Influences on Media Content:

Domestic News Production Processes

at Four Omani Print News

Organisations

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Dedication

To my dear mother, older sister and Ibrahim Al-Jabri, three of you

create something on me.

Acknowledgments

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines internal and external influences on news content at four Omani news organisations, *Oman* and *Al-Watan* (Arabic-language dailies) and *Oman Observer* and *Times of Oman* (English-language dailies).

Three theoretical frameworks guided this study: the political economy approach, the cultural approach, and the social organisation of news. The study is divided into macro and micro levels of analysis. At the macro level, the study focuses on ownership and control, economic determinations, and media-society relationships. At the micro level, the study investigates newsgathering and news selection processes by focusing on journalists' backgrounds, journalistic practices in newsrooms, news values and journalists/sources relationship.

Three methods are employed to collect the data in this study: content analysis of the selected news media, personal interviews (with journalists, editors, and editors-in-chiefs) and participant observation of the newsrooms at the Omani dailies.

The findings of this research show that Omani daily newspapers, either private or government owned, are political projects working under government control. Most of the Omani news workers observed in this study were aware that they were not doing professional journalism work. The channels for gathering domestic news items at all four Omani newspapers in this study were very limited. The four main news sources for gathering domestic news items were (1) Oman News Agency (ONA), (2) public relation and information offices (PR), (3) reporters and (4) correspondents. News workers heavily depend on the national agency, and on ready-made news from the PR offices. Poor writing from correspondents leads to poor, similar domestic content in all daily newspapers. Because of the limitation of the news gathering channels, the selection processes were also limited. The findings of interviews and observations show the long process of decisions-making routines at the government-owned dailies. In contrast the private dailies work with less bureaucratic processes. Nevertheless, both private and government owned papers face the same problems in routines for selecting news items and the same difficulties gaining access to information, not only from the official sources, but also from ordinary people. The news workers face pressures from official sources, readers, advertisers, news organisations' administrations, and personal financial pressures.

The findings of this research support the theoretical approaches to media content while focusing on Omani context. However, the findings match some perspectives more closely than others. The organisational, extra-media level and societal factors work stronger than the individual communicator perspective.

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List of Abbreviations

SQU: Sultan Qaboos University

OEPNPA: Oman Establishment for Press News Publication and Advertisement

OTV: Oman Television

MHJP: Muscat House for Journalism and Publishing

OAPR: Omania for Advertising and Public Relations

OPP: Oman for Printing & Publishing

FAA: Finance & Administration's affairs

ONA: Oman News Agency

PARC: Pan Arab Research Centre

PR: Public Relations

ROP: Royal Oman Police

PL: Publication Law (1975)

PPL: Printing and Publication Law (1984)

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction

This thesis investigates the internal and external factors that influence news content at four Omani print news organisations, which are *Oman, Al-Watan, Oman Daily Observer* and *Times of Oman*. Three theoretical approaches are used: the political economy approach, the social organisation of news and the cultural approach. Three methods are employed: content analysis, participant observation and semi-structured interviews.

This study includes macro and micro levels of analysis. At the macro level, the study focuses on ownership and control and economic factors that affect news production processes at the Omani news organisations. At the micro level, the study investigates journalists' backgrounds and journalistic practices in newsrooms. Newsgathering and news selection processes, also, will be examined at this level. The study, in brief, is about the nature of the print news organisations in Oman and the influences of media content on these newspapers.

1.1. Prelude

Like any developing country, Oman considers the press, and the mass media in general, a fundamental part of the political and economic system. The reason behind such a view could be that governments in developing countries have used the mass media to propagate their own policies (Lule, 1992; Habte, 1983; Munir, 1983). In Oman, the media since its inception has been used by the government as an instrument for fostering plans and strategies for such goals as attracting foreign investments, marketing local products abroad, and fighting illiteracy.

The state controls the press in two main ways. The first means of control is through the 'Printing and Publication Law (PPL)', which was introduced in 1975 and renewed in 1984. According to the mandates of this law, the government has the right to control editorial practices in both private and government owned newspapers. The government can also controls newspapers by cutting off subsidies, which are one of the main sources of financing for those papers (Al-Mashekhi, 1996; Al-Hasani, 1996; Al-Hasani, 1999; Al-Kindi, 1995: 28-32; Al-Mashikhi, 1994: 46-122).

1.2. Statement of the problem

Omani media researchers (e.g., Al-Mashekhi, 1996: 120; Al-Mashikhi, 1994; Al-Murjan, 1997: 255) have observed that Omani newspapers are characterised by their 'poor' content, low distribution, low circulation and low readership, with the result that many Omani readers turn to other media to satisfy their needs, especially for international news. Al-Mashikhi (1994: 319) found that more than 70% ($n = 125$) of a group of Omanis read regional and international newspapers regularly. Al-Murjan (1997: 255) found that less than 50% ($n = 181$) of a group of Omanis read Omani newspapers. He argued that regular exposure to the Omani Arabic-language dailies is low compared with national newspapers that are published in other countries[1] (ibid: 156). Many Arabic and Gulf newspapers and magazines are well distributed in Oman. Al-Mashikhi (1994: 25) argued that the content and the layout of these non-Omani papers are better than those of the Omani press. Al-Murjan's (1997) study also shows that Omanis most frequently prefer to read general news about Oman (though the study did not define 'general news'),

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[1] There is only one T.V. channel in Oman, and it is a government owned. Al-Shaqsi (1995: 46, 2000: 199) shows that viewers have also become less likely to watch Omani TV.

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and crime and accidents news items second-most-frequently. However, the same study shows a 'strong negative response' to news contents that deal with government projects (ibid: 255-58). Al-Murjan (1997) concluded that media censorship has negatively affected the circulation and popularity of Omani newspapers and is positively associated with newspapers' high consumption of foreign mass media (ibid: 264). Al-Mashekhi (1996: 133) argued that the main problem facing the Omani media is the lack of 'qualified and skilled journalists'.

In summary, earlier media studies in Oman focused on the media product and its effects on audiences[2]. However, these studies paid little attention to the origins of media messages. The studies mentioned above suggest that content produced by Omani print news organisations do not satisfy the readers' needs. However, they did not investigate the influences on media contents in these organisations. Halloran (1981: 164 and Barrat, 1992: 58) argue that for a more comprehensive analysis of the communication process, the messages of news organisations need to be combined with examination of communicators and news organisations and the context in which they operate. Thus, news content, in the end, is a result or product of journalism practices and routines inside news organisations (Shoemaker & Reese, 1991, 1996; Riffe, et.al, 1998: 7).

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[2] Al-Mashikhi's (1994) study was a historic and descriptive study of all mass media in Oman (TV, radio, press, and cinema). Al-Murjan (1997) studied the role of mass communication in national development. He developed his views abour the press from a readers' survey. Al-Mashekhi (1996) studied Oman television (1974-1993). He obtained his information about the press by conducting interviews and examing documents (see Al-Hasani, 2002).

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1.3. Objectives of this study

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To provide a general historical and critical account of the Omani print media.

2. To investigate the domestic news content of the Arabic-language and English-language newspapers in Oman.

3. To investigate the internal and external factors that affect the content of the selected news organisations.

4. To explore the differences (or similarities) between the government and private news organisations.

5. To explore the differences (or similarities) between the Arabic-language and English-language news organisations in shaping domestic news contents.

6. To address the problems that face print news organisations in Oman in producing their contents.

1.4. The main questions of the study

This thesis will provide a current, detailed description of the domestic content and some of the dominant news production processes in Omani daily newspapers. In keeping with the research problem and the objectives of the study, I will answer six main questions:

a.) What proportion of the total coverage in Omani newspapers is devoted to domestic news?

b.) How are domestic events covered in the Omani daily newspapers? Do the government-owned and privately-owned newspapers differ in their domestic news

coverage? Do the Arabic-language and English-language newspapers differ in their domestic news coverage?

c.) What are the main news values in Omani newspapers in general, and with regard to domestic news events in particular? How do these values determine news coverage?

d.) How do outside influences (i.e., Ministry of Information, sources, other organisations or institutions) affect news content in the Omani daily newspapers?

e.) How do inside influences (i.e., the role of journalists, journalistic routines, organisational factors) affect newsgathering and selection within the Omani organisations?

f.) What are the problems that face print news organisations in Oman in producing their contents?

1.5. Significance of the study

Many studies of the Omani media (e.g., Al-Mashikhi, 1994; Al-Abd, 1995; Al-Mashekhi, 1996; Al-Murjan, 1997) have argued that the content of the Omani press cannot satisfy readers inside the country, and that many readers prefer to read newspapers from other countries. However, no single study, to the best of my knowledge, has analysed the journalistic practices inside these print news organisations and the pressures that journalists face in producing news contents. Moreover, the contents of the Omani newspapers were not analysed by the previous studies (see Al-Hasani, 2002).

Few studies have been conducted of news production in Arabic news organisations. Most of the studies that have been done of Arabic countries have translated Western-oriented theories and models (e.g., Abdulraoof, 1993; Rushty, 1985; AlSyed, 1989). Halloran (1997: 40) argues that indigenising social science models and theories along with native media policies and strategies is a solution for what he called 'international social science'. Due to the lack of indigenous approaches, this study examines the applicability of the Western-oriented media theories and models to an Omani context. But in this study I also add new categories of analysis to categories and models that were used in previous studies (see chapter 2: influences on media content).

1.6. Levels of analysis

In this study, I conduct my analysis on two main levels: 1) the macro level, which includes studying the wider context of the media organisation (i.e., the mass communication system in Oman, ownership and control of these organisations, and the commercial influences, and 2) the micro level, which includes analysing domestic news content, daily journalistic practices in the newsroom (i.e., the process of news production), and the relationships between sources and journalists/editors. Influences on news content are going to be analysed both inside the news organisations (individuals, routines and the organisational system) and outside the organisations (sources and political and societal systems). In this study, then, I am going to start with the news organisation, which is the core of the study, by analysing the content, communicators' role, organisational level and the communication system in Oman (Shoemaker and Reese, 1991, 1996; McQuail, 1994; 2000).

1.7. Limitation of the study

This study is limited to looking at some of the influences that shape news content in the Omani Arabic-language and English-language dailies as discussed earlier. Arab and international news are excluded from this study. This study also analyses daily newspapers, though any other news organisations (i.e. magazines, TV, or radio organisations) are excluded from this study.

1.8. Structure of the thesis

The remainder of this thesis is divided into six parts. Chapter two outlines the three main theoretical frameworks that are used in this study: political economy, a cultural approach and a social organisation of news. This chapter analyses the theoretical frameworks and models that related to previous studies made in other societies. It also discusses how these three approaches are applied in this study.

Chapter three examines the Omani media system by providing a historical and critical analysis of Omani news organisations. This chapter also discusses the laws that govern media in Oman.

Chapter four focuses on the methodology of the study. It outlines the processes by which content analysis, interview and observation methods were developed and analysed.

Chapter five presents the findings of the content analysis study. This chapter is divided into two main sections: the first discusses the results of the first sample of content analysis, and the second analyses the second sample of content analysis.

Chapter six presents the findings of the interviews and observations methods. This chapter is divided into two main sections: the first one discusses the macro level of analysis, which includes the ownership and control, and economic influences on the four news organisations under study. The second section focuses on the findings of the micro level of analysis, which includes journalistic practices, news gathering, news selection and news values inside the news organisations.

Chapter seven, the conclusion, summarises the main findings of the three methods of the research. It also includes the conclusions and recommendations for further studies.

Chapter Two

INFLUENCES ON MEDIA CONTENT

2. Introduction

The main concern of this thesis is to investigate the content of four Omani dailies to find out the factors (inside and outside news organisations) that affect news content. Thus, the content is the dependent variable and the inside and outside influences on news organisations are the independent variables. To achieve the main aim of this thesis,

> We need to look not only at the media organisation but also at its relations with other organisations and with the wider society. We also need to look within the organisation, at its internal structure and activities (McQuail, 1994: 185).

The aim of this chapter is to analyse and discuss theoretical frameworks that relate to influences on media content. This is to provide a theoretical background for the thesis and to identify the suitable models or approaches for studying the influences on media content at Omani news organisations. To achieve this aim, the chapter will include two main sections: the first section uses a macro-sociological perspective and will discuss two main theoretical approaches, the political economy and cultural approaches. The second section looks at issues on a micro-sociological level, using the social organisation approach to analyse the definitions of news, news values, gatekeeping and the influences on media content that are internal to news organisations.

2.1. Theoretical frameworks of media content

Influences on media content are the core of this thesis. Gans, 1980; Gitlin, 1980; Shoemaker and Reese, 1991, 1996 summarise the theoretical frameworks to influences on media content in five main hypotheses (see McQuail, 2000: 246):

1. A 'mirror approach'. This approach assumes that the mass media accurately reflect the social reality for the audience. Media channels in this approach are just 'natural' channels, which reflect the world as it comes with little or no distortion. However, this approach has been criticised by many researchers (e.g., Lippmann, 1922; Fishman, 1980; Strentz, 1989; Beardworth, 1980; Watson and Hill, 2000) who have argued that news is not neutral, but selected and produced in news organisations. Shoemaker and Reese (1996: ix) wrote:

> The mass media do not simply mirror the world around them. If you were an eyewitness to an event and you then read or viewed a story about it in the news media, any similarity between what you saw and what the news media reported would hardly be the result of a *simple* process. Mass media content-- both news and entertainment--is shaped, pounded, constrained, encouraged by multitude of forces. Sometimes the reality presented by the media matches the world as you know it, and sometimes it is very different. Sometimes two media present similar versions of the same event, and sometimes the result is very different.

This thesis will not discuss a 'mirror approach' as an influence, because media content is not just a mirror of reality, but it goes through many procedures and influences as will discuss through this chapter.

2. Communicator-centered approach. This approach can be applied by examining journalists' professional, personal and political attitudes, and the professional training they receive.

3. Media routines approach. This approach focuses on journalists in their daily routines in news organisations and assumes that the routines influence media content.

4. Extra-media approach. This approach assumes that social institutions, economic cultural forces, and audiences outside the organisation in society influence the media content.

5. The hegemony approach. This approach holds that media content is influenced primarily by the ideology of those in power. Media content depends on the political and economic systems which control the media in the society.

The hierarchical model in Shoemaker and Reese (1991, 1996) is one of the comprehensive models of news production processes; it includes most of the previous approaches, except the mirror one. The model divides the influences into five levels (see figure 1).
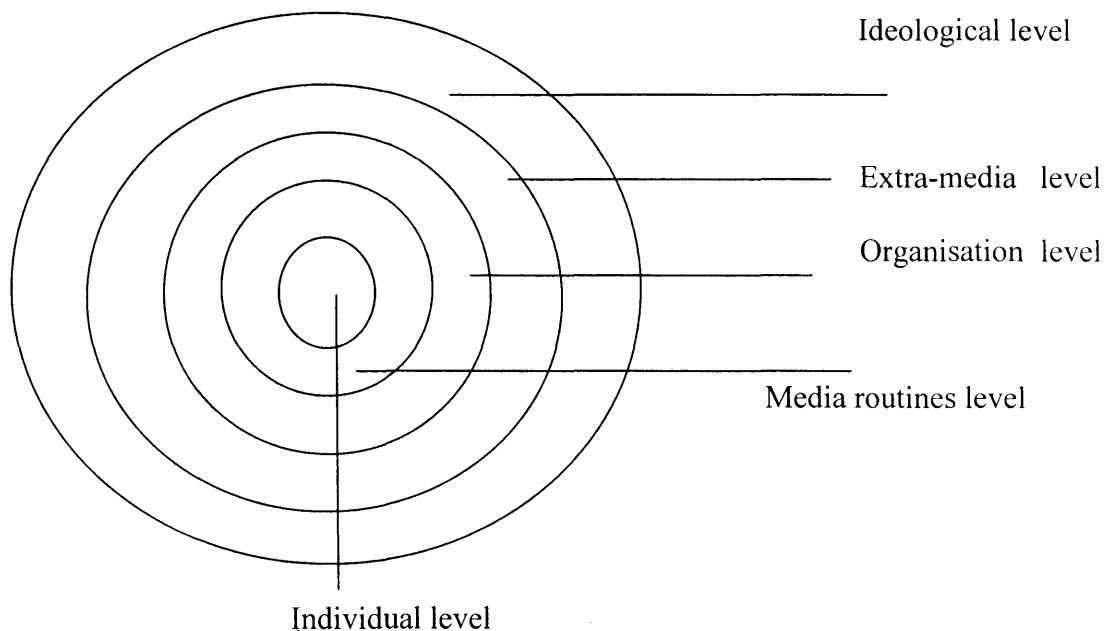
Figure 1: hierarchical model.

Source: Shoemaker & Reese, 1991, 1996

McQuail (1994, 2000) developed 'a similar but modified' version of the hierarchy model employed by Shoemaker and Reese (1991, 1996). The focus of McQuail's model is the 'news organisation level' and the relationship between the media organisation and other agencies, institutions, and society from one side and the people working within these news organisations on the other side. According to this model, a

media organisation works under pressure from different sources: its audience, owners, social and political institutions, advertisers, news sources, investors. These can be divided into two main categories: economic pressures and social and political pressures. The relationship between these two categories and the media organisation depends on the 'main goals' of the media organisation (McQuail, 1994: 186-211).

In the coming sections, each approach will be analysed, except the mirror one, which will not be used in this thesis. Two of these approaches (political economy and cultural approaches) analyse media content at the macro-level and the other two approaches (communicator-centered and social organisational approaches) analyse media content at the micro-level analysis. I will start discussing macro-level approaches and then micro-level approaches of media content. The aim of this analysis is to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of each approach and ways of applying the approaches in the context of Omani media.

2.2. Influences on news content (macro-level analysis)

2.2.1. Political economy and news organisations

The original idea of the political economy framework, which has its roots in the work of Karl Marx, is that a small powerful group, the 'ruling class', dominates, by its economic ownership of organisations in societies, the 'working classes' (see Barrat, 1992). This means the final product of 'ideas', which are produced by organisations, including the mass media organisations, reflects the interests of the small powerful groups in the society.

This approach had been analysed and elaborated by many researchers in the capitalist, Western countries (e.g., Tunstall, 1970, 1980, 1992; Golding and Elliott, 1979; Golding and Murdock, 1996; Murdock and Golding, 1973, 1977; Westgaard, 1977; Boyd-Barrett, 1980; Schlesinger, 1980, 1989; Negrine, 1994; Curran and Seaton, 1991; Chomsky, 1989; Chomsky, 1997; Herman & Chomsky, 1994; Herman, 2000) ‐ who have concentrated on the link between the ownership of media organisations and the control of these organisations' out-put. Questions of the relationships between the owners (businessmen or governments) and news organisations, how economic determinates affect the daily journalism work, how political groups or advertisers control the media content -- all of these questions can be answered by this approach to understand the factors that shape the content produced by each news organisation (Schudson, 1989: 266-269; Golding & Elliott, 1979: 159).

> A focal question for the political economy of communications is to investigate how changes in the array of forces, which exercise control over cultural production and distribution, limit or liberate the public sphere. In practice this directs attention to two key issues. The first is the pattern of ownership of such institutions and the consequences of this pattern for control over their activities. The second is the nature of the relationship between state regulation and communications institutions (Golding & Elliott, 1979: 159).

The economic factor is the main element in this approach in the capitalist countries (Fishman, 1980: 149-50). Davison, et.al. (1982) argue that the closely related theory which explains the content of American media is that the commercial media are moneymaking, produced by the business class in its own interest (1982: 71). Market place competitions are of great concern to owners and managers of news organisations. This is one of the reasons for bureaucratic routine in newsrooms. Newspapers should arrive at newsstands on schedule. If not, readers may buy the available competing newspaper (Fishman, 1980: 146; Golding and Murdock, 1996:

11). Thus, the person who finances the newspaper will control the final product of the media organisation. This influence can be achieved by designing the whole strategy or policy of the organisation or intervening into the daily practices of the journalists.

Roshco (1975: 118), on the other hand, concluded that news judgment is a 'reflection of the economic and political arrangements that control the social order and shape its social values'. He emphasized the relationship between journalists and audiences, and asserted that a news organisation should study its audiences continually to see the changes within them over time.

Another part of the economic dimension that affects the news content, is technologies that are used by each news organisation (Golding, and Elliot, 1979; Smith, 1977; Parker, 1997: 21-44; Shoemaker and Reese, 1996: 215; Aldridge, 1994: 19; Cottle, 1993, 1999; Schudson, 1996).

> Changes in the technology, both of production and distribution, in the organisation of newsgathering and production, and in the purposes, political or economic, which prompt production in the first place, all shape the form and context of journalistic activities (Golding and Elliot, 1979: 20).

The question of how new technology affect the final product, by both production and distribution, is still new in media research. New technologies that are used in newsrooms have made the processes easier than they were in the past in terms of time and effort, but as Cottle argues:

> We need to know much more, for example, about processes of 'technological embedding' and the 'social (and professional) shaping' of news technologies by journalists in use, as well as their wider impact on working practices, source involvement, and news forms and story output (Cottle, 1999: 20-21).

I agree with Cottle (1993; 1999) and others mentioned above on their view that technology should be studied in more 'close-up, empirical observation' (as will be

discussed later) (ibid: 20). However, I am going to investigate the influences of new

technology on Omani news organisations in 'general view' terms, for two main

reasons: 1) my study investigates the whole process of influences of news contents. 2)

In the case of Oman, the technological dimension is less important as an influence on

content, from my point of view, than the political and social system of professional

journalists. Thus, technology will be studied in this thesis as a part of the economic

dimension that shapes news content.

Herman and Chomsky (1994), by their 'propaganda model', added another side to the

discussion of the political economy approach in the capitalist Western countries. In

brief, this model argues that the media product is a propaganda tool for political elites

who hold power in the liberal democratic countries (Herman and Chomsky, 1994,

Chomsky, 1997; Chomsky, 1989; Herman, 2000).

> A propaganda model focuses on this inequality of wealth and power and its
> multilevel effects on mass-media interests and choices. It traces the routes by
> which money and power are able to filter out the news fit to print, marginalize
> dissent, and allow the government and dominant private interests to get their
> messages across to the public (Herman and Chomsky, 1994: 2).

There are five main 'ingredients' or a set of 'news filters' (as they call it) in this

model:

> (1) the size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth, and profit orientation of the
> dominant mass-media firms; (2) advertising as the primary income source of
> the mass media; (3) the reliance of the media on information provided by the
> government, business, and "experts" funded and approved by these primary
> sources and agents of power; (4) "flak" as a means of disciplining the media;
> and (5) "anticommunism" as a national religion and control mechanism. These
> elements interact with and reinforce one another. The raw material of news
> must pass through successive filters, leaving only the cleansed residue fit to
> print. They fix the premises of discourse and interpretation, and the definition
> of what is newsworthy in the first place, and they explain the basis and
> operations of what amount to propaganda campaigns (ibid).

This model has been criticized by some researchers. Golding and Murdock (1996) argue that although dominant elites such as government, businessmen, and advertisers have a 'privileged access' to the mass media or choose some news organisations to convey their messages, nevertheless, the media does not always do what they wish. These news organisations work under structures and limits of time, space and organisational routines. Schlesinger (1989) argues that this model is a "highly deterministic vision of how the media operate coupled with a straightforward functionalist conception of ideology" (p: 297).

From the above, it is apparent that the political economy approach views the economic element as a central influence on media in the Western capitalist countries. Nevertheless, this approach also recognizes, as does the propaganda model, that the politician elites influence the news organisations' work. This happens indirectly most of the time, through the news organisations' relationship with the owners of news organisations or the pressures which may be exerted by political groups against one news organisations or another (Epstein, 1975) (i.e., by restricting access to information from the officials). Hamada (1993: 69) describes the relationship between politicians and news workers as a 'pivotal' relationship. News workers pay special attention to politicians as main sources for political news stories. Politicians, on the other hand, need the mass media to spread their ideas and policies.

2.2.1.2. Government/press relationship in the Arab world

The discussion about the relationship between politics and the media in the Arab world and developing countries in general is more complicated. The influence of the political systems over the news organisations in the developing countries in general

and Arab countries in particular is much more effective (Mostyn, 2002; Abu-Osba, 1999a; Abu-Osba, 1999b; Abu-Osba, 1995; Shah, 1996; Hamada, 1993; Al-Jammal, 1991; Rugh, 1979, 1987; Badran, 1988; Almaney, 1972; Stevenson, 1988; Vasquez, 1983). The media in the Arab world are newer than the media in the Western countries. Most of them were established at the beginning of the twentieth century[1] by the new governments as tools to support their development programs (Nasser, 1983; Al-Jammal, 1991; Hamada, 1993; Tarabay, 1994).

In the 1980s, the degree of ownership and control differs from one Arabic country to another. According to Abu-Zaid (1986), five countries have public ownership of newspapers (Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Libya, Algeria). Ten Arab countries have both public and private ownership (Egypt, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE, Oman, Tunis and Morocco). Only one country (Lebanon) has private ownership alone (Abu-Zaid, 1986: 23-28).

Most Arab governments control the content of their countries' mass media in the Arab world directly (by government-ownership of media) or indirectly (by direct or indirect subsidies for private news organisations) (Mostyn, 2002: 159-170).

The governments in the Arab world control the mass media directly by their right to make or reject permission to establish a news organisation; official censorship by laws and instructions (see chapter 3: Oman and Omani media), or indirectly through economic control, exerted by cutting subsidies, especially in countries such as Oman that have a small advertising-market (see chapter 7).

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1 For more details about the history of the media establishment in the Arab world, see Abu-Osba, 1999b: 315-336.

The press organisations in the Arabian Gulf (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE) are characterized by some researchers (i.e., Rugh, 1979, 1987; Al-Jammal, 1991; Tarabay, 1994) as loyal to their countries' regime and as avoiding publishing critical issues. Nevertheless, one cannot generalise this description to all the countries. Kuwaiti journalists, for example, more openly criticize government policies or plans than do journalists in the other Gulf countries. Al-Jazeera TV channel, in Qatar, made many challenges for Arab governments by broadcasting very critical issues (political, economic, social and cultural issues) related to the Arab world. Therefore, many Arab governments (e.g., Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan) have had problems with this channel, because its broadcasting of critical issues (e.g., human rights, civil society and democracy in the Arab world) about these countries (see El-Nawawy and Iskandar, 2002; Alterman, 1999; Anderson & Eickelman, 1999; Rathmell, 1997).

The political approach gives a general picture (that is, a macro analysis) of news organisation work in different societies. This point, argues Schudson (1989: 268; 1996: 143), is both the strength and the weakness in the approach. It is the strength because this general picture helps to show how media organisations work, the relationship between media and power, especially the political power, and the role of media in society. However, the weakness of this general picture is that it fails to answer questions dealing with the daily practice of creating news in media organisations. This daily practice is valued in this research, because it helps to answer some of the research questions in this thesis, which deal with the influences on media content in Oman.

It has been already shown in section 2.2.1. of this chapter that the majority of media researchers (Tunstall, 1970, 1980, 1992; Golding and Elliott, 1979; Golding and Murdock, 1996; Murdock and Golding, 1973, 1977; Westgaard, 1977; Boyd-Barrett, 1980; Schlesinger, 1980, 1989; Schudson, 1989; 1996, Negrine, 1994; Curran and Seaton, 1991; Chomsky, 1989; Chomsky, 1997; Herman & Chomsky, 1994; Herman, ̄ 2000) have studied the media in the United States and Europe. These societies, however, have different media systems than those found in Oman and most Arab countries. If economy and indirect politics, as highlighted in the Herman & Chomsky's propaganda model, determine the media projects in the capitalist societies, media in Oman and most Arabic countries are political projects more than economic ones, as already shown in section 2.2.1.2. of this chapter. The economic dimension cannot be separated from the political system, which is more important in the case of Oman. The government in Oman, for instance, controls both the government newspapers and private newspapers. Gaining access to these news organisations is not easy. This may explains the very few studies that have dealt with news production in the Arab world in general. However, news content is not influenced by political economy factors only (factors identified by a macro perspective), but also by the functions inside news organisations (factors identified by a micro perspective).

2.2.1.3. Media organisations and sources

The macro-level analysis of the political economy approach also highlights influences from outside the media organisation. These influences can be summarized in sources of information and sources of revenue (Sigal, 1986; Fishman, 1980; Shoemaker and Reese, 1991; 1996; Gans, 1980; McQuail, 1994, 2000).

There are many kinds of information sources: local sources, national and foreign sources, state and regional sources. Revenue sources include audiences and advertisers. Information sources include social institutions such as business and official sources. Official sources, as part of information sources, are preferred by the journalists not just because they are easy to gain access to, but also because some reporters argue that official sources 'have important things to say' (Shoemaker and Reese 1991: 152). However, what defines 'importance' and for whom are these things important? This question needs to be answered every day inside media organisation. In Oman, the term 'official sources' refers to governmental sources, and these are covered more than non-official sources (Al-Mashikhi, 1994; Al-Mashekhi, 1996, Al-Kindi, 1995). One aim of this thesis is to analyse the reasons of this situation. This is to find out to what extend information sources affect media content in Omani daily newspapers.

In his investigation of the information sources of one Omani news organisation (a television station), Al-Rwas (1997) found that 'positive' news items were reported in greater volume than 'negative' news items. Although the study was useful for understanding way news department in Omani state television works and the interaction between the journalists and their sources, it did not pay, as other media researches about Oman, much attention to the individual, organisational or societal influences that shape news content in Oman TV. It analysed the contents and sources of the evening (10.00 pm) news bulletin, but did not explain why news content is as it is in Omani television.

Revenue sources (advertisings and audiences) in most capitalist free-market countries are other influences on media content. Media scheduling and planning reflect the

interest of advertisers. This influence of advertising comes by providing information that has 'promotional value, product placement, and sponsoring (McQuail, 2000: 261). Advertising in Arabic and developing countries also affect on media content, but less than media organisations in the free-market countries. This is because of Advertising market in Arabic countries is very small comparing with the developed capitalist countries (Abu-Osba, 1999a). Nevertheless, advertising is the main source of income for all media organisations in capitalist and developing countries. However, advertiser influence is 'ethically disapproved' (McQuail, 2000: 262) and media organisations have to keep its content, especially news content, away from advertiser influence.

Readers, as a second source of revenue, are the figure of greatest power (Murdock, 1980: 42; Whale, 1977: 82; Turow, 1992: 97). They are significant factors not only in shaping newspaper policy, but also they are important to attract advertising revenue. Gurevitch and Blumer (1977) emphasise the role of audiences in shaping the content, but they argue that this role differs according to the system in which news organisation work (1977: 251-269). However, news production studies show that readers do not know about news reporting and 'journalists write primarily for themselves, for their editors, and for other journalists' (Shoemaker and Reese, 1991: 96). This thesis aims to show to what extent that journalists in Oman know their readers and to what extent that readers in Oman influence news reporting.

2.2.2. Cultural approach and news organisation

Schudson (1989, 1996) brought a new dimension to news production studies by using the cultural approach, along with the political economy and social organisation approaches. The culturological approach studies the relationship between media and society to give a clear view of how media organisations are influenced by the 'cultural air'[2] of the ideological atmosphere in any society, which tell media what should and what should not be said (Schudson, 1989: 278).

The 'culturological'[3] (or anthropological) approach investigates the constructing force of a broad cultural symbol system (Schudson, 1996, 1989; Allan, 1999). Because of the purpose of my research, I use the cultural approach from an anthropological perspective, which analyses how the given culture influences the news production (Schudson, 1989). Culture, in this study, refers to sets of values, traditions, and a way of life in a particular society, which are different from those of other cultures or societies (see Scollon and Scollon, 1995; Al-Shaqsi, 2000). News, in this perspective, is a cultural product produced by journalists who believe in specific cultural values. Many studies have used this approach to analyzing journalistic practices (i.e., Peterson, 1979; Hansen and Linné, 1994; Ettema, Whitney, and Wackman, 1997; Shaari, 1997; Zhu, et.al., 1997).

In his study about news workers of *The Times* in England, Peterson (1979) found that preferred to publish and the role of their cultural background in selecting foreign news items. Peterson (1979), who emphasised out the importance of the cultural approach in news production studies, indicated that the cultural background of journalists and

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2 This term used by Hoggart (see Schudson, 1989: 278).

3 The term used by Schudson, 1989: 275

correspondents is important in selecting and gathering news (1979: 118-119). Regarding domestic news he wrote,

> ... domestic events seem more proximate (psychologically closer) to a correspondent or to a stringer who has probably lived in the country most of his life. This may be, therefore, a test of proximity as news factor (ibid: 120).

Ettema, Whitney, and Wackman (1997) argued that although the news production process is the work of individuals (e.g., journalists, producers), it is affected by organisational routines and economic determinates. Thus, they suggested that two main levels of analysis are required, at the industrial and institutional levels (1997: 33). In their study, they concentrated on the cultural context of news production. They concluded journalism is a ritual practiced by journalists in groups who share one culture. Therefore, the journalists have the same interpretation of events (ibid: 27).

Zhu, et.al. (1997), in their comparative study of journalists in China, Taiwan, and the United States, found that societal influences have the 'strongest impact on journalists' view about media roles', an impact greater than organisational or individual influences (1997: 84).

Thus, the cultural context of where news workers making their news content is essential to analyse the content and the influences on media content in any society.

2.2.2.1. Ideology and news organisations

Many researchers argue that news content, as a cultural product, is not neutral, but ideological (e.g., Golding and Elliot 1979; Golding, 1977; Gans, 1980: 30; Davison, et.al, 1987: 75; Hall, 1993; 1989; Hall, et.al, 1978; Heck, 1981).

'Ideology' is defined in the *Dictionary of Media and Communication Studies* as follows:

A system of ideas and beliefs about human conduct which has normally been simplified and manipulated in order to obtain popular support for certain actions, and which is usually emotive in its reference to social action (Watson and Hill, 2000: 144).

By looking at ideology, researchers focus attention on the symbolic influence of media on audiences (Hall, 1993, 1989, 1981). Gans (1980: 80) argues that journalists express the dominant political ideology; they often do so unconsciously (see earlier discussions on political economy sections 2.2.1. and 2.2.2).

Mudgal (1995) tries to understand the media's relationship with 'terrorism' and the state in the Indian Punjab. He argued that,

> News is a process by which the society comes to know itself. This understanding of the media-society relationship helps journalists to form a 'working ideology' for them, which may have little to do with the actual process and practice of news production (Mudgal, 1995: 35).

The results of (Mudgal 1995) showed how the state 'defines the conflict, characterizes violence and labels perpetrators'. The study brought together many aspects of other news production studies. Interviews with the participants of the conflict added a new dimension in news production studies. However, the use of the 'propaganda model' to study war time coverage in a developing country was not appropriate, because media systems in most developing countries support their government, which means that those systems directly use the propaganda model. Governments in the developing countries control the media more during war times than at any other time (see Al-Kindi, 1995). However, this model as Herman and Chomsky (1994: 1), show is appropriate to United State's media, which indirectly support political elites.

Ideology in news content can be seen not only in written texts, but also in photographs and visual elements (Hall, 1973). Langton (1995) used ethnographic interviews, textual analysis, and quantitative analysis to analyse photographic production at four major news publications. The study concluded that photographic images are interpretations (or representations) of one 'reality' among many. Photographers are not involved in the interpretive process, but writers and editors shape the meaning of the photographs according to their own views of the world. Langton concluded that photographers, in contrast, could do that only through by their technical decisions (e.g., choice of subject, composition, depth of field, and lighting).

Another point related to ideology that many Arabic and researchers from developing countries have raised is an imbalance in the flow of information from the developed Western countries to less developed countries (Abdulrahman, 1984; Al-Srayrah, 1989; Drwish, 1998; Saleh, 1998). Drwish (1998: 23-5) indicated that news production studies in the Arab countries should cover the influences of international, especially Western, content on the domestic news content. Saleh (1998: 20) believes that the definitions of ideology relate to capitalism and Western societies, which aim to give the consumers what they want without considering the interests of societies. According to Saleh, although journalism in many developing countries operates within different media systems than that in developed countries, the Western media still dominates over these countries and news organisations within them (ibid: 23).

