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Research Paper

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Key skill: Reading between the lines

On the self-image of Western expats in professional journalist training at universities in the United Arab Emirates and Qatar

Abstract: **Academics who come from Western countries to teach the next generation of journalists in the United Arab Emirates or Qatar find themselves straddling two worlds. Myriad taboos mean that curricula from the United Kingdom or USA are of limited use, or none at all. The problem is that certain boundaries are not always clearly defined – and infringements can even result in academics being expelled from the country. A qualitative survey of 19 expats on self-image in academic journalist training in the Gulf.**

For those who have never visited, the main associations with Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, or Doha tend to be luxury cars and shiny modern skyscrapers.[1] Universities would not be high on the list. Yet many international universities have set up international branch campuses in these countries, alongside the domestic universities with their wide range of subjects, including journalism studies. Teaching in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is primarily the reserve of Western, English-speaking professors and teachers sent to the Gulf at the request of the respective head of state (cf. e.g. Martin 2012: no page number).

The fact that the education systems of these countries have, at their own request, been implanted with Western mechanisms like some kind of foreign body, results in a range of tensions. Is the self-image of journalism, the public

1 This essay is based on the dissertation *Zwischen den Zeilen. Das Öffentlichkeitsverständnis der Berufsbildung für Medien in den rohstoffreichen Golfstaaten. Grenzen und Chancen akademischer Expats aus dem Westen* [Between the lines. The understanding of the public sphere in professional training for media in the oil-rich Gulf states. Limits and opportunities of academic expats from the West.] (2019) by Andreas Sträter, Faculty of Culture Studies, TU Dortmund, supervisor: Horst Pöttker.

sphere, and transparency, as anchored in Western media teaching, antithetically opposed to the cultural and political reality of the oil-rich Gulf states? Is more academic teaching of journalism and media in a non-democratic sphere not automatically doomed to fail? What professional intentions do locals have when studying journalism in the first place? And, at hyper-modern universities in futuristic-looking cities, what remains of the illusion of being able to act just as one would in the West? Does the entire construct cause disillusionment or fatigue among Western expats? These are the questions that arise when one examines the situation of those who teach journalism in such countries.

Although these teachers and educators are equipped with the journalistic tools of the Western world, they are able to present only a ›light‹ version of this knowledge and self-image. The fear of losing their visas is just one of the barriers they face.

Diplomatic relations between the UAE and Qatar were halted in June 2017, with talks only resuming in late 2020, yet the situation in the two countries is very similar. Both, for example, have outstanding media infrastructures (cf. Kirat 2012: 458). Both are developing countries from a socio-cultural point of view, even though – in contrast to most countries in Africa and Asia – their rich natural supplies of oil and gas put them among the richest countries in the world (cf. Scholz 2000: 132). Neither country grew up organically; instead both can be seen as a »human construction, formed on a drafting table as an act of will« (Hermann 2011: 102).

The role of journalists is to create a public sphere and to communicate content in a comprehensible way in order to allow actors in civil society to form their own opinions. As a result, the way journalists are trained has an impact on society and its discourse as a whole (cf. Pöttker 2001: 24). Pöttker (cf. 2000: 377) argues that a society in which too little or no public sphere is created cannot work well – an idea corroborated by a glance at the states examined here. Academic professional training is one building block that can help to optimize the public sphere (cf. Pöttker 2001: 20; 2013a: 3, 15f.).

The media systems of the United Arab Emirates and Qatar

The dry desert state of the UAE relies on both water and crude oil as natural resources. Its economy has been strongly dependent on its raw material reserves ever since its first crude oil exports in 1962. The result is a state structure that is based on annuities as a source of income, largely to secure wealth for the locals. Expats – who make up the vast majority of the population at around 85% – have a different legal and social status than the locals, resulting in a strong distinction between »nationals« and »non-nationals.« Foreign guest workers are

subject to the *kafala* mechanism, which is based on a system of securities and sponsors. This instrument of control allows the state to dominate people who are brought into the country to work.

The local population, on the other hand, is defined by nomadic, Bedouin structures that allocate each person their place in society. For centuries, the locals have been used to the power of the tribal leadership being centralized in a single ruler. To this day, the ruler of each emirate retains a key role in law-making in the UAE's federal political system. Most locals would be unfamiliar with the concept of participation as the involvement of responsible recipients, including in relation to media. The sense of security afforded by a privileged lifestyle causes the value of freedom of opinion and the press to be superseded by the population's mentality of subordination.

