Introduction

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This two-part issue of *Ethnographic Studies* brings to you work of a geographically broadly based group of ethnomethodologists. We live and work in places as varied as Prague and Damascus, Manchester and Dubai, Boston and Beirut. All of us are trying to understand violent social conflicts, and in particular the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Palestine, as well as the 9/11 attacks in New York and 07/07 in London, and, especially but not only, the place that media plays in them. All of us analyse presentations of violent deeds, wars and their protagonists and try to refine the analytic tools available, such as membership categorisation analysis. The broad base of the group is helping us to accomplish a more balanced and refined understanding of the issues involved in these conflicts, particularly by bringing in perspectives from the Middle East.

The wars in Iraq and Palestine and their coverage by Arab channels gave the impression that there was a unanimous opinion supporting the Iraqi and Palestinian "causes" on the ground of its supposedly shared identity. This is not very flattering for "Arabs": it assumes they get caught in the combined emotions of nationalism and Islamism, and that they cannot evaluate rationally the constraints that bear on them. Worse, it also assumes that democracy is less important for them than identity. As for the broadcasts concerning post-Saddam Hussein Iraq, these give the impression of a versatile population that applauds the tyrant one day, supports the Americans the next day, and which today opposes the occupation and yet descends into a civil war.

It is necessary to deal with these images and to look at the way they are produced and mutually articulated. First, we must provide some indication of the analytic perspective towards media events that informs the papers in this special issue . This contrasts with the mainstream approach to such events in contemporary social science. According to this view there is an idea of an "Arab" or "Muslim" public space. It is commonly opposed to the concept of the public sphere that is supposedly characteristic of Western modernity. The former would be characterized by the lack of any deliberative capacity and the violent expression of political opposition. This conception starts from the Habermassian concept of 'public sphere'. It, however, does not provide a sociological tool to describe what actually happens when specific people orient contextually to specific audiences – see Bogen (1999). In our view, however, there is neither an "Arab" nor a "Muslim" public. Rather, there are differentiated public constituencies to which particular people orient, according to circumstances and in specific contexts. This is why a preacher who vilifies the "Americans" or the "Jews" during his Friday sermon does not express the opinion of "Muslims" on the "Americans" or the "Jews", but addresses what seems to be for him a topic appropriate to circumstances (e.g. the Iraq war) and context (the Friday sermon and its emphatic rhetoric). His discourse can be very different if he is invited to participate in a religious lecture on the television, or moves from one channel to another. It is impossible in sociology to determine which of his discourses is "true". The question of whether there is a true discourse is in fact irrelevant and is possibly influenced by a Platonic conception of truth as something that is contrary to, and badly reflected in, appearances. Social reality is however

thoroughly mundane (Pollner, 1987), and appearances are real (contrary to Baudrillard's positions; cf. Bjelić, 1999). What people say is indexical to relevant circumstances rather than an expression of circumstance transcending preferences – logically there can be no social position detached from contexts or de-situated language (cf. Zaller, 1995).

What is the advantage of this epistemological position, which is mainly inspired by ethnomethodology and ethnomethodological media studies (e.g. Jalbert, 1999)? It permits us to go beyond the first impression of unanimity and to consider that "Western" and "Arab" or "Muslim" discourses on the wars in Iraq and Palestine are not the expression of monolithic "Muslim" thought, but instead are distinct situated discourses, addressed to precise audiences in specific contexts and to be understood against the background of what "totalized others" (e.g. "Westerners") are claimed to say and believe. There is therefore a need to bear in mind that discourses orient to audiences and not to one audience; and moreover, that discourses orient to the audience that they construct (Livet, 1994).

During the war in Iraq, discourses were multiple, formally dependent upon the media that were used, and oriented to diverse audiences. Hence, these discourses were not the mere expression of a public space dominated by one single system of representations. References to nationalism and Islam were themselves multiple and contradictory, something that can be characterized as a kind of "solidarity without consensus" (Kertzer, 1988). These discourses presented also some intertextual, i.e. dialogic and polyphonic features (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986) partly captured in the concept of 'dialogical network' developed by Ivan Leudar and Jiří Nekvapil (see Leudar, Marsland and Nekvapil, 2004; Leudar and Nekvapil, 2004).

Seeing that discourses are dialogic, polyphonic and oriented to distinct audiences, it seems difficult to consider them as the expression of one and the same identity preoccupation. On the contrary, they reflect different positions and address audiences stipulated by the discourses rather than pre-existing them. Thus, a Cairo taxi driver, for instance, can listen to a preacher calling Muslims to act, read a governmental newspaper criticizing the American breaches of international law, and compliment the Egyptian government for its non-intervention in the conflict. The discourses vary with the context, like the participants' identities. Identities are, indeed, linked to courses of action and to people's orientation toward a precise yet virtual audience, which is perceived through a set of categorizations that are taken for granted. The public of a mosque is made of "Muslims", and the Arab public, of "Arabs", so that it is the discourse reference that "modalises" identity. Taking into account the dialogic and polyphonic nature of discourses, many identities can be set into motion in one and the same sequence: Islamicity, being an Arab, modernity (in the sense of a discourse grounded on human rights and international law). These identities are contextually relevant according to the discursive performance in which they are embedded (cf. Matoesian, 2001: 108). From this point of view, all the declarations of journalists, editorial writers, statesmen, and religious personalities participating in the media use diversified and contextualized identity references that often address a virtual audience and which, for the observer as well as for the speaker, are constituted by the discourse's orientation and not its reception.