This is an old problematic issue, which has been discussed by many media researchers (Mowlana, 1977; Al-Ahmed, 1987; Lule, 1992; Wells, 1981). Mowlana (1977: 73) refers to the importation of Western mass media to most Middle East countries. He

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noted that can be seen on two levels: (1) as imported communication technology through introduction of the printing press, telegraph, telephone, radio, television (and Internet), and (2) as various forms of nationalism, modernisation, ideology, news and most entertainment. In most developing countries, the political, bureaucratic and intellectual elite (or ruling class) plays the dominant major role in shaping the structure and function of the press (Mowlana: 1977: 79; Al-Shamari, 1989: 36). Mowlana (1977: 80) argues that the media content, especially that of press, is still designed for the elite in developing societies, because of illiteracy. (Sixty five million people in the Arabic countries are illiterate (*Al-Wasat*, 20/09/1999: 16-20).

Although I agree that the international news agencies and organisations influence news content in Arabic dailies, these researchers did not show the causes of this influence. Most of their studies used macro-level analyses. However, alternative methods are needed to find out how the dominant ideology that comes from outside the society affects the style of writing, selecting and presenting news content. Another point which needs to be analysed is the extent to which the outside ideologies or cultures affect the quality of domestic or international news content.

The above-mentioned studies have investigated that news production by journalists that either have the same 'culture air' or are part of a hegemonic ideology. However, one cannot generalise from the findings of these studies to all societies, especially where journalists from different societies and cultures came to work within the same place, such as Omani Arabic-language and English-language news organisations. Many journalists who work in Omani news organisations come from different cultures (e.g., from other Arabic countries, India, and the Philippines), which means

they hold different beliefs and ideologies. (See chapter 3, Oman and Omani media).

Therefore, the cultural approach will be used in this thesis to find out influences of

individuals on media content as a result of their working in a different society which

has hegemonic system and culture.

The cultural approach, like the political economy one, gives a wide picture (a macro-

level perspective) of the influences on media content. It pays close attention to the

cultural backgrounds of news workers in each media organisations, where they come

from, the length of their stay in Oman for example and whether they are originally

from Oman or they just from other countries come to work (see chapter 3: Oman and

Omani media). However, this approach cannot identify other influences at work

inside these news organisations (a micro-level perspective) such as the nature of

content they cover, why they choose to cover this content rather than another one, and

the differences in dealing with sources. Therefore, I also draw on the social

organisation approach to understand the internal influences on media contents.

2.3. Social organisation of news production (Micro-level analysis)

2.3.1. What is 'News'?

The field of the 'sociology of news' examines two main questions: 'What is news?'

and 'What makes news?' (Tumber, 1999: 3; Berkowitz, 1997: xii). The definition of

'news' is one of the complex issues in communication studies. This is because no one

definition is shared among researchers, or among the journalists themselves.

Lippmann (1922), who is one of the essential sources in the field of news, defines

news as a social product of journalistic routines. Roshco (1975) argues that news is

'more easily pursued than defined, a characteristic it shares with such other

enthralling abstractions as love and truth' (p.33). Gieber (1964: 218) argues that news

is 'what newspaper men make it'. News is 'manufactured by journalists' (Cohen and

Young, 1973: 97). News for Fishman (1980) is 'the result of the methods news

workers employ' (1980: 14). A recent dictionary of mass communication studies

defines news as:

> ... a *process*, or rather an amalgam of many processes, which mediate
> information, select it, edit it, emphasize some parts of it, distort it, even
> manipulate it. News, that is, the raw information which is eventually
> *constructed* as news, is turned into NARRATIVE, a mode of storytelling,
> which by the application of certain professional practices – conventions –
> establishes what has come to be termed news DISCOURSE (Watson and Hill,
> 2000: 206).

Researchers in Western countries define news as a product to sell (Martin and

Chaudhary, 1983: 3; Nasser, 1983: 34; Grossberg, et.al., 1998: 14; Schudson, 1995:

29). However, many researchers in Arabic and developing countries reject the

Western news model because they see it as unsuitable for their societies (see Nasser,

1983). Most researchers in these countries define the news in relation to the

development of the society (Saleh, 1998: 19; Abu-Zaid, 1981: 27; Abdulnabi, 1989:

241).

The definitions above make apparent the difficulties involved in defining news, for

Western researchers (i.e. Altheide, 1976; Hartley, 1982; Hetherington, 1985;

Fishman, 1980;) or Arabic researchers (i.e. Saleh, 1998; Abdulnabi, 1989; Nasser,

1983; Abu-Zaid, 1981). Other researchers have not defined the news, but rather

described the processes of news action as a manufactured process (i.e. Lippmann,

1922; Cohen and Young, 1973, 1981; Gieber, 1964; Fishman, 1980; Strentz, 1989;

Beardworth, 1980; Galtung and Ruge, 1999; Watson and Hill, 2000). As Altheide

(1976: 196) said, news cannot be a 'truthful and complete account of the social

world'. No news organisation can report every event of the social world. The definition of news as a 'mirror of reality'[4] was critisised, also, by numerous researchers (Berger and Luckman, 1966; Tuchman, 1978, Parenti, 1993: 52; and Shoemaker and Reese, 1996: 37).

Based on the above discussion and the differences between the Western and developing countries in defining news, in this thesis I suggest that term 'news' refers to a product that is selected and influenced by many factors inside and outside the news organisation. Thus, news in this thesis, is not seen as a 'mirror of reality', but rather as being selected, shaped and produced in news organisations.

2.3.2. Mass communicator inside news organisations

> Journalists do not write articles, they write stories with structure, order, viewpoint and values. So the daily happenings of our societies are expressed in the stories we are told in the media (Bell, 1998: 64).

The early studies of news sociology began with White (1950). He suggested that journalists act as gatekeepers of media messages. They select the events which will become 'news'. Breed (1955) examined how journalists become socialised to their jobs. His study showed the way pressure exacts conformity in a newsroom. 'The reporters learn what management wants and then pursue what is in their own best interest' (Breed, 1955: 326-335).

Chomsky (1989) and Parenti (1993) assert the importance of the role of the journalist in news selection and his/her self-censorship in shaping the content. Curran (1998) argues that controls operate 'unobtrusively' through beginning staff selection, and

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4 The concept of 'news reality' as a social construct fits with a philosophical approach known as constructivism (or constructionism). This concept exaggerates the role of the knower, while 'ignoring or minimising constraints imposed by the known (Perry, 1996: 71). This concept of 'news reality' was developed and examined by many researchers (i.e., Paterson, 1997; Shoemaker and Reese, 1996; Parenti, 1993; Fishman, 1980; Tuchman, 1978; Tunstall, 1978; Berger and Luckman, 1966).

through self-censorship rather than through obvious coercion (p. 84). Ericson, et.al, (1987) indicate that journalists' cultures and attitudes affect their work in newsroom. All the previous views pay attention to the journalist in the news organisation who works as a gatekeeper. This leads us to the gatekeeping model in news production studies.

2.3.2.1. Gatekeeping

Lewin, a social psychologist, coined the term 'gatekeeper', and then several social scientists (e.g., White, 1950; Gieber: 1964) applied it to journalism to refer to the person (or persons) inside news organisations who decide what is and what is not be published (Schudson, 1989: 264). White (1950) studied a gatekeeper (or 'Mr. Gates' as White calls him) for one week and found Mr. Gates decided which wire service stories would run in the paper and which would not. White found the gatekeeper highly subjective in what he decided would be 'news'. In contrast, Gieber's study (1964) of sixteen wire editors in Wisconsin found the telegraph editor to be

> ... preoccupied with the mechanical pressures of his work rather than the social meanings and impact of the news. His personal evaluations rarely entered into his selection process; the values of his employer were an accepted part of the newsroom environment (1964: 175).

Thus, there is a contrast contrary in the results of White's and Giber's studies. The two communicators in the two both studies are both gatekeepers who decide which items could be news at the end of the day. But White (1950) stresses the role of the gatekeepers' attitudes and values, whereas Gieber (1964) argued that the role of the gatekeeper is just a daily routine.

McNelly (1959, cited in McQuail and Windahl, 1993: 169-170) suggested that news, in the process of production, crosses through various communicators, not only one gatekeeper as White (1950) argued. In a study of the international flow of news, McNelly found that a newsworthy item went first to the foreign agency correspondent, then the regional bureau editor, deskman, national or regional home bureau editor, and finally the telegraph editor (or radio and TV stations). Even after publishing the item, readers were gatekeepers in that they ignored some information. Thus, there is no one gatekeeper, but many. Each of these gatekeepers may have a different cultural background, political attitudes or social values that could influence the final news content.

Bass (1969) revised the gatekeeping theory and suggested that there are no differences between the roles of the gatekeepers in White (1950) and McNelly (1959). Bass also noted that, in these two models, one cannot observe the most 'significant' point of selection. Bass (1969) suggested that the gatekeeping activity could be seen within processes that are practiced in news organisations (media routines). He divided these processes into two stages: 1) news gathering and 2) news processing. In the first stage, news gatherers make 'raw news' into news copy. In the second stage, news processors turn the news items into the 'completed product'.

Brown (1979) indicated that the whole process of news production could not be summarised by the 'gatekeeping' model (1979: 595). 'News production involves the four functions of extraction, concentration, purification and product formulation' (ibid: 596). By extraction, he meant the process of selecting information from the whole events. Concentration is the activity of 'reducing' the news item to be ready for

publishing. The third step, 'purification', is the 'internal refinement of an information item in terms of removing extra details to achieve a tight but comprehensive form'. Finally, product formulation mixes the item with others from other channels 'in a group format for passage through the gate' (ibid). In each stage, some information may be destroyed or ignored. However, this is not just because of the attitude of the gatekeeper in each stage, but may be due to a size or time limit or any other technical element.

The models of gatekeeping discussed above analysed processes of news organisations as isolated projects of the society or social forces that affect news content. The weakness with the gatekeeping model, as Schudson (1996; 1989) points out, is that it 'leaves information sociologically untouched'. The items arrive to the gate already prepared. Mr. Gates just chooses the items events to fit the size of a paper or length of a news show. The gatekeeper metaphor 'transforms organisational 'bias' into individual subjectivity' (Schudson, 989: 265). Schudson (1989), in his critique of the gatekeeping model, argues that a 'gatekeeper' needs some criteria for selecting which items can pass through the gate and which to return. But, argued Schudson, 'this underestimates the complexity of the situation; news items are not simply selected but constructed'.

No one can ignore the role of gatekeepers in shaping and constructing news, and it is not always the role of 'Mr. Gates' to fit the item to the size of the paper. The gatekeeper chooses the news and sometimes rewrites it to publish in the newspaper. However, the gatekeeper works within the context of other factors that shape news. Therefore, many researchers (e.g., Gans, 1980; Nwanufero, 1984: 11; Schudson,

1989, 1996; Shoemaker, 1991; Tuchman, 1991: 91; and Abu-Osba, 1999) extended the concept of gatekeeping to include other factors that have stronger effect on the process of news production such as the political, economic and cultural factors than the effect of the 'traditional gatekeeper'. The construction of news is not made by journalists, publishers, or gatekeepers, but in the process by which all parts, routines – and arrangements of the organisation create news.

Gatekeeping also can be affected by the ideology of the social system in which the gatekeeper exists. The ideological system causes the gatekeeper to select items that serve the purpose of a powerful elite. Shoemaker (1991) extended the gatekeeping model to cover three main levels that affect the decision of the gatekeeper: individual journalists, the organisation, and the society. She identified various psychological processes affecting the gatekeeping process. She also argued that social forces affect news content and that news organisations relate very strongly to the social system in which they operate (see also Shoemaker, et.al, 2001).

Although the gatekeeper model has been refined and criticized since White's (1950) study, it provides an insight into the subjective nature of the news production process. The gatekeeping model also indicates 'a degree of reliance on the judgments, experiences, and attitudes of the participants of the news process' (Tumber, 1999: 63). In my study, I will study the process of gatekeeping as a part of social organisation approach. This is to observe the levels of gatekeepers that affect the content and to determine if there are any differences between private and government newspapers. 'Gatekeeper' as a term is used in this thesis to refer to the people (or organisations) that decide what is published and what is not in the Omani press.

2.3.2.2. News Values

The approach of social organisation of news work as a micro level analysis also includes news values perspective. News values in news production process organise news selection process by suggesting a number of values that guide gatekeepers to select or reject news items. This is cannot be separated from the gatekeeping perspective, because gatekeepers use these values to select or reject news items. Galtung and Ruge (1970, 1981) suggested that there were twelve 'news factors' affecting the selection or rejection process. These were 1) frequency, 2) intensity, 3) clarity, 4) cultural proximity, 5) consonance, 6) unexpectedness, 7) continuity, 8) both the composition and socio-cultural values of the society or gatekeepers, 10) elite nations, 11) elite people, and 12) something negative. This model was widely investigated by many communication research studies in the West and developing countries (i.e., Gutiezzez, 1992; Lule, 1992; Ericson, et.al., 1987; Stephen, 1980; Gans,1980; Rubin, 1979; Galtung and Ruge, 1973; Tunstall, 1983; Schoenbach, 1983; Hartley, 1982).

Deciding What's News (Gans, 1980) is a classic, study in the field of news production. Gans used both content analysis and ethnography in his study which combined both print and television journalism (*Time* and *Newsweek* as well as CBS and NBC). Content analysis in Gan's study was used to identify news themes. This led to the identification of news values, which the researcher then continued to study using ethnographic analysis. The long period of the study (nearly a decade) was one of the problems in Gans's study. Some might argue that this long period of time could yield more accurate results. However, this argument cannot be acceptable because many changes happened in news organisations during these years (Reese, 1993: 21;

Paterson, 1997). Another disadvantage of this study is that did not assess the differences between the print and electronic news organisations and the way people worked within them.

Hetherington (1985) conducted a similar study of British newspapers and television organisations. He asserted that even countries with the same system, (e.g., both the United States and Britain which share a capitalism system), differ in their journalism practices (1985: 2). Hetherington analysed the BBC, BBC Scotland, STV, ITN, *The Guardian, Daily Mail, Daily Mirror,* and *The Times.* Three dailies (*Daily Telegraph, Daily Express,* and *The Sun*) refused to grant him access to their operations: *Daily Telegraph* and *Daily Express* agreed to allow him to interview their editors outside the organisations. The study analysed the newspapers by content analysis. The results showed that the editor (or editors) plays strong role in the British press. On a micro level of analysis, the study investigated the press in wartime by using four case studies: The 1982 war in the Falkland Islands, Northern Ireland, and the sieges of the Iranian Embassy in 1980, and the Libyan Embassy in 1983. The study pointed out that war times in journalism are exceptional occasions in the relationship between the authorities and journalists, during which the government exerts strong control over news organisations (ibid: 291). The study concluded that changes of management, ownership and the law influence the environment in which journalists work (ibid: 295). The study supplied much information about journalism work in Britain in both the press and TV. It tried to analyse news production in the types of media in the UK. However, it could not analyse how all aspects of these types of media influence the product. The study looked at news content over few days only. However, it could be argued that in such a short period one cannot observe the characteristics of each medium. Other elements such as advertisements, sources and audiences were not

discussed in detail. Microanalysis of war cases was not suitable to understand the typical characteristics of news organisations. War time is, as the study showed itself, an exceptional occasions in which the authorities control the media coverage.

The list of news values that may guide the journalist (or gatekeeper) in the Western countries in selecting a news item includes immediacy, proximity, importance, unusualness, human interest, conflict, size, novelty, timeliness, and drama. Even given these broad common values, the newsgathering and selection choices of Western journalists and news organisations differ in many ways. These differences depend on the society, and on the newspaper, its policy, journalists and readers.

Differences in news values are even more evident when one compares journalism work in Western countries, the Communist world[5] and developing countries[6]. Journalism work in the Communist world was seen to be a propaganda medium for the party in power (Martin and Chaudhary, 1983: 26). Thus, the gathering, selecting and publishing of news depended on ideological elements (Karch, 1983: 111). Karch notes that news values in these countries related to the Communist Party, and the journalist in these countries was employed by the Party that is in the power. Another news value in the Communist world was social responsibility. News, as a part of the society, was expected to be positive, and effective, and to emphasise government achievements. News could also be critical, but only of those who were against the Communist Party. News in the Communist world was also required to be educative

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5 The term 'Communist world' here refers to the former Soviet Union and former East European Communist systems modelled after the Soviet Union (Hopkins, 1983: 281).

6 The term 'developing world' is very problematic because of the different economic situations of the countries that are involved. The term is used here to refer to the less industrialized countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America (Habte, 1983: 97; Paterson, 1997: 1). In this thesis, I use it to refer to the Arabic world (Asia) more than to Africa and Latin America, because Oman is considered part of Asia.

and cultural. It was presented to educate the public about the Party's ideology. Like in the Western world, human interest was as a news value in the Communist world. However, as Lendavi (1983) observes, in the Communist world there was an ideological theme that news was about the people in general but not about a person himself (p. 82). Newspapers in these countries gave attention to readers' letters which supported the Communist Party's policies. Some other news values in the Communist world were nearly the same as those in with the West, such as immediacy, proximity, and importance, but these were considered less important than those noted above by Lendavi (1983) and Karch (1983), and they were to support the ideology of the Party.

In the developing countries, the situation is more difficult to describe because of the large groups of countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America that are included in this classification. The Arabian Gulf countries, for example, are in a better economic situation than Arabic countries in North Africa. These countries differ in their political, economic and cultural systems from the Western countries. However, one thing shared by the media in all the developing countries is the value placed on 'development' (Lule, 1992: 56; Habte, 1983: 95- 110; Hester and To, 1992). Supporting 'development' is the first news value in the developing countries. News is valued, in these countries, if it supports economic, political, social and cultural efforts of the government in the society. Beyond this, each society has its own ideas and ways for development, which may differ from the others. Nasser (1983) writes:

> In a country where the news media are expected to play a political and ideological role, the journalist becomes an "educator" and "nation builder". Third world countries argue that Western news values are rejected because they do not meet their needs. In their view, news should promote national goals, support authority, and forge a new social order (1983: 61-62).

As in the West and the formerly Communist countries, news workers in the Arab world value social responsibility. But how do they define 'responsibility'? The definition of responsibility is very wide. Does social responsibility mean that journalists select, gather and publish only news supportive of the government, to help the government building the societies without in-depth investigation of the government policies or social problems? Or does the journalist have a responsibility to inform about problems that happen in the society, to avoid such problems in the future? In most Arabic countries, including Oman, the government normally is the one to decide that.

2.3.3. Daily routines inside news organisation

The routine processes practiced by individual journalists inside news organisations is another factor that influences media content. News organisations face time and space limitations in delivering the product to readers. Therefore, it is essential to understand the routine news work before analysing other influences in the news making process (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996: 109; Fishman, 1980: 15). In their study about routine practices that defines news production in three countries, Nigeria, Sweden and Ireland, Golding and Elliott (1979) found that production fell into a cycle of four sequences: planning, gathering, selection and presentation (p. 70). This division and others (e.g., Ericson, et.al, 1987) guide news production researchers in their examination of the relationship between the work of individuals and the news organisation's responsibilities.

Fishman (1980) in his study 'Manufacturing the News' argued that there are two levels of news making: routine journalism and manipulated journalism. Routine

journalism means the 'standard fare that fills newspapers day after day'. Manipulated journalism involves 'the moves and counter moves in a political game in which news is treated solely for its instrumental value in the service of particular interest' (1980: 15). Fishman (1980) argued that the news production process can be analysed as four separate stages: (1) detect occurrences, (2) interpret them as meaningful events, (3) investigate their factual character, and (4) assemble them into stories. These stages, nevertheless, need qualified journalists, so one cannot separate the study of the routine processes from the study of the organisation's system and its role in developing and training the journalists[7].

The role of the communicator's routine is also highly noted in works of Tuchman (1973, 1978). These studies conducted microanalyses of daily routines of journalists and reporters, and found that the social world is 'routinely constructed'. However, the method of these works was criticized on linguistic grounds. For example, Van Dijk (1988b: 7-8) argued that this 'microanalysis also requires systematic descriptions of news as a product of news-making practices'. Other researchers (Gans, 1980; Hetherington, 1985) combined macro analyses with microanalyses of news organisations, news routines, and news values. However, these works did not show exactly how the journalists interpret news and how their interpretations shape the final product (Van Dijk, op.cit: 7). Although focusing on the linguistic dimension of media content, as Van Dijk (1988) shows, by using discourse analysis or semiotics for example helps in knowing news values or newspapers' ideologies, the linguistic approach alone cannot provide any relevant information about daily practices inside

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7 For more details on the importance of journalism training for journalists, see

Boyd-Barett (1970: 181-201, 1980: 307-339) and Galtung and Ruge (1970: 259-298).

media organisations. It can give a very narrow picture about the differences in using language of the content, but this should be supported by other approaches of news production to show other factors that affect news content. Thus, combining macro analyses with micro analyses gives more accurate picture of the process of news production than adopting using only a micro level analysis, such as the linguistic analysis, in analysing influences on news production.

2.3.4. Social organisation approach and Arab media organisations

These studies mentioned above were done in societies that have different conditions than those in Oman and Arab countries. However, few studies were done about Arabic news organisations (e.g. Tarabay, 1994; Al-Rayyes, 1994).

Tarabay (1994) employed the political economy, the social organisation and the culturological approaches to show the influence news content on the Arab news organisations. The study used content analysis and ethnography to examine work practices in two different contexts: Beirut and London. However, this study analysed news production process in two very different cultural and political environments and both countries are different from an Arabic Gulf country like Oman, where no political parties are allowed and can be described as "more conservative" in religious and cultural traditions (see chapter 3: Oman and Omani media).

A study about Kuwait television supports Tarabay (1994) by arguing that Arabic media are 'political projects' more than economic ones. Al-Rayyes (1994) examined news production in Kuwait television using participant observation. She indicated that the government has incorporated broadcasting journalism as a tool for promoting its cultural and political policies.

Al-Rayyes also investigated the routines that are practiced by journalists in Kuwait television. The study revealed the high level control by the government over television news organisations. A disadvantage of this study is, however, that it did not analyse in detail the role of individuals or the relationship between the content and social organisation influences.

Other Arabic studies (e.g., AlSyed, 1989; Abdulnabi, 1991) have investigated the working of news organisations and come up with general views of the role of the journalists in making news. However, these studies, in general, fail to explain the general picture of journalism work in Arabic countries. To understand the working of the mass media many levels of analysis need to be investigated including the content, the journalists (communicators), the news organisations and the system that these organisations are working under (McQuail, 1994, 2000; Shoemaker and Reese, 1991, 1996; Drwish, 1998; Abu-Osba, 1999).

2.3.5. Omani media and social organisation approach

Regarding journalism in Oman, three questions arise here. First, to what extent do journalists in Oman, who have less experience in journalism work than journalists the West, or even many other Arab countries, affect news content? Second, to what extent do foreign journalists, with their personal attitudes, values and beliefs and professional background, affect the domestic content of private or government-owned news organisations? Third, to what extent does the daily routine inside news organisations affect the news content in the Omani daily newspapers?

Journalism workers work with other reporters, correspondents, the editor and the manager or owner of the news organisation to produce the content. However,

journalism work is more complicated than this is. The importance of the political and economic environment immediately becomes apparent if one compares the mass media in the United States or Western Europe with those in a developing country. Many news organisations in these countries lack advanced technologies and well trained journalists. The organisations in the rich developing countries such as Oman are under the control of the government, which exercises great influence on the content they produce through censorship or through indirect pressures such as allocation of newsprint or licensing of journalists (Davison, et.al., 1982: 73-74; Abu-Osba, 1997). Many levels of pressure exist in these news organisations; the owner (or owners) of the news organisation put pressure on the editor, and the editor puts pressure on reporters. Administrative pressures, news sources, ownership and control, self-censorship, and formal censorship are all factors that affect the work of news organisations in the Arab countries (Al-Syed, 1989; AbdulNabi, 1991; Drwish, 1998).

Omani news organisations (both private and government) work under one political system. Laws and instructions come from the Ministry of Information to all media organisations (see chapter 3: Oman and Omani media). However, how these four daily newspapers under study deal with the media law in Oman? The answer of this question helps to understand some parts of news production process in these dailies.

2.4. Levels of analysis in this study

Many of the preceding studies have concentrated on factors that affect news making, taking various slants (e.g., 'manufacture of news', 'social construction of news', 'news reality', 'news sociology', 'sociology of news production'). Lippman (1922) pointed out that news is a social product made in news organisations. In the 1950s and

1960s, White (1950), Breed (1955) studied the roles of the communicators (or gatekeepers) in shaping news content. In the 1970s and 1980s media researchers, by criticising and developing the gatekeeper model, paid attention to the news organisations that produce the content (e.g., Epstein, 1974; Gans, 1980). Other studies from the same period concentrated on the news routines in news organisations and how these determine the content (e.g., Tuchman, 1973, 1978; Fishman, 1980). Two Arabic studies related to this kind of research (AlSyed, 1989; Abdulnabi, 1991). In the 1970s and 1980s, some studies (e.g., Hall, 1973, 1981, 1989; Hallin, 1986; Gitlin, 1980) studied how the ideology of those in power in societies and the owners of media organisations affected news content.

Similar studies were conducted in the 1990s and continue to be conducted today. However, some of these studies now pay attention to some factors that shape media content more than others, such as routines in news organisations or pressures exerted by news organisations. The problem with these different studies is the absence of a 'complete theory' that allows researchers to generalise from these results (Drwish, 1998: 19). This is because the factors that shape media content are many and it is difficult to include them at all levels of analysis in one study because of limitations of time, access, and efforts (see Paterson, 1997). In spite of that, some researchers have tried to propose the most significant levels according to their research problems and objectives of their studies. Paterson (1997: 74) suggested that the

> ...attributes of the specific news production process under analysis help to determine that focus. Most studies deal with some combination of these levels, yet I am aware of none that comprehensively addresses them all.

The argument of Paterson (1997) may be valid if one analyses a Western news organisation or even a "big" Arabic news organisation such as *Al-Ahram* or *Al-Hayat*

newspapers or *Al-Jazeera* or *MBC* TV channels, which have many news workers inside and outside the news organisation. However, in small media organisations, like the ones found in Oman, I think one can address all levels, or at least most of them, if that achieves the research's problem. In my study, it is essential to start with the news organisation (or media-centric approach); from the news organisation we can understand most internal and external influences on news content in the Omani daily newspapers (McQuail, 1994; 2000) (see Figure 2).
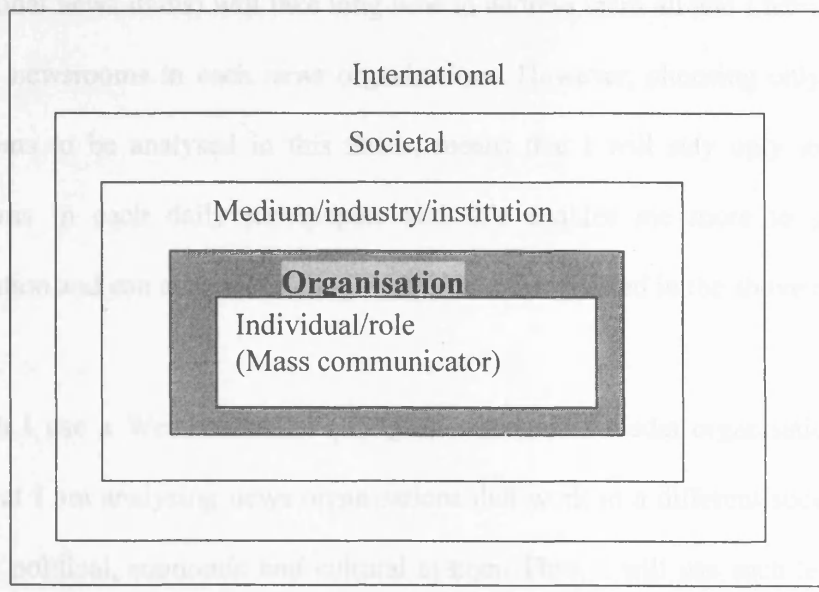
Figure 2: Levels of analysis in McQuail's model of media organisations
Source: McQuail, 1994: 189, 2000: 248 (emphasis added).

As shown already, some studies paid more attention to one or two levels of analysis (e.g., routines in Fishman, 1980, or organisational pressures in Tuchman, 1978; Epstein, 1974; AlSyed, 1989) or several levels of analysis (e.g., Gans, 1980; Hetherington, 1985; Shah, 1987, 1990; Tarabay, 1994). In my study, I will focus on four main levels of analysis: (1) the mass communicator's role, (2) the organisational level, (3) the extra-media level and (4) the societal level; I will ignore the international level (this is similar to the analysis in McQuail, 1994, 2000). This is

because the study focuses on domestic news items only. There are three reasons for choosing these four levels and not concentrating on one or two levels. First, it is the first research, to the best of my knowledge, which deals with journalism practices and the influences on news content in Omani news organisations. Second, the nature of these news organisations, which are small-scale businesses, helps me to understand the daily work inside them. And third, I will analyse only the domestic news items of these news organisations. Because choosing all news items (domestic, Arabic, and international news items) will take long time to address them all and I have to stay in different newsrooms in each news organisations. However, choosing only domestic news items to be analysed in this thesis, means that I will stay only in domestic newsrooms in each daily newspapers and this enables me more to give more specification and can address all four levels that are suggested in the above model.

Although I use a Western model (McQuail's model of media organisations), I am aware that I am analysing news organisations that work in a different society with a different political, economic and cultural system. Thus, I will use each level in this model with taking into consideration my country's cultural, political, economic and social system. For this reason the next chapter will focus on Oman and Omani media. I choose this model because, as already seen through this chapter, there is no Arabic theoretical model that analyse news production processes in media organisations. In fact some Arabic researchers have suggested using the same levels of analysis described by McQuail (1994, 2000) in analyzing influences of media content in the Arabic world, but concentrating on Arabic society's culture and different political and media systems (Drwish, 1998: 9-35; Abu-Osba, 1999b: 293-312).

2.5. Summary

In the 1970s, many studies (e.g., Epstein, 1974; Roshco, 1975; Altheide, 1976; Tuchman, 1978) focused on news organisation construction. Since then, a number of studies have focused on how media workers and their employers, as well as organisational structures and society itself, affect media content (Fishman 1980: 4; Reese, 1993: 1; Shoemaker and Reese, 1991, 1996: 5). Several researchers (e.g. Engwall, 1978; Tremayne, 1980; Shoemaker and Reese, 1991; 1996: 138), have examined related questions, such as the following: How are organisations structured? How do they differ from (or resemble) each other? How is authority exercised within them? What difference do these factors make to media content? Works of Epstein (1974), Tuchman (1978) Schlesinger (1978), Tremayne (1980), Tunstall (1971), Hetherington (1985), Gans (1980), Ericson, et.al. (1987) have emphasized the influence of organisational elements inside the news organisation, the owners' policy and their goals in shaping the final product.

The major aim of this thesis is to analyse influences on media content at four Omani news organisations. This chapter has discussed the theoretical frameworks of the thesis. Three main approaches were discussed in this chapter: the political economy approach, the cultural approach, and the social organisation approach.

The chapter also showed how small groups of political elites, owners, companies, advertisers control the media content in capitalist or developing (including Arab) countries. The advantage of the political economy framework is that it gives a general picture of media systems. It highlights the relationship between people in power, i.e. governments, owners, or economic elites, in addition to issues of Ownership and

control and the role of news organisations in societies. The core of this thesis is to examine the internal and external influences on news content. Therefore, this framework will be very helpful in discussing media/government relationship in Oman and the role of revenue and information sources in shaping news content. However, the political framework does not focus on the daily practices inside news organisations.

The other framework which helps to give a macro level analysis in this thesis is the cultural approach. This analyses the way that the cultural context on a given society affect media content. Because this thesis will analyse four different dailies, the cultural framework is essential to be adopted. This is because there are two main different cultures; Arabic (Omani and other Arab) and Indian journalists. This framework will analyse the extent to which these different cultural backgrounds affect media content.

The social organisation framework combines both the political economy and cultural approaches to explain the influences on news content. The advantages of the social organisation framework is that it highlights journalistic practices, routines and organisational procedures that govern the daily activities of journalists in selecting, gathering and writing news. This approach includes an examination of the day-to-day newsroom operations. However, the weakness of the social organisation framework is the limitations of this micro-level of investigation. This level of analysis alone cannot help the researcher to observe the factors that are outside the newsroom or the 'cultural air' of the society in which the journalist works. Therefore, a combination of

the cultural approach and the political economy approach has been suggested (Schudson, 1989, 1996) to cover this weakness.

This study will focus on four levels of influences. Two of them (political and socio-cultural system, and extra media level) analyse Omani news organisations at the macro level). The extra-media level looks at how forces from outside the news organisation affect news content (i.e., the sources, other news organisations, and institutions) and the political and cultural system will analyse the Omani political, economic, and cultural context and the role of journalists (Omani and non-Omani) in this particular system. This will be done by political economy and cultural frameworks. The other two levels of analysis that are adopted in this thesis are the communicator level and daily routine inside news organisations. The mass communicator level examines journalists (communicators) and their personal and professional backgrounds, education, personal attitudes, values, and political or religious beliefs. The second level looks at media routines practiced by journalists, gatekeeping processes, and the values that guide journalists in their work. These two micro levels will be analysed by social organisation framework.

Chapter Three

OMAN AND OMANI MEDIA

3. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to provide general historical and critical accounts of Oman and the Omani media. This chapter has three main sections. It will start with a general background about Oman as a society and culture. Omani media is the focus of the second section. It will give an introduction about how the media works in Oman. Because the core of this research is about the Omani print media, I will discuss the newspapers in more detail in the third section. The purpose of this analysis is to help explain the relationship between these news organisations and the government, and in particular to describe how the government influences the media content and practices.

3.1. OMAN SOCIETY AND CULTURE

> Beside its international significance as an oil producer, the Sultanate of Oman is rich historically, geographically, and culturally. Although the history of Oman goes back as far as 12,000 B.C., the history of the mass media in this land is less than a quarter of a century old (Noor Al-Deen, 1994: 194).

3.1.1. Location

The Sultanate of Oman, with its 309,500 square kilometres, occupies the south-eastern part of the Arabian Peninsula. It is surrounded by Saudi Arabia to the west, United Arab Emirates (UAE) to the northwest, Iran to the north, the Republic of Yemen to the south and the Arabian Sea to the east. It is the third largest country in the Arabian Peninsula. The strategic and geographical importance of Oman is its place at the main entrance to the Arabian Gulf, commonly known as the Persian Gulf, by the strait of Hurmz, a transit point for the world's crude oil (Morris, 1991: 5). Oman also has a long coastline of 1,700 kilometres (Ministry of Information, 1999: 25). The country is divided into eight

Governorates: Muscat (the capital city), Batinah, Dhahira, Dakhliah, Sharqiyah, Wusta, Janubia and Musandam. The central government services are located in the capital, but there are governmental branches in the provinces.

3.1.2. The people

The first official census of the whole population of Oman was carried out in December 1993. It counted 2,018,074 people, 73.5% of whom were nationals, and 26.5% of whom were foreigners (Ministry of Information, 1995: 146). However, the most recent census of the Omani population, which was conducted in July 1999, counted 2,446,645. (www.the*worldfactbook*, 1999: 2). The Omani people can be categorised into four groups: the coastal people, the people who work in agriculture, the mountain people and the Bedouin of the desert areas. Most of non-Omanis (85%) come from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh and most of them are concentrated in Muscat (www.the*worldfactbook*, 1999: 2; Al-Shaqsi, 2000; Al-Kindi, 1995).