The Publications and Publishing Law of the UAE has been in place unaltered since 1980 (cf. e.g. Duffy 2013: 41; 2014: 33ff.), originating at a time when public communication took place exclusively in traditional media.[2] What makes this law unusual is its harsh punishments for relatively harmless (from a Western point of view) reporting (cf. Duffy 2013: 40). Arguments for the protection of Islam and national interests dominate. Bans focus on topics in the fields of politics, religion, and sex – a trio of taboo areas that applies in almost every Arab country (cf. Hafez 2002: 35). Amin (cf. 2003: 107) also adds national security concerns.

The country has one of the best infrastructures for the press, broadcasting, and electronic media in the entire region. The Dubai Internet City and Dubai Media City districts in particular are home to television stations, media agencies, and e-commerce companies. There is outstanding access to the internet and social media applications.

In the UAE, the government puts limits on journalism by indirectly and individually influencing media producers using legal, financial, and political means. Journalists are keen to guard against lèse-majesté and errors; in the background is a constant fear of publishing content that could be misinterpreted by the state and classified as illegal (cf. e.g. Pöttker 2013: 3). Legislation prevents journalists from fulfilling their true role: creating a public sphere and acting as an organ of scrutiny.

Around 80 percent of core journalistic work is conducted by foreigners and expats (cf. Kirat 2012: 458ff.). Most locals with professions related to the media are not journalists, but instead hold monitoring, supervisory, and regulatory roles at the Ministry of Information, state media organizations, or the National Media Council in Abu Dhabi. Media production and operative journalism remain the domain of the Western expats who once helped to establish the infrastructure needed for broadcast.

2 Qatar is the only country in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) whose media law is older.

The capital of the smaller, rocky desert state of Qatar, Doha is home to Al-Jazeera – the most significant broadcaster in the Arabic-speaking world. With its exposed geographical position, the country is considered a mediator in the Middle East. While it maintains a modern external image, with luxury accommodation and an urban silhouette similar to that of Dubai, internally it is also dominated by tribal structures. The Al Thani family is inextricably linked to the history of Qatar. Young sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani is described as omnipotent and absolutely authoritarian; he answers to no-one, holds full control over his country's military budget, and is Commander in Chief of the armed forces.

Teaching at the state-run Qatar University in Doha is in single-sex classes, reflecting a conservatism that goes hand-in-hand with the Wahhabi culture, despite superficial signs of economically-driven modernization. International branch campuses (IBCs), intended to attract academics and (selected) knowledge to the country, enjoy a little more freedom. America's Northwestern University has also set up a campus in Doha's Education City (Northwestern University Qatar, NU-Q).

Through subsidies, Qatar has succeeded in establishing an expertise-based industry with satellite universities in order to position itself as a center for education and science. The infrastructure is good here, too, although there are limits on academic freedom that force both local and foreign professors and academics to work within ill-defined boundaries. From a journalistic point of view, it is interesting that Qatar has set up the Doha Centre for Media Freedom despite the problems with ill-defined boundaries illustrated by the expulsion of one of its former directors.

The broadcaster Al Jazeera reports relatively freely on the Middle East and the world in general, yet is much more reticent when it comes to affairs on its own doorstep (cf. Miles 2005). Despite the presence of this internationally renowned broadcaster, restrictive media legislation means that journalists, bloggers, and authors immediately face custodial sentences for infringements of the taboo boundaries outlined so vaguely in law.

The ultimate result of such laws is self-censorship. In addition, few locals work for the media directly, instead – like in the UAE – often holding directing or monitoring positions. Those who do work in the media, claims Roger Blum (cf. 2014), tend to act more as mouthpieces for the government than independent counterparts, given the culture in journalism of remining in line with the leadership.

Developing a model based on Habermas and Wittfogel

A diagram used by Jürgen Habermas (cf. 1962: 43) to outline a civic public sphere in the 18th Century is used as the framework for developing a public sphere

model for the analysis. The famous sketch distinguishes between the private sphere and the sphere of public control, with the media and journalists in modern societies acting as intermediaries between the two by producing a public sphere. In this intermediate sphere, no topic should be off-limits. The intermediary media today include not only print, radio, and television, but also online media, blogs, and social media applications; the intermediaries include people who create a public sphere via a blog or on YouTube, for example.

