that AJE's coverage of Latin America performs a series of critical operations in the face of a homogenizing global media field of representation on the region. I have charted how this can be seen as an attempt to platform peoples' stories that rarely feature elsewhere, but also that the channel has done more than just remedy a dearth of regional reporting. Countering the extractivism of global news production, the channel does not speak for the 'other' but produces intellectual and interpretative labor be it through local journalists, academics, analysts, from the 'global south'. Indeed, the commitment to reflecting how historically subjugated, socially marginalized, economically exploited people around Latin America have been able to generate their own media, today and in the past, has depleted the relevance of the very term 'voice of the voiceless' itself.

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