3.1.3. Religion and language

The principal religion in Oman is Islam. Arabic is the official language, while English is taught as a second language. In addition, several languages and dialects are spoken by some people or groups in Oman: Balochi, Swahili, Urdu, Hindi, Jabbali, and Mahri (Noor Al-Deen, 1994: 186; Al-Mashikhi 1994: 33; Al-Shaqsi, 2000: 90). Omanis who came from East Africa, particularly from Zanzibar, speak Swahili[1]. Balochi, Urdu and Hindi

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[1] Oman, by the end of the 18th century, controlled an ample empire that included parts of East Africa (Mombassa and Zanzibar) (Sagiron, 1993: 193-229).

are widely spoken by people who originate from the Indian subcontinent[2]. Jabbali and Mahri are spoken in Janubia (the southern Governate). Hawley (1995: 195) notes that an Iranian dialect called Kumzar is spoken by some groups in the north of Oman as a result of geographical proximity to Iran.

These several languages and dialects, though spoken in Oman, are not represented in the media. Arabic and English are the only languages used in the Omani media. Most of those who speak the mentioned languages use them within their families, or with friends (Al-Shaqsi, 2000: 90).

3.1.4. Family and tribe

In Arab societies, family values, loyalty to the tribe, the relationship between men and women and the power of religious organisations are different than in the West (Eickelman, 1988; 1999; Kazan, 1993). Eickelman (1988) wrote:

> Even state authorities fear compromising their own legitimacy by attacking institutions; hence action in the name of Islam offers at least a partial latitude for confronting state authority and challenging existing institutions (Eickelman, 1988: 78).

Thus, the governments in most of Arabic countries, including Oman, present themselves as Islamic values protectors in order to avoid the scrutiny of the public (see Al-Shaqsi, 2000: 85).

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[2] Gwadar, which is now on the coast of Pakistan, was part of Oman until September 1958. For more information see Innes, 1987: 256; Arab and AbdulHaleem (1995); www.arab.net/oman/history/on_empire.html.

Al-Shaqsi (ibid: 85-86) argues that Oman and most Arab countries, especially the Arab states of the Gulf still have strong 'tribal patriarchies', and an unwritten hierarchy among tribes. Sometimes, for example, it is very difficult to marry someone from a tribe that is higher than one's own in the hierarchy. The names of the people from high-level tribes_ (e.g., sheiks) are widely used in Omani society. These sheiks have their own power in the society, which is supported by the government, among other people or institutions.

A poet is another important figure part in Arabic culture, and the part a poet plays is different from in Western culture. Arab culture traditionally produced many poets who sewed as spokesmen for tribes on any occasion. In short, they played the role that mass media organisations have played in recent history. Until recently (2000), Arabic poets' work is published very widely in the Omani and Arab newspapers (see chapter 5 results of the content analysis).

3.1.5. The administrative system

A common expression heard in Oman is 'before Qaboos--nothing': and it is true that for Omanis their country was reborn on 23 July 1970, and that any change had to be an improvement (Clements, 1980: 65).

The country before 1970 was extremely backward in health, education, housing and communications. In addition to these difficulties, 'a full scale local war was being fought in Dhofar, against a communist insurgency, with a small, inadequately equipped army' (Ministry of Information, 1999:10; Morris, 1991: 55-63). On 23 July 1970, Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al-Said came to power. He has headed the Omani government ever since, and he brought about the conditions under which development could be initiated.

The administrative system under Sultan Qaboos consists of the Divan of the Royal Court,

the Ministry of Palace Office, the Cabinet of Ministers, the Secretariat of the Cabinet, the

Specialised Councils, the Governorate of Muscat, the Governorate of Dhofar and the

Council of Oman. The Council of Oman consists of two chambers: the Council of State

(*Majlis Al-Dawla*) and the Consultant Council (*Majlis Al-Shura*). The second of these is

wholly elected. It reviews all social and economic draft laws and participates in setting up

development plans (Ministry of Information, 1999: 30-39). (See Chapter 5 in this thesis

regarding the case of *Al-Shura* elections). No political parties are allowed in the country.

Few pressure groups exist in the country, and those that do exist are weak.

3.1.6. Economy

The economy of Oman still depends on oil, which began production in 1967.

Nevertheless, the Omani government is intent on diversifying income sources and

developing the natural resources, such as agriculture, fisheries and minerals. At the

beginning of 1997, with the introduction of the new five-year plan, the Omani

government encouraged the private sector to play an active role in the diversification of

the economy in order to create new wealth and jobs for the Omani people (ibid: 17).

3.1.7. Education

In the education field, the number of schools has increased from only three schools in

1969-1970, with a total of 909 pupils, to (in 1998/99) 958 state schools with 514,315

students and 111 private schools with 21,863 students. The higher education system was

started in Oman with the opening in 1986 of Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), which includes seven colleges: agriculture, arts, commerce and economics, education and Islamic sciences, engineering, medicine and science. In 1997, 6,782 students were enrolled in adult education centres through the Sultanate. In addition, 4,139 students attended classes at 148 centres for the eradication of illiteracy (ibid: 198-210).

3.1.8. Health

The average life expectancy in 1970 was under 50 years; today it is over 70. In comparison with only one small hospital in Muscat in 1970, there are now 47 hospitals, 13 of which are classed as regional hospitals. In addition there are 115 health centres around the country. Because of the high fertility rate, which doubles the population every twenty years, the Ministry of Health has launched a campaign aiming to limit the number of children per family. The campaign aims to put across the message that 'Birth spacing is not against the customs of Oman, but is essential for the well-being of the whole family' (ibid: 223).

3.2. OMANI MEDIA

The government of the Sultanate of Oman has used the media to promote its strategy for national development (Mikkawi, 1989: 51). The media organisations were established with the aim of helping the government to achieve its policies (see Al-Murjan, 1997; Al-Rawas, 1997; Al-Mashekhi, 1996; Al-Mashikhi, 1994). This section presents a history of Omani media and critically discusses how the Omani government controls the media.

3.2.1. Radio of Oman

One week after the Sultan came to power in 1970, a small broadcasting station was established at Bait Al-Falaj (in Muscat). It had only a one-kilowatt transmitter. In 1972, station 10KW was established, broadcasting regularly 14 hours a day and 18 hours on-holidays. In 1975 the Ministry of Information installed 100-kilowatt transmitters in Muscat and Salalah. In 1979 these two stations were linked by satellite and began broadcasting in Arabic on 1242 KHz from Muscat and on 738 KHz from Salalah. In November 1985, the power of the medium-wave transmitter for the radio station in Muscat was increased to 200 kilowatts (Ministry of Information, 1991: 47). In 1997 about 80% of the material broadcast was domestically produced (Boyd, 1982; Noor Al-Deen, 1994; Ministry of Information, 1999: 61).

3.2.2. Television

Oman Television (OTV) broadcasting started in November 1974 from Muscat and November 1975 from Salalah. The two stations were linked by satellite in 1979. Like the radio station, OTV had only one-channel hampers. However, beginning in 1996 it became possible to receive other satellite channels in Oman (Al-Mashekhi, 1996: 162; Al-Shaqsi, 2000: 19). In November 1998, OTV started to broadcast 24 hours daily (Ministry of Information, 1999: 62). There are also many domestic programmes, such as *Beatna Al-Jameela* ('Our Beautiful Environment'), and *Qhwat Al-Sabah* ('Morning Coffee'). Omani television and radio are still lacking in drama production, which is more helpful in supporting development than direct advice (Al-Mashikhi, 1994; Al-Mashekhi, 1996; Al-Murjan, 1997; Al-Rwas, 1997).

3.2.3. Oman News Agency (ONA)

The Oman News Agency was established on 29 May 1986 to become a main source of information about domestic activities; economic, political, social and cultural news; and also international events (Mikkawi, 1989: 61). Most of the ONA staff are Omanis who have had training courses in running news media (ibid). In 1997, the ONA, combined with *Oman* and *Oman Daily Observer* (all of which are government-owned media) were brought together under a single management, located in one building, and jointly renamed as the Oman Establishment for Print News Publication and Advertisement (OEPNPA). While the three media organisations work under one management, they still separately carry out their daily practices of gathering and selecting news stories. The ONA has its own correspondents around the country and in many parts of the world.

3.2.4. Print media

The history of the Omani print media begins with the start of the twentieth century, when Omanis published their first newspapers in East Africa during their residence in that part of the world. News items about the mother land (Oman), political, economic, social, and cultural, were widely covered on these newspapers. There were more than ten newspapers and magazines, such as *Al-Najah* (first published in 1911), *The Gazett* (1929), *Al-FlaQ* (1929), *Al-Eslah* (1932), *Al-Nahdha* (1949), *Al-Murshid* (1954) and *Al-Ummh* (1958)[3]. The one obvious question is why these magazines and newspapers were published in East Africa, but not in Oman. However, this research is not interested in the answer to such a question. The focus of this research is on the daily newspapers that have

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[3] For more details see Al-Kindi, 2001; Sagiron, op.cit; 193-229; Saleh, 1990.

been established in Oman since 1971 when the first private daily was founded. Nevertheless, these newspapers published in East Africa need to be analysed in detail, because many researchers (i.e., Al-Mashikhi, 1994; Al-Mashekhi, 1996; Al-Murjan, 1997; Mikkawi, 1989) who have analysed the Omani media from that period have not mentioned these newspapers (see Al-Hasani, 2002).

3.2.4.1. Governmental newspapers and magazines

There are two daily newspapers that are owned by the government. One is published in Arabic (*Oman*) and the other in English (*Oman Observer*). There is also a quarterly magazine (*Nizwa*) that is published by the Ministry of Information. Ten other magazines are published by different Ministries and government establishments. In short, magazines try to cover the Ministries' activities (see Table 1).

Name	First Published	Frequency	Publisher	Interest
Oman	18-11-1972	Daily	OEPNPA	Political
Oman Observer	15-11-1981	Daily	OEPNPA	Political
Official Gazette	17-4-1972	Fortnightly	Deputy Prime Minister for Legal Affairs	Legal
Jund Oman	1-1-1974	Monthly	Ministry of Defence	Military
Al-Markazi	January, 1976	Monthly	Oman Central Bank	Business
Al-Shurta	18-11-1976	Quarterly	Royal Oman Police	Police
Al-Ghurfa	January, 1979	Every two months	Omani Chamber of Commerce	Commerce

Al-Edari	August, 1979	Quarterly	Institution of General Management.	Administration
Risalat Al-Masjed	18-11-1979	Seven issues per year	Department of Mosques and schools of the Royal Court	Religious
Al-Omania	January, 1980	Monthly	Ministry of Social Affairs	Social and Woman issues
Nizwa	November, 1994	Quarterly	OEPNPA	Culture and Literature
Al-Bahria	March, 1993	Quarterly	Royal Oman Navey	Navey
Muscat	November, 1991	Quarterly	Municipality of Muscat	Environment
Commerce & Industry	November, 1982	Quarterly	Ministry of Commerce & Industry	Commerce
Al-Hras	November, 1983	Annually	Omani National Guard	National Guard
Education message	January, 1985	Half annually	Ministry of Education	Ministry of Education
Civil service affairs	January, 1982	Quarterly	Minstry of Civil Service	Civil Service
Omani scouts	October, 1992	Quarterly	The Administration of Omani Scouts	Scouts
Regional Municipality and Environment	June, 1991	Quarterly	Regional Municipality and Environment	Environment
Economic bulletin	1975	Quarterly	Omani Central Bank	Economy

Table 1: The Government Press in Oman

Source: Ministry of Information, 1997; 2000

3.2.4.2. The private newspapers and magazines

There are three daily newspapers in the private sector: *Al-Watan, Al-Shabiba* (in Arabic) and *The Times of Oman* (in English). There are also two weekly magazines in Arabic, *Al-Usra* (*Family*), and *Al-Nahdha* (*Renaissance*), and one monthly magazine, *Al-Ru'ya* (*The View*) (see Table 2).

Name	First Published	Frequency	Publisher	Interest
Al-Watan	28-01-1971	Daily	Omani Establishment for Press, Printing and Publication	Political/general
The Times of Oman	23-02-1975	Daily	Al-Essa Establishing and Printing House	Political/general
Al-Shabiba	2-01-1993	Daily	Al-Essa Establishing and Printing House	Sport & culture
Al-Ruya	June 2000	Monthly	Al-Taii	Arts
Al-Nahda	18-11-1973	Weekly	Al-Nahda Press and Publishing House	Various current affairs
Al-Usrah	1-07-1974	Weekly	Al-Usra Printing and Publishing House	Social
Al-Fahal	18-11-1980	Fortnightly	Petroleum Development of Oman	Oil
Akhbar Shrktna	May, 1968	Quarterly	Petroleum Development of Oman	Oil
Al-Srage	January, 1976-1978 reissue January, 1992	Monthly	Qrimtin for Journalism, Distribution and Publishing	Culture

			Al-Dhamri for Publishing and Distribution	Religion
Islamic Girl	March, 1992	Quarterly	Al-Dhamri for Publishing and Distribution	Religion
Akhbar Oman	18-11-1977	Weekly	Ahmed Nasib	Political

Table 2: The Private Press in Oman
Source: Ministry of Information, 1997; 2000.

The newspapers are the core of this research. Therefore, I will discuss these in more

detail by analysing the available literatures that have discussed Omani dailies. Other

publications and magazines will be excluded from this discussion, because they are not

included in this project.

3.3. OMANI DAILY NEWSPAPERS

3.3.1. Preface

The above introduction about Oman and Omani media has already explained that

journalism is still a new field in Oman. This is one of the difficulties that faced me in

finding any detailed source or academic writing about the daily newspapers. Four

doctoral theses have dealt with Omani media (Al-Mashikhi, 1994; Al-Mashekhi, 1996;

Al-Rwas, 1997; and Al-Murjan, 1997). Al-Mashikhi's (1994) study was a

comprehensive, historical study of the mass media in Oman. He analysed the

development of all print and electronic media (press, radio, television and cinema) in the

Sultanate. He aimed to discover the obstacles to the 'effectiveness' of the Omani media

and to outline 'a future strategy' to improve the quality of these media. Although the

study of Al-Mashikhi (1994) did not give a close picture of journalism in Oman (because

he analysed all the mass media in Oman), it presented essential introductory information.

It also demonstrated the importance of domestic news for Omani dailies.

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Al-Mashekhi (1996), another descriptive analysis, examined Omani television from 1974 to 1996. Al-Mashekhi (1996) described the situation of the Omani press (newspapers and magazines) in one chapter. He concluded that the government in Oman, as in all other-Gulf countries, controls the media in an authoritarian manner.

Al-Rwas (1997) presented another study that focused on Omani television. Unlike Al-Mashekhi (1996), who analysed television using a 'macro-level' analysis, Al-Rwas (1997) examined the activities and operations of the news department at Sultanate of Oman television for the 10:00 pm newscasts; that is, using a 'micro-level' analysis.

As Al-Mashikhi (1994) did, Al-Murjan (1997) studied all mass communication media in Oman. The main aim of his thesis was to discuss the 'speed of development and the general awareness of the public on development issues' (p. 12). He did this by discussing the government's development plans and how Omani media helped achieve them. Al-Murjan (1997) depended on a sample survey as a major part of his research to evaluate public attitudes and opinions about official government plans. He also conducted interviews with media professionals and development officials.

Four master's degree dissertations have been written on Omani media; two of them dealt with Omani dailies (Al-Kindi, 1995; Al-Hasani, 1996). Al-Kindi (1995) analysed the coverage of two Omani Arabic dailies (*Oman* and *Al-Watan*) during the second Gulf war. Al-Hasani (1996) investigated the use of news photographs in three Omani Arabic-

language dailies (*Oman, Al-Watan* and *Al-Shabiba*). However, these two MA dissertations concentrated on content analysis, but did not analyse journalistic practices of news workers in Omani dailies. The third master's degree dealt with radio (Al-Mashekhi, 1986)[4] and the fourth dealt with satellite dishes in Oman (Al-Shaqsi, 1995).[5]

A few published books, papers, or private companies' reports (e.g., Noor Al-Deen, 1994; MEMRB, 1994; PARC, 1998) and some governmental sources (Ministry of Information publications) have dealt with the Omani media in general, but not with daily newspapers in particular. These papers include very brief information, without any in-depth, critical analysis of journalism practices.

Other facts about the Omani press can be obtained from the Internet and new technology sources (e.g. www.al-iraqi.com-arabic-media; CIA World Facts). However, these sources also give only very brief facts, without analysis.

3.3.2. Government and private dailies

Al-Mashikhi (1994) found that the government dailies have two advantages over the private dailies. First, the unlimited financial support from the government gives the papers excellent facilities and well-qualified personnel. Second, access to official information is easier for the government's news organisations to attain than for private ones (p. 108). Al-Mashikhi (1994) also asserted that the 'poor quality' of the Omani

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[4] This dissertation was written in Russian.
[5] I obtained information about studies of Omani media (MA dissertations and Ph.D. theses) from the Ministry of Higher Education.

private papers has two main causes: expatriate journalists and unqualified Omani editors and sub-editors.

> Journalists working in the private sector do not seem to understand the requirements of Omani readers, neither do they know what the priorities are (Al-Mashikhi, 1994: 79).

However, neither the Al-Mashikhi (1994) study, nor any other Omani media study, has shown what the differences are between Omani journalists and others especially when they are working in the same organisational and political system. Nor has any study analysed the extent to which 'qualified'[6] Omani journalists face difficulties more than expatriates. The previous studies, also, did not show the relationship between Omani and expatriates journalists and Omani readers. This requires analysis of mass-communicators who work inside media organisations.

3.3.3 Press facilities

Al-Mashikhi (1994) wrote in his description of the newspaper *Oman*'s financial resources,

> The sources of income of this newspaper are varied. However, unlike other private newspapers, **government subsidies are very small** because of the **success** of the newspaper (1994: 96) (emphasis added).

I see two problems with this statement. First, it is not clear why governmental news organisations, as *Oman* and *Oman daily Observer*, need a government subsidy. Second, Al-Mashikhi (1994) did not give a definition of a 'successful' newspaper.

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[6] Qualified journalists means those who have academic degrees in journalism studies.

Oman and *Oman Observer* make profits from the government advertisements, printing, and publishing, and from their government subscribers (the ministries and all other government organisations) (Al-Mashikhi, 1994; Al-Mashekhi, 1996; Al-Murjan, 1997).

Al-Mashikhi (1994) argued that the private press should look for more 'realistic' solutions for their losses than depending on government support. That is, should they look for other ways to increase their readership and sales. He suggests that the government could help the newspaper (or magazine) in the beginning of its establishment until the paper can be 'self-sufficient' (ibid).

When discussing this argument, one should ask to what extent could Omani private newspapers survive without the government subsidies? I will examine this question in chapter 6, analysing these private organisations in depth.

The private newspapers also depend on advertisements as a main source of income. In 1989 *Al-Watan* provided received 65 percent of its total income from advertisements (Mikkawi, 1989: 71). Advertising is also the main source of revenue for the *Times of Oman* (Al-Mashekhi, 1996: 105).

3.3.4. Arabic and English newspapers' circulation and readership

Omani media researchers (Al-Mashikhi, 1994; Al-Mashekhi, 1996; Al-Murjan, 1997) have found that daily Omani newspapers have low circulation in general. In his comparison between Omani Arabic-language and English-language dailies, Al-Mashikhi

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(1994) concluded that the English-language dailies had higher circulations than the Arabic-language papers (see Table 3).

Newspaper	Total circulation	Local circulation	Overseas circulation
English newspapers *Times of Oman*	12,000	12,000	--
The Observer	17,000	14,700	1,697
Arabic Newspapers *Oman*	21,000	18,777	2,748
Al-Watan	6,000	6,000	--

Table 3: Comparative daily newspaper distribution in Oman
Source: Al-Mashikhi, 1994: 112

Al-Mashikhi (1994) suggested that the high circulation and readership of the English-language dailies is because the expatriates, who came from the UK, India and Pakistan, read the newspaper as a part of their daily life. A culture of reading the press exists that still does not exists in a country like Oman (ibid). Al-Mashikhi (1994) arrived at his conclusion by comparing the circulation for one year of one newspaper with circulation from different years of other newspapers. He used the circulation figure of *Times of Oman* from 1988, the circulation of *Oman* and *Oman Observer* from 1990, and the circulation from *Al-Watan* in 1992. In addition, he gave the circulation of *Al-Watan* as only 6,000 copies, although he mentioned earlier (p. 51) that the circulation of *Al-Watan* was between 6,000 and 9,000 copies.

Al-Murjan's (1997) study, with a small sample of 181 persons, indicated that most Omani readers are 'the elite'. Al-Murjan (1997) found that only 48.1 percent of Omanis

read Omani newspapers regularly, 48.6 percent read them sometimes and 3.3 percent did

not read newspapers at all.

Now that I have discussed results of previous studies, it is essential to analyse the-

communication system that governs Omani media, by analysing Oman's media laws.

3.3.7. OMANI PRESS LAWS

The Arab press in general has a long history of restricting journalism work and putting it

under the government's control (see Abdulmajeed, 2001; Al-Shamari, 1993; Al-Jammal,

1991; Abu-Osba, 1997; Abu-Zaid, 1986). Al-Shamari (1993: 92-93) argued that most of

the Arab countries have nearly the same prohibitions. Most of these countries, he argued,

prohibit critical economic analyses; critical articles on the armed forces, the president,

any minister, any government party, any government projects, or any friendly country;

and any articles dealing with opposition parties. In his analysis of printing and

publication laws in 16 Arabic countries[7], AbuZaid (1986) found that Arabic journalism

systems reflect the political, economic and social situations in the Arabic societies. The

authoritarian system, he found, is the most popular among the Arabic countries

(AbuZaid, 1986: 9-10).

Before I discuss the different views of how the government in Oman controls the media,

it is essential to analyse the Omani laws that the government has established to organise

the journalism work in the country. The three main laws are: 1) the Publication Law

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[7] Egypt, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, South Yemen, Libya, Tunis, Algeria, and Morocco

(1975), 2) the Print and Publication Law (PPL) (1984) and 3) the Basic Statute of the State (1996).

3.3.7.1. Publication law (PL) (1975)

The first Publication Law in Oman was passed in 1975 to organise the profession of journalism and publishing in the Sultanate (PL, 1975: 12). It included five main chapters: the first chapter was about the definitions of terms used in the law. Chapter two discussed articles that related to newspapers, journalists and printing houses. Chapter three dealt with procedures of permissions to sell publications; publications from abroad; articles which could not be published, printed, or distributed; and responses and corrections to articles. Chapter four related to publications' crimes and punishments, and the government publication committee. Chapter five consisted of brief conclusion articles. This law applied to both private and government publications. The law gave unlimited rights to the Ministry of Information to deny any request to establish new newspapers or close any existing newspaper (article 9, PL, 1975: 14). In the section about importing publications from abroad, the law stated that it was illegal to bring into the country any publication which threatened the security or included offensive materials. Another section noted that the following types of items could not be published, printed or distributed in Omani newspapers and magazines:

1. Any news or picture which relates to the Sultan unless it comes from an official source.

2. Any item which relates to the Sultan as a person or the royal system in the country, any item that speaks badly about these, any item counter to the or national interest of the country.

3. Any item that blame any president of a friendly country or that could lead to a_ disturbance in the relationship between the Sultanate and a friendly country.

4. Any item that the Minister of Information asked the newspaper not to publish.

5. Any confidential reports, books, letters, articles or news items.

6. Any item that could endanger the national and international security of the country, and any news about the army unless the appropriate authority has ruled that it could be published.

7. Any news that endangers the national currency or lead to confusion about the economic situation in the Sultanate.

8. Any item that spoke negatively about ethics or any religion.

9. Any news item, article or picture that the editor-in-chief was told by the Minister of Information not to publish.

The law also established a 'printing committee', which included five members, three of them from the Ministry of Information, one from the Ministry of Interior and one a lawyer. This committee was authorised to judge if anyone failed to follow these restrictions and decided on reasonable punishments.

It can be seen that many points of the 1975 law were vague (2, 3, 7, 8) and could be interpreted in different ways by the persons in charge at the Ministry of Information. The

law also gave the Ministry of Information the right to do whatever it wanted without giving rights to journalists or protecting them.

3.3.7.2. Printing and Publication Law (PPL) (1984)

On 26 May 1984 the most recent version of the PL (1975) was revised under a new name, Printing and Publication Law (PPL). This law had nine chapters, most of which were the same as in the previous version of the law, but some articles were added. Chapter one defined terms used in the law. Chapter two included articles about printing in general. Chapter three dealt with the distribution of domestic publications and of any publications from abroad (Al-Hosni, 1998). As did the PL (1975), the PPL (1984) stated that the minister of information had the right to ban any publication he considered to be against the general ethics of Omani society or against Islam. Again here the PPL was very vague, because it was not clear in what sense this publication or any other could be against the ethics of the society, for example. The chapter stated that the punishment for anyone who broke the law was imprisonment for not more than two years or a fine of not more than 2,000 Rials (3,600 pounds), or both. Chapter four dealt with specific items that could not published Political and security considerations, economical considerations, Social considerations, Health considerations, and Religious considerations. For example, the new law forbade saying anything bad about the royal family members, directly or indirectly (article 25, PPL: 12). The law also forbade any item that could be seen as 'against' the ruling system in the country. No item could be published that could jeopardise the national or international security of the country. No army news items could be published unless they were specifically allowed to be published by the appropriate

authority. No item could be published that might adversely affect the national currency or cause readers to be confused about the economic situation in the Sultanate.

Another article added to the law forbade any news, photo or comments pertaining to people's private family affairs or personal lives, unless a judge's ruling had specifically allowed the release of the information (but such a ruling should be by permission from the Minister of Information (article 30, PPL: 13). Any films or printed materials from abroad including arts publications should have permission from the Ministry of Heritage and Culture or Ministry of Information.

Another new article required that any advertisement about medical supplies would only be published with permission from the Ministry of Health (article 33, PPL: 13-14).

Islamic values and traditions have to be respected in all newspapers. The law included new articles requiring media to respect other religious and cultures and forbidding any item to take an unethical stance or blame any religion. For example, defamation, violations of privacy, discussions of scandals or pictures of nude people are not allowed to be printed in any newspapers or magazines.

The punishment for people who violated article 25, concerning statements against the Sultan and the royal family, was three years' prison or a 2000 Omani Rials fine, or both. The punishment for violation of the other articles was two years prison or 2000 Omani Rials fine, or both.

This law stipulated that the editor-in-chief of any newspaper should be Omani. This law also specified members of the publication and printing committee: the deputy minister of

the Ministry of Information (president), general manager of information in the Ministry of Information, the head of information affairs in the Ministry of Foreign Affaires, the general manager of culture in the Ministry of National Heritage and Culture, the general manager of Islamic affairs in the Ministry of religious Affairs, and a member from the palace office.

It can be noticed that there were few differences between the two publication laws. Both laws indicated that the editors-in-chief were directly responsible for their newspapers. Both laws stipulated that no newspaper was allowed to publish any item, or cover any topic that was not allowed to be published by the Minister of Information. This means any instructions that came from the Ministry of Information to any news organisation could be seen as having the power of law.

Neither law mentioned allowing any independent organisation to protect journalists working in Oman from any punishments from the Ministry of Information. Most articles in both laws discussed what the journalist or the communicator should do or publish, but there were no discussions about the rights of these journalists. The two laws were very vague in many articles and could be treated in different ways.

3.3.7.3. Basic Statute of the State (BSS) (1996)

On 6 November 1996, the Sultan issued the Basic Statute of the State (BSS). This law included seven chapters: chapter one was about the state and the system of government. Chapter two dealt with the principles guiding the state's policy. Chapter three analysed

the public's rights and duties. Chapter four was about the head of state. Chapter five was about the Oman council. Chapter six discussed the judiciary. Chapter seven gave general provisions. Two of its articles (articles 29 and 31) were directly related to media. Article 29 says 'The freedom of opinion and expression thereof through speech, writing or other-forms of expression is guaranteed within the limits of the law' [PPL] (article 29, chapter 3: 12). Article 31 says, 'Freedom of the press, printing and publishing is guaranteed according to the terms and conditions specified by the law' [PPL] (article 31, chapter 3: 12).

Although the BSS offers some freedom of expression for the press, this freedom must be within the limit of the laws that govern the media in the country. This means no changes in freedom of expression for the Omani media even with the latest law (BSS). However, the Omani PPL was being reviewed by the Ministry of Information and *Al-Shura* (Consultant) Council during the period of this study.

3.3.8. Omani media in normative media theories

In view of the information presented in this chapter about the Omani media in general and the laws that govern the Omani press in particular, can one classify journalism in Oman under normative media theories of the press[8]? This section tries to do so by reviewing Omani media studies.

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[8] According to McQuail (1994) there are six normative theories of the press: the authoritarian theory, the libertarian theory, the Soviet communist theory, the social responsibility theory, the development theory and the democratic participant theory.

Another researcher (Al-Kindi, 1995) indicated that the government controls the press in three main ways: through the Print and Publication Law (PPL), governmental subsidies and self-censorship. Regarding the first of these three methods of control, the PPL

> ... has erected so many barriers to press freedom, such as the limitation of news, which is critical of the government policies. Perhaps more serious is that the Ministry of Information can coerce an editor to emphasize one story and ignore another (Al-Kindi, 1995: 31).

Regarding the threat of loss of government subsidies, the second method, the heavy dependence of the press on these subsidies is evident. This argument was very similar to the one made by Rugh (1979; 1987) in his analysis of the media in the Arabian Gulf countries which he described as 'loyalist' media. However, Al-Kindi (1995) did not mention how much the government supports the press, especially the private publications.

Al-Mashekhi (1996) also classified the Omani press under the authoritarian theory. He wrote:

> The majority of the Arab world media, including Oman and other Gulf states, lie within the authoritarian theory. Some newspapers in these countries are privately owned. Nevertheless, they follow the censorship regulations, which are laid down by the government (1996: 43).

The reason for such a situation, according to Al-Mashekhi (1996: 44), is that both Oman and other Arab countries in the period of the mid-1960s through the 1970s were marked by 'dramatic and political events': civil war in Oman, the Arab-Israeli wars (1967 and 1973), and the Cold War. Thus the government controls the media in war times more than other times. This can be seen not just in the loyalist press, but also in democratic

countries (Chomsky, 1994; Epstein, 1975). Regarding Oman, Al-Kindi (1995), who

analysed the coverage of Omani press in the Gulf War in two Omani dailies, concluded

that

> Only Western view point was effectively propagated by the [Omani] mass media,
> and the main sources of news ...[I]t is a myth that there were fairness, balance,
> professionalism and nonbiased reporting and coverage of the Gulf War by the two
> Arabic daily newspapers *Al-Watan* and *Oman*' (1995: 113).

Wartime may be seen as an exception that puts the newspapers directly under

government control. However, the civil war in Oman ended in 1974, and the first private

newspaper in Oman (*Al-Watan*) started publication just three years before this date. From

1971 until 1975, when the PL was enacted, *Al-Watan* was discussing many social,

economic and political issues in a critical way[9]. Articles published in *Al-Watan* during

this period criticised government policies and plans.

Noor Al-Deen (1994), on the other hand, argued that Omani media enjoy more 'freedom'

than the media in many other countries. Unlike Rugh (1979; 1987) and Al-Kindi (1995),

Noor Al-Deen (1994) indicated that:

> Omani media appear to enjoy a greater degree of freedom than similar media in
> many other countries. There is no censorship in the news, and journalists apply
> good taste in their reportage (1994: 194).

However, the discussion above of the PPL and other laws shows that the government

exercises direct censorship over all newspapers in the country.

Al-Mashekhi (1996) concurred with Noor Al-Deen (1994), arguing that:

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[9] I looked at the issues of *Al-Watan* from 1971 to 1975 during the time of period study in April 1999

In spite of the regulation and supervision of the press by the government, it can be said that journalists enjoy the freedom of indirect criticism of any establishment and any problems appearing in Omani society (p.: 90).

Nevertheless, Al-Mashekhi (1996) did not explain what he meant by observing that the Omani media enjoy 'freedom'. Despite making that observation, he pointed out how Omani media are controlled by the PPL and 'self censorship'.

Al-Mashikhi (1994), in contrast, classified the press in Oman under social responsibility theory. But this classification seems flawed, for several reasons. First, according to McQuail (1994, 2000), this theory argues that citizens should be informed about the problems of the society. However, Al-Mashikhi (1994), himself, argued that the Omani private print media does not discuss the problems of the society. Second, 'self-sufficiency' of the news organisations, are of the characteristics of social responsibility theory, means independence from pressure groups. But Al-Mashikhi (1994) mentioned earlier the difficulties the private press in Oman face in trying to be independent. Moreover, the government is more forceful than any pressure groups in Oman. Al-Mashikhi (1994) indicated that the critical items against the government are not found in Omani print media (ibid: 69). For all these reasons, it is evident that the Omani press does not have the elements of a press operating in keeping with social responsibility theory, as defined by McQuail (1994; 2000).

Al-Rwas's (1997) study, on the other hand, suggested that the media in Oman is working under two theories: the 'social responsibility' and 'development' theories. He wrote:

Oman is a traditional Arab and Islamic society, which believes in the preservation of its national values, culture and heritage. The social responsibility theory points to these objectives. Also, Oman is a Third World country striving to modernise and develop its infrastructure at all levels--social, economic and political. This suggests that the development media theory is applicable to the Omani context as well (1997: 53).

According to this description, the press in many countries (developed or developing) could be classified as falling in the 'social responsibility' and 'development' theories. But this seems too broad. Each country has its special characteristics in language or religion and traditions, but does that mean their media are working under social responsibility media theory? Nor does the classification of 'development theory' seem a good fit. According to McQuail (1994: 131), the main goal of the development media theory is: 'the national development task (economic, social, cultural and political)'. The development theory also aims to aid in 'the pursuit of cultural and informational autonomy' and to give 'support for democracy' (ibid). However, the previously discussed Omani media studies and laws showed the high control of the government and the obstacles to democracy in Omani media in general (Al-Kindi, 1995; Al-Shaqsi, 2000). Al-Shaqsi (2000: 29) wrote:

> They [press freedoms] are not [a] subject for negotiation since the media in Oman are the mouthpiece of the government. The media have not as yet been fully utilised as the means for free reciprocal participation between the government and people. Watchdog or investigative journalism still faces formidable resistance especially concerning internal matters.

Therefore, it is difficult to place the Omani press under development theory as well as social responsibility theory. From the studies above, one can get a sense of the high level control of the government exerts over the private and government newspapers in Oman. The authority theory of media fits the country best.

None of the above studies studied the content of the Omani press in-depth, except Al-Kindi (1995) in an exceptional time (i.e., the Gulf War) and Al-Hasani (1996), who analysed the content of news photographs in the three Arabic dailies. The content of the daily newspapers needs to be examined, as do journalism practices in Oman and the main factors that influence the media content, in order to understand the Omani media characteristics. If we understood what are the main characteristics of the messages and the influences on media contents, we may find the difficulties that face these news organisations from inside (Barrat, 1992; McQuail, 1994, 2000).

3.4. Summary

Despite the long history of Oman, it was 'reborn' in 1970. The media in this country is nascent. Some newspapers were published in East Africa in the beginning of the twentieth century. However, no print media existed in Oman until 1971. In general, very few studies have dealt with Omani dailies, and this was one of the difficulties that faced me in writing this review.

Oman currently has three private and two government dailies. Two of these dailies are published in English. All of the dailies work under the supervision of the government. The problems of these dailies, as previous studies have shown, can be summarised as low circulation and low readership. An increasing number of people are reading domestic news items from foreign media, which are widely distributed in Oman. Therefore, domestic news is in demand because it cannot be obtained in detail except through Omani

media. Omani news organisations, also, need to be put under a micro level analysis to show the difficulties that face these organisations in reaching readers by domestic news items. Routines in each news organisations and the roles of editors in the journalism work need to be understood. The relationship between the government and the press needs to be explained.