In the USA, such intermediaries are able to create lively, largely unlimited exchange between the private and public spheres. There are few restrictive laws to impede the flow of communication, nor do external factors inhibit freedom of the press. This situation is largely thanks to the Constitution's First Amendment, which bans the passing of laws that limit freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of religion, freedom of assembly, and the right of petition (cf. e.g. Cox 1986: 8; cf. Canavan 1984: 1ff.; cf. Berns 1976: 80ff.).

The intermediary function of journalists is also aided by professional training that is closely linked to this understanding of the public sphere. It can be assumed that, in the USA, a great deal of academic input has found its way into the intermediary role of journalists thanks to the subject of journalism studies, which has had a strong academic basis since it began being taught at the Mid-West's University of Missouri in 1908 and is thus fully professionalized (cf. e.g. Pöttker 2013: 14; cf. Redelfs 2007: 144). There, investigative research is considered a craft (cf. Redelfs 2007: 134, 144) that, when used correctly, can be used to create a public sphere and remedy injustices. As »agents of the public sphere« (Kleinsteuber 2003: 76), journalists act as the Fourth Estate – not least because the private sphere is skeptical towards state power (cf. Redelfs 2007: 134, 136).

If the model derived from European history is to be applied to oil-rich Gulf states, it must first be adapted to the conditions there. Help can be found from the classic voice of social sciences, Karl August Wittfogel, originally part of the Frankfurt School. In his key work Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power (1957), he derived the history of society from the respective natural conditions, paying particular attention to the unequal distribution of water supplies.

Wittfogel's original idea was this: Well into the 18th Century, China was ahead of the West when it came to the construction of dykes and irrigation channels and systems (cf. e.g. Wittfogel 1977 [1962]: 80ff.). To achieve this, the work had to be organized and steered centrally by a bureaucratic apparatus. There was therefore a clear state hierarchy, with a single leader at the top and mass forced recruitment.

Replacing the importance of water with that of natural gas or crude oil allows Wittfogel's ideal typus of a despotic water construction society to be applied to the resource-rich Gulf states of the Arab Peninsula. Just as ancient China and Egypt were dependent on dams and canals, UAE and Qatar today rely on the exploitation

of these fossil natural resources. Their modern urban structures are only possible because exporting resources brings in an enormous amount of money.[3]

The sphere of public power is determined by the central clusters of a »hydraulic state,« as Wittfogel calls it in Die Orientalische Despotie (1977 [1962]). This suprastructure requires a central authority to direct the many small, quasi-autonomous units below it. In addition, the state sphere is inextricably intertwined with the religion, with the central leaders and despots appearing as oversized, sacrosanct, priest-like beings (ibid.: 135).

While a democratic society sees dynamic exchange between the private sphere and the sphere of public power, this interaction does not occur in hydraulic states. There, little communication occurs between these spheres, as there are no structures to enable it. In Habermas' model (1970 [1957]: 43, 221), political solutions for the body politic are (or should be) sought and found in the public sphere; there, there is a vacuum. (Non-public) news is communicated via state mail and a relay system that is described as technically highly developed but strictly controlled (cf. Wittfogel 1977 [1962]: 86). The relay system does not offer access to the public sphere; the principles of confidentiality and concealment are more important than the principles of publicizing.

There are few links between the private sphere and the state; political solutions are found not together, but only by the holders of despotic power.

Method

There is currently no systematized knowledge of the self-image taught in journalistic training in the two countries, nor of any risks or opportunities that this presents for academic expats. Data was therefore generated using qualitative, semi-standardized guided interviews.

The survey was conducted among a deliberately chosen, non-representative group of Western, predominantly English-speaking expats who currently teach or have taught the next generation of media professionals in the UAE or Qatar. The results give no more than an indication. Among those surveyed were also people in positions of responsibility, such as deans of media science institutes. The subjects were found via personal contacts, recommendations, online research, local research, and official email inquiries with the respective institutes and universities.