The analytic consequences of the ethnomethodological stance we are taking are clear. We must analyse identity references in the context of speeches rather than take these identities as the source of

speeches (cf. Moerman, 1974). We should not consider identities as expressing global orientations toward questions which themselves are global. An ethnomethodological stance reveals the illusionary character of any 'culturalist' interpretation of conflicts related to the Middle-East and Islam of the kind proposed, for example, by Huntington (1997). It instead points to the close association of the categorization processes, the audiences toward which speeches are oriented, and the media used.

The Western public space must itself be analysed, as it produces a vast amount of discourses on "Arabs" and "Muslims" and is itself the ground for much of "Arab" and "Muslim" discourses that reflexively posit themselves with regard to the Western media. In this regard, the many public spaces are intertwined. They all claim to produce "truth" and "good information" for the sake of the audience they orient towards and according to what the other media broadcast. There is thus a coordinated double-contextualisation: one related to the audience, and the other related to other media.

Instead of closed cultural systems confined within the borders of distinct ideologies, we observe coordinated identity performances accomplished through similar devices, and using equivalent means of categorisation that mirror each other (see Leudar and Nekvapil's contribution to this issue). This is less related to Edward Saïd's idea of a colonial domination extending through the imposition of stereotyped categories, than to what Alfred Schütz (1990) called "reciprocal antagonist perspectives", which occupy limited and changing areas of the daily world. Media's pretence to tell the truth is by no means a media ideology, because it is not the sole product of media and it is not shared at any one moment by everybody. Moreover, it is not a mere artefact, because, as Lena Jayyusi shows in her contribution to this issue, the mundane attitude is that there is something that "really happened" beyond media pictures. This moral certainty that is ordinarily shared puts an actual limit to the empire of stereotypes.

Contributions to the first part of this two-part issue of *Ethnographic Studies* focus on the practices of public discourse pertinent to conflicts and identities in the Arab and Muslim world. Dušan Bjelić's article considers the discrepancy between "what really happened" and "what we watch". He shows the "editing work", which is itself actual and can be documented, shapes and relates various documents (pictures, movies, etc.) and eventually creates a false reality. He analyses how two pictures of a "raped woman" in the former USSR during WWII, and a "sniper" in the former Yugoslavia, could be identified in contrasting ways and help supporting discourses that were totally contradictory in the ascription of responsibility they made. Lena Jayyusi's article addresses the issue of the formulation and contest of media "truths" concerning the counting of victims during the siege of the city of Fallujah by American troops. She shows how, beyond the discrepancy between "what happened" and "what is given to watch", scenic arrangements as well as editing work always have real bodies as substrates. Such a reality is morally implicative, so that contrasting versions of one and the same event are morally constrained.

Ivan Leudar and Jiří Nekvapil are concerned with the management in the media of identity of Muslim Britons in the days immediately following 9/11. The authors demonstrate concerted efforts by the British Prime Minister Blair and the leading British Muslims to formulate contrastive membership categories to represent British Muslims' and the perpetrators of the attack respectively. The

authors document procedures participants use in talk to create and change membership categories. They analyse a "dialogical network" in which the participants accomplished their task. They show how the protagonists – allies and enemies – interacted in media without directly speaking to each other and acknowledging each other as partners in communication.

Baudouin Dupret and Jean-Noël Ferrié, analyse the "self-presentation" made by three Arab channels, al-Jazeera, al-Manar and al-Hurra. They describe the advertising spots and the websites through which these channels present themselves to their audience and, therefore, the audience that they virtually ascribe to themselves. They show how subjective identities are objectively constructed. They document that these identities are polyphonic, as the spectator of one channel can also be the spectator of another.

The impetus for this special issue of *Ethnographic Studies* came from the international conference of the IIEMCA held in Manchester in 2003. The editors, Baudouin Dupret, Ivan Leudar, and Jiří Nekvapil felt that the ethnomethodological work on conflict, media, and identity needed to be extended in a systematic fashion. This special issue stems from three workshops that ensued. Two of them – "Arabs in the Media: Wars, Identities and Public Space" and "Media, Wars, and Identities" – were held in Damascus, Syria in May 2004 and March 2005, and were supported by the French Middle-East Institute and the Ford Foundation, Cairo office. The third one – "Ethnomethodology and Media: Wars, Borders and Identities" – was held in June 2006 in Prague and supported by Charles University, Prague, Grant Agency of the Czech Republic, Czech Ministry of Education and The French Institute for Social Research, Prague. The Damascus meetings were focused on the Arabs in the Media, the workshop in Prague extended the themes discussed and included considering the situation and identities of people on the margins of globalized societies, such as Roma, refugees, immigrants and displaced people (such as Palestinians). The special two-part issue of *Ethnographic Studies* contains mainly the contributions to the Damascus workshops.

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