This chapter also analysed print and publication laws in Oman, which were found to be very vague and could be interpreted in different ways. Therefore, these laws need to be reviewed by the Ministry of Information. The laws also show the power of the Ministry of Information over the private and government owned newspapers. Most articles in the print laws concentrated on journalists' duties, and very few of them paid attention to the rights of news workers in Omani media.

Thus, this thesis hopes to understand the work of print news organisations in Oman; it is the first doctoral thesis, as far as I know, to have this focus. However, it continues the work initiated by other media research efforts in (and about) the Sultanate of Oman, and looks again at some of their findings in light of new evidence.

Chapter Four

Methodology

4. Introduction

This thesis required a multiple-method research design involving a content analysis of the selected news media, personal interviews (with journalists, editors, and editors-in-chiefs) and participant observation of the newsrooms in the Omani dailies. Several studies (e.g., Tarabay, 1994; Ericson, et al, 1989, 1987; Van Dijk, 1988b; Fishman, 1980; Gans, 1980; Epstein, 1974; Elliot, 1972) have suggested that a combination of social science research techniques, including observation, interviews, examination of organisational documents and systematic analysis of organisational products, is required for a full understanding of a news-media institution.

To understand the influences of media content, the researcher needs to go beyond the description of the manifest content of the news organisation (Barrat, 1992; McQuail, 1994). Halloran (1981) argues that for a more comprehensive analysis of the communication process, examination of the messages of news organisations needs to be combined with examination of communicators in news organisations and the context in which they operate (p.: 164). Murdock and Golding (1977) advocated the investigation of factors in the news organisation in addition to the content. (These factors are discussed in detail in chapter 2, which concerns the theoretical framework). The research design used in this study has been influenced by the line of thinking of Murdock and Golding (1977), Halloran (1981), Shoemaker and Reese (1991, 1996), and McQuail (1992, 1994, 2000). This study investigates not only the content of the Omani news organisations, but also some of the influences on the production of content that have been outlined by the above researchers and studied by Gans (1980), Fishman (1980), Hetherington (1985), Shah

(1987, 1990), Tuchman (1991), Tarabay (1994) and others previously discussed in

chapter 2, influences on media content.

4.1. Content analysis

> If we wish to describe and analyse media content in a more comprehensive way, a
> way less prone to subjective selectiveness and idiosyncrasies, then we must employ
> a systematic method. Content analysis is one such method for the systematic
> analysis of communications content. It is by no means the only method for studying
> media content (Hansen, 1998: 91).

There are many definitions of content analysis, but the most commonly quoted definition

was given by Berelson (1952):

> Content analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematic, and
> quantitative description of the manifest content of communication (p.18).

One of the most controversial questions about content analysis is whether it is an

'objective' method of analysis. Hansen argues,

> ...objectivity in content analysis as in any other kind of scientific research is an
> impossible ideal serving only to cover cosmetically and mystify the values,
> interests, and means of knowledge production which underpin such research
> (Hansen, 1998: 95).

Content analysis is a 'systematic' method, which means the researcher works within a set

of procedures to arrive at results by analysing categories which have been established in

order to answer questions or hypotheses (Holsti, 1969; Abdulhameed, 1983).

Quantification is another characteristic of content analysis. This means recording specific

dimensions of texts as numerical values and discussing the results in terms of variously

defined categories of content occurrence (Berelson, 1952: 17-18; Stemple, 1989). The

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problem here is to what extent the quantification of content analysis offers interpretations of the meanings in texts. Some researchers (i.e., Holsti (1969), Abdulhameed (1983), McQuail (1994)) suggest that content analysis requires inferences from content data. Abdulhameed (1983: 15-30) supports Holsti's (1969: 6) argument that the researcher should find common patterns among descriptions and make inferences from content data frequencies. However, Hansen (1998) indicated that

> ... there is no such simple relationship between media content and its reception and social implications. Content analysis can help provide some indication of relative prominences and absences of key characteristics in media texts, but the inferences that can be drawn from such indications depend entirely on the context and framework of interpretation by which the texts analysed are circumscribed (1998: 95)[1].

This problem has led researchers to apply qualitative approaches (such as semiotic analysis and discourse analysis) to the study of news content. McQuail (1994, 2000) summarises the relationship between what he calls 'traditional content analysis' and 'interpretative approaches' in four points. First, there is no quantification to be found in structuralism and semiology, so 'meaning derives from textual relationship, oppositions, and content rather than from number and balance of references'. Secondly, in the 'interpretive approaches' attention is directed to latent rather than manifest content, and latent (thus deeper) meaning is regarded as actually more essential. Thirdly, structuralism is systematic in a different way from traditional content analysis, in that the former gives no weight to procedures of sampling and rejects the notion that all units of content should be treated equally. Finally, structuralism 'does not allow the assumption that the world of social and cultural reality, the message and the receiver all involve the same basic system

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[1] For more details and examples, see Hansen, et.al., 1998: 95-98

of meaning' (McQuail, 1994: 278, 2000: 327-328). However, this does not imply the

necessity for the complete separation between quantitative and qualitative approaches of

media content. 'Berelosnian' and 'Barthian'[2] methods have been used in combination to

discuss results and discover latent meanings in a study of British television news by the

Glasgow Media Group (1976, 1980, 1985). However, Hansen (1998) indicated that the

number of times a word (e.g., fundamentalism) appears, fails to capture the meaning of

symbols in the text analysed.

> But then again very few content analyses confine themselves to such 'meaningless'
> counting. Content analyses count occurrences of specified dimensions and they
> analyse the relationships between these dimensions.... Moreover, and in contrast to
> many 'qualitative'/'interpretative' approaches, content analysis, because it follows
> clearly articulated rules and procedures, lays open to scrutiny the means by which
> textual meaning is dissected and examined (1998: 98).

Hansen (1998) concluded that:

> ... much of the criticism which has been directed at content analysis touches on
> problems more to do with the potential and actual (mis)-uses and abuses of the
> method, than to do with any inherent weaknesses of this method as a method of
> data-collection (ibid).

Despite the criticisms discussed above, content analysis, with its systematic nature, has

the advantages of allowing large amounts of data to be analysed and decreases the

subjectivity of researchers in selecting and analysing data (Wimmer & Dominick, 2000;

Hansen, 1998; McQuail, 1994, 2000; Berger, 1991; Ericson, et.al., 1991; Fowler,1996;

Fairclough,1995; Krippendorff, 1980). In the end, the usefulness of the method depends

on the research problem and the questions that need to be answered.

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[2] These two phrases are borrowed from McQuail (1994: 279, 2000: 328). 'Berlsonian' refers to Berelson (1952), who gave the classical definition of content analysis, and 'Barthian' refers to Barthes (1977), who classified the main points of connotation in content analysis.

4.2. The key steps of content analysis in this study

4.2.1. Content analysis questions

The content analysis in this study is used to answer questions related to message characteristics, news values, channels of gathering news and the extent to which news organisations depend on advertisements.

The quantitative content analysis will answer these questions:

1. What are the main types of content that are published in the Omani daily newspapers?

2. What proportion of domestic news items, as compared with Arabic and international news items, are covered by the Omani dailies?

3. What is the total space allotted to commercial and governmental advertisements in the Omani daily newspapers?

4. What proportions of government advertisement items, as compared with private advertisement items, are covered by the Omani dailies?

5. What are the main, and second, topics of domestic news items covered by the daily newspapers?

6. What are the main types of news items (e.g., lead news, editorial, or letter to the editor) that are covered by the Omani daily newspapers?

7. What are the main locations of the domestic news item in the Omani dailies?

8. Who are the main, and second, actors in news items covered by the Omani dailies?

9. What are the main, and second, types of sources of news items covered by the Omani daily newspapers? This category is followed by two sub-categories: nationality of the source and gender of the source.

10. What importance is given to the various topics of domestic news covered by the Omani daily newspapers? I will analyse the relative importance of topics using two main categories: place of the news item and item's format.

Questions one through four will identify the general characteristics of the Omani daily newspapers. Questions five through ten will identify the characteristics of the domestic content in the four dailies.

4.2.2. Selection of newspapers

I selected four Omani dailies (*Oman, Al-Watan, Oman Observer* and *Times of Oman*) to investigate. These news organisations were selected for three reasons. 1) Only four daily newspapers in Oman concentrate on general issues[3]. The four papers allowed a broader representation. 2) There are differences in ownership between these dailies: *Oman* and *Oman Observer* are government owned; *Al-Watan* and *Times of Oman* are privately owned. 3) These newspapers differ in the language of publishing; *Oman* and *Al-Watan* are Arabic-language dailies, while *Oman Observer* and *Times of Oman* are published in English.

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[3] The fifth daily is *Al-Shabiba*, but it specialises in sport, culture and literature. I excluded this daily from this study because these specialities differ from the general content of the other dailies.

4.2.3. Sampling

There were two approaches to use in this study: 1) to choose similar periods not focused on any particular event or 2) to analyse different periods relating to the same specific domestic events. I chose the first approach to perform the quantitative, manifest content analysis, for four reasons.

First, the nature of the study is to examine the problems that face domestic news gathering in general, not with regard to specific events. Thus, the event-oriented approach is not enough to view the whole problem. In addition, the second approach allows a chance for the researcher's subjectivity to affect the selection of events (see Tarabay, 1994: 74).

The second reason concerns the nature of the Omani news organisations. Choosing particular events cannot achieve the main aim of the study, which is to analyse the influences on news content on the Omani dailies. Most Omani news items are covered by government sources (e.g., social problems like crimes and drug problems are covered by the Royal Oman Police (ROP), and defence news items are covered by the ministry of defence.)[4]. Accordingly, choosing one event cannot show how official and non-official sources affect media content and journalistic practices toward these sources.

Third, the pilot study (25% of total $n = 48$) showed that domestic news topics comprised a small percentage, with the exception of sport news items, of the whole domestic

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[4] For more details about the nature of Omani media, see chapter 3: Oman and Omani media.

coverage. Thus, focusing strictly on specific events or topics would decrease the generalisation of the results to the whole situation in the Omani news organisation.

Finally, no study, to the best of my knowledge, has investigated news contents of Omani newspapers in normal times.

Nevertheless, the second approach (event-oriented) will be used in the second sample of content analysis, in which I analyse two events that happened during the fieldwork of this research and were covered by the four news organisations.

4.2.4. Dates of issues

Two main samples will be analysed in this study: 1) The first sample, which I will analyse in this chapter, consists of 12 issues from each of the Omani dailies, or 48 issues in all (Stempel, 1952; Riffe et.al, 1998). These issues all cover a one-year span from 1 July 1999 to 31 June 2000. I selected the year of coverage because it was the latest one before the fieldwork started and covered the period before and during my fieldwork analysis of the news organisations. One day in each month and all days of the week will be represented from each newspaper (see Hussein, 1995: 296). This is important to describe the characteristics of newspapers' manifest content published in a normal period without concentrating on special events (e.g., war). According to Hussein (1995), one can obtain the gaps between the issues by dividing the number of days in the year by the number of the issues in that year. The first day, which was randomly selected, was 9. Thus the first sample of this study became as follows:

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No.	Day	Date
1.	Friday	9 July 1999
2.	Sunday	8 August 1999
3.	Tuesday	7 September 1999
4.	Thursday	7 October 1999
5.	Saturday	6 November 1999
6.	Monday	6 December 1999
7.	Wednesday	5 January 2000
8.	Friday	4 February 2000
9.	Sunday	5 March 2000
10.	Tuesday	4 April 2000
11.	Thursday	4 May 2000
12.	Saturday	3 June 2000

Table 4: Issue dates of the first sample

4.2.5. Sampling of relevant content

The main focus of this study is domestic news content. Domestic news refers to any news item about Oman that happened inside the country or home news abroad that is covered by the four Omani news organisations (Shalabi, 1994: 575; Shah, 1987: 193). This means international news items are excluded from this study, except in the first three categories, where they are used to compare domestic and international items. Domestic news items were chosen for two main reasons: 1) The pilot study showed that fewer domestic news items than international news items are covered by the Omani dailies. 2) Omani readers can turn to other media for international news, but no source, other than local news organisations provides detailed information about domestic events. Previous studies about the Omani print media have shown that readers pay more attention to home news items than to items about other Arab countries or international events. Thus, the main way for these newspapers to attract more readers is to develop their home news contents,

especially since many readers turn to other media to satisfy their needs (Al-Mashekhi, 1996; Al-Murjan, 1997; Al-Mashikhi, 1994).

4.2.6 Analytical categories and coding schedule

4.2.6.1. General characteristics

The quantitative categories were designed depending on the content analysis questions that were asked. Analytical categories mainly concern the messages' topics, actors, sources, locations and priority of items. Some of the categories were divided into subcategories. All of these categories are defined in Appendix A[5]. The following categories are investigated in this study.

4.2.6.2. Type of content: The aim of this category is to measure the general characteristics of the types of content that are published in the dailies and to determine which of these types receive more attention than others. The subcategory includes the following: lead news, other news story, leading editorial, column-article, comments and analysis, feature, letter to the editor, poetry (or short story), interview, illustration (e.g., caricature, maps, diagram, drawing), classified advertisement, commercial advertisement, public service, press release and other.

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[5] In designing the categories of this study, I was guided by various content analysis studies (i.e., McQuail, 1976, 1977, 1994; Galtung, and Ruge, 1981; Shah, 1987; Ericson, et.al., 1987, 1989, 1991; Van Dijk, 1988a; Tarabay, 1994), but I depended on Musa, 1988, in particular. This study covered the characteristics of messages in general, not with regard to specific subjects, just as this study does. Also, it covered one of the Arabian dailies (Jordan), which had nearly the same cultural context. However, I added my own categories in this study, because Oman differs from other developed and developing countries in its media policies.

4.2.6.3. Home/international content: This category investigates the total content that

was covered by the dailies, including domestic news, Arabic news and international

news. Home/international content is used to evaluate the characteristics of the content in

news reported by the four news organisations. In addition, it investigates the extent to⁻

which these organisations pay attention to the domestic news, compared with other

content. International news items are investigated here only regarding the categories type

of content and home/international content[6].

4.2.6.4. Space of advertisement: This category is going to measure the space of

commercial and governmental advertisements that are published in the Omani press. The

last category will show to what extent these government and private dailies depend on the

government advertisements compared with the commercial ones.

4.2.7. Home news content

4.2.7.1. Topics of domestic news content[7]: This category, which investigates domestic

content, is divided into the following categories: Political Affairs (PA), Armed Forces

(AF), Economic & Commerce (EC), Social Affairs (SA), Police (PC), Religious (R),

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[6] Musa (1988) included local, Arabic, occupied nation, and Israel and international as categories.

[7] Stempel (1989) argues that using categories that have been used by one or more other researchers is advantageous because the new researcher already knows that these categories are 'workable'. 'Validity and reliability will be lesser concerns' (p. 122-123). Many newspaper content analysis studies offered me guidance for classifying the full range of topics in the newspaper (i.e., Deutshmann (1959), cited in Stemple, 1989: 122, McQuail, (1977), Van Dijk, (1988), and Musa (1988)). However, I have adapted these categories to suit the Omani news organisations coverage. For example, I changed the category of armed conflict (Deutshmann, 1959) because it is not a subject in the Omani dailies, and replaced it with a new category, which is Armed Forces (AF). I also ignored the categories of law and labour union (Musa, 1988) because Omani dailies do not report on these topics. I combined women, children, housing (ibid.) to be in one category, which is social affairs. I also combined youth and sport to be one category, sport. I added some new categories: environment and public services and made subcategories for the advertisements (Ads) category to be more specific and to guide me in the interviews and organisational analysis.

Education (E), Sport (S), Science & Technology (ST), Health & Medicine (HM), Arts & Literature (AL), Agriculture (A), Environment (E), Media (M) and Other. The category of topics gives a general view about which subjects were paid more attention in the total coverage of the Omani news organisations. Topics divided into the subcategories main-topic and second topic.

4.2.7.2. Location of domestic news[8]: This category investigates where the domestic news takes place: the capital (Muscat), other regions, abroad, and not specified. This category will show the differences in the coverage among events that take place in the capital (Muscat), other regions, and abroad.

4.2.7.3. Actors[9]: The actor in any news items is the person who performs the action and is quoted or referred to in the item. This category includes: heads of the state, ministers, other government officials, religious bodies, workers, journalists, academics, scientists, teachers and students, ordinary citizens, businessmen, sports figures, police and army figures, artists, and actors who cannot be identified. Actor is divided into the subcategories main actor and second actor.

4.2.7.4. Type of source[10]: This category includes: organisation staff, correspondent, reader, specialist, Oman News Agency (ONA), agencies, unspecified source and other.

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[8] Musa, 1988: 93.
[9] Shah, 1987: 202. I ignored the categories of legislature, opposition party, pressure groups, entertainers, royalty, and vice president because these entities are not covered by Omani press (pilot study). Groups of nations, and international body are also ignored because these are not relevant to the research objectives.
[10] These source categories were classified by Ericson, et.al. (1989, 1991) and Shah (1987). I ignored two categories (source context and types of knowledge provided by sources), because these categories are not relevant to my project objectives. I created all the subcategories for these source categories.

This category is designed to obtain an idea about the role of the journalist in gathering and presenting news content. The category will also show the relative amount of coverage given to content from the government, journalist and individual sources. Source is subdivided as main source or second source.

4.2.7.5. Priority of item: This category investigates the prominence of the news items. Two subcategories will be measured: position of news item and news item format. The first category will be divided into three categories: 1) front page, last page, inside page. The second category (format of item) evaluates the importance of news items. It includes eight categories: 1) news item with colour headline and colour picture (NCC) 2) news item with colour headline and black-and-white picture (NC), 3) news item with colour picture and black-and-white headline (NP), 4) news item with black-and-white headline and picture (NB/W), 5) news item with colour headline, but without picture (NC), 6) news item with black-and-white headline without picture (N), 7) picture only (P), and 8) other (see Appendix 1).

4.2.8. Constructing a coding schedule[11]

After the analytical categories are defined, they are set out in a codable form on a coding schedule. This coding schedule contains a list of the variables, which are coded for each item (See Appendix 2).

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[11] The coding schedule of this study is guided by Hansen (1998): 117-121.

4.2.9. Piloting the coding schedule and checking reliability

Before doing analysing a full-scale content analysis, it is essential to test the coding schedule on a small sub-sample. I tested my coding schedule on 25% of the total sample in the pilot study. I revised the analytical categories and the coding schedule many times to assess the reliability of the codes and categories (Holsti, 1969; Hansen, 1998). I also checked the reliability of the coding schedule and the analytical categories by discussing the categories with three researchers in the field[12] to ensure that the categories covered all areas under investigation.

4.2.10. Data-preparation and analysis

All the data of the content analysis of this study were entered into a computer data file and analysed with the help of SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) program. The purpose of this step is to make the analysis easier, especially in comparing between items and their relationships with the newspapers under study.

4.3. Observations and interviews

The methods of observation and interviewing were used in this study to gather data about the processes of domestic news production from inside the organisations and to observe the people who were involved in these processes. The goals were (1) to identify the influences on media content and (2) to find the reasons why things happen as they do in the production of domestic news (Jorgenson, 1989: 12). While I used content analysis to

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[12] Dr. Abdullah Al-Kindi, Dr. Obaid Al-Shaqsi (lecturers in the mass communication department at Sultan Qaboos University), and Dr. Khyrat Adlan (lecturer in media college at Cairo University).

gather quantitative evidence of the messages in the Omani newspapers, I chose to conduct interviews and observations in order to gain qualitative information concerning the factors that shape the media content through the process of news production. I also hoped the two methods of interviews and observations would help me to understand the roles played by news workers with different experiences and cultural backgrounds in shaping media content in the four news organisations.

4.3.1. Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used in this study to obtain information related to five main categories: 1) journalist characteristics, 2) journalist/source relationship, 3) journalist/reader relationship, 4) organisation characteristics and 5) societal-level factors, such as journalism education and training, government communication policies, and publication laws in Oman. I conducted semi-structured interviews with owners (or editors-in-chief), news editors, central desk journalists and all domestic news journalists in the selected newspapers. I asked the editors-in-chief (or managers) several questions about 1) characteristics of the news organisation itself, 2) economic determinates of the news organisation, 3) patterns of ownership and control, 4) advertising, 5) circulation, 6) readership, 7) the relationship between the news organisation and the Ministry of Information and 8) communication policies in Oman. The responses the managers gave helped me to gain insight into organisational attributes and ownership and control, and the differences, or similarities, between the news organisations.

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News editors were asked about 1) editorial policy, 2) interaction between journalists and editors, 3) decision-making processes, 4) the relationship between the news organisation and the Ministry of Information, 5) interaction between these news organisations and other governmental and non-governmental institutions and 6) how these factors influence the domestic news content. The editors' responses helped me gain an understanding of the organisational and institutional dimensions of this study.

I interviewed reporters to collect information about 1) journalists' characteristics, 2) their backgrounds, 3) their perceptions of their audiences, 4) their roles in the organisation, 5) the performance of their news organisation's domestic news production, and 6) their interaction with sources, news gathering and selection processes. Interviews with journalists allowed me to obtain more information about the mechanisms of the domestic news production process and difficulties that journalists face in their work (see Appendix 3).

4.3.1.1. Limitations of interviews

Most of the interviews went smoothly, and the majority of interviewees talked very freely, especially the Omani journalists. However, many Arabic journalists (both Omani and non-Omani) used many metaphors from their dialects. It is sometimes very difficult to translate metaphors into a different language. To solve this problem, I requested help from an Omani lecturer who specialises in translating metaphors from Arabic to English in translating some of these problematic terms[13].

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[13] Dr. Al-Harrasi, A. Lecturer in English-language department, College of Arts, SQU, assisted me in translating some of the passages of interviews conducted in Arabic.

Another limitation of the interviews was that some of the news workers asked me not to mention their names, and many of them insisted on the confidentiality of their comments. In order to respect this request and to enable the interviewees to talk freely without any sensitivity or fear, I decided to limit my use of quotations and have not mentioned interviewees' names.

The third limitation of interviews in this type of research is that the researcher can never be sure about the accuracy of the responses. In this study, all interviews were recorded. Some researchers have argued that recording interviews makes some respondents uncomfortable (Hussein, 1995: 205; Wimmer and Dominick, 2000; Shah, 1987: 95). However, by comparing results of content analysis and those of participant observation, the limitations of interviews are decreased (Shah, 1987).

For more accuracy, the questions for news workers were reviewed by the three researchers mentioned in footnote 12 to be sure that the questions covered all the areas of investigation of the study. I also changed some questions after piloting them with four interviewees before I conducted the actual interviews.

4.3.1.2. Interviewees

Designation	Number of staff				
	Al-Watan	*Oman*	*Oman Observer*	*Times of Oman*	Total
Editor-in-chief (1)	1	1	1	1	4
News editor (1)	1	1	1	1	4
Central desk	2	2	2	2	8
Chief Reporter (1)	1	1	1	1	4
Reporter	7	6	7	5	25
Others[14]	0	1	1	2	4
Total	12	12	13	12	49

Table 5: Designation of news workers

I conducted 49 interviews with the news workers of the four news organisations, *Al-Watan*, *Oman*, *Oman Daily Observer* and *Times of Oman*. These news workers came from different levels of the editorial hierarchy (see Figure 1). I chose workers from different levels in order to learn how each of the mentioned personnel was involved in the news production processes.

Editor-in-chief
↓
News editor
↓
Central Desk
↓
Chief reporter
↓
Reporter
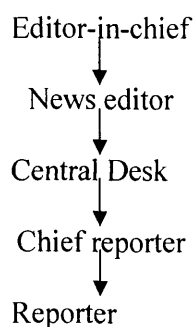
Figure 3: Editorial hierarchy in the Omani news organisations

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[14] I also interviewed two translators in the English-language dailies (*Oman Observer* and *Times of Oman*), the planning and training manager for the government dailies (*Oman* and *Oman Observer*) and the general manager of the *Times of Oman*.

All reporters who deal with domestic news items were interviewed in this research. Only three news workers refused to make interviews, all of them in the government news organisations. The Arabic-language dailies have a department called 'domestics', which deals with domestic news items. However, in the case of the English-language dailies, all reporters are in the same room. So they have a room called 'reporters' (see Appendix 4).

4.3.3.2. Participant Observation

The third method used in this study is participant observation. The advantage of the observation method in general is that it allows the researcher to observe the subject under study in the natural environment, and this can provide detailed data from inside media organisation (Gold, 1969; Spradley, 1980; Jorgenson, 1989; Cottle, 1998: 44; Deacon, et.al. 1999: 259; Wimmer and Dominick, 2000: 112).

However, access to organisations is one of the most difficult steps that a researcher faces when deploying this method either in Western countries (Cottle, 1998: 44; Deacon, et.al, 1999: 168) or in the news organisations of developing countries (Shah, 1987). Hetherington (1985) conducted a study of national news media in the United Kingdom. Three dailies refused him access: *Daily Telegraph, Daily Express,* and *The Sun.* However, he analysed all the papers in his study using content analysis, and the *Daily Telegraph* and *Daily Express* agreed to make interviews with their editors outside the organisations. Shah (1987) on the other hand, was allowed to watch the activities of journalists inside newsrooms, but for only a short time –about 20-45 minutes. 'The researcher was told on more than one occasion that he was an interloper from the West

and that he was merely interested in "mining" the data for personal gain' (Shah, 1987: 89).

4.3. 2.1. Design

In this study, I began with a general focus by observing how domestic news is gathered and selected. I then observed how domestic news becomes front-page news and which types of domestic news can become a lead story or other news on inside pages[15].

There is neither a set time to conduct observations, nor a set number of news organisations the researcher should examine. These discussions depend on the study's overall aims, limitations of time and resources, and 'conditions of access' (Cottle, 1998: 50). The observation analysis in this study took place during the period from 6 May to 10 June 2000. But I made many other visits during the period from 1 May 2000 through 25 July 2000 to prepare for my fieldwork, collect materials and meet journalists. In addition, I visited the four news organisations under study one year before the observation analysis took place (in April and May 1999) to develop a reasonable way to design my fieldwork. As a result, I became familiar with all four news organisations.

Four main roles could be adopted by a researcher during the fieldwork of participant observation; complete participant, participant as observer, observer as participant and complete observer (Gold, 1969: 30-39). Access to news organisations in order to collect

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[15] Many news production researchers have used this approach of starting with a general focus, then narrowing their attention to build a more detailed understanding of some aspects of news production (see for more details Fishman, 1980; Paterson, 1997).

data is one of the most difficult steps that a researcher faces either in Western countries (Cottle, 1998: 44; Deacon, et.al, 1999: 168) or in developing countries (Shah, 1987: 89).

In this study, I decided to be an *observer*-participant (see Cottle, 1998: 51). This is because I would not be allowed to become fully involved in some of these news organisations, especially the government ones. Therefore, I decided to follow the same research procedures in all four news organisations.

4.3.2.2. Access

Gaining access to the news organisations is the most essential stage for observation analysis (Cottle, 1998; Deacon, et.al, 1999). To gain access, I sent letters to all the news organisations attached with two other letters from my research supervisor and my place of work, Sultan Qaboos University.

4.3.2.3. Limitations

During the first days of the fieldwork, I tried to 'break the ice' (Cottle, 1998) with news workers by having many friendly chats with them. That was easy for the Arabic-language dailies (*Oman* and *Al-Watan*), because the news organisations were very familiar to me as were most of the news workers. This is because I trained as a young journalist in these dailies, when I was a student at Sultan Qaboos University. When I became assistant lecturer, I also visited these dailies with my students as an academic supervisor. Nevertheless, some reporters were suspicious of my presence in these newsrooms, especially in the first days of the fieldwork. Observation analysis was a very new thing to these individuals; it was not a tradition in the Omani organisations. Many news workers

asked me how I was going to deal with the interviews in my thesis. I heard many suspicious comments in all four news organisations: 'We see him here everyday, but we don't know what he's doing'; 'be careful he is going to test you. He wants to get some information'; 'you are going to take the information and publish the secrets for the public to read'; 'This is Oman not America'; 'These [interviews] are very confidential aren't they?' or 'Why did you choose this topic?'

I also faced difficulties in gaining the daily access to the government newspapers' offices. I had to pass three main 'gates' to enter the domestic newsrooms of *Oman* and *Oman Daily Observer*. First, at the main entrance to the Oman Establishment for Press, News, Publication and Advertisement (OEPNPA), I was asked about my identity and my reasons for being there. Second, inside the building, I was asked nearly the same questions. Third, the entrance to the first floor of *Oman* and *Oman Daily Observer*[16] couldn't be opened except by a staff member's card. The procedures involved in entering the offices of the government owned newspapers were more complicated and more bureaucratic than at the private newspapers' offices. One of *Oman*'s employers described it as 'an intelligence agency'. However, after few days I get used to these procedures and most of news workers get used to see me inside the organisation everyday.

Another difficulty I found at the *Times of Oman* (private English-language daily), was that inside the newsroom, the reporters usually spoke to each other in their own language (Urdu) which I did not know well. However, after two days I tried to do 'friendly chats'

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[16] The building was used by many organisations: the Oman News Agency, *Oman*, *Oman Observer*, *Nizwa* Magazine, Oman Advertising Agency and circulation and distribution for all these organisations.

with most of the news workers inside the newsroom. Therefore, they were telling me

nearly about most news items or instructions, which were coming from other newsrooms

or administration. Moreover, most documents that arrive to this newsroom were written

in English-language or in Arabic-language, so I do not have a problem to read them.

4.4. Content analysis and the other two methods

In this thesis, content analysis helps to analyse a large amount of data, as already

discussed on 4.1. section of this chapter, and study media content statically. This gives an

introduction basis to the next two methods (participant observation and interviewing) that

are used in this thesis. Content analysis describes characteristics of newspapers' content.

This helps to understand the nature of news content that is published in Omani dailies.

However, content analysis cannot give answers to some questions of this research, which

relate to the daily work of news workers inside news organisations. For example, content

analysis can gives percentages of different news sources that news workers depend in

gathering and selecting domestic news items. However, this result cannot tells the reasons

of why this source get high percentage and the other get very low one. This could be

found by interviews with news workers or participant observation inside newsrooms. On

the other way around, observation and interviewing can be very helpful methods in

collecting detailed data from inside news organisations, but these two methods cannot

help in analyzing the messages of the newspapers understudy. Analyzing media messages

before entering news organisations and study news workers in their daily work is

essential in this thesis. This is to understand the content of these papers and the

characteristics of this content, especially with no study (see chapter 3: Oman and Omani media) gives general characteristics of domestic press content in Oman.

4.3. Summary

This chapter has discussed the three quantitative and qualitative investigations I conducted for this study: content analysis, interviews, and observations. I used content analysis to learn about the characteristics of media content in the Omani newspapers. However, content analysis cannot help in analysing the influences on media content or the reasons for such content, which are the core of this study. Therefore, I used interviewing and observation methods to complement the findings from the analysis of newspaper content; specifically, I used them to collect detailed information about journalistic practices inside the news organisations and the internal and external factors that affect media content at the Omani news organisations.

Chapter Five

CONTENT ANALYSIS

5. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the results of the content analysis of the Omani newspapers. Three main parts will be discussed in this chapter. The first one will give general characteristics of the Omani newspapers' content. This helps to understand the general contents of the Omani newspapers and to what extent they pay attention to the different domestic and international messages. This is in addition to their attention to the advertisements, as a source of income in these newspapers.

The second part will discuss the results of the analysis of domestic news items that were covered by the four dailies. I will do this by analysing the topics, actors, sources, places and format of the content of domestic news items published in the Omani newspapers. This helps to understand the characteristic of the domestic contents that were covered by the four Omani dailies, before discussing the journalistic practices and the ways that news about domestic events is gathered and selected.

In order to better understand the journalistic practices at the four news organisations, the third section discusses case studies of how the four newspapers covered two topics: the *Al-Shura* Council elections and a medical error made by practitioners at a major Omani hospital. These two cases were the most widely discussed by news workers inside the four news organisations during my fieldwork.

5.1. General characteristics of the Omani newspapers

The main aim of the next three categories is to give a general view of press content in general. This will show to what extent that Omani daily newspapers pay attention to domestic news items comparing with Arabic and international news items. These general categories also give a general view of the types of contents that are published at the four dailies and which of these types receive more attention than others. These three macro categories give a general idea about the content before analysing news organisations from inside. This is because it is difficult to start observing news workers without knowing the messages they produce.

5.1.1. Items for analysis

The analysis of the general characteristics of the four Omani newspapers included 12,515 items. Table 6 shows that the private newspapers (*Times* 28.3% and *Al-Watan* 26.6%) had more items than the government newspapers (*Oman* 22.8% and *Observer* 22.3%). This is because the private dailies included more classified advertisements than the government owned daily newspapers.

Types of content Newspapers	Oman (n = 2, 583)	Al-Watan (n = 3,326)	Observer (n = 3, 541)	Times (n = 2,795)	Total (n = 12,151)
	%	%	%	%	%
Lead news	1.4	1.6	2.0	0.9	1.5
Other news story	49.4	42.2	55.0	42.7	46.8
Leading editorial	0.2	.0	.0	0.1	0.1
Column-article	0.9	3.9	0.5	0.7	1.6
Article	3.0	2.5	4.3	2.6	3.1
Feature	1.1	0.5	0.1	.0	0.4
Letter to editor	0.8	0.5	.0	1.2	0.6
Poetry	2.0	2.3	.0	.0	1.1
Interview	1.1	0.6	0.1	0.3	0.5
Illustration	0.1	0.7	0.1	.0	0.2
Classified advertisement	25.0	30.5	24.7	42.5	31.3
Commercial advertisement	5.6	8.7	7.0	5.0	6.6
Governmental advertisement	1.4	2.2	0.9	0.2	1.2
Public service	5.3	3.4	5.1	3.8	4.3
Press release	1.3	.0	.0	.0	0.3
Other	1.3	0.5	.0	.0	0.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 6: Type of item in Omani daily newspapers

Table 6 gives us information about all contents that were published in Omani daily newspapers. This helps us to understand the general characteristics of these daily newspapers under study. Although, Arabic-language dailies employed more news workers than the English-language newspapers (see chapter 6), nevertheless Table 6 shows that the English-language newspapers (the Observer and the Times) had more news stories than the Arabic ones (the Oman and the Al-Watan). This could be because the Arabic language dailies include more details than the English-language dailies, which make the news item as short as possible.

Classified advertisements were the second most frequently covered item (31.3%), and commercial advertisements were third most frequent (6.6%). Table 6 also shows that both commercial (8.7%) and governmental advertisements (2.2%) in Al-Watan (Arabic-language private newspaper) were more numerous than in the other newspapers. This is

due to the high attention that the administration gives to advertisements in general as main sources of income. In contrast, the government dailies can obtain their financial support directly from the government.

The third significant characteristic in Omani daily newspapers shown by Table 6 is that the English-language private daily (the *Times*) had more letters to the editor than the Arabic-language dailies, which concentrated on poetry or short stories from the readers. This means readers' pages in Omani Arabic-language daily newspapers do not pay as much attention to domestic or international issues as many Arabic newspapers do in other countries (e.g., *Al-Hayat, Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, Al-Khaleeg, Al-Ahram*). Nevertheless, all the letters at the English-language dailies were printed by one paper (the *Times of Oman*), simply because there is no readers' page in the *Oman Daily Observer*. Letters to editor in the Arabic-language dailies discussed home issues, while most of the *Times* letters concentrated on international issues. Most of the interviews in the Arabic-language dailies were conducted with people inside the country, while most of the interviews in the English-language dailies concentrated on international interviews. *Al-Watan* newspaper had the most illustrations, but most of these were about Arabic and international items. For example, the paper publishes a daily political caricature about Arabic or international events, but not about domestic events. Regarding the comments and analyses (3.1%), the English-language newspapers had more numbers than the Arabic-language dailies, whereas the percentage of column-articles (1.6%) and interviews (.5%) in the Arabic-language dailies were higher than in the English-language ones. Leading editorials (.1%) were found only in *Oman* (.2%) and the *Times* (.1%). *Oman*, also, is the only newspaper

that had a leading editorial that concerned home issues, and it was the only newspaper

that paid more attention to home issues than international issues in its column-articles.