3 The countries on the dry desert peninsula also remain dependent on water. After all, just like the hydraulic states Wittfogel describes (ibid.: 40), the UAE and Qatar are shaped by »the absence of sufficient precipitation and of the availability of accessible water supplies.«

Following pre-testing, a total of 19 people were interviewed in person, on the telephone, or in video calls between March 2015 and September 2016.[4] The work of the interviewees focuses on different fields: Nine can be said to work primarily in the (core) journalistic sector, while seven worked in both journalism and PR, and a further three listed only PR/communications as their focus. Fifteen worked primarily in teaching, while four worked mainly in more administrative roles at universities. Eight of the interviewees were (still) in the country under investigation at the time of the interview, while eleven were in the USA (7) or other countries (United Kingdom, Thailand, New Zealand, France) when interviewed. Fourteen interviewees had experience in the UAE, four in Qatar, and one in both countries. A significant number of the interviewees with experience in the UAE were focused on the renowned Zayed University, with its College of Communication and Media Sciences in Dubai and Abu Dhabi. At the time of the interviews, Qatar was home to two significant universities offering Journalism Studies or Communications as subjects: the state-run Qatar University and Northwestern University Qatar in Doha (NU-Q).

Among the interviewees was the American Professor and watch blogger Matt J. Duffy, who was expelled from the United Arab Emirates in the summer of 2012 after many years teaching mainly International Media Law at Zayed University, and wrote about the incident in his blog.

The semi-standardized guide comprised six fields of questioning:

1. Personal information and biography of the interviewee
2. In-country behavior of the interviewee/behavioral rules
3. Content of teaching, e.g. taboo topics
4. Observed understanding of the students on their future professional role, e.g. as a political mouthpiece or watchdog?
5. Experiences of the teachers, disillusionment?
6. If the interviewee was expelled: (assumed) reasons for expulsion?

Findings

The interviews allow an initial idea of how Western, largely English-speaking actors in professional media education – some of whom themselves come from conventional journalism, who follow liberal principles of opinion and coun-

4 Franziska Apprich, Dubai, UAE; Ralph Donald Berenger, Sharjah, UAE; James Buie, Abu Dhabi/Dubai, UAE; David Burns, Salisbury, USA; Pamela Creedon, Abu Dhabi/Dubai, UAE; Mary Dedinksy, Doha, Katar Matt J. Duffy, Atlanta, USA; Beverly A. Jensen, Al Ain/Dubai, UAE (in Bangkok, Thailand, at time of interview); Alma Kadragic, Miami, USA; Janet Keefer, North Carolina, USA; Mohamed Kirat, Doha, Katar; Elizabeth A. Lance, Doha, Katar; Robert Wesley Meeds, Doha, Katar; Peyman Pejman, VAE (in France at time of interview); Stephen Quinn, Brighton, UK; Kenneth Starck, Iowa City, USA; Catherine Strong, Dubai, UAE (in New Zealand at time of interview); Judy VanSlyke Turk, Richmond, USA; Tim Walters, Austin, USA.

ter-opinion, who know the value of a public sphere – pursue their work in the UAE and Qatar.

Matt Duffy says that those from the English-speaking world who train journalists pay a price for teaching in the UAE and are able to lead a life with many comforts there. This is a deal, he says – a pact that comes at the price of one's own freedom (of speech). He does not judge anyone who enters into such a pact, he says: »That's their decision, it was not one that I could make.«

Mohammed Kirat lists the benefits enjoyed by Western expats at universities in the GCC[5] states based on his experiences at universities in Ajman and Sharjah (both UAE) and in Doha: [...] your salary, it's tax-free [...] here they make more money [...] they have like the housing is paid, the tickets are paid, everything is paid. They have full insurance coverage.«

Stephen Quinn mentions that Americans are paid more than Australians, for example, and certainly than Arabs: »[...] there was a salary scheme based on your nationality [...] Americans were paid the most, then Canadians, then the Brits, and then the Australians, and then the people from Egypt or Tunisia or whatever.«

One result of the analysis: Those who spend a lucrative period in the Arab Gulf for purely financial reasons are less motivated to change the cultural norms there than academics who take on a role at a university or institute in those countries for reasons of conviction. The more conservative and unstable the surroundings, the easier it is for purely financially driven journalism and media teachers to work in a non-Western environment. The truth is, most of the interviewees are motivated by both financial considerations and conviction. Spending a period in the rich Gulf states is especially lucrative for emeritus professors from the USA, whose pension is often lower than that of their counterparts in Germany.