Thus, the general characteristics of Omani daily newspapers can be summarised as

newspapers, which pay more attention to news stories more than opinions or comments.

The newspapers in Oman do not pay attention to readers' opinions or comments. The

private dailies have more advertisements than the government owned dailies.

5.1.2. Home/international content

The second category that describes the general characteristics of Omani daily newspapers

focuses on news contents only. It includes four main sub-categories: 1) home news, 2)

Arabic news, 3) international news and 4) other content. It can be seen by Figure 4 that

Omani newspapers cover international news items (56%) more than home (28.3%) and

Arabic news items (14.5%).
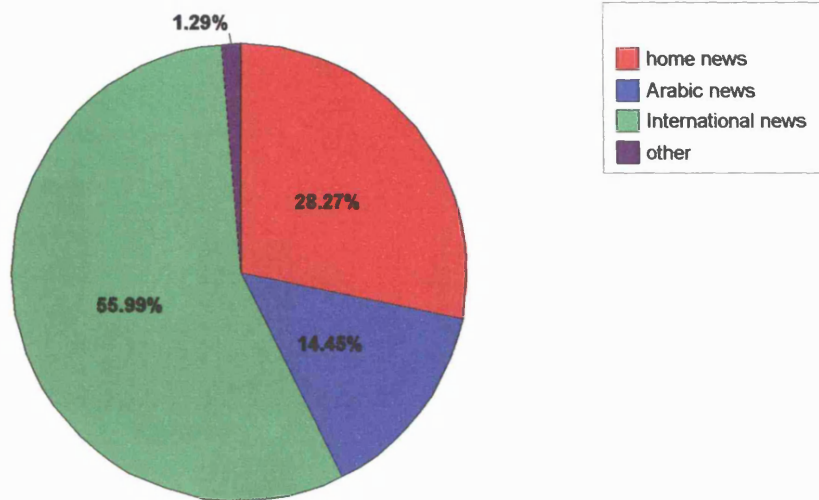
Figure 4: Percentage of home versus international content in Omani newspapers

Figure 4 shows that Arabic-language dailies pay less attention (both *Oman* and *Al-Watan* 33%) to the international news than the English-language dailies do (*Observer*, 82% and the *Times*, 77%). This is mainly because the English language dailies focus on expatriates as audiences who work in Oman, i.e., Indians, Philippinoes, and British. However, the Arabic-language dailies pay more attention to Omanis and Arabs in Oman.
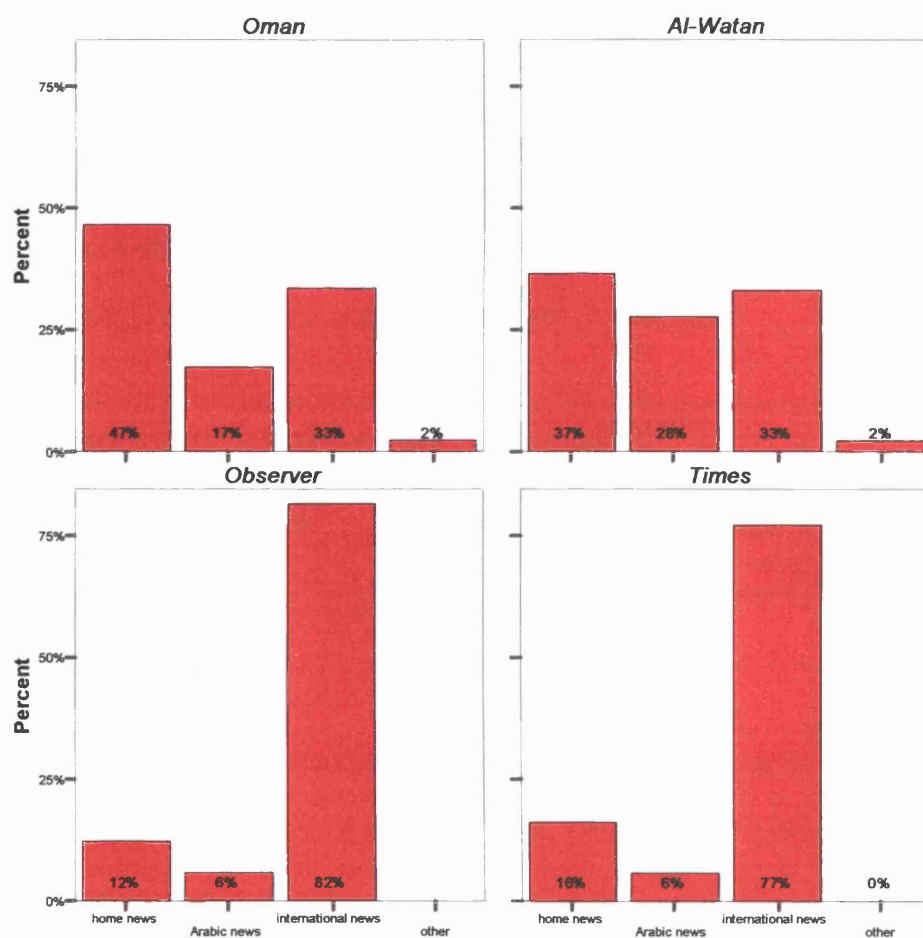
Figure 5: Home/international content in each daily newspaper.

5.1.3. Advertising space in the Omani newspapers

The third category of general characteristics pays attention to advertisements, governmental or private ones. This helps to understand to what extent this source of revenue influences the content and the differences between these four dailies in their depending of advertisements. This helps to understand later, when I will discuss the daily work, the relationships between news workers and sources of revenues like private and

government advertisements. Source of revenue is one of influences on media contents, which is the main core of this thesis.

Table 7 shows that the space allotted to commercial advertisements (90.7%) was much more than that for governmental advertisements (9.3%) in all Omani daily newspapers. _Al-Watan_ (Arabic-language private) allotted the greatest amount of space for commercial (19,627.9 cm/c) and governmental advertisements (2,488 cm/c).

	Newspapers									
Ads.	_Oman_		_Al-Watan_		_Observer_		_Times_		_Total_	
	Space	%	Space	%	Space	%	Space	%	Space	%
C.A. (col-cm)	13570.4	86.6	19627.9	88.8	11987.93	94.4	9202	97.3	54388.23	90.7
G.A. (col-cm)	2099.9	13.4	2488	11.2	706	5.6	260	2.7	5553.9	9.3
Total	15670.3	100	22115.9	100	12693.93	100	9462	100	59942.13	100

Table 7: Advertisement space in the Omani newspapers
Col-cm = column centimetre
C.A. = Commercial Advertisement
G.A. = Government Advertisement

This is due to the high attention that is given to advertisements by this newspaper in particular, as will be discussed in next chapter. The second Arabic-language newspaper (_Oman_), a government paper, allotted the second greatest amount of space for commercial advertisements (13,570.4 cm/c) and governmental advertisements (2,099.9 cm/c). The English-language governmental newspaper was third-most-frequent position in both commercial (11,987.3 cm/c) and governmental advertisements (706 cm/c). The private English daily (the _Times_) came in the last position, with 9,202 cm/c of commercial advertisements and 260 cm/c of government advertisements. The findings show that _Oman_ (Arabic-language government-owned paper) allotted the most space to governmental advertisements (13.4%) compared with the space of its commercial advertisements. The _Times of Oman_ (English-language private-owned) allotted the least

space to governmental advertisements (2.7%) compared with the space of its commercial advertisements.

The last three main categories described the general characteristics of all contents in the Omani newspapers.

5.2. Domestic news in the Omani newspapers

The next categories analyse in detail the home news content that is published in the Omani newspapers. These categories focus on domestic news items in more details. This is because before entering the four daily news organisations to find out the influences of domestic news content, it is essential to obtain a detailed data about this content first (see chapter 4: Methodology). For example, I cannot analyse similarities, or differences, of domestic media contents by interviewing or observation without analysing these contents in all four newspapers and find out the topics, sources or place of item. This helps to understand the nature of news reporting inside Omani news organisations.

5.2.1. Home news content

This category investigates where the domestic news items take place. This is to find out the differences in the coverage among events that take place in the capital (Muscat), other regions, and abroad. This will give a view about the role of news workers inside news organisations and to what extent that some regions have more correspondents than others.

This also gives an idea about the reasons, for example, that some parts of the country depends more on Public Relations offices or governmental sources, because a lack of journalists in that part.

Figure 6 shows that most of the events that constituted the home news content happened in the capital (41.3% out of a total of 1,991 home news items).
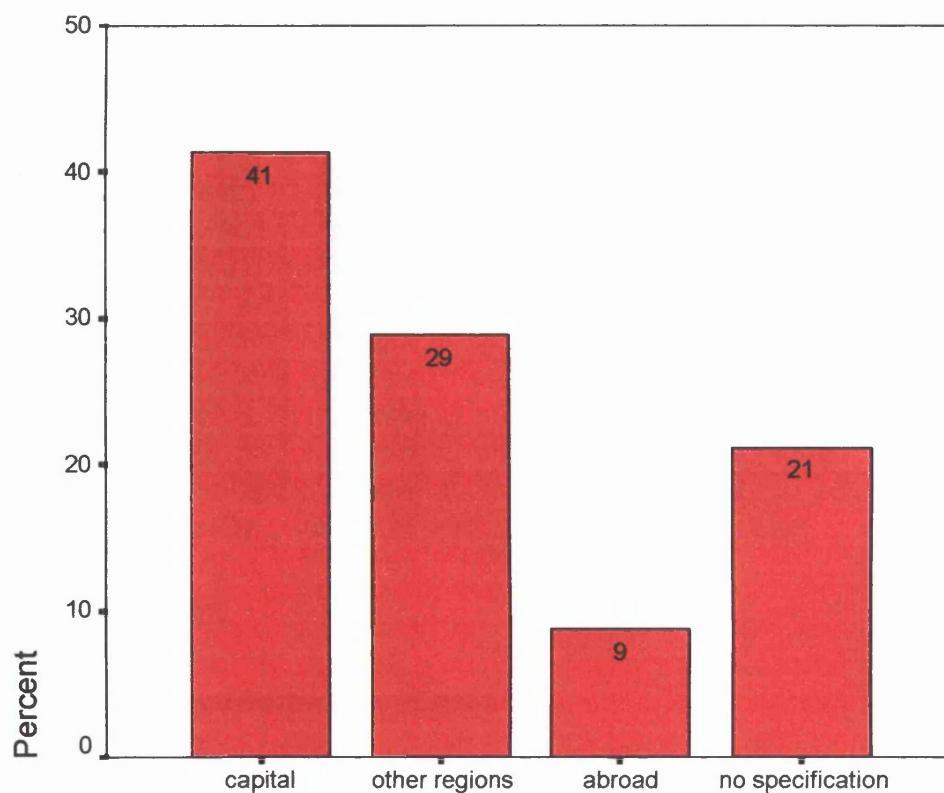
Figure 6: Home news content in the Omani press

This high percentage can be explained by the fact most of ministries, government organisations and big companies are located at the capital. Home news events that took place in other regions of the Sultanate were reported second most often (28.8%). Other

home news content, which was covered without specification, was covered third-most often (21.2%), and home news items that took place abroad came in the last place (8.7%).
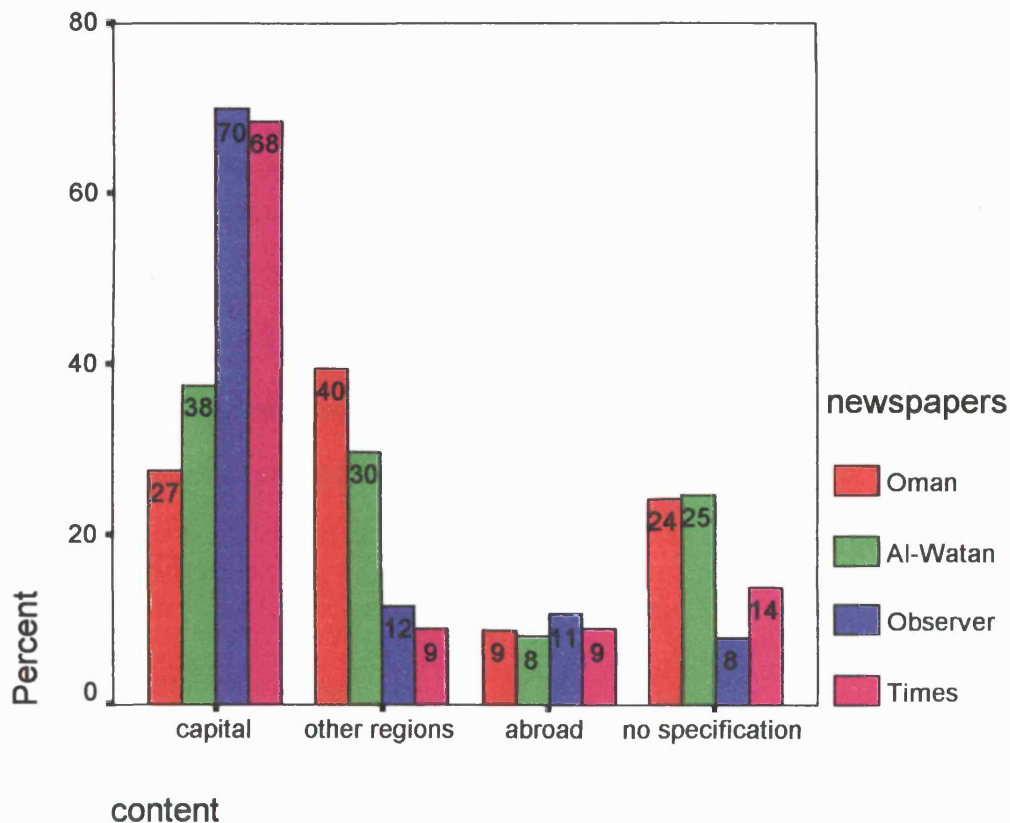
Figure 7: Home news content in each newspaper

Figure 7 shows that most of the home news events printed in *Oman* (Arabic-language government owned) were covered at cities and villages outside the capital (27%). This is because of the high number of correspondents in Omani region working for *Oman*, compared with other daily newspapers. However, most home items covered in the other three dailies took place in the capital. (See, e.g., percentages for the English-language dailies: the *Observer* 69.9% and the *Times* 68.4%).

5.2.2. Main topic of domestic news items

The aim of this category is to give a view about which subjects were paid more attention in the total coverage of the Omani news organisations in general and in each daily in particular. This will help later when I analyse inside news organisation to ask about why these subjects, not others, were paid more attention and why some other subjects have less attention.

Although the four Omani dailies under study are characterised in political general issues, Figure 8 shows, interestingly, that sport items were covered most frequently by the Omani daily newspapers (24.1%).
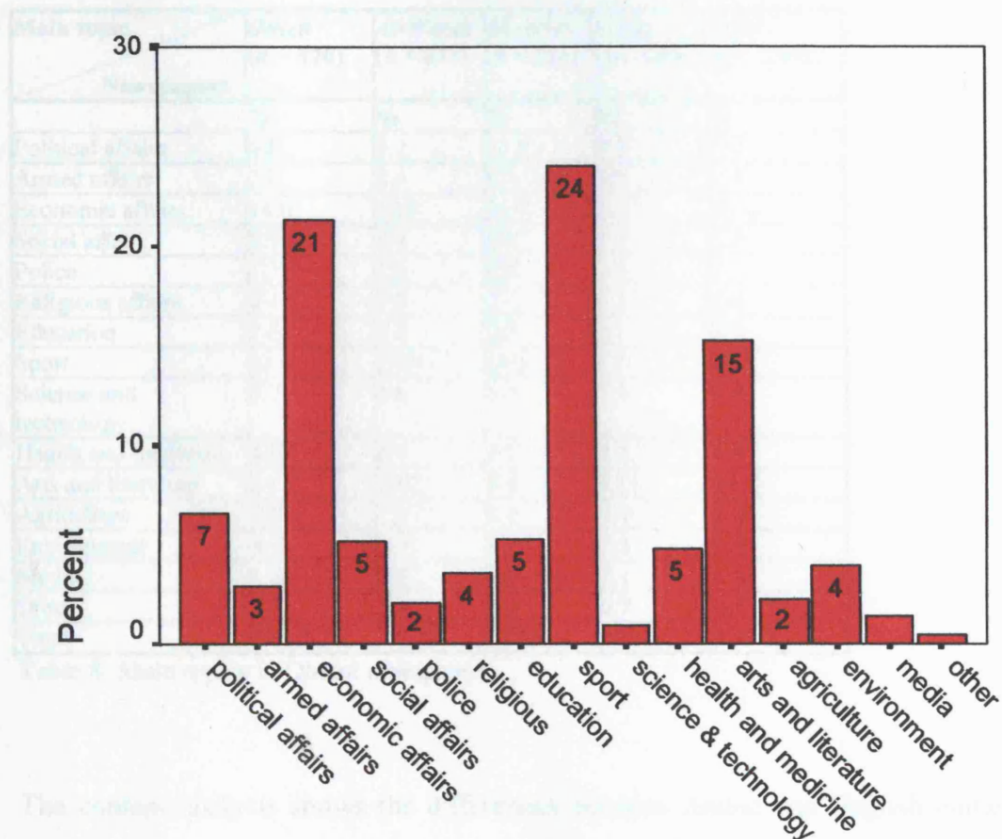
Figure 8: Main topic of domestic news items in the Omani newspapers

The topic given second-most-frequent attention by the Omani newspapers was economic news (21.3%). Arts and literature news items were third-most frequent (15.2%). The following subjects were covered in descending order: political affairs (7%), education (5.3%), social affairs (5.2%), health (4.8%), environment (3.9%), religious affairs (3.6%), armed services (2.9%), agriculture (2.3%), police events (2.1%), media (1.4%), science and technology (1%) and others (0.5%).

Main topic Newspapers	Oman (n = 820)	Al-Watan (n = 673)	Observer (n = 216)	Times (n = 282)	Total (n = 1,991)
	%	%	%	%	%
Political affairs	4.6	5.2	13.9	9.9	6.6
Armed affairs	2.0	2.4	6.9	3.9	2.9
Economic affairs	14.6	19.0	34.7	36.2	21.3
Social affairs	5.9	6.4	0.9	3.5	5.2
Police	1.3	1.8	4.6	2.8	2.1
Religious affairs	4.1	3.9	2.3	2.1	3.6
Education	5.6	5.3	3.7	5.3	5.3
Sport	33.3	21.8	14.4	9.9	24.1
Science and technology	0.7	0.6	1.4	2.1	0.9
Health and medicine	4.0	6.4	3.2	4.3	4.8
Arts and literature	14.8	20.2	5.6	12.1	15.2
Agriculture	2.7	2.4	1.4	1.4	2.3
Environment	4.9	2.7	4.6	3.5	3.9
Media	1.2	1.5	0.9	2.1	1.4
Other	0.2	0.4	1.4	0.7	0.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 8: Main topics in Omani newspapers

The content analysis shows the differences between Arabic and English dailies in the coverage of home content. The Arabic dailies paid the most attention to sport news content (*Oman*, 33.3%, and *Al-Watan*, 21.8%), while the English-language dailies paid the most attention to economic events (*Observer*, 34.7%, and *Times*, 36.7%). The topic that was given second-most-frequent attention by the Arabic papers was arts and literature (*Oman*, 14.8%, and *Al-Watan*, 20.2%). Economic events were reported third-most often in both dailies (*Oman*, 14.6%, and *Al-Watan*, 19%). In contrast, the *Observer* reported sport items second-most-frequently (14. 4%) and political affairs third-most-frequently (13.9%). Arts and literature were reported second-most- frequently in the *Times* (12.1%) and political affairs and sport tied in the *Times* for third-most- frequent coverage (9.9%).

5.2.3. Actors quoted, referred to or interviewed

This category guides me, when I will be inside the news organisations, to find out why Omani papers focus more on some people or organisations more than others. My questions will be more focused and specific with this data when I will interview news workers or make observations.

Figure 9 shows that ministers and government officials are well covered in the Omani newspapers: they were the main actor in domestic items 30% of the time. Sport figures (22%) were the second-most frequent actor in the Omani newspapers.
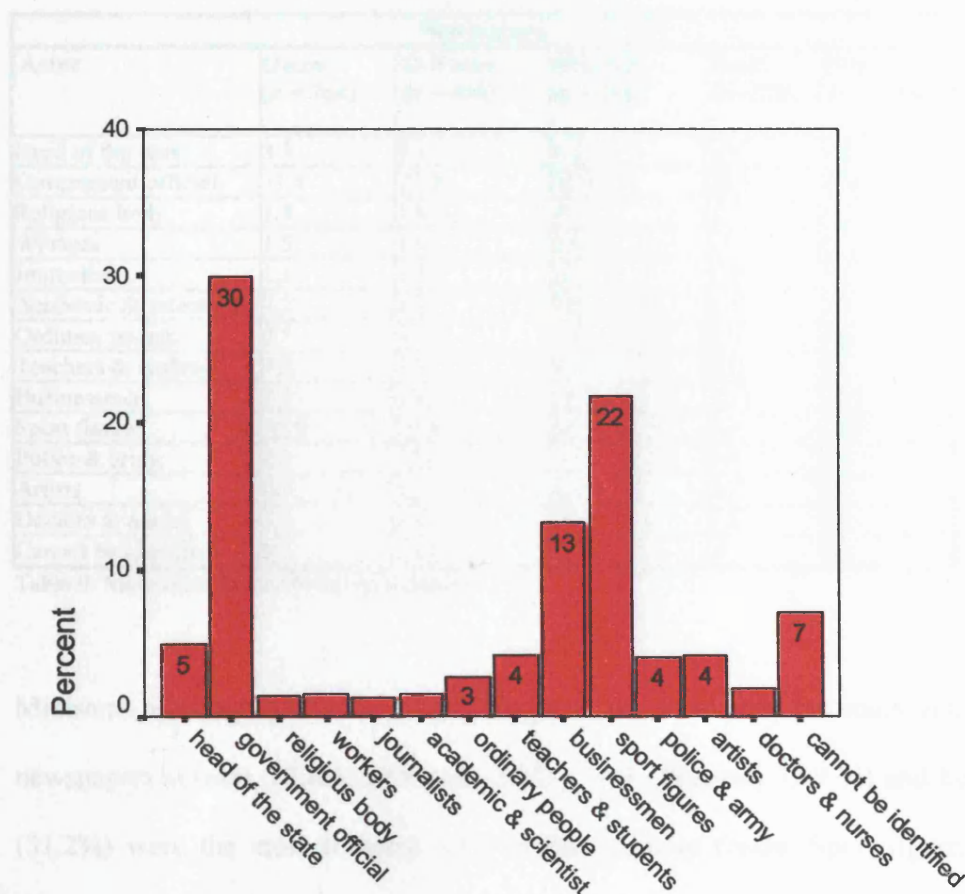
Figure 9: Main actor in domestic items in the Omani press

Businessmen were the third-most frequent (13.3%) main actors in the Omani newspapers.

The head of state (5%) followed in fourth position and then teachers and students (4.2%),

artists (4.2%), police and army figures (4.1%), ordinary citizens (2.6%), doctors and–

nurses (2%), workers (1.5%), academic persons and scientists (1.5%), journalists (1.3%),

religious bodies (1.4%) and cases in which the actor could not be identified (7%).

These findings show the high attention that was given to government organisations in

these newspapers, compared with ordinary people, for example.

Newspapers					
Actor	*Oman* (*n* = 764)	*Al-Watan* (*n* = 610)	*Observer* (*n* = 216)	*Times* (*n* = 282)	Total (n = 1,991)
Head of the state	3.5	5.1	8.3	6.4	5.0
Government official	31.5	27.8	32.9	28.7	30.0
Religious body	1.8	1.8	0	0	1.4
Workers	1.5	1.6	1.9	1.1	1.5
Journalists	1.3	1.5	.5	1.4	1.3
Academic & scientists	1.2	1.2	3.2	1.8	1.5
Ordinary people	2.7	3.3	1.4	1.8	2.6
Teachers & students	4.0	5.2	1.4	4.6	4.2
Businessmen	5.2	10.7	28.2	31.2	13.3
Sport figures	30.9	19.8	12.5	7.8	21.8
Police & army	2.3	3.9	7.4	7.4	4.1
Artists	4.4	4.3	1.4	5.7	4.2
Doctors & nurses	1.5	3.1	.5	1.8	2.0
Cannot be identified	8.2	10.8	.5	.4	7.1

Table 9: Main actor in the Omani newspapers

Ministers and high government officials were the most frequent main actor in three

newspapers (*Oman*, 33.8%, *Al-Watan*, 30.7%, and *Observer*, 32.9 %) and businessmen

(31.2%) were the most frequent actor in the *Times of Oman*. Sport figures were the

second-most-frequent main actor in the Arabic newspapers (*Oman*, 33.1%, and *Al-Watan*,

21.8%), whereas businessmen (28.2%) were the second-most-frequent main actor in the

Observer and ministers (28%) were the second-most-frequent main actor in the *Times*. Businessmen were the third-most-frequent main actor in both Arabic-language dailies (*Oman* 5.6% and *Al-Watan* 11.8%), while sport events were the third-most-frequent main actors the English dailies (the *Observer*, 12.5%, and the *Times*, 7.8%).

The lead stories in all newspapers were most frequently about the head of the state (*Observer*, 6.5%; *Times*, 5.3%; *Al-Watan*, 3.3%; *Oman*, 2.1%). Most of the leading editorials that appeared in Omani newspapers were related to the head of the state (Sultan), while column-articles mostly covered government officials. Most comments and analyses that appeared in the Arabic-language newspapers also paid more attention to the head of the state and government officials. Most of the interviews covered by the Arabic dailies were with government officials (*Oman* 2.1% and *Al-Watan* 1.1%). However, most interviews in the English-language dailies were made with other types of individuals, such as ordinary citizens, sport figures and businessmen.

This category shows the similarity among the types of actors quoted or interviewed in all the dailies. All four newspapers paid attention to ministers or other high government officials as second actors in their news items.

5.2.4. Type of source

This category is designed to obtain information about the role of journalist in gathering and selecting domestic news content. The importance of this category in this thesis is to present a data about source of information in Omani daily newspapers. This helps to find

out, later inside the media organisation, the power of these sources and the reasons, which make news organisations give these sources high attention than others.

Figure 10 shows that most of the home news items (37%) came without sources. This is because most government organisations prepare their news items by themselves and give them to the newspapers, sometimes with pictures (this will be discussed in more detail in chapter six). Correspondents were the second-most-frequent (19.9%) primary source.
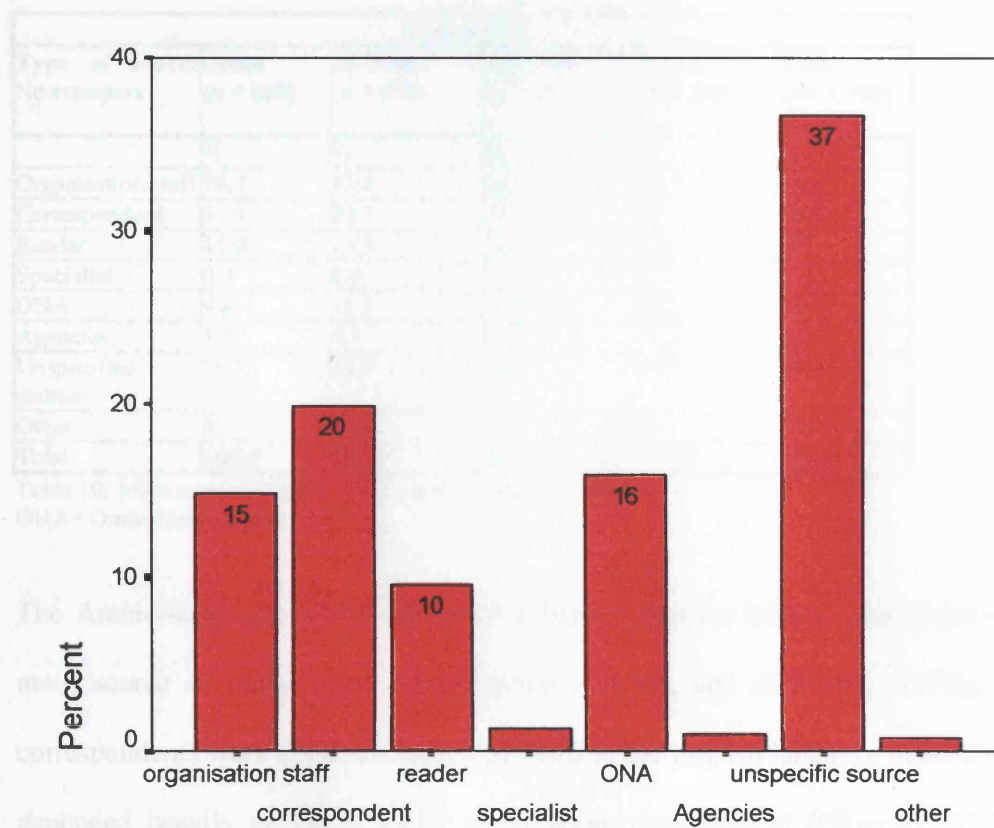
Figure 10: Type of source in the Omani press
ONA= Oman News Agency

Oman News Agency (ONA) was the third-most-frequent source (15.9%), the organisation's staff was the fourth-most-frequent source (14.9%) and readers (9.6%) were

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the fifth-most-frequent source. Following in descending order of frequency were

specialists (1.3%), agencies (0.9%) and other sources (0.9%).

Table 9 shows that all dailies ran items that did not name a source (*Oman*, 36.8%; *Al--*

Watan, 38.5%; *Observer*, 35.2%; *Times*, 33.3%).

Newspapers					
Type of source Newspapers	*Oman* (*n* = 820)	*Al-Watan* (*n* = 673)	*Observer* (*n* = 216)	*Times* (*n* = 282)	Total (*n* = 1,991)
	%	%	%	%	%
Organisation staff	10.7	12.0	22.7	27.7	14.9
Correspondent	31.3	20.7	0	0	19.9
Reader	10.0	13.5	0.5	6.0	9.6
Specialist	0.4	0.9	3.7	3.2	1.3
ONA	9.6	11.4	37.5	28.4	15.9
Agencies	1.1	0.7	0.5	1.4	0.9
Unspecified source	36.8	38.5	35.2	33.3	36.7
Other	0	2.2	0	0	0.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 10: Main source of home news content in the Omani press
ONA= Oman News Agency

The Arabic-language dailies depend to a large extent on internal correspondents as a

main source of home news content (*Oman*, 31.3%, and *Al-Watan*, 20.7%). Internal

correspondents were never the source of items in the English-language dailies, but these

depended heavily on the ONA to gather home news content (*Observer*, 37.5%, and

Times, 28.4%).

Organisation staff was the third-most-frequent main source in three dailies (*Oman*, 10.7%, *Observer*, 22.7%, *Times*, 27.7%), while readers (13.5%) were the third-most-frequent source of *Al-Watan* and the organisation's staff (12%) was the fourth.

This category shows the influence of the ONA on the gathering and selecting of home news items, especially for the English-language dailies. The role of organisation staff, as the category shows, is very little compared with unnamed sources or internal correspondents, for the Arabic-language dailies, in gathering home news items. This point will be discussed in the next chapter to see the reasons behind such a situation.

5.2.5. Place of item

This category, and the next one, investigates the prominence of news items. It helps to understand the most important, form the Omani papers' point of view, domestic news items. This gives data that could be used later in interview and observation analyses by finding out the reasons which make Omani daily newspapers, together or separately, giving these topics more importance than others. The front page in any newspaper is the most important page of the newspaper.
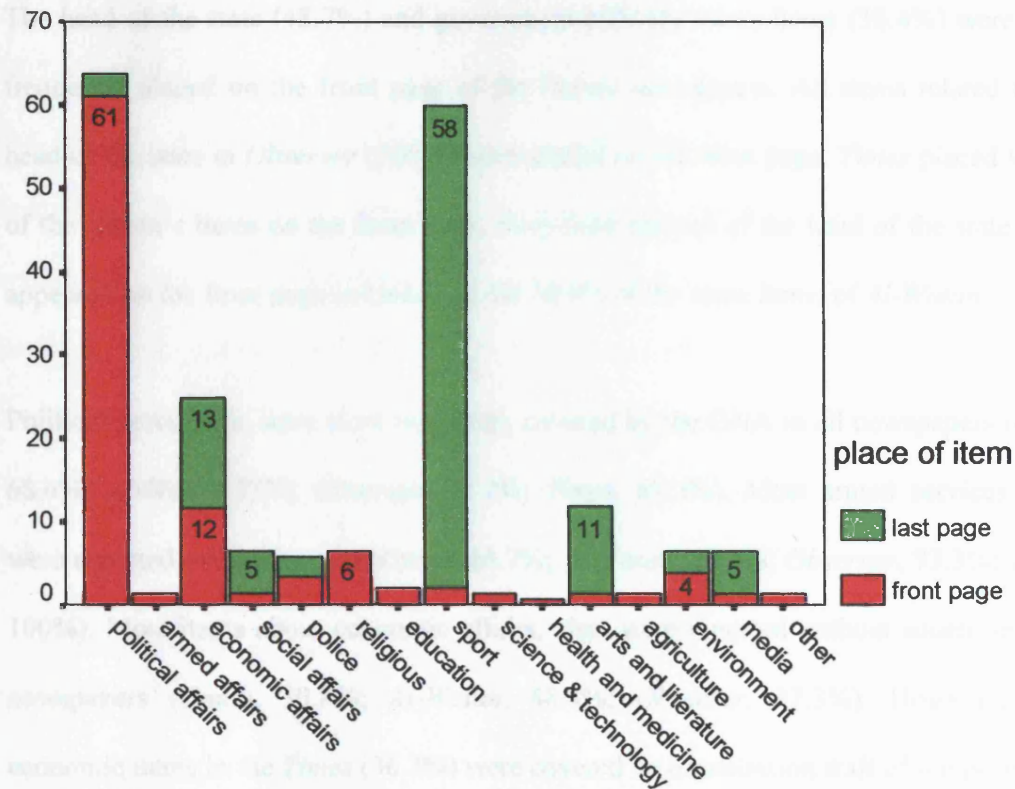
Figure 11: Topics published in front and last pages of Omani dailies

Figure 11 shows that political affairs items most frequently appeared (61% of all political news items) on the front page in the Omani newspapers, followed by economic news items, of which 13% were placed on the front page. Arabic-language dailies placed most of their political news items on the front page (*Oman*, 74%; *Al-Watan*, 71.4%). The English dailies devoted their last pages to sport news items (*Observer*, 70%; *Times* 71.4%).

The head of the state (48.7%) and government officials' news items (36.4%) were most frequently placed on the front page of the Omani newspapers. All items related to the head of the state in *Observer* (100%) were placed on the front page. *Times* placed 94.4% of the Sultan's items on the front page. Sixty-nine percent of the head of the state items appeared on the front page in *Oman*, as did 58.8% of the same items of *Al-Watan*.

Political news items were most frequently covered by the ONA in all newspapers (*Oman* 68.4%; *Al-Watan* 75%; *Observer*, 83.3%; *Times*, 89.3%). Most armed services items were reported without source (*Oman*, 68.7%; *Al-Watan*, 93.7%; *Observer*, 73.3%; *Times*, 100%). Most items about economic affairs, also, were reported without source in three newspapers (*Oman*, 30.8%; *Al-Watan*, 48.4%; *Observer*, 37.3%). However, most economic items in the *Times* (36.3%) were covered by organisation staff of the paper.

Most of the front-page items (n =154) in the Omani newspapers were covered by the ONA (68.2%). Organisation's staff (52.6%) was the most frequent source in the last pages (n = 38) and most of inside pages items (n =1799) were reported without source (38.7%). All dailies paid attention to the ONA items, for example, 43% of the ONA items in *Oman* were covered on the front pages. Of the ONA items in *Al-Watan*, 36.4% were reported on the front page. *Observer*, however, placed 27.2% of its ONA items on the front page, and 26.2% of ONA items published in the *Times* were placed on the front page.

This category shows the differences in placing items between Arabic-language and English-language dailies. It shows also the importance that Omani dailies give to political and economic news items. However, these two important topics were mostly covered by the ONA or unnamed sources, but not by organisation staff in Omani dailies.

5.2.6. Format of item

This category shows the facilities of new technology in using colour pictures and illustrations for home news topics. This category shows to what extent that each daily use high technology in printing and presenting news content. This gives an idea about the facilities inside each newspaper and the reasons that some papers have more facilities than others.

Figure 12 shows that *Oman* used colour headlines and colour pictures more often with their home news items than did the other papers (69% of all NCC home news items).
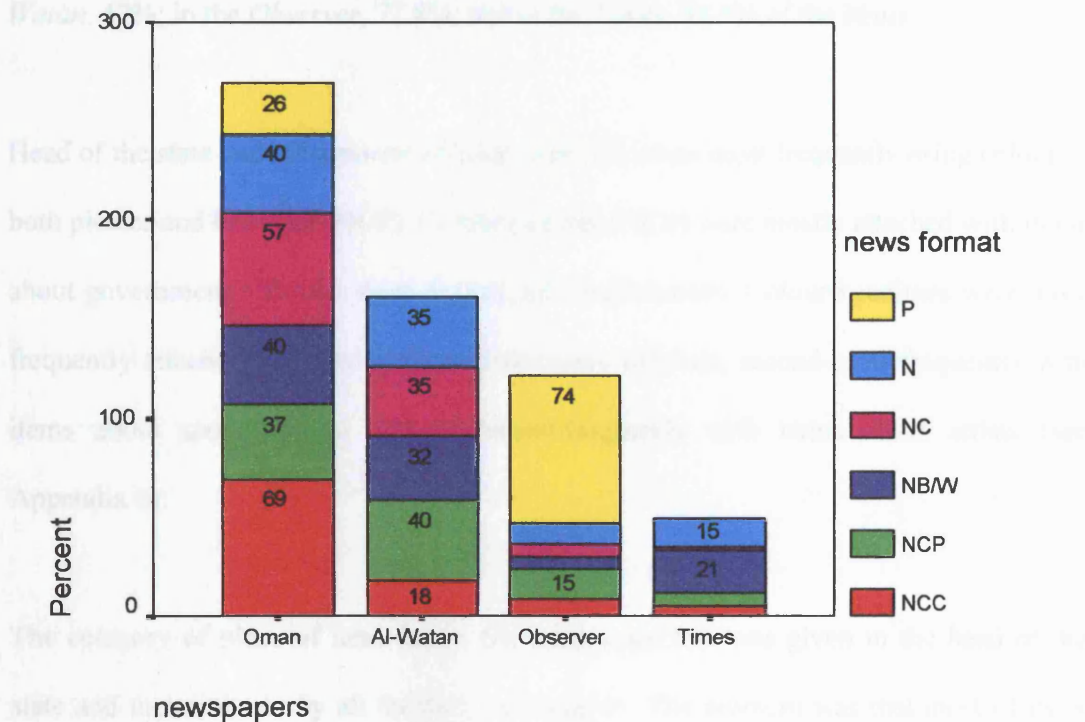
Figure 12: Format of items in the Omani press (NCC= News item with colour headline and colour picture; NCP= News with colour picture; NB/W: news with a black and white photo; NC= news with colour headline; N= news item only; P= picture only).

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The *Observer*, on the other hand, more often published pictures only (74%). Both newspapers are government owned, and have more updated facilities than the private dailies. *Al-Watan*, on the other hand, published the most home news items with colour pictures (40%).

News items related to the head of the state (19.9%) and ministers or government officials (59%) were most frequently covered by the ONA. This is mainly because the ONA is the main source of domestic news items in the country (see Appendix 5).

Of those items about the Sultan appearing in *Oman*, the ONA covered 58.6%; in *Al-Watan*, 47%; in the *Observer*, 77.8%; and in the Times, 88.9% of the items.

Head of the state and government officials were the items most frequently using colour in both picture and headline (NCC). Colour pictures (NCP) were mostly attached with items about government officials, sport figures, and businessmen. Colour headlines were most frequently attached with items about government officials, second-most-frequently with items about sport figures, and third-most-frequently with items about artists (see Appendix 6).

The category of place of item shows the importance that was given to the head of the state and the ministers by all the daily newspapers. The problem was that most of these front page items that came with colour headlines were reported by the ONA or PR offices in ministries. This means the leading domestic news stories are same in private and

government dailies. These stories are mainly official and ready-made domestic news stories.

5.3. Two case studies during the fieldwork

The previous analysis gives information about general characteristics of press content in general and domestic news content in particular. This section discusses two cases that were widely covered by the four Omani newspapers during my fieldwork: *Al-Shura* Council elections and the medical error case (see chapter 4: Methodology). The main aim of choosing this very micro content analysis of two domestic cases that happened during the fieldwork is to enable more detailed understanding about the influences on media content and find out if there any differences between the four dailies in their coverage of these two focused case studies.

5.3.1. The *Al-Shura* case

The current *Al-Shura* Council was established on 12 November 1991. Members of the Council are elected from all Omani states. The government appoints the head of the Council. Before May 2000, each state elected three candidates. The government then chose one out of the three candidates, who was appointed by a royal decree (Ministry of Information, 1992: 49). Beginning with the year 2000, each state is solely responsible for selecting its representative to the Council. The main aims of this Council are to evaluate the economic and social development and plans that are prepared by the ministries before these are finalised, and to offer reasonable opinions to develop the existing social and economic laws in the Sultanate. (ibid: 48). This Council also has the right to invite any

Minister to present a report about the programmes of his Ministry before the members.

The members have the right to discuss every single point that is made by a minister and

make suggestions concerning it (Rshwan, 1999: 36).

I chose to follow the newspapers' coverage of the *Al-Shura* Council as a case during my

fieldwork for two reasons. First, this Council is of central importance for the people in

Oman. Some previous studies of Omani media (Al-Murjan, 1997; Al-Mashikhi, 1994)

have shown that many readers and viewers prefer to read or watch the coverage of the *Al-*

Shura Council's sessions more than any other domestic news items.

Second, the elections of the Council's members took place during my fieldwork. Thus, it

was an opportunity for me to analyse how the process is covered in the four news

organisations. This case also shows the pressures that face news workers in gathering and

selecting domestic news items.

5.3.1.1. Coverage of *Al-Shura* Council news items

The four newspapers together published 139 items related to *Al-Shura*. The Arabic-

language dailies concentrated on covering the elections of the *Al-Shura* Council (of all

Oman news items, 40.3% related to the Council, as did 31.7% of *Al-Watan*; see Figure

13).

shura

newspapers
- Oman
- Al-Watan
- Observer
- Times

40.29%

31.85%

15.11%

12.95%
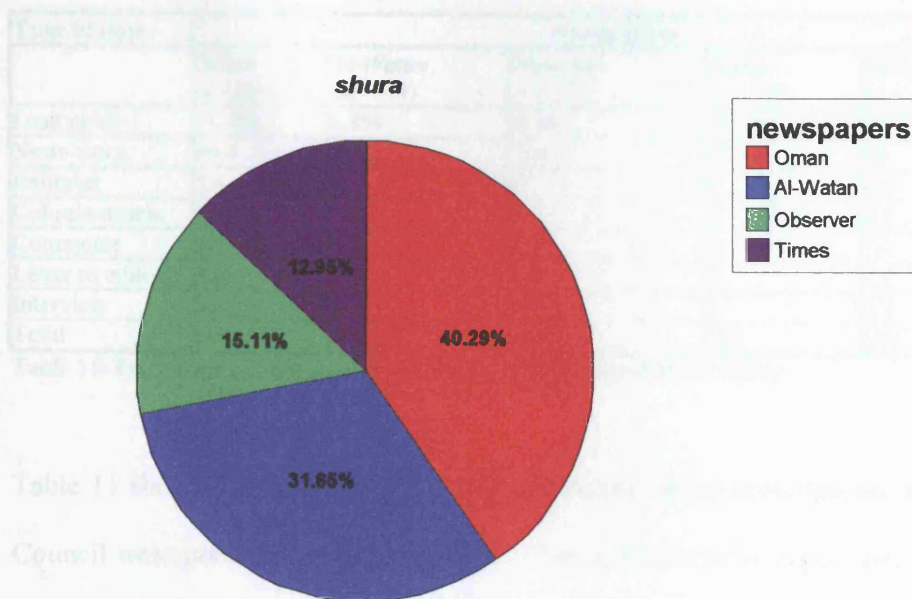
Figure 13: Coverage of Al-Shura Council in Omani daily newspapers

The English-language dailies, in contrast, paid less attention than the Arabic-language dailies to covering the elections and *Al-Shura* items in general. (Of all news items in the *Observer*, 15.1% related to *Al-Shura* Council, as did 12.9% of the *Times*' news items).

5.3.1.2. Types of content

News stories were the most frequent type of content published about *Al-Shura* (64%). The importance of *Al-Shura* Council items was obvious in the high percentage of items about the Council that appeared on the front pages as lead news stories (17.3%). Column-articles were the third-most-frequent type of item (9.3%) about the Council.

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Type of item	Newspapers				
	Oman (n = 56)	*Al-Watan* (n = 44)	*Observer* (n = 21)	*Times* (n = 18)	Total (n = 139)
Lead news	21.4%	6.8%	28.6%	16.7%	17.3%
News story	46.4	75	71.4	83.3	64
Editorial	5.4	2.3	0	0	2.9
Column-article	16.1	9	0	0	9.3
Comments	1.8	2.3	0	0	1.4
Letter to editor	3.6	2.3	0	0	2.2
Interview	5.6	2.3	0	0	2.9
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Table 11: Percentage of each type of content about *Al-Shura* in Omani dailies

Table 11 shows that in the English-language dailies, items published about the *Al-Shura* Council were predominantly news stories (*Times*, 83.3% news stories and 16.7% as lead news; *Observer*, 71.4% news stories and 28.6% as lead news). Thus, these newspapers did not publish analyses, comments, interviews or column-articles to discuss the elections. Both newspapers heavily depended on the ONA to cover the *Al-Shura* Council. *Oman* most frequently published news stories (46.4%) and lead stories (21.4%). *Al-Watan* published more column-articles (9%) than lead stories (6.8%) about the Council. It is obvious, then, that there were no opinion or analyses from the journalists at the English-language dailies. They presented the news items as they received them from the ONA or the PR offices.

5.3.1.3. Actors focused on in news items

In all newspapers, the actors that were the focus of news items about the *Al-Shura* Council were predominantly ministers or high government officials (72.7%). The head-of-state was the second-most-frequent actor (7.9%) and sheikhs or governors were the third-most-frequent actors (7.2%).

Actor	Newspapers				
	Oman (n = 56)	Al-Watan (n = 44)	Observer (n =21)	Times (n = 18)	Total (n = 139)
Head of state	10.7%	2.3%	9.5%	5.5%	7.9%
Minister or high government official	60.7	77.3	81	88.9	72.7
Other official	0	2.3	0	5.5	1.4
Ordinary people	10.7	6.8	0	0	6.5
Sheikhs or governors	8.9	6.8	9.5	0	7.2
Academic	5.4	0	0	0	2.1
Can't identified	3.6	4.5	0	0	2.9
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Table 12: Percentages of *Al-Shura* Council items about various types of actors

For all newspapers the Ministers and high officials were the most frequent actors in items about *Al-Shura* (*Times*, 88.9%; *Observer*, 81%, *Al-Watan*, 77.3% and *Oman* 60.7%). The head-of-state was the second-most-frequent actor for three newspapers (*Oman*, 10.7%; *Observer*, 9.5%; and *Times*, 5.5%). Ordinary people and sheiks or governors were the second-most- frequent actor for *Al-Watan* (6.8%). The reason for this high percentage of high officials as actors is that governors or governmental officials normally supervised most of the Council's meetings. The newspapers also made an effort to publish any item that related to the head of the council, who is a part of the government. Thus all newspapers should cover any single meeting of the head of the council with officials from Oman or any other countries.

5.3.1.4. Source of item

Table 13 shows that most news items about *Al-Shura* were prepared for the newspapers by the ONA (32.4%) or by the news organisations' staff (31.6%). The English-language dailies mostly depended on ONA items (*Observer*, 81%; *Times*, 72.2%).

Source	Newspapers				
	Oman (n = 56)	Al-Watan (n = 44)	Observer (n = 21)	Times (n = 18)	Total (n = 139)
Organisation staff	50%	29.5%	0%	17%	31.6%
Correspondent	5.4	16	0	0	7.2
ONA	14.3	16	81	72.2	32.4
Reader	7.1	4.5	0	0	4.3
Unspecific source	23.2	34.1	19	11.1	24.5
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Table 13: Percentages of Sources of news items about *Al-Shura*

Oman, the Arabic-language, government owned newspaper depended heavily on its journalists (50%) to cover developments that related to *Al-Shura*. This means they had more access to the Council's officials and than the other newspapers. In contrast, most items about Al-Shura that appeared in *Al-Watan*, the Arabic-language, privately owned newspaper, were reported without a source (34.1%). Thus the most frequent type of news items, except *Oman* was a pre-prepared item sent by the ONA to all newspapers. The role of the reporter in preparing news items was very minor.

5.3.1.5. Place of item

Table 14 shows that 27.3% of *Al-Shura* news items were placed in the front pages.

Place	Newspapers				
	Oman (n= 56)	Al-Watan (n =44)	Observer (n =21)	Times (n= 18)	Total (n =139)
Front page	26.8%	18.2%	28.6%	50%	27.3%
Last page	10.7	4.5	0	0	5.8
Inside page	62.5	77.3	71.4	50	66.9
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Table 14: Place of *Al-Shura* in each newspaper (in percentages)

Times of Oman published 50% of its items that relate to *Al-Shura* council on the front page, while the *Observer*, 28.6%; *Oman*, 26.8%; and *Al-Watan* 18.2%. This shows the importance that was given to *Al-Shura* news items in all newspapers.

5.3.2. Medical mistake

The second topic that was widely discussed among news workers inside the four news organisations during the fieldwork was the death, in a reputable Omani hospital, of an Omani announcer. The wife of the deceased made 'a strong complaint' to Omani radio⁻ programme called *Albath AlMubasher* (On Air), saying that the man 'had died due to apparent negligence of the hospital authorities' (*Times*, 30 May 2000: 1). However, the authorities claimed that 'he died due to natural causes and not due to their carelessness or oversight' (ibid).

5.3.2.1. Coverage of medical issues

I found only 6 news items published during the period of my fieldwork that related to this case. However, many items (170 items) were published about the topic of health in general during my fieldwork. All the other news items about health issues, especially the interviews and analyses or the daily news items about events that happened around the country, covered the achievements of the Ministry of Health.

Topic	Newspapers				
	Oman (*n* = 53)	*Al-Watan* (*n* = 82)	*Observer* (*n* = 20)	*Times* (*n* = 15)	*Total* (*n* = 170)
Broadcaster's death	5.7	1.2	0	13.3	3.5
Medical issues	94.3%	98.8%	100%	86.7%	96.5%
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Table 15: Percentage of reporting on the case of the broadcaster's death in each daily and on other medical issues

Table 15 shows that the *Times of Oman* most frequently published items about the broadcaster's death. Of all items it published about medical issues (*n* = 15), 13.3% were about this incident. *Oman* was the second-most-frequent publisher of items about the

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incident (5.7% of all its 53 medical news items). *Al-Watan* published only one item about the incident and I found no item about it in the *Observer*.

5.3.2.2. Type of content

Table 16 shows that the English-language dailies published more news stories about medical issues than other types of news items (*Observer*, 95% of all items about this topic; *Times*, 86.7%).

Type of news item	Newspapers				
	Oman (*n* = 53)	Al-Watan (*n* = 82)	Observer (*n* = 20)	Times (*n* = 15)	Total (*n* = 170)
Lead news	0%	1.2%	0%	15.3%	1.8%
News story	71.7	90.2	95	86.7	84.7
Editorial	1.9	0	0	0	.6
Column-article	7.5	0	0	0	2.3
Comments	1.9	2.4	0	0	1.8
Feature	9.4	2.4	0	0	4.1
Letter to editor	3.8	2.4	0	0	2.3
Interview	3.8	1.2	5	0	2.3
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Table 16: Percentage of types of items published about medical issues

Oman published news stories about this topic most frequently (71.7%) and features second-most-frequently (9.4%). *Al-Watan* most frequently published news stories (90.2%), and second-most-frequently concentrated on comments and analyses, features, and letters to editor (2.4%).

This category shows that comments or analyses, editorials, and readers' letters to editors were very rarely published about health, which means discussions of health issues were not well covered compared with news stories. However, most of these news stories, as will be seen in Table 18 were covered by the ONA or came without source.

5.3.2.3. Actor of item

Table 17 shows that Ministers and high officials were the most frequent actors in items published about medical issues in each daily (*Observer* and *Times*, 60%; *Al-Watan* 69.5% and *Oman*, 52.8%).

Actor	Newspapers				
	Oman (*n* = 53)	*Al-Watan* (*n* = 82)	*Observer* (*n* = 20)	*Times* (*n* = 15)	Total (*n* = 170)
Head of state	1.9%	1.2%	0%	0%	1.2%
Minister or high government official	52.8	69.5	60	60	62.4
Ordinary people	5.7	1.2	10	6.7	4.1
Sheikhs or governors	5.7	8.5	0	0	5.9
Doctor/nurse	30.2	19.5	30	33.3	25.3
Can't be identified	1.9	0	0	0	.6
Other	1.9	0	0	0	.6
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Table 17: Actor in items about medical topics in each newspaper

Doctors and nurses were the second-most-frequent actor for all the dailies (*Times*, 33.3%; *Oman*, 30.2%; *Observer*, 30%; and *Al-Watan*, 19.5%). This category shows that most items were about government officials. (These officials emphasised on the achievements of the Ministry of Health and ignored 'negative' information about the Health in the Sultanate).

5.3.2.4. Source of item

Table 18 shows that items without a specific source (42.9%) were the most frequent items. This is because many items were covered as a ready-made news items from the PR office of the Ministry of Health and published in all four dailies, sometimes with nearly the same headlines.

Type of source	Newspapers				
	Oman (n = 53)	Al-Watan (n = 82)	Observer (n = 20)	Times (n = 15)	Total (n = 170)
Organisation staff	13.2%	2.4%	20%	27%	10%
Correspondent	41.5	47.6	5	0	36.5
ONA	1.9	2.4	15	27	5.9
Reader	5.7	2.4	0	0	2.9
Unspecific source	37.7	41.5	60	46	42.9
Other	0	3.7	0	0	1.8
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Table 18: Percentage of various types of sources in reporting about health issues

Aside from these items, the Arabic-language dailies mostly depended on their correspondents to cover health issues (*Oman*, 41.5%; *Al-Watan*, 47.6%). In contrast, the English-language dailies published items about medical topics without a specific source (*Observer*, 60%; *Times*, 46%). The English dailies have no correspondents around the country; therefore, they depended heavily on ONA items or the items that received from the PR offices.

5.3.2.5. Place of items about medical issues

Items regarding medical issues were most frequently published on an inside page by all four newspapers (*Oman*, 96.2%; *Al-Watan*, 98.8%; *Observer*, 90%; *Times*, 73.3%), though the two English-language dailies were more likely to place these items on the front page. (Only 1.2% of the medical items published in *Al-Watan* appeared on the front page, and no item about medical issues was published on the *Oman* front page during the course of my fieldwork) (see Table 19).

Place of item	Newspapers				
	Oman (n = 53)	Al-Watan (n = 82)	Observer (n = 20)	Times (n = 15)	Total (n = 170)
Front page	0%	1.2%	10%	26.7%	4.1%
Last page	3.8	0	0	0	1.2
Inside page	96.2	98.8	90	73.3	94.7
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Table 19: Place of items about medical issues in each newspaper (in percentage)

By sitting in each news organisation and observing how the front page items were selected, I found out that all the dailies prefer to put a domestic item as a lead news story. At the Arabic-language dailies, more domestic news items were gathered by reporters_ than at the English-language dailies, which concentrated more on international items. (This is because the English-language dailies had a shortage of reporters who cover domestic items).

5.4. Summary

This chapter discussed three main sections: 1) general characteristics of content in Omani newspapers, 2) coverage of domestic news content, and 3) case studies of how the four newspapers covered two topics: the *Al-Shura* Council elections and a medical error.

The findings show the differences between Arabic-language and English-language newspapers in the general characteristics of their coverage. The Arabic-language papers concentrated more on home news and Arabic news content, while there was a lack of domestic and Arabic contents in the English dailies, which paid more attention to international news content. The Arabic-language newspapers had more advertisements (commercial and governmental) compared with the English-language dailies. The Arabic-language private newspaper (*Al-Watan*) allotted the most space to these advertisements.

Leading Editorials were not a prominent category of the Omani newspapers' content. In fact two papers (*Al-Watan* and *Observer*) did not publish a leading editorial in this period

of analysis. All leading editorial in the third paper (*Times*) were about international content, not domestic content. Unlike in the Arabic press, most column-articles, comments and analysis, and interviews in the English dailies were about international content.

Regarding home news contents, the findings show that the government items in both private and government-owned newspapers were highly reported. This could be shown by the quantity of items that related to the government activities, included officials as actors, or depended on a government source (ONA) and the importance that was given to these items. Like some other studies of Arabic and Omani contents (Musa, 1988; Al-Hasani, 1996), this study found that most home news contents, especially about the armed services, economic and sport items, was reported without a source. Opinions and views about home events were, also, very few, especially in the English-language newspapers, which mostly depended on formal news items prepared by the ONA. *Oman* (Arabic-language, government-owned) most frequently used comments and analyses, interviews, and column-articles to cover domestic items, while *Al-Watan* (Arabic-language, private) devoted these categories to Arabic events. The findings also show that there were no items covered by correspondents in either English-language daily. Front pages in all Omani newspapers were most frequently about political news items. Most of these items published on the front page were covered by an official source (ONA). The last pages in the English-language newspapers concentrated on sport items, while the Arabic-language newspapers devoted these pages to arts and literature or economic items.

This chapter also discussed the coverage of two cases that happened during the fieldwork of this thesis, which were elections of *Al-Shura* Council and a medical error. The first case showed that, the government by its officials were highly presented more than other categories.

The results of the second case show that the four newspapers published only six items that directly related to the medical negligence case. Meanwhile, all the newspapers published a number of items about the achievements of the Ministry of Health.

Content analysis is a useful tool for this study because a large amount of data needed to be analysed. The 'systematic' analysis of the newspapers guides me to some aspects related to the news production process (i.e., how domestic news is structured and presented, and why). I also can compare the results of content analysis with interviews for a better understanding of the organisations' work. However, content analysis reveals little about the producers of the message, the news organisations or the societal context in which media messages are produced. To understand the influences on media content, the researcher needs to go beyond the description of the manifest content of the news organisation.

Chapter Six

INTERVIEWS AND

OBSERVATIONS

6. INTRODUCTION

This chapter analyses the data gathered from participant observation and semi-structured interviews. This chapter has three main sections. The results of these methods are organised in two main sections. Section 1, a macro-level analysis, gives a brief history of the Omani news organisations under study and describes the general characteristics of each, including ownership and control, organisational structure, and economic determinations. It also shows how these organisations work in Oman. Section 2 is a micro-level analysis of the daily work and journalistic practices of journalists inside the news organisations.

6.1. GENERAL VIEW OF OMANI NEWS ORGANISATIONS

This results section compares the four news organisations with regard to their general characteristics (including their editorial policy and organisational structure), and looks at how these relate to patterns of ownership. It then looks at economic influences, including sources of income, circulation and readership figures.

6.1.1. Ownership and control

I studied two private newspapers in this study: *Al-Watan* (Arabic-language daily) and *Times of Oman* (English-language daily).

6.1.1.1. *Al-Watan (Arabic-language daily)*: A brief history

Al-Watan was the first Omani daily newspaper to be published in the Sultanate of Oman (its first issue was dated 28 January 1971). The history of *Al-Watan* to date can be

divided into five periods[1]:

1) From 1971 to 1977: The country was very new during this period when *Al-Watan* started publishing as a weekly newspaper. Due to the lack of printing facilities in Oman¯ and the many consequent printing problems, the newspaper was printed outside Oman (in Beirut, Kuwait and Cairo).

The newspaper is owned by the Al-Taii family. The first editor-in-chief was Nasser Al-Taii (who died in 1972). His brother succeeded him as owner during the period from 1972 to 1977. In this first phase, *Al-Watan* was very limited in content and distribution. It faced difficulties finding readers who were interested in reading about domestic events, as there were very few educated people in the country. It also faced difficulties in writing about domestic events around the country, because the communication facilities in the new country were very poor until 1974, the year that the civil war ended in the south of Oman (See chapter three, Oman and Omani media). Due to the lack of facilities (i.e. telephone systems, streets, cars), reporters sometimes used animals or government helicopters to travel to cover domestic events around the country. After the civil war started in Lebanon, the newspaper transferred to Cairo for printing and then to Kuwait.

2) From 1977 to 1984: In 1977 Mohamed Al-Taii became the editor-in-chief of *Al-Watan*. Al-Taii started to develop the paper with new staff, an advertising department and new technology. In this period, the government started

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[1] Sources: Mikkawi, 1989; Al-Mashikhi, 1994; Al-Mashekhi, 1996; interview with the editor-in-chief during the fieldwork of this study; unpublished documents from the newspaper I collected during the fieldwork.

establishing civil laws, and the communication systems, education, and the economy began to function better. On 28 January 1984, the newspaper started to publish daily.

3) From 1984 to 1989: During this period, *Al-Watan* acquired its own printing press and relocated to a new building built expressly to house it in Al-oziba (Muscat). This was one of the big changing stages for *Al-Watan*. More technological facilities and departments were developed in this period, and more staff were hired.

4) From 1989 to 1996: During this period the paper was delivered to every state in the Sultanate. The circulation figures increased to 37,010 copies per day. The newspaper's facilities expanded again in this period.

5) From May 1996 through 2000: At the beginning of this stage the newspaper increased its issue price (as did all the dailies), in its case from 100 *biza* (nearly 0.25 pounds sterling) to 200 *biza* (0.50 pounds sterling). This increase was due to the increasing cost of raw materials and newsprint in the global market. The circulation initially decreased to 20,000 copies per day following the price change, but then began to increase (and has continued to increase). On 18 June 1996, *Al-Watan* changed the size of the paper and added a wing as a logo on the letterhead. In 1997 the newspaper computerized all the work in writing, designing and lay out. On 18 July 1997, the paper started publishing on the

Internet, and on 22 July 1999 it began using glossy paper for the front and back pages. *Al-Watan* has 114 workers (35% Omanis and 69% foreigners).

Although *Al-Watan* is a private newspaper, the government sets broad policy guidelines for the newspaper. The government is strongly involved in journalistic practices, as will be discussed in the section on government/press relationship.

6.1.1.2. *Times of Oman* (English-language daily): A brief history

The Al-Zadjali family owns the *Times of Oman*. The recent editor-in-chief established the newspaper, on 23 February 1975. The paper was established with the intent of defining Oman for foreigners and serving foreign readers inside the country. *Times of Oman* is the second of two private newspapers that are published by the Muscat House for Journalism and Publishing (MHJP). The company publishes another newspaper, an Arabic paper specialising in sport and culture. The *Times of Oman* started as a weekly, 12-page newspaper with a circulation of 2,000 copies per day. In 1988 the newspaper transferred to a new building with new printing facilities. In 1990 the newspaper started publishing daily. A typical issue is now 20 pages long, and the publishers are trying to develop it into a 28-page newspaper. The circulation is now between 15,000 and 16,000 copies per day. The MHJP employed the editor-in-chief's son as its general manager on 1 April 1999 with the goal of solving a number of financial and administrative problems. The general manager reported that he has tried to solve the 'previous mistakes' in the editorial, advertisement and circulation departments. However, he mentioned that he faces many problems in dealing with the employees because he comes from a different

occupational background (information systems) and still has his job in a government organisation. As at *Al-Watan*, both the editor-in-chief and the general manager of the *Times of Oman* indicated that the Ministry of Information exerts heavy control over the newspaper.

6.1.1.3.1. *Oman:* A brief history

I studied two government-owned newspapers in this study: *Oman* (an Arabic-language daily) and *Oman Daily Observer* (an English-language daily). *Oman* was established as a weekly newspaper on 18 November 1972[2]. It began to publish twice a week on Saturday and Tuesday on 18 November 1975 and became a daily newspaper on 18 November 1980. By a royal decree, on 25 June 1997 *Oman* and *Oman Daily Observer* both became part of one large organisation (OEPNPA) that subsumed eight small organisations. The two dailies moved to one large building shared with other government print media. According to the editor in chief, because the newspaper is owned by the government, its editorial policy is controlled by the government (editor-in-chief). Thus, the newspaper takes care to highlight any governmental activity or 'national event'. It is, in short, a mouthpiece of the government. The editor-in-chief described it as a 'historical document' for anyone who wants to write about the country or the Omani government in the future. The average daily issue is between 20 and 24 pages long.

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[2] The national day of Oman is 18 November; the government typically begins its major new initiatives on this day.

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6.1.1.4 *Oman Daily Observer:* A brief history

The second government daily newspaper is *Oman Daily Observer*, which started publishing in 1983. The recent editor-in-chief started working at the newspaper on 1 January 1990 as a news editor and became the editor-in-chief in 1993. He is the only one of the four editors-in-chief who holds a journalism qualification. The newspaper shares facilities and technologies with *Oman* newspaper. Though government owned, these facilities and technologies were not highly developed at the time of my study. At *Observer* for example, there was a shortage of computers, i.e., there were not enough for all the news workers, and the electronic design system was not available on all computers (editor-in-chief of *Observer*).

6.1.2. Organisational structures

I will discuss the organisational structure of the Arabic-language newspapers first because of their similarities, and then discuss the English-language newspapers' structure together, for the same reason.

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6.1.2.1. Organisational structure of *Al-Watan*

General Manager & Editor-in-chief (1)

Secretary (1)

Administration (13)

News workers

Production

Finance (7)

News Editor (1)

Computer (or type setting) (13)

Classified Ads. (3)

Central desk (3)

Pages' designers (4)

Commercial Ads. (12)

Proof-reading (6)

Photographers (3)

Culture dept. (2)

Sport dept. (6)

Political dept. (4)

Domestics dept. (6)

Translation (4)

Internet (2)

Printing (17)

Archive & Library (4)
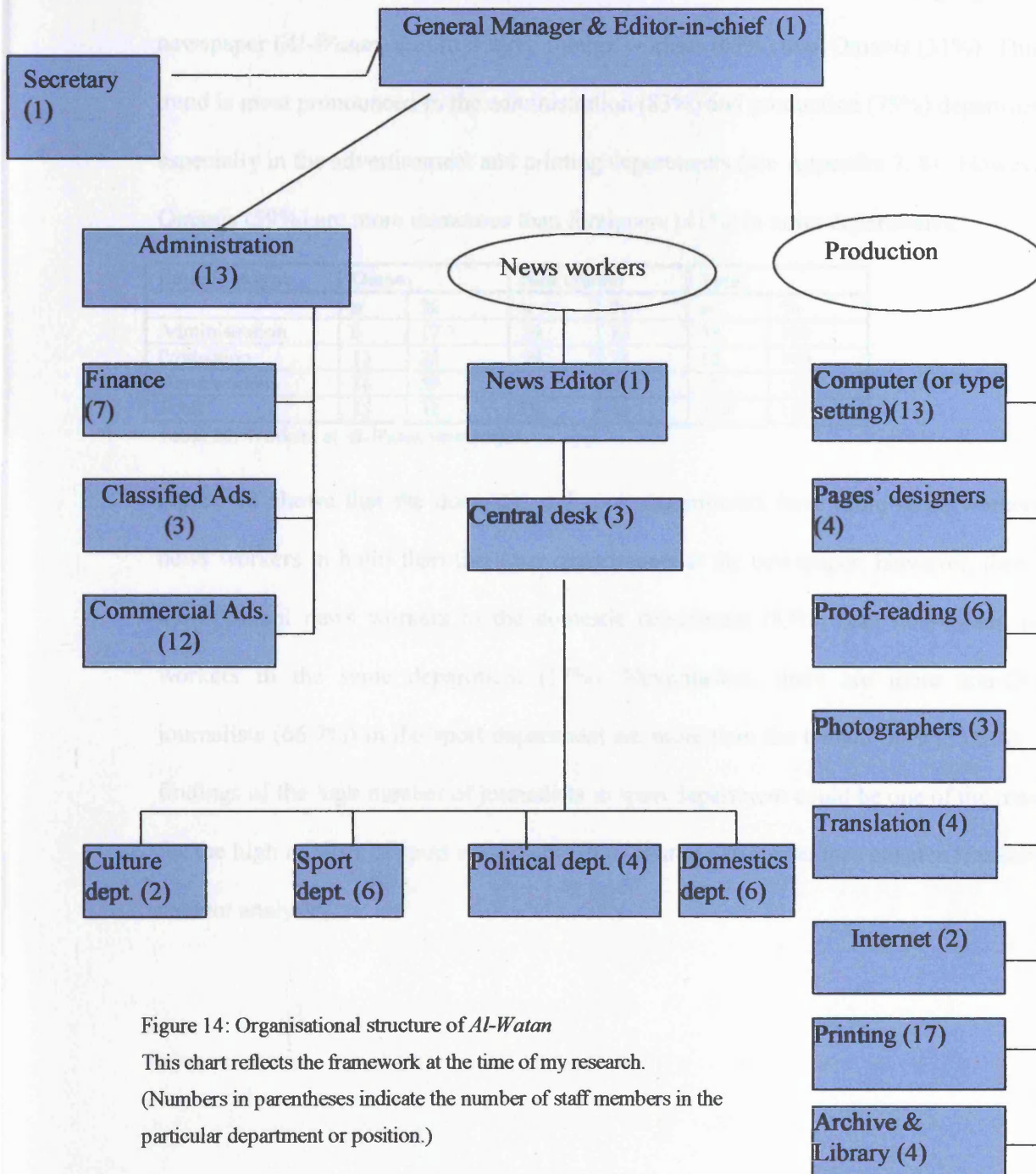
Figure 14: Organisational structure of *Al-Watan*
This chart reflects the framework at the time of my research.
(Numbers in parentheses indicate the number of staff members in the particular department or position.)

The structure of *Al-Watan* can be divided in three main sections: Administration, news

workers, and production (see Figure 14). Table 20 shows that the Arabic-language private

newspaper (*Al-Watan*) employs more foreign workers (69%) than Omanis (31%). This   _

trend is most pronounced in the administration (83%) and production (75%) departments,

especially in the advertisement and printing departments (see Appendix 7, 8). However,

Omanis (59%) are more numerous than foreigners (41%) in news departments.