Those who work at Christian educational institutions or religious schools in the West, argues Duffy, needs to be just as aware of certain principles. Ultimately, those working in the UAE will know from their own experience where the boundaries are and how they can be sounded out: »They know where the lines are, they don't cross them [...] they're not pushing boundaries still.« This can result in self-censorship, he says, although nobody would admit to it. No-one is immune to errors, he continues. And after all, just as in Duffy's own case, interpretation of the laws and the final decision-making authority ultimately lies with the ruler in question.

Duffy describes how even a critical examination of international media law during a lesson was a taboo for him. Despite this, he claims he did not succumb to self-censorship: »That's not what they told me they want.« The UAE did not bring him to the Gulf for him to censor himself, he says, but so that he could

5 Gulf Cooperation Council, founded in 1981.

teach students in line with international standards. Duffy was forced to leave the Emirates and sees himself as »radioactive« for the entire region.

Ultimately, not censoring oneself is a privilege that only some can afford, says Alma Kadragic, former professor at Zayed University and the private Australian university Wollongong in Dubai. She argues that non-Western journalists in particular have internalized the principle of self-censorship as the only way to hold on to both their jobs and their residency rights. Western journalists, on the other hand, like to keep for home controversial topics close to the undefined red line. There is an enormous difference between living in a country and speaking in it, she continues. Kadragic reports on an AEJMC[6]-conference she attended in Washington D.C., where she met people who thought that it would be possible to teach the concept of investigative journalism in the Emirates: »[...] it's cheap for them to say that. It doesn't cost them anything, but people who are on the ground and who don't have other choices have to be careful.«

It is clear that theory and practice can be worlds apart. People behave differently on the ground from at their desks.

Kadragic's approach to teaching media law is motivated by other factors than Duffy's. She herself spent many years as a journalist for the American television station ABC, and takes a pragmatic view: »I don't want to teach you [the students; ed.] how to go to jail.« According to Kadragic, both the military and the royal families of the seven Emirates are absolutely off-limits: »You don't mess with the royal family; they release statements when they want to.« The locals have been used to the power of the tribal leaders being centralized in the ruler for centuries: »[...] the first love is Sheikh Zayed, then the current ruling Sheikhs [...],« is how Alma Kadragic describes the mentality of many locals.

Kenneth Starck, former Dean of Journalism Studies at Zayed University, explains how he believes Western teachers have adapted to the local conditions: You become socialized to the work setting [...] Which means that when you enter a work enivironment and that's confining to journalism either a news organization before long you find out what's acceptable and what's not acceptable.«

It is important to take circumstances like the Arab Spring into account, he says, as the situation in the Emirates has actually become more tense since then. In order to prevent similar revolts, the government has taken a tougher stance when dealing with free speech – in precisely the places where opinions are produced and reflected upon:

> »Surveillance in the Emirates following the Egyptian Spring and what was happening in other neighbouring countries. This influenced what was

6 Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication

> happening in the Emirates. [...] This cloud [...] got a little thicker and a little darker.«

No-one who spends an extended period living in a country diametrically opposed to one's own in myriad ways, he says, can escape a sense of culture shock.

The more experience the teachers interviewed had previously been able to gain in non-Western countries, the less pronounced this shock was for them in the countries under investigation. Those who have previously worked in Egypt, Central Turkey, China, or the countries of the former Soviet Union, or who were socialized in a region like North Africa, seem to have an easier time maneuvering in a state with a strict moral code and sounding out limits for themselves.

Janet Hill Keefer, the American PR specialist and former Dean at Zayed University's College of Communication and Media Sciences, mentions frustration on the ground – not least because it is impossible to put everything into practice as it is intended in theory. Looking back, Keefer describes her role in the UAE as an experience full of contradictions, albeit one of value to her.

The results show a similar pattern when it comes to those teachers with experience of working in Qatar: According to Robert Meeds, employed as a public relations expert at Qatar University, people at universities tend to sound out societal boundaries rather than criticizing the government. He was always very cautious when it came to giving examples, says Meeds: »You want to be sure that you're showing things that don't offend to students too much [...].« When he arrived in Qatar, he continues, he was »flying blind,« having received no introduction to the teaching methods or content expected. He therefore learned to recognize the limits through his own experience and personal errors: »You learn from your mistake.« Islam, on the other hand, was debated relatively open among the faculty, and he was not aware of any complaints or consequences related to the explicit way that religion was discussed. When it came to teaching PR and advertising, he claims to avoided the topic of homosexuality and never showed any pictures of pigs: You know things that are considered *haram* [...]. Because it's going to offend students.« In journalistic subjects, teachers had to censor themselves a little more on sensitive topics and monitor themselves, especially when teaching investigative journalism. Meeds: It's fine to do investigative reporting about businesses or private organizations but you're not going to focus on the government because it's not a democracy.«