Employee type	Omani		Non Omani		Total	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Administration	6	17	29	83	35	100
Production	13	25	39	75	52	100
News workers	16	59	11	41	27	100
Total	35	31	79	69	114	100

Table 20: Workers at *Al-Watan* newspaper

Figure 15 shows that the domestic and sport departments have more news workers (6

news workers in both) than the other departments at the newspaper. However, there are

more Omani news workers in the domestic department (83%) than non-Omani news

workers in the same department (17%). Nevertheless, there are more non-Omani

journalists (66.7%) in the sport department are more than the Omani ones (33.3%). The

findings of the high number of journalists in sport department could be one of the reasons

for the high number of sport news items in *Al-Watan* newspaper (see chapter 5: results of

content analysis).
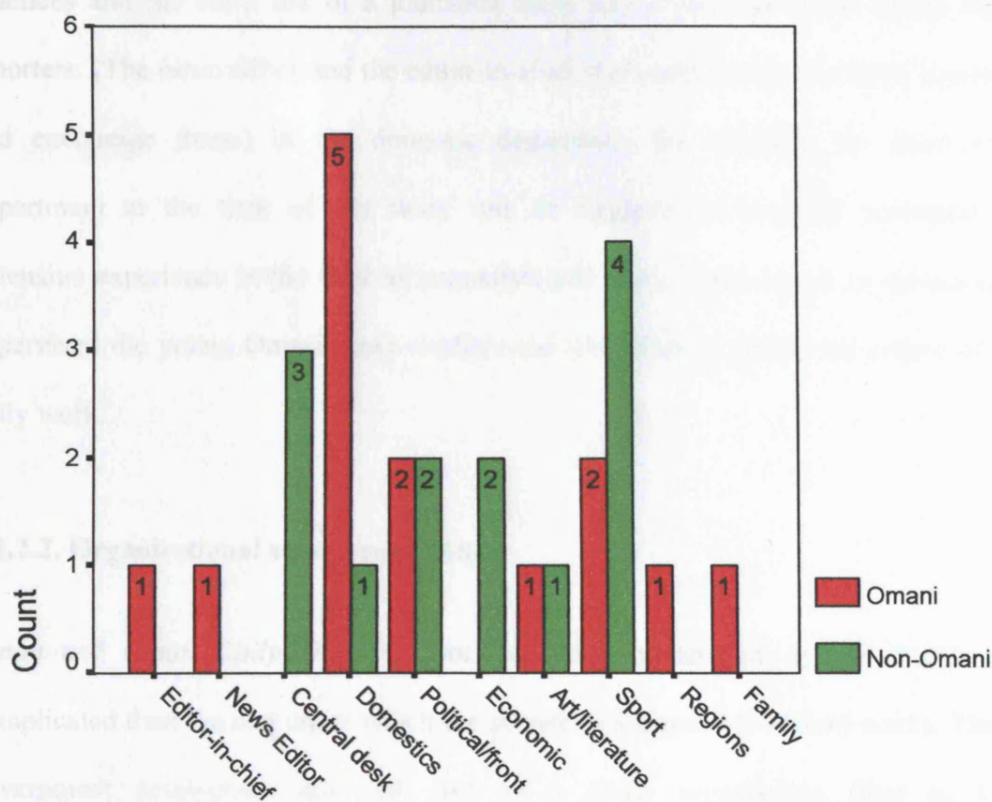
Figure 15: Number of journalists at *Al-Watan*.

The policy of the editor-in-chief is to involve Omanis, as much as he can, in the work of reporting the news (see Table 20). However, he faces difficulties in finding professional Omanis to work as journalists (editor-in-chief, 22 May 2000). Therefore, many Omani journalists in the newspaper have come from different departments like proofreading or typesetting. Most of the Omani journalists do not have professional qualifications in journalism. The policy of the newspaper is to assign young Omani journalists to work under the supervision of one or more experienced, professional foreign journalists. The intent of this policy is that the Omanis can obtain experience and learn about journalistic

practices and the daily life of a journalist while under the supervision of the foreign reporters. (The news editor and the editor-in-chief also supervise these Omani journalists and encourage them.) In the domestic department, for example, the head of the department at the time of my study was an Egyptian professional journalist with extensive experience in the field of journalism and in the Omani press in particular. He supervised the young Omani news workers and trained them during the course of their daily work.

6.1.2.2. Organisational structure of *Oman*

Oman and *Oman Daily Observer* work within a hierarchical system that is more complicated than the one under which the private newspaper (*Al-Watan*) works. The two government newspapers are both part of a single organisation (that is, Oman Establishment for Press News Publication and Advertisement (OEPNPA)) comprising eight separate organisations working under one administration. This organisation includes two dailies (*Oman* and *Oman Daily Observer*), two magazines (*Omania* and *Nizwa*), Oman News Agency (ONA), Oman for Advertising and Public Relations (OAPR), Oman for Printing and Publishing (OPP) and Finance and Administration Affairs (FAA). This complex hierarchy helps explain these organisations' slowness in making decisions or implementing changes, as we are going to see later in this section and the next one. Figure 16 shows the organisational structure of *Oman* daily newspaper.

Figure 16 shows the organisational structure of the newspaper. [faded background text obscured]