His former colleague at Qatar University, Mohammed Kirat, explains that there are certain rules of the game in Qatar that have to be adhered

to: »In here, [...] you have some headlines [...] that you don't talk about them. It's like they are there, you have to take them as they are and that's it.«

He clearly takes a relatively pragmatic view of these rules, accepting them for what they are. They are no barrier to teaching, he claims: »I teach what I want to teach, what I want to say, and I don't feel any problems or constraints.« Kirat compares: It's like if I teach here or I teach at the university in the U.S., to me, it's the same.«

American Elizabeth A. Lance, Research Administrator at NU-Q, admits that she, too, is careful when it comes to criticizing the rulers. When she was new to the country, she says, she acted with great caution in order to avoid losing her job. She eventually worked out the boundaries through her own experience and is aware that she is working in a country that guarantees neither freedom of speech nor public debate: [...] this is not a democratic country [...] it's an Emir. It's ruled by a monarchy and if you know if the Emir says you know from tomorrow forward X is the new policy [...] the Emir has that power to say [.] this is what the rule will be from henceforth.«

In the countries under investigation, the limits on content are largely set by the students themselves, most of whom have been brought up with a strict moral code by their parents and therefore act conservatively. In addition, they have little occasion to question the world in which they live. The interviewees were unanimous that accepting this situation and not seeing themselves as superior to others is a vital skill for Western expats.

It is also true that the idea of developing their own opinion, independent of that of their families, is a foreign concept to many young people in the region. Challenging the way things are – one of the core roles of journalism in the West – is not common in a cultural sphere dominated by an apparently benevolent dictatorship. The widespread view is that the rulers and government know best what they can demand from their population and what is good for them.

The supremacy of the Emir does not make it easy for American institutions to operate in this environment, explains Lance. In addition, the number of indigenous Qataris is tiny compared to the size of the expat community, especially from the West and from South East Asia. Yet despite this government supremacy, Lance takes an optimistic view of the future of the young state of Qatar: »[...] [Y]ou better be optimistic than to look around [...] and I think this is just a really bad experiment that's doomed to fail, which is an attitude that a lot of people have.«

Mary L. Dedinksy, an American working at Northwestern University Qatar, emphasizes that cultural sensitivity is a key character trait necessary for anyone working abroad.

Conclusions

The intermediary function of journalism – a key characteristic of the profession – cannot be fulfilled in the model of the public sphere outlined for the states under investigation. Instead, there is problematic disfunction, as certain topics are excluded from societal discourse from the outset. Although journalism does exist, and can even be critical within certain limits, this critique is not brought into the sphere of public power. What is said is packaged very diplomatically so as not to ruffle any feathers (cf. Marcuse 1966: 93ff., 97: »repressive tolerance«). The state and society have nothing to fear from anything written in newspapers or broadcast.[7]

Just as in a company, those involved in academic professional training for journalism and media have to adhere to certain rules of behavior. These may not be directly recorded, but are certainly expected and carry the threat of sanctions.

Those training journalists have to work out for themselves the topic boundaries within which they can operate. As a result, they need to bring with them a certain curiosity, as well as researching the local customs and the Quran intensively before beginning their placement in the Gulf. Even though the rules are not set out in as many words, all the interviewees were able to name taboo topics, risky content, and unwanted actions. Analyzing these boundary areas has produced a list of no-go topics and actions, adding additional limits to Hafez' triangle of taboos (cf. 2002: 35). It can be used as a roadmap for journalistic work and in providing academic professional training:

- Criticism of the government, the royal families, or individual members thereof
- Criticism of Islam, the prophet Mohammed, or the Quran
- Aspects in international comparison when teaching media law
- Touching students (including their hands)
- Addressing homosexuality
- Social media contact with students
- Criticism of the military
- Using irony or humor (possibility of misinterpretation)
- Downplaying alcohol
- Descriptions of student drinking or lifestyle
- Addressing nudity
- Addressing Judaism
- Addressing Bin Laden or Al-Qaeda
- Presenting images of pigs

7 I do not necessarily concur with Habermas' (cf. 1970 [1957]: 220f.) view that sensible public discourse can always produce solutions. Why should controversy not be allowed to remain unresolved in a world that is ever more complex and often very compartmentalized?

- Questioning the system in general
- Supporting the Muslim Brotherhood
- Addressing sexual scandals
- Using food-related examples (especially during Ramadan)
- Dealing with very controversial research topics
- Addressing money laundering, drug dealing, or people trafficking
- Alcohol abuse
- Exchanges of affection in public (especially during Ramadan)
- Addressing differences between genders
- Describing the Western model as the only correct model

The overarching taboo topic is criticism of the ruling emirs, members of their families, and the government. The lèse majesté rules in both countries forbid both locals and expats from criticizing the government. Violations of these rules always carry the threat of sanctions.

To make the situation more complex, there are further taboo topics that are not set out in as many words – Western expats have to work them out for themselves once there. The professional group examined here thus requires the key skill of being able to read between the lines, in order to monitor their own actions both inside and outside the classroom accordingly. The academic expats interviewed considered the introductions to local customs and cultural information provided by the institutions insufficient, leaving them no choice but to work out the limits of what they can say through trial and error.

The additional taboo topics not only relate to political opinions, but also include everyday topics like drinking and youth culture in the West. This is important because the public sphere is more than just the sum total of what journalists publish via conventional media houses (cf. Hoffjann/Arlt 2015: 2ff.) – posts on social media, cartoons, and entertainment programs on television must also be considered part of the public sphere as a whole.

The fact that many boundaries in the states investigated here are not named explicitly, is clearly a considered, deliberate principle. It appears that the first violation of the informal rules of the game does not immediately lead to the culprit being expelled from the country. Instead, teachers are given a chance to learn from their mistakes and adapt their behavior accordingly. The more vaguely red lines are formulated and the limits of certain topics are indicated, the more conservative teachers' behavior becomes; they use self-censorship as a strategic instrument to protect themselves against potential restrictions. As opinions and counter-opinions cannot be exchanged unimpeded, Habermas' concept of the public sphere cannot be applied in its original sense.

The threat of expulsion from the country hangs over the teaching staff in everything that they do in the public sphere – a threat that is even more present

following the case of Duffy in the UAE. Teaching staff run the risk of losing both their job and their residency rights if they violate certain rules. If they want to test the boundaries, they must be willing to pay the price. There is no doubt that those with a Western worldview have to leave out a lot more when teaching risky, culturally sensitive topics than they would in the West. Problems can be talked about, but in a diplomatic way. But just because specific problems can be named, this does not mean that they are actually addressed or resolved.

Teaching staff are often dazzled by the glossy, luxury appearance of cities like Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, and Doha. When they feel as though they are in a Western country – and these cities certainly look the part – they are easily tempted to behave accordingly. Yet this is exactly where care must be taken. The dazzling effect is further strengthened by the universities' efforts to achieve international accreditation from the ACEJMC and their desire to meet the very highest Western standards. New arrivals thus find themselves in a contradictory environment and should prepare themselves for this before beginning their new job – not least given that this contradiction appears to be permanent and impossible to resolve.

The way that teaching staff at a university act depends on how the leaders there (instruct them to) act. The example that deans set their staff and the topics they allow in public discussion thus appear vital. Yet the way a dean acts is itself dependent on numerous factors: What is the general situation? How strict is the moral code enforced by the country, the Emir, or the current ruler? Is an institute, a college, or the university aiming to achieve international accreditation? Is the university private or state-run? And there are plenty more potential questions besides.

So much in the rich Gulf states remains vague, unclear, and undefined, with certain cases impossible to decode entirely. Foreign expats thus have a hard time behaving as they would in their home countries. Those who want to work in professional training for the media in the UAE or Qatar should therefore be able to move between the lines.

The analysis of the interviews does at least allow the compilation of some advice for expats planning to teach journalism studies in the Gulf, or indeed anywhere else outside the Western world:

- Do not expect adventure
- Prepare intensively in advance of the period abroad
- Do not take a position at a university for purely financial reasons
- Be able to live with inconsistency
- Be aware of being a guest at all times
- Do not compare countries like the UAE or Qatar with the Western world
- Be open – all the time, everywhere!

If Western expats in professional education can succeed in teaching the power that journalism has when it works unimpeded, I believe that this can help to transform these developing countries in the long term – or lead to additional confusion and more academics being expelled.

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