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                        ┌─────────────────────────┐
                        │   Editor-in-Chief (1)   │
                        └────────────┬────────────┘
                                     │
        ╭───────────╮    ┌───────────┴──────────┐    ╭──────────╮
        │Production │────│   News Editor (1)    │────│   News   │
        ╰───────────╯    └──────────────────────┘    │ workers  │
                                                       ╰──────────╯
```

Production	News workers
Editor Assistant for Arts Affairs (1)	Editor Assistant for Editorial Affairs (1)
Design & layout dept. (6)	Editing administration (7)
Arabic setting & typing (16)	Economic Department (5)
Proofreading dept. (5)	Culture (3)
Montage dept. (11)	Domestic News (5)
Photography (4)	Sport (7)
Document & Information (Archive) (3)	Religion (1)
	Studies & Features (2)
	Miscellany (1)
	Women & Children (3)

Figure 16: Organisational structure of *Oman*

(This chart is based on findings at the time of the research. Numbers in parentheses indicate the number of staff in the particular department or position.)

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Figure 16 shows that *Oman* has more news workers than *Al-Watan* does. It seems that the paper has had a policy of attempting to employ Omanis (see Appendix 9). As Figure 17 shows, my study found that 95% of the news workers in the newspaper were Omanis and two journalists (5%) were foreigners (Egyptian).
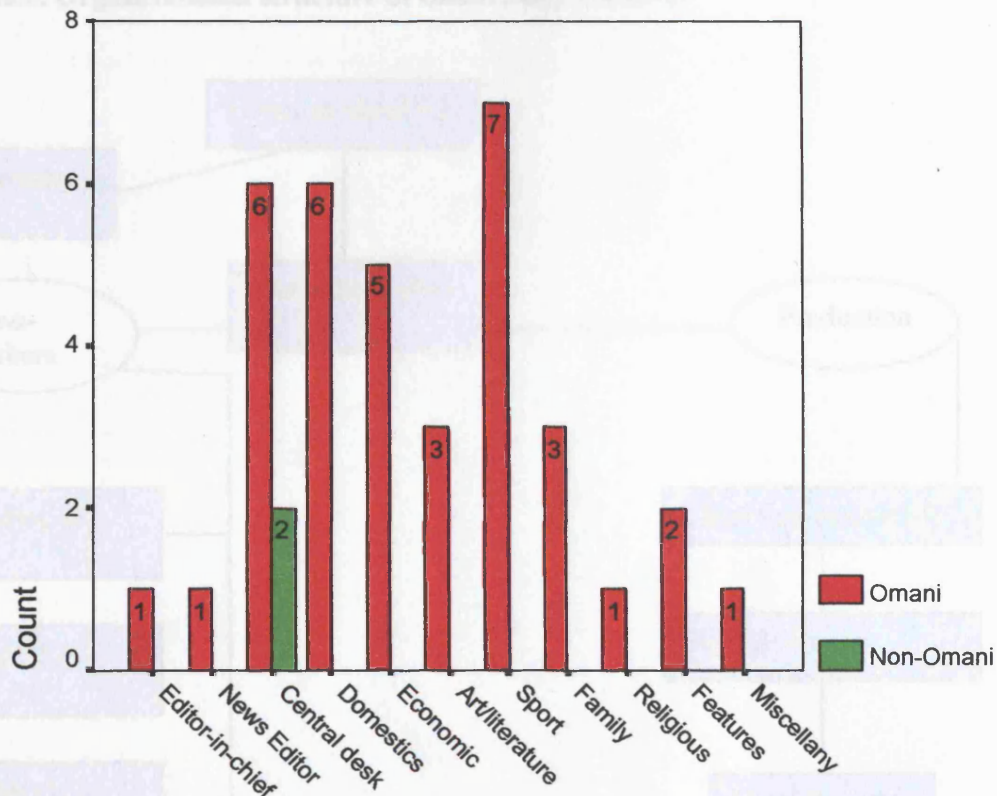
Figure 17: Omani and non-Omani news workers at *Oman*

All the production and administrative staff were Omanis (see Appendix 7). In 1989, in contrast, 79% of the total staff were Omanis; 35 editors and journalists and two expatriate political analysts on the staff were from Egypt. In addition, the paper had 45 local correspondents (Al-Mashikhi, 1994).

The newspaper now has 101 internal correspondents around the country, while *Al-Watan* has only 38 internal correspondents (see Appendix 10) and 42 international

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correspondents around the world, while *Al-Watan* has only 19 international correspondents (see Appendix 11). However, most of the internal correspondents, many reporters indicated, are not qualified in journalistic practices. Their reports, I was told, need to be edited by the editor or journalists in-house.

6.1.2.3. Organisational structure of *Oman Daily Observer*
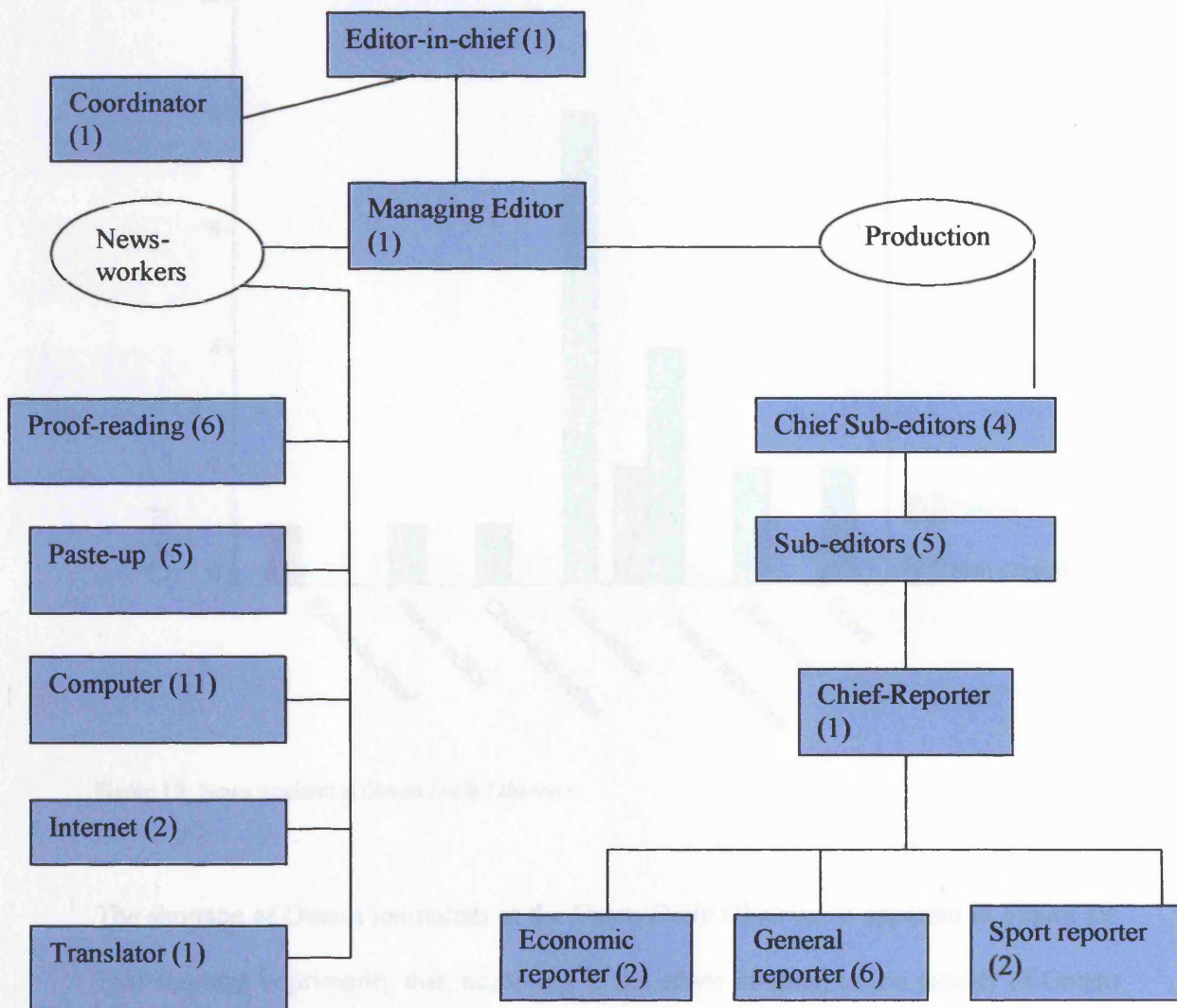
Figure 18: Organisational structure of *Oman Daily Observer*
(This chart is based on findings at the time of the research.)

The structure of the English-language daily (*Observer*; see Figure 18) differs from the structure of the Arabic-language dailies. Reporters for this English language daily include general reporters, sport reporters and economic reporters.
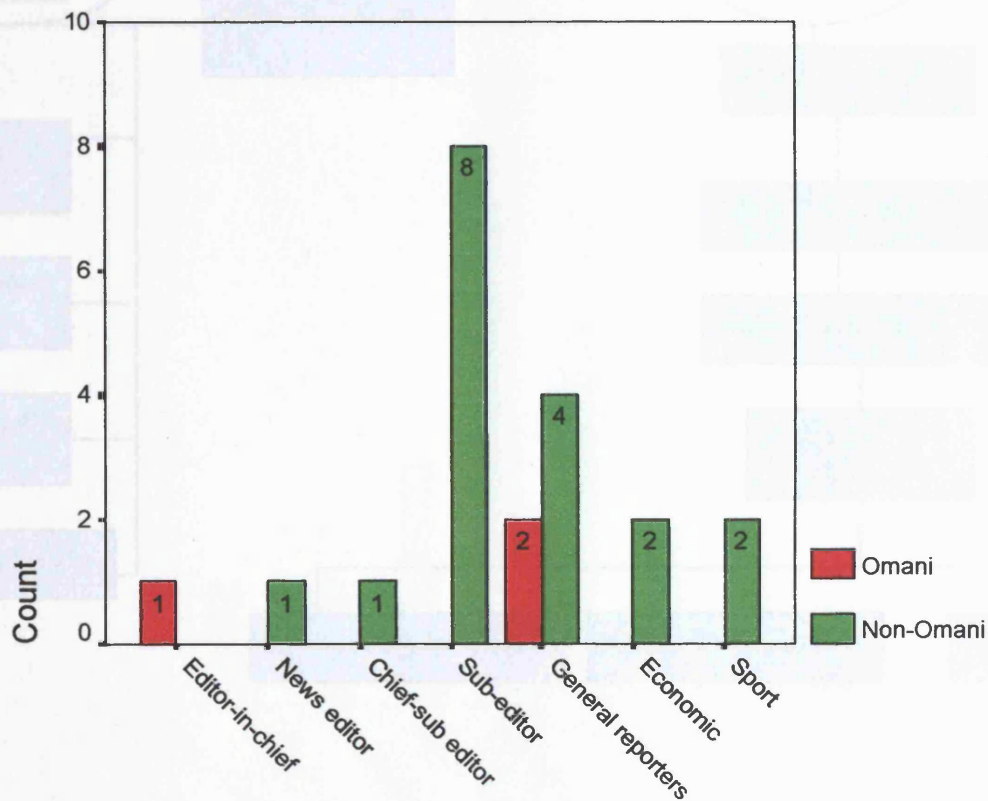
Figure 19: News workers at *Oman Daily Observer*

The shortage of Omani journalists at the *Oman Daily Observer* is apparent in Figure 19. This shortage is primarily due, according to the editor-in-chief, to the paucity of Omani journalists who are sufficiently fluent in English; the paper's use of the English language is a barrier to the involvement of Omanis in the profession. A second cause, the editor-in-chief noted, is the general paucity of well-qualified Omani journalists.

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6.1.2.4. Organisational structure of *Times of Oman*
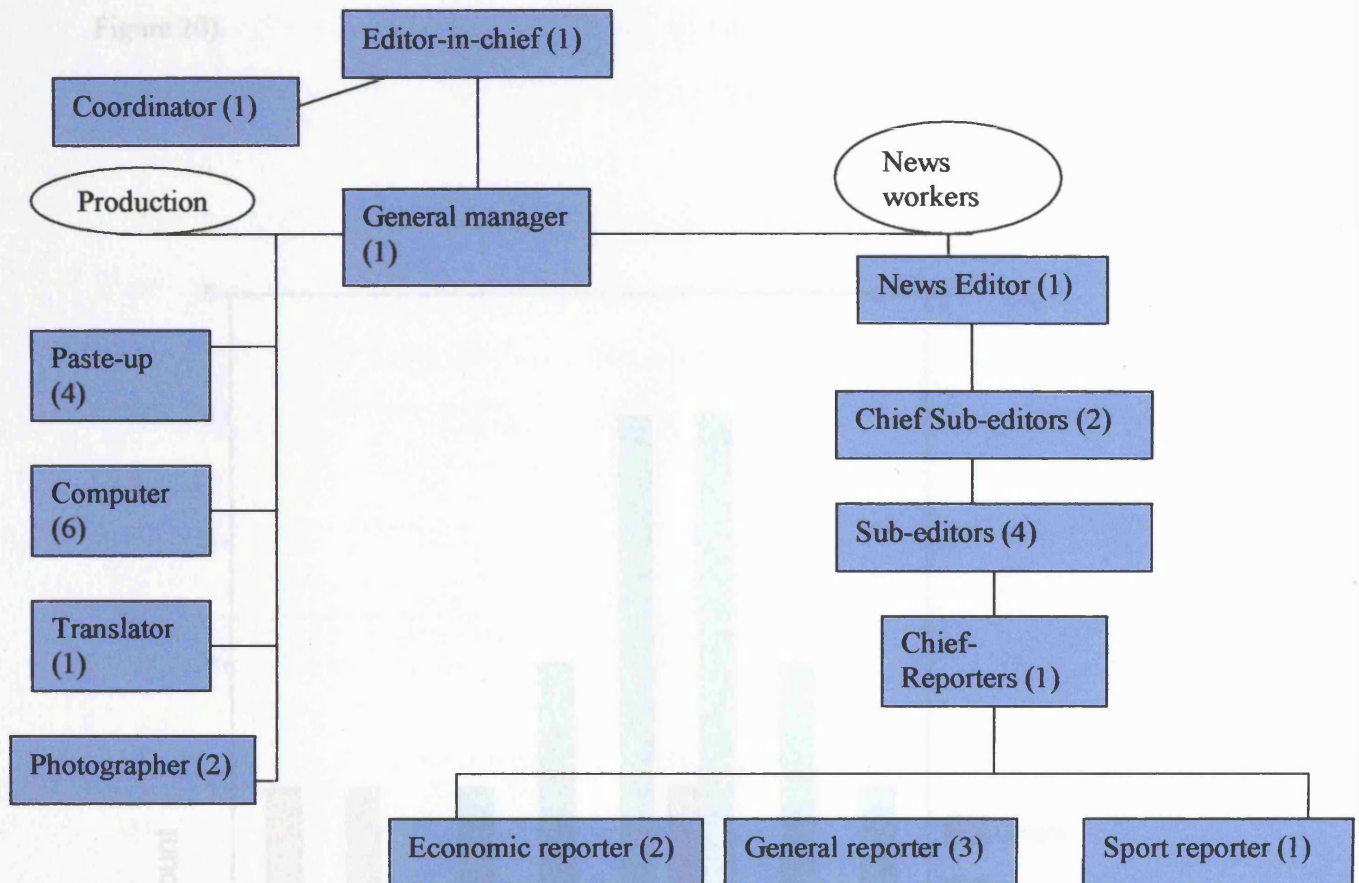
Figure 20: Organisational structure of *Times of Oman*
(This chart is based on findings at the time of the research.)

The structure of the second English-language, private newspaper, was similar to that of the *Observer*. *Times of Oman* employed fewer news workers than the *Observer* (see Figure 20).
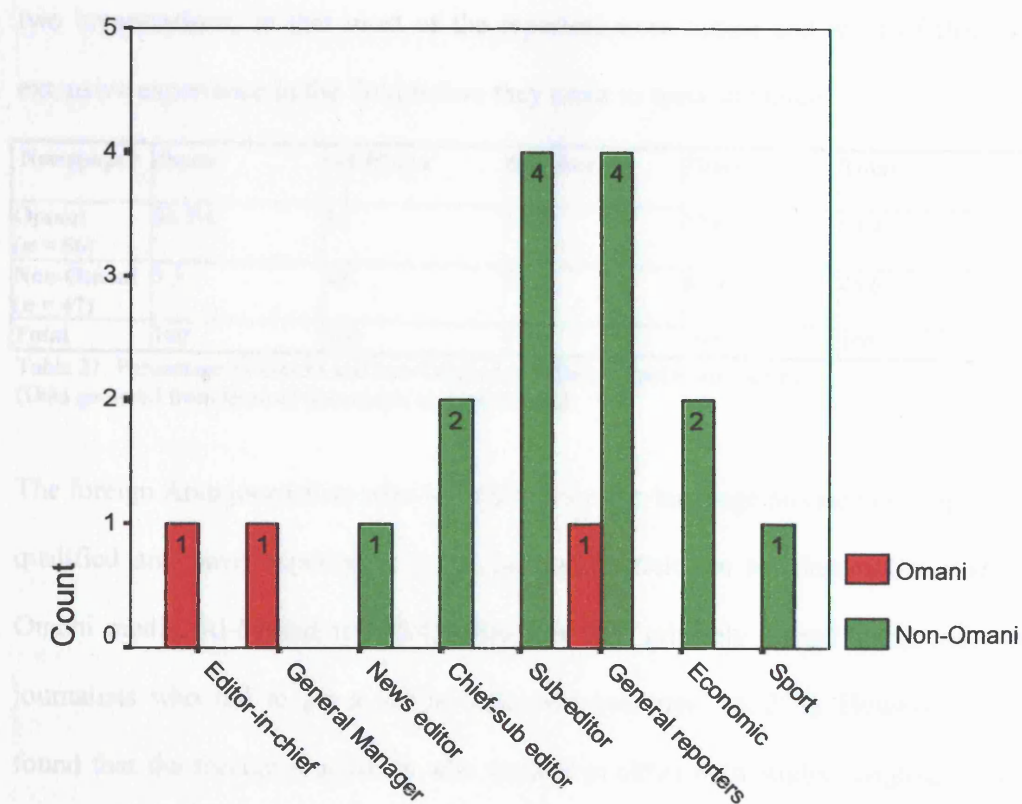
Figure 21: News workers at *Times of Oman*

As at the *Oman Daily Observer*, most of the news workers at the *Times of Oman* are non Omani (i.e., citizens of India working in Oman) (see Figure 21). Many Indians also work in the advertising, administration and production departments.

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6.1.3. General view of journalists at the Omani news organisations

The Arabic-language government newspaper had the highest percentage of Omani journalists (94.7%), while both private and government English-language newspapers had very few Omani journalists (*Observer*, 14.3%, and *Times*, 17.6%) (see Table 21).

There was a different culture in the English-language news organisations than in the other two organisations, in that most of the reporters were Indian and most of them gained extensive experience in the field before they came to work in Oman.

Newspaper	*Oman*	*Al-Watan*	*Observer*	*Times*	Total
Omani (*n* = 56)	94.7%	52	14.3	17.6	54.4
Non-Omani (*n* = 47)	5.3	48	85.7	82.4	45.6
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Table 21: Percentage of Omani and non-Omani journalists at the Omani dailies
(Data gathered from internal documents and interviews)

The foreign Arab journalists who work in the Arabic-language private newspaper are also qualified and have experience in the journalism field. In his descriptive study about Omani media, Al-Mashikhi (1994) wrote that the 'privately owned media only attracts journalists who fail to get a job in their own countries' (p. 277). However, my study found that the foreign journalists who worked in either both Arabic-language private or English-language newspapers were qualified and had extensive experience in the field like their colleagues at the *Observer* and *Times*.

My study found that there are three main groups of Omani journalists: The first includes old journalists who have worked in journalism for a long time but who generally do not have academic certificates in journalism. The second group includes new journalists who

have academic qualifications in journalism studies or another degree in the social sciences, but do not have working experience in the profession. Most of these work for the Arabic-language government newspaper (*Oman*). The third group consists of Omani young persons who have a high school degree or less education. These most often work for the Arabic-language private newspaper (*Al-Watan*).

In general, too few Omanis join this profession. The main problem of employment for the Arabic-language private newspaper is that it pays less than the Arabic-language government owned newspaper, which attracts the graduate Omanis by its high salaries. All the dailies except *Oman* face economic problems in paying high salaries for their journalists. But the *Oman* news organisation employs no more than two persons each year. The foreign journalists are paid lower salaries than the Omanis. Thus, the Arabic-language private newspaper, which cannot find qualified Omani journalists to join the profession, hires high school graduates and trains them inside the newspaper by working with others who have experience in the field. The situation for the English-language news organisations in their search looking for qualified Omani journalists is more complicated because English language competence is another qualification they require, in addition to experience or certificates. They cannot find qualified Omanis with good English language skills, and if they find such a person, they pay him a lower salary than other organisations, private or government owned. In addition, people in the field of journalism must work long hours, with no specific times for going home (Editors-in-chief of *Observer* and *Times*).

Oman has the most Omani journalists. The editor-in-chief of *Oman* was aware of trying to 'Omanise' the news organisation, and he argued that one of *Oman*'s roles and aims is to depend on 'her kids'. Nevertheless, he agreed that one negative effect of the Omanisation is the difference in experience between his workers and those who work in the private newspapers. But he also argued that those professional foreign journalists came from a different environment, which means a different sensitivity and line of thinking about domestic or international events.

Both the news editor and the central desk journalists of *Oman* have a different argument from that of the editor-in-chief. The news editor argued that, 'One of the weak sides for *Oman* newspapers was the quick Omanisation'. One of the central desk's journalists argued that Omani journalists need to work with experienced journalists to gain experience through their daily work. The majority of the domestic reporters I spoke to indicated that they want to work with experienced foreigner journalists.

The private newspapers can avoid employing graduate journalists and paying them a high salary. The Arabic-language private daily (*Al-Watan*), as shown in Table 22, had fewer experienced reporters who deal with domestic news items than the other Arabic newspaper, which has more graduate Omanis. However, *Al-Watan*, as we will see when discussing financial resources, was the most popular newspaper in Oman. Thus, if the newspaper can employ those non-graduate persons with less payment, there is no need for the graduates, who request more money. In addition, as mentioned by the head of the domestic news department in *Al-Watan*, those journalists who have graduated from the

university are more difficult to work with than the non-graduate journalists. 'They think of themselves as editors-in-chief'.

The editor-in-chief of *Observer* argued that two main requirements are needed to_ 'Omanise' the government English-language news organisation, which are the 'right programme' and the 'right budget'. The news organisation should be committed to a long-term programme to employ Omani journalists. This programme would include sending new journalists for training courses abroad and then guiding them inside the organisation. However, this programme cannot be carried out done without a special budget (editor-in-chief of *Observer*). The two points are reasonable in theory, but there were many difficulties in achieving them inside the news organisation. The main obstacle for the government owned newspaper is that the authority to undertake such a programme does not rest with the editor-in-chief. The involvement of a number of bureaucrats, using bureaucratic methods, would be required. The editor-in-chief of the *Observer* told me that he had suggested this programme of 'Omanising' the news organisation many times, but he could not do anything more than that. He faces a problem of employing foreigners also because of the budget.

The editor-in-chief of the other English-language daily (*Times of Oman*) had the same argument that there are no training courses for journalism in Oman and that they (the news organisation) are looking for Omani persons who have journalism certificates and a good command of the English language, but they cannot find them (editor-in-chief and general manager of the *Times of Oman*).

6.1.3.1. Journalist characteristics in this study: (age, nationality, education, experience)

Table 22 gives the characteristics of the news workers in the Omani dailies with regard to age, sex, nationality, education and experiences. The English-language dailies have older employees, on average (30s and 40s).

News worker (number)	Age	Sex	Nationality	Education	Work in recent organisation	Experience (in years)
Al-Watan						
Editor-in-chief = 1 News editor = 1 Central desk = 2 Chief reporter = 1 Reporter = 7 **Total = 12**	40s = 3 30s= 6 20s= 3	M* = 10 F** = 1	Omani = 9 Non-Omani = 3 (Egyptian)	Mid-school =1 High school = 3 BA holders = 5	Minimum <10 years Maximum 30 years	Minimum <1 year Maximum 25 years
Oman						
Editor-in-chief = 1 News editor = 1 Central desk = 2 Chief Reporter = 1 Reporter = 6 Others = 1 **Total = 11**	40s = 1 30s = 5 20s = 5	M = 9 F= 2	Omani = 11 Non-Omani = 0	BA holders = 6 High school = 3	Minimum = 10 years Maximum 29 years	Minimum <1 year Maximum 18 years
Observer						
Editor-in-chief = 1 News editor = 1 Central desk = 2 Chief Reporter = 1 Reporter = 7 Others = 1 **Total = 13**	60s = 1 40s = 4 30s= 7 20s= 1	M = 11 F = 2	Omani = 3 British = 1 Non-Omani = 10 (Indian = 7 Philippines = 1 Sudanese = 1).	MPHIL = 1 MA = 5 BA = 4 Diploma = 1	Less than 10 years	Minimum = < 1 years Maximum = 16 years
Times						
Editor-in-chief = 1 News editor = 1 Central desk = 2 Chief Reporter = 1 Reporter = 5 Others = 2 **Total = 12**	60s = 1 50s =1 40s = 2 30s = 8	M = 11 F= 1	Omani = 3 Non-Omani = 9 (Indian = 8 Sudanese = 1)	PhD = 1 MA = 4 Diploma = 3 BA/B.Sc. = 4	Minimum = 10 years Maximum = 25 years	Minimum = < 1 years Maximum = 25 years
Total all = 49						

Table 22: Characteristics of the interviewees
*M = Male **F = Female

The majority of these news workers are foreigners (mostly Indian) and these employees have more experience in the journalism field on average than the employees of other papers. In contrast, reporters in the Arabic-language dailies are younger (20s and 30s); most of them are Omanis; and they have fewer years of experience, on average, than the reporters of the English-language dailies. Most of the foreign reporters have many years' experience in the journalism field, as well as educational qualifications. In contrast, the Omani reporters on average have fewer qualifications and experiences. This is basically because the media in Oman is very new, compared with the media of other Arabic countries and non-Arabic media. There is only one department of journalism in Oman, which is a part of the college of arts in the only university for the whole country. This department was established in 1987, and the first group of students graduated from this department in 1991. Very few of them joined Omani news organisations. *Oman* (Arabic-language/government) hired the majority of them. Only one Omani reporter worked at *Al-Watan*, and no Omani worked at either of the English-language dailies during the time of my fieldwork. In fact, some reporters to whom I spoke at the two English-language dailies were not aware there was a department of journalism in Oman.

The central desk in three dailies was controlled by the foreign journalists -- Indians, in the case of the two English-language dailies (*Oman Daily Observer* and *Times of Oman*) and Egyptians at the Arabic-language private daily (*Al-Watan*). This department (the central desk) is important as a point of contact between the reporters and the news editor or editor-in-chief. The central desk editor has to check the accuracy of all news stories before they are published.

The news editors at the two Arabic-language dailies were Omanis, while both of them were foreigners at the English-language dailies. However, all the editors-in-chief were Omanis, in keeping with Omani printing and publishing law, which requires that the editor-in-chief should be Omani and must be responsible for everything that is published at his newspaper (PPL, 1984).

Now that I have discussed the ownership and organisational structures of each news organisation, it is essential to look at the press relationship with the government to understand how the government controls both private and government newspapers in Oman.

6.1.4. Government/press relationship

This section discusses the relationship between news workers and the government. In other words, it looks at how the government, in particular the Ministry of Information, affects the news content in the news organisations under study and what journalists think about this relationship.

6.1.4.1. The Printing and Publication Law (PPL)[3]

Chapter 3 on Oman and Omani media discussed the argument, put forward by earlier researchers, that the PPL controls the print media in Oman. This section discusses to

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[3] The PPL was analysed in detail in chapter 3 (Oman and Omani media).

what extent the news workers in the four news organisations are aware of the law and their views about it.

The findings of this study show that few news workers in all Omani news organisations have read the PPL law (see Table 23). Only 34.5% of all reporters have read the law. More news editors (66.7%) and editors-in-chief (100%) than reporters and news desk journalists had read the law.

Journalist	Newspapers									
	Oman (*n* = 11)		Al-Watan (*n* = 12)		Observer (*n* = 12)		Times (*n* = 9)		Total (*n* = 46)	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Reporters	13.8	10.3	13.8	13.8	3.4	24.1	3.4	17.2	34.5	65.5
News desk	25.0	0	12.5	12.5	0	25.0	0	25.0	37.5	62.5
News editor	33.3	0	33.3	0	0	33.3	0	0	66.7	33.3
Editor-in-chief	25.0	0	25.0	0	25.0	0	25.0	0	100.0	0
Total	18.2	6.8	15.9	11.4	4.5	22.7	4.5	15.9	43.1	56.8

Table 23: News workers' answer in each newspaper to the question, 'Have you read the PPL?'

It is obvious, from Table 23, that more of the Arabic-language reporters (*Oman* and *Al-Watan* 13.8%) than their colleagues at the English-language newspapers (*Observer* and *Times of Oman* 3.4%) had read the law.

More reporters on *Oman*'s staff have read the law (4 out of 7 reporters), while half of *Al-Watan*'s reporters have not read the law (4 out of 8). At the English-language dailies, a minority of reporters have read the PPL. Only two reporters, one at each English-language daily, have read the law. The majority of reporters at the English-language dailies have no idea about this law. Many reporters were surprised when I asked them,

'Have you read the PPL?' Their answers show that they have no idea about it. 'No, no idea about that', 'No. We [were] never told that there is a press law here in Oman', '[I] didn't see press and publication law here', 'No no what is it about?' or '[I] have no experience about the laws in the country'. Although the translators at the English-language dailies mentioned that they translated the law into English, I could not find any English-language copy of the law either in the Ministry of Information or with the translators. This high percentage of journalists who have not read the PPL was not just among the reporters; some news desk journalists, who play important roles in selecting news items, also have no idea about the PPL.

The majority of those who have read the PPL argued that the law does not control the newspapers in Oman, although all of them agreed that it should be renewed. Rather, they said, instructions from the Ministry of Information, official sources and editors-in-chief control the daily work of journalists inside the news organisations. As news workers mentioned, the law is old (established in 1975 and renewed in 1984), very general and very broad, and it includes very few elements that deal with journalists. Many news workers mentioned that one could interpret the law in two ways positive and negative.

> Everything [is] not allowed, not allowed, not allowed, punished, punished, and punished. Where is the law that says protect the journalist? If the journalist wrote a news item and the item was true, but it didn't please a minister [the minister would say] 'I want you to punish this journalist' (a reporter at the Arabic-language private newspaper).

Many reporters at the Arabic-language newspapers argued that there is no association that protects the journalist. 'You receive an instruction from the Ministry of Information that

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[you are] not allowed to deal with this topic (a chief reporter at *Oman*). Another reporter argued,

> Let us work under a specific law. The policy of publishing and not publishing is not clear ... and this is the biggest problem in the news organisation.

The news editors and the editors-in-chief in all news organisations all made this type of argument and mentioned that the recent PPL is old. All agreed that it can be interpreted many different ways.

The majority of interviewees who read the law argued that the law has not had an influence on media content, because no one works with it. I was told that they receive many instructions from the Ministry of Information which do not have their basis in the law. Table 24 shows the responses of the reporters and gatekeepers to this question: Which of the following control the daily work inside the news organisation more than the others: instructions from the Ministry of Information and editors-in-chief, self-censorship, or PPL?

Newspaper				
Form of control	*Oman* (*n* = 7)	*Al-Watan* (*n* = 8)	*Observer* (*n* = 8)	*Times* (*n* = 6)
PPL	.0	12.5	.0	.0
Instructions	85.7	75.0	75.0	66.7
Self-censorship	14.3	12.5	12.5	33.3
Other	.0	.0	12.5	.0
Total	100	100	100	100

Table 24: Reporters' and gatekeepers' responses to the question: 'Which of the following control the daily work inside the news organisation more than the others: PPL, instructions or self-censorship'?

It can be seen from the answers of reporters that they believe instructions control the daily work. The next section discusses these instructions.

Results from my fieldwork and interviews indicate that four main types of instructions control the daily work in the Omani news organisations. These instructions can be divided into two main categories: (1) external instructions from outside the news organisations (from the Ministry of Information and official sources) and (2) internal instructions from inside the news organisations (from editor-in-chief, news editor and self-censorship of journalist).

6.1.4.1.1. External instructions

The Ministry of Information gives instructions to all the news organisations, and sometimes individual organisations. Only the head of the domestic department (experienced non-Omani) at *Al-Watan* argued that the instructions (both oral or formal) coming from the Ministry of Information do not control the work of journalists. This reporter believed the instructions are just for organising the work in all news organisations. He argued that the journalist himself is the one who knows how to obtain the news items. However, all other reporters in the domestic departments at both *Oman* and *Al-Watan* argued that the instructions control their work inside the news organisations.

Both the *Oman* and the *Al-Watan* reporters disagreed with many instructions that came from the Ministry of Information and argued that the journalist himself, by his experience

and his work inside the news organisation, knows what he should write or should not. Reporters mentioned also that no discussion of these instructions is allowed.

The English-language news workers usually receive these instructions from the Ministry of Information via the editor-in-chief (as at the *Observer*) or from both the editor-in-chief and the news editor, as at the *Times of Oman*. All the news workers at the English-language dailies argued that these instructions are respectable. But at the same time the majority of them argued that it is very challenging to write a 'unique story' while adhering to these restrictions.

The editor-in-chief of *Al-Watan* argued that some of the ministry's instructions do not agree with the law; however, he said this does not harm the profession. 'We don't ignore their instructions, but we don't let them control our editorial policies'. However, the Ministry of Information punished *Al-Watan* by closing it for one day on 14 May 1989 and requiring the newspaper to pay a financial fine. This was because an article discussed the influence of Syria on Lebanon's situation. The newspaper reprinted the article from another media source. The editor-in-chief argued that the article was 'positive' and there was no legal basis for stopping the newspaper from publishing. But because the Ministry of Information is the judge, the newspaper then accepted this punishment without objection (the editor-in-chief of *Al-Watan*).

The editor-in-chief of the second private daily (*Times*) argued that the newspaper is just like a PR paper which follow the instructions set by the Ministry of Information without discussion. He argued that the Ministry places no trust in journalists.

The editor-in-chief of *Oman* and *Observer* argued that the Ministry of Information transmits instructions that are related to high-level policies. The Ministry's officials do not discuss these instructions, with the exception of some, which are orally transmitted.

6.1.4.1.2. Internal Instructions

The reporters receive formal letters of instructions from the editor-in-chief or the news editor. At the Arabic-language dailies, I observed, letters are typically submitted to all related persons such as the news editor, the head of the domestic department and the news workers. These individuals have to read it and sign on it. Oral instructions also arrived from the Ministry of Information to the editor-in-chief, who conveyed these to news workers in a way that suited him. During my fieldwork I also saw examples of the editor-in-chief (at *Al-Watan*) or the news editor (at *Oman*) giving written instructions to the news workers telling them to follow the instructions from sources, with the warning that the news workers would be held responsible if they did not follow such instructions. The punishment of expulsion for the news worker (being fired from the news organisation) was stated in the memos.

6.1.4.1.3. Self-censorship

In addition to all these instructions, self-censorship is practised by the news worker in dealing with domestic news items. Many reporters at *Oman* mentioned that they are confused about the guidelines for publishing domestic items, because they sometimes expect items to be published, but then these are not. As a result, they become discouraged about researching news items that in the end will not be published. As many reporters mentioned, when there are many instructions and restrictions, the self-censorship will be higher. Reporters at the four news organisations argued that after spending time inside the news organisation, they know what kind of domestic news needs to be covered and how it will be covered.

6.1.4.2. Types of restrictions

I categorise the restrictions that limit the work of the four news organisations into three types: 1) political, 2) socio-cultural, and 3) linguistic restrictions.

6.1.4.2.1. Political restrictions

According to the Ministry of Information, news about the Sultan, the royal family, Omani ministers, Omani foreign policy and Omani government projects should not deal with these topics negatively in text or photo. This is because, according to the government, such materials will cause confusion among the people (PPL, 1984). Restrictions based on this principle come directly from the Ministry of Information from time to time, and there is no discussion about them. For example, at one point all news organisations were told

that they should not write about whether the peace negotiations between Arab countries and Israel had failed. The editors-in-chief pay keen attention to these kinds of instructions and follow them very carefully.

6.1.4.2.2. Socio-cultural restrictions

Another kind of restrictions relate to the society's culture. For example, no item may be published relating to social problems, such as crimes or juvenile delinquency, tribal problems or unemployment in the Sultanate, unless the item was submitted by the PR office of the Royal Oman Police (ROP).

Another type of socio-cultural restriction is that the Ministry of Information sends lists of sheiks, doctors, and *saiid* (honoured individuals). No one who is not on these lists can be referred to in a newspaper as a sheikh, *saiid* or doctor.

Some government restrictions pertain to sport reporting. For example, the newspapers are told not to publish any news items about karate, or any item that relates to noise from games or fights between clubs. One reporter gives an example about a sport event,

> The Gulf [football] championship was in Oman. The national team was facing many problems, but the newspapers received instructions from the Ministry of Information not to cover any event related to the team except the official news items that came from the official channels (a reporter at *Al-Watan*).

6.1.4.2.3. Linguistic instructions

The third kind of restrictions concerned the use of formal Arabic language (by Arabic-language newspapers). The Ministry of Information sends a list of words to all private and government newspapers. For example, reporters were told they should not use 'computer', but '*hasoop*' (the Arabic word for computer). Words like 'attack' and 'demolish' are not supposed to be written. No words that have sexual connotations such as 'molest' may be written. For example, one letter from the Ministry of Information to all four news organisations instructed that they should not use the words 'killed in' or 'died in...' when describing missing people in any natural catastrophes. Instead of that, the papers should say 'number of casualties...' or 'cause of missing (number of) people'.

All these restrictions are sent to the editor-in-chief, and he is responsible for telling his news workers about them. Changes are made to the restrictions from time to time according to changes in the daily life of the country and in what the government wants to present through the media. According to the editors-in-chief, these restrictions were not as numerous in the year 2000 as in the years before.

6.1.5. Economic influences

This section discusses financial resources for both government and private news organisations in Oman, analysing advertising revenues, circulation figures, government subsidies and readership figures of the Omani newspapers.

6.1.5.1. Advertising revenue

All Omani newspapers depend heavily on advertisements as one of their main sources of income. However, the Omani advertising market is very small compared with those of other Arabian and Gulf countries. (manager of Al-Omania for Advertising and Public Relations (OAPR), 21 May 2000). The manager of the OAPR argued that the private sector in Oman is unaware of the importance of advertising, and that few people, as yet, are trained in the field of advertising.

Although the formal rates for advertising were the same for all four dailies, each news organisation was able to make its own discounts to attract advertisers.

Year	Newspaper			
	Al-Watan	*Oman*	*Observer*	*Times of Oman*
1998	3 million OR	2,500 OR	2,150 OR	1,400 OR
1999	2,400 OR	2,200 OR	1.700 OR	1,700 OR

Table 25: Advertisement revenues earned by for the Omani news organisations, 1998 and 1999. OR = Omani Rials
Source: Al-Omania for Advertising and Public Relations (OAPR), 2000

Table 25 shows that the advertising revenues of all four newspapers decreased in 1999 from their level in 1998. The manager of the OAPR argued that this was because of the country's general economic difficulties in 1999. This may be one of the reasons that three of the newspapers (*Al-Watan*, *Oman*, *Oman Observer*) started printing with glossy paper in July 1999 to attract more advertisers.

It is apparent from Table 25 that *Al-Watan* (the Arabic-language private newspaper) attracted more advertisers than any other daily in Oman. This news organisation pays

great attention to the importance of the advertisements. It is a challenge for the newspaper to be in the news market, especially after cuts made in government subsidies in 1995 (editor-in-chief). Therefore, the newspaper offers advertisers many more advantages than do the other news organisations, especially the government ones. *Al-Watan* has four sheets of glossy paper, which the other dailies do not. The editor-in-chief himself supervises everything about advertisements and gives instructions to production personnel. An example of the paper's efforts to attract advertisers can be seen in the issue of 12 November 2000, which had a glossy front and back page with two big advertisements on each and included other advertisements, though not glossy ones, inside. These advantages are not given to advertisers by the other dailies. Both editors-in-chief of the two government news organisations mentioned that their news organisations are not advertisement bulletins and they cannot let advertisers control the newspaper.

In contrast, the editor-in-chief of *Al-Watan* explained his policy by mentioning that the news organisation lost a lot of money because of glossy paper and this loss 'should be recovered as soon as we can'. It is worth mentioning that when news organisations changed to the use of glossy paper they did not increase the rates of advertising. The editor-in-chief of *Al-Watan* mentioned that his newspaper did not want to convert to the use of glossy paper because it already had its advertisers, whereas when the government newspapers (*Oman* and *Oman Daily Observer*) changed to glossy paper, *Al-Watan* had to do so to keep their advertisers in Oman's small market. The decision of whether to use glossy paper, unlike the decision of whether to increase prices, came as an individual decision on the part of the editor-in-chief (*Al-Watan* editor-in-chief).

The other private, but English-language daily (*Times of Oman*) lost many advertisers because of not using glossy paper. 'All the colour advertisements go to them…In spite of the high price, we are under pressure to go for it (glossy paper)' (editor-in-chief of the *Times*).

Thus, the two private newspapers were under financial pressure as a result of the government news organisations' change to glossy paper. Both private news organisations (the one which changed to glossy paper and the one which did not) lost lots of money because of the high price of the new machines required to print on glossy paper, and the government's absorption of this cost without an increase in advertising rates.

Regarding other dailies, *Oman* had the second highest advertising revenues. However, the editor-in-chief of *Oman* indicated that the newspaper did not have advantage of receiving the government's advertisements. *Oman Daily Observer* had the third-highest advertising revenues, and the *Times of Oman* had the lowest rates for the year 1998, as did the *Observer* in the following year. The editor-in-chief of the *Observer* argued that advertisements are very important for the news organisation, but they should be controlled and should not affect the content.

6.1.5.2. Circulation figures

Circulation figures are another element that affects the position of news organisations in the market. However, gaining access to these figures is one of the biggest difficulties for

conducting research about the Arabic press in general (Tarabay, 1994), and Omani news organisations in particular (Al-Mashekhi, 1996; Al-Shaqsi, 2000). To deal with this problem, I depended on the different available sources that mentioned circulation figures in Omani newspapers. I also collected data from each news organisation by interviewing distribution departments and advertising departments, and obtaining feedback from editors-in-chief, news editors, and journalists about the distribution of their newspaper.
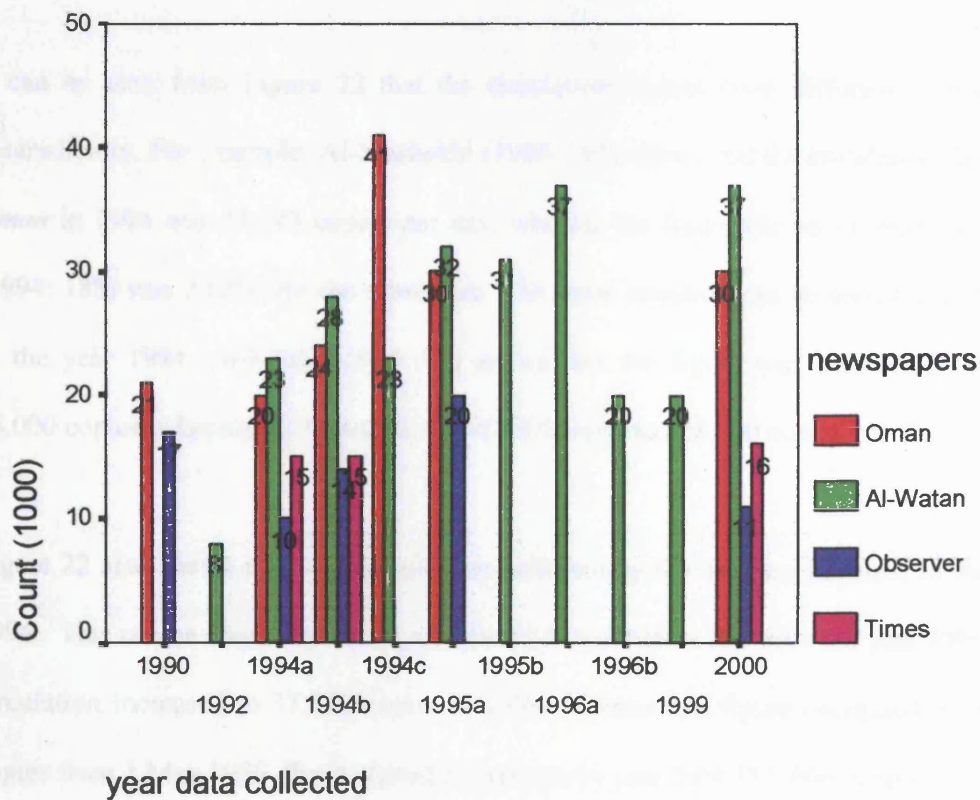
Figure 22: Circulation figures at Omani dailies
Sources: Al-Mashikhi, 1994: 50, 54, 100, 102; Noor Al-Deen, 1994: 188; Al-Mashekhi, 1996: 103; Al-Kindi, 1995: 28; Al-Hasani, 1996. I collected other figures for the years from through 2000 from each newspaper.

Figure 22 gives a general idea about the comparative position of the news organisations

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with regard to circulation. In the years of 1994, 1995 and 2000, for example, *Al-Watan*

(private Arabic-language daily) had the highest circulation figures. *Oman* had the second

highest circulation in those years (1994a and 1995a). Figure 22 also shows that *Al-Watan*

was the only newspaper that increased its circulation between the years 1995 (32,500

copies) and 2000 (37,000 copies). However, neither government newspaper increased its

figures in these mentioned years (30,000 copies for *Oman* and 20,000 copies for

Observer). *Times of Oman* had the lowest circulation (15,000 to 16,000 copies).

It can be seen from Figure 22 that the circulation figures from different sources are

contradictory. For example, Al-Mashekhi (1996: 103) shows that the circulation figure of

Oman in 1994 was 24,543 copies per day, whereas the figure shown by Noor Al-Deen

(1994: 188) was 20,000 for the same year. The same situation can be seen for *Al-Watan*

in the year 1994. Al-Kindi (1995: 26) shows that the figure was between 20,000 to

25,000 copies, whereas Al-Mashekhi (1996: 103) reported 28,000 copies per day.

Figure 22 also shows that newspapers were affected by the increase in prices in the year

1996. This can be shown by the figures for *Al-Watan* before and after the year 1996. The

circulation increased to 37,010 copies in 1996, whereas this figure decreased to 20,000

copies from 1 May 1996. But it started to increase by year 2000 (37, 000 copies).

As in any developing country, the circulation figures of any news organisation in Oman

are very confidential. "It is like 'the woman's age'; you cannot tell" (the editor-in-chief

of *Oman*). This is because news organisations try to attract advertisers by concealing their

circulation figures and giving high numbers.

Al-Mashikhi (1994: 112) found that the circulation figures of the English-language dailies are higher than those of the Arabic-language dailies. However, I found, as Table 26 shows, that one Arabic paper (*Al-Watan*) has a higher circulation than both English newspapers (see chapter 3: Oman and Omani Media).

	Newspapers			
	Arabic-language Newspapers		**English-language newspapers**	
	Oman	*Al-Watan*	*Observer*	*Times of Oman*
Circulation figure	30,000	37,000	20,000	16,000
Total	67,000		36,000	

Table 26: Comparative daily newspaper circulation figures in the year 2000

The *Al-Watan* editor-in-chief was very comfortable and confident in giving that newspaper's circulation figures. However, I faced difficulties in obtaining circulation figures from the government newspapers. But the news editor, training manager, and central desk journalists indicated that the circulation of *Oman* is very low and the returning unsold issues from the daily public sales are very high.

6.1.5.3. Government subsidies

Table 27 shows that the private press obtained subsidies from the government in the years 1990 through 1994. *Al-Watan* newspaper obtained 54,000 Omani Rials (around 90,000 sterling pounds) in 1994, but the subsidies decreased to 20,000 (around 37, 000 sterling

pounds) in 1994. Subsidies of the *Times of Oman* increased from 10,000 Omani Rials

(16, 000 sterling pounds) to 20,000 in 1994.

Subsidy	Newspapers	
	Al-Watan	*Times of Oman*
1990	OR 54,000	OR20, 000
1994	OR10, 000	OR20, 000

Table 27: Government subsidies for private Omani news organisations
Sources: Al-Mashikhi, 1994; Al-Mashekhi, 1996

From 1995, the government replaced its subsidies to the private newspapers with a long-

term interest-free loan for five years (1994-2000) (editors-in-chief of *Al-Watan* and the

Times of Oman).

As in other Arabic countries, the mass media in Oman are political projects (see chapter

3: Oman and Omani media), used to achieve the government's aims. To what extent can

Omani private newspapers survive without government subsidies? Journalism in Oman is

still conducted by small businesses owned by individuals. From the early 1970s until the

early 1990s, the government in Oman helped the private press (newspapers and

magazines) with subsidies, official subscriptions and long-term loans. However, when the

government stopped providing these direct subsidies in 1995, the printed organisations

were asked to find other ways to continue to survive in the small market. Two weekly

magazines (*Al-Aqeeda* and *Al-Adhwa*) could not continue to publish. However, the

government still provides support to newspapers in the form of long-term loans.

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6.1.5.4. Readership

Figure 23 shows that the readership of the Arabic-language daily newspapers is larger than that of English-language newspapers. The readership of *Oman* was high in 1985 and started to decrease by 1994.
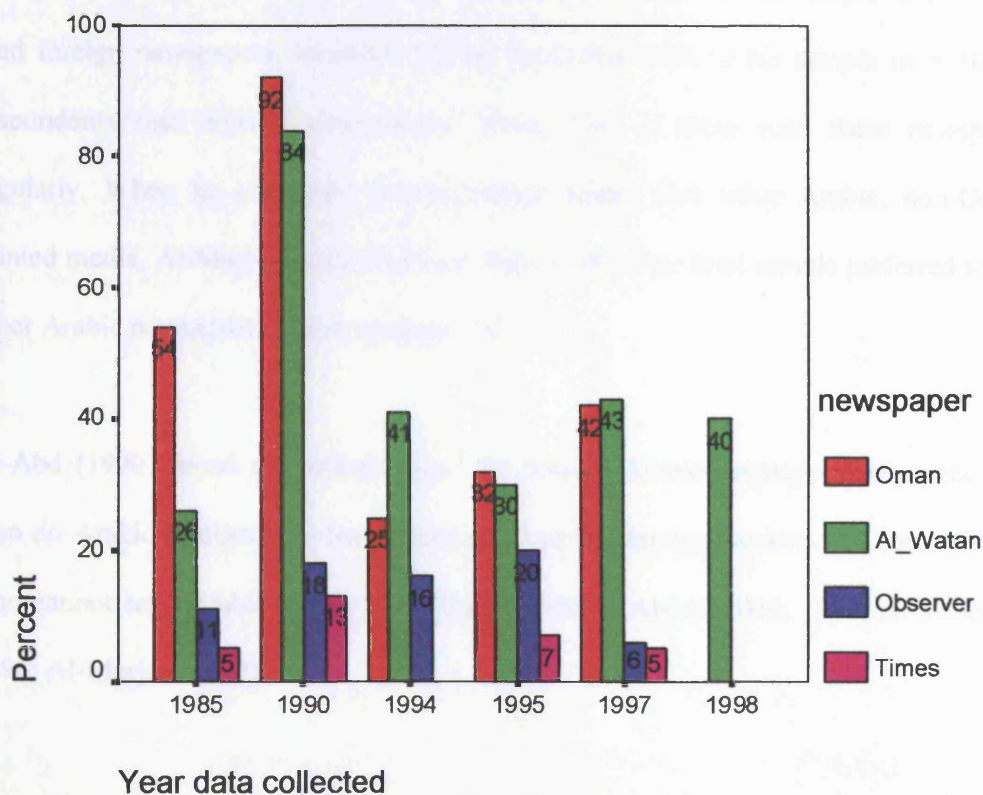
Figure 23: Percentages of surveyed people in Oman who read the four Omani newspapers by year
Sources: Al-Abd (1990); Al-Mashikhi (1994); Al-Mashekhi (1996: 121); MEMRB (1994); PARC (Pan Arab Research Centre) (1998); Al-Murjan (1997: 256).

In 1995, the readership of the Arabic-language newspapers was nearly the same (*Oman*, 32% of (*n* = 1, 517) and *Al-Watan*, 30%) (PARC cited in Al-Mashekhi, 1996: 121). In contrast, during the years 1994 to 1997 the readership of *Al-Watan* increased year after year. It was the most widely read newspaper in Oman for the years 1994, 1997 and 1998.

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The government English-language newspaper (*Oman Observer*) was read more than the private English-language one, as the available figures show.

In contrast, Al-Murjan (1997) found that only 48% of readers (*n* = 181) read Omani newspapers frequently. The same study found that about 95% of the sample said that they read foreign newspapers. Mashikhi (1994) found that 82% of his sample (*n* = 103) of respondents read foreign newspapers. About 73% of them read these newspapers regularly. When he compared Omani printed media with other Arabic, non-Omani, printed media, Al-Mashikhi (1994) found that 66.4% of the total sample preferred to read other Arabic newspapers and magazines (ibid: 322).

Al-Abd (1990) found that Omanis read the foreign Arabic-language newspapers more than do Arabic foreigners in the country. In contrast, foreign workers and some Omanis who cannot read Arabic mostly read English dailies (Al-Mashikhi, 1994; Al-Mashekhi, 1996; Al-Murjan, 1997).

Generally, the percentage of the population that read newspapers in Oman is low compared with other developing countries (see Al-Mashikhi, 1994; Al-Murjan, 1997) and compared with the total population, which is two million. Previous studies also have shown that the percentage of the population that reads non-Omani newspapers is high. This argument of high readership of foreign newspapers inside the country was supported by the majority of journalists, especially in the Arabic-language newspapers, in this study. They argued that the circulation of the Arabic Gulf newspapers in Oman is

increasing, while they also argued that readers in Oman did not 'trust' Omani newspapers any more. Many journalists, news desk journalists and news editors in the Arabic-language dailies talked about this issue in the interviews.

> The problem of our newspapers is that they can't compete with the foreign newspapers inside the country. I mean it is a real impasse in the history of the national press. There is no external newspaper in any country which circulates more than the internal newspapers, except here (central desk journalist in *Oman*).

However, the editors-in-chief and the foreigner journalists did not argue that the Omani newspapers face a competition from foreign newspapers inside the country. Their argument was that readers can only learn about domestic news from the local newspapers.

The editor-in-chief of *Oman* disagreed with his reporters and central desk and the news editor. He argued that the newspaper attracts many readers and that readers play an important role regarding changing many aspects in the society by their letters to the newspaper. He gave as an example a letter to the editor regarding changing the clock's ring at the beginning of each hour in the radio.

The same argument was heard from news workers at the English-language newspapers. A central desk journalist in *Observer* argued that,

> Even with Gulf papers I don't think there is any major competition as such. Because people who are interested in local stories definitely read the *Observer* or *Times of Oman*, because other Gulf papers cannot give local stories (central desk's journalist in *Observer*).

Another argument was that any other newspaper that came to the country would pay high prices for transport and distribution. Therefore, the circulation would be very limited (editor-in-chief of *Oman* and editor-in-chief of *Al-Watan*).

The editor-in-chief argued that *Oman*'s articles and daily columns relate to the daily life of the people; therefore, as he mentioned, many readers read the newspaper. One of these columns, which he supported, was the news editor's. However, a few days after my interview with the editor-in-chief, the paper stopped publishing this column. Through other interviews and chats with news desk journalists, I found that the news editor presented an article, but the editor-in-chief refused to publish it. Therefore, the news editor preferred to stop writing the daily column. This difference of opinions between the senior management (editor-in-chief) and the staff (editors and journalists) show that the newspaper follows an unclear policy in order to improve the quality of the newspaper to reach more readers.

The editor-in-chief of the *Observer* argued that the aim of the newspaper is to help the reader to know about Oman. Reporters do their job within certain limitations and instructions set by the Ministry of Information, which are highly respected at this news organisation. All the reporters and editors at the newspaper agreed with their editor-in-chief about the importance of in respecting the limitations and instructions, even though that they disagreed with some of these instructions.

The news editor of the *Times of Oman* argued that the paper has a very large readership and the newspaper is for 'all Omani society'. However, the editor-in-chief argued that the paper faced many pressures from the reader to write things that related to their lives, which it could not do because of many restrictions from the Ministry of Information. 'Many readers have phoned the newspaper using strong language to complain about its lack of coverage of things relating to them' (editor-in-chief).

I argue that the editors-in-chief and the officials in the Ministry of Information are likely to be aware of the competition from other Gulf and Arabic newspapers inside the country. This sense of competition leads them to develop and improve their contents, especially the domestic contents. The journalists of the Omani newspapers, including highly placed ones, pay attention to the increasing number of other Gulf and Arabic newspapers in the country. Some journalists for the Omani newspapers are also correspondents for these non-Omani newspapers. Their writing in the foreign newspapers is different from their writing in the Omani press (e.g., see the coverage of medical mistakes in Oman in chapter 5). When I asked them about the reason, they responded that when they write for a non-Omani newspaper they write without restrictions. There is no doubt that most domestic news items can be found in the local newspapers, but when the content of domestic news items does not satisfy the needs of the readers, they will look for another paper. It is also worth mentioning that the prices of some newspapers like *Al-Khaleeg* and *Al-Byan* are the same as those of the Omani newspapers (200 *biza* [25 pound sterling]).

6.1.6. Summary

In this section I have briefly discussed the history, organisational structure, and workers in each of the four Omani news organisations. As I stated at the outset of section 2, the private newspapers are smaller and less bureaucratic organisations than the government owned newspapers. The advantage of the organisational structure of the private newspapers is that the editor-in-chief directly controls the news organisation, whereas the government-owned newspapers have a larger and more complex hierarchy of decision-making. The editors-in-chief of government-owned papers are responsible for editorial functions, but other departments manage other functions, such as advertisements and financial affairs. This means that the editor-in-chief is not the one who has the final word in the news organisation. But even private news organisations are not totally independent organisations. Their editorial policy is still controlled by the Ministry of Information, as is that of the government newspapers.

It is obvious that there is a shortage of Omani news workers in the Omani media in general. The government Arabic-language newspaper attracts graduates, but the private Arabic-language newspaper depends on professional Arabic journalists to train new high school journalists. The English-language newspapers are highly dependent on professional, well-experienced journalists.

Advertising revenues and government loans (for private newspapers only) are the main financial resources for Omani news organisations. The most recent figures of advertising,

circulation and readership show that the Arabic-language private newspaper (*Al-Watan*) has the highest levels of advertising, circulation and readership. There is an increasing readership for foreign newspapers inside the country due to the 'poor coverage' of domestic issues in the Omani newspapers, from the researchers' and many interviewees'‾ point of view.

Section 6.1 has looked at ownership and control of Omani news organisations as external factors affecting news content. It has shown that the government controls the content of the newspapers (both private and public), management behaviours and organisational structures of the four Omani dailies. The next section discusses how internal organisational factors affect news content through the daily work of journalism practices.

6.2. ORGANISATIONAL INFLUENCES ON DOMESTIC NEWS ITEMS

News production researchers (see chapter 2) have argued that analysing the 'insiders' or the processes of news production in news organisations is one of the essential ways to study the influences on media content. Accordingly, this section presents a micro-level analysis that deals with the journalistic practices in gathering and selecting news items. This section discusses three main areas: interaction between sources and journalists, journalist-editor interaction, and news values in gathering and selecting domestic news items.

6.2.1. News Gathering

Before discussing the influences of sources on media content, it is essential to obtain a⁻

general view of sources of domestic news items in the Omani news organisations. This

helps to explain the reasons why some newspapers depend on certain sources more than

others.

6.2.1.1. News sources

There are four main sources of domestic news items for Omani news organisations: the

Oman News Agency (ONA), Public Relations (PR) departments, reporters and internal

correspondents. Fewer than ten non-specialist journalists in each of the four news

organisations cover all the events in the country. The Arabic-language newspapers have

internal correspondents, while the English-language dailies do not. *Oman* (the

government Arabic-language newspaper) has more internal correspondents than the

private Arabic-language paper (*Al-Watan*). The *Oman Daily Observer* and the *Times of*

Oman depend on the ONA to cover domestic news items that cannot be covered by their

reporters.

6.2.1.1.1. Oman News Agency (ONA)

By a royal decree, the ONA is the official source for formal domestic news in the country

(see chapter 3). News items about the Sultan, high officials or the royal divan, for

example, can only be printed as received from the ONA. One of the essential roles of all

reporters in both private and government news organisations is to look at the ONA

bulletin and print the news items that are covered by it without changes.

> What I change in the text of copy provided by the ONA is a matter of a
> headline, maybe.... I change some simple things. ...Most of the minister's
> news items are covered by the ONA. When we phone sources, for
> example, to cover news, they tell us it'll be coming from the ONA (A
> reporter in a private newspaper).

Many Omani reporters were not satisfied with this situation. They argued that the ONA

competes with them in gathering domestic news items. When I talked with the Omani

reporters in the Arabic-language dailies, most of them responded that they are forced to

accept the domestic news items as covered by the ONA. Otherwise, they would be

questioned by the administration of the newspaper and might be punished. I found an

instruction signed by the news editor of *Oman* in the domestic newsroom, which said that

any news item from the ONA should be used. When I asked the news editor about that,

he responded that the newspaper is required to accept the news items that come from the

ONA. The news editor and the editor-in-chief of *Oman* said that they would be

questioned, by the council board and the Ministry of Information, if they did not. The

same argument was made by the editor-in-chief of the private Arabic-language paper (*Al-*

Watan). All the reporters and editors-in-chief disapproved of the monopolistic situation

of the ONA in relation to the Arabic dailies. They argued that the situation does not serve

the interests of journalism in the country. Only one organisation (ONA) gives the

domestic news items to all dailies in the country, with the result that most of the

newspapers' domestic items look like copies of each other.

In contrast, the foreign reporters at the English-language dailies argued that the ONA items help them to cover domestic news items. This is because of the shortage of reporters, the lack of correspondents in the Omani cities, and the difficulties of gaining access to sources.

6.2.1.1.2. Public relation and information offices (PRs.)

As chapter 5 (content analysis) showed, the official sources are the main sources in domestic news stories. Thus it is not that unusual to see reporters telephone, or get telephoned b y, the PR departments in the government organisations. To get a story, a reporter has to telephone these PR people to ask them about any news in their Ministries. Most reporters, and even the people who are in charge in the newspapers, argued that they had a hard time reaching these official sources. Only three reporters of all the reporters at the four news organisations argued that the relationship between the official sources and news organisations has improved. In contrast, many reporters argued that dealing with official sources has become worse. 'In the past, we could reach formal sources, and had a very strong relationship with officials, but this is changed now' (reporter at *Al-Watan*).

All the reporters at the government dailies, except a sports reporter at *Oman*, argued that the offices of PR in the ministries control the domestic news items, and that there is no direct relationship with the officials but by these channels.

> I think the official source controls the news item 100% and maybe more...The source may telephone you at night and tell you to remove the

news that he gave you in the morning very easily... **it isn't always you who decides; sometimes you are forced to publish this news item.** (A reporter at *Oman*; emphasis added).

The training manager in the same newspaper, who had been a news editor, indicated that interventions from outside the news organisation were one of the reasons that he left his former position:

> Most ministers in the ministers' Council intervene in your work. If you published a news item for a minister, but he disliked this news, you expect a hot telephone call next morning [accusing you of] defamation and threatening.

Many experienced journalists in the English-language government dailies faced the same difficulties in dealing with PR offices.

> It's not very easy [dealing with] the government officials. Quite [a few] of them do insist on first checking, you know, seeing the draft of stories and ask[ing] to make changes ... revise the story according to what should be done.... This should not happen; because the journalist is experienced and professional (reporter at *Observer*).

Another reporter compared the relationship with that in his country (India) and said,

> [In] countries like India where I was working... there were people free to talk. They want[ed] to talk. And we are free to write whatever we want, even [a] negative report. **But here people have many secrets in their operations...** They (sources) give you press releases and they want you to go by whatever they give [you]. And you [are] not supposed to get news [on] your own. That culture [of being free to talk] is not [practiced] in this part of the world. And if you write something, even [a] positive report, people come and say, who told you to write about this? (A reporter at *Observer*; emphasis added).

However, most reporters in the private, English-language daily argued that the official sources are cooperative if the reporter avoids using the PR stories and meets the officials

directly. 'But without saying anything negative about them', as one said. Nevertheless, I did not observe differences between this newspaper and the others in the ways reporters dealt with domestic news items. The reporters were receiving items from the PR by fax or formal letters. If the item was in Arabic, they gave it to the translator.

I found that all the newsrooms receive official letters from the Ministry of Information and PR telling reporters to cover events in the country. 'They (the Ministry and the PR) tell us the news item arrived to you ready-made. We cannot give you more' (reporter at *Al-Watan*).

ROP, defence, Country's Council (*Al-Dawla*) and sometimes consultant council (*Al-Shura*) news items come directly, mostly with pictures, from the PR departments in those organisations. Sometimes the source gets angry if the newspaper does not publish his news item or even if the newspaper shortens the item. On 19 April 2000, the Country's Council sent to the ONA a news item about a meeting between the head of the Country's Council and another official from a different country. *Oman* accepted the item from the ONA, shortened it and published it. Making the story shorter displeased the Country's Council, which sent a formal letter to *Oman* on 23 April telling the news organisation to publish any news item in full without cutting any text next time. The source wrote 'this should not happen in the future'.

In three instances during my fieldwork, government organisations invited reporters to cover an event, and when the reporters arrived they could not attend the conferences and were told that the item would be sent by fax. There was no obvious difference between private or government newspapers in this pattern. Individuals at all news organisations reported this happening many times.

On the same day as an event, the PR department of the organisation involved writes a news item about the event and sends the item by fax to the ONA and to the four newspapers. Many reporters at all dailies said that they do not make many changes in the PR items and publish them as they are. When I asked them why they do that, they said that the item was ready for publication and the PR staff had qualifications in journalism, so there was no need to change the items that came from them. They also mentioned the difficulties they had gaining access to another information about of these news items.

However, reporters sometimes can catch the officials themselves during conferences or opening projects and get exclusive stories from them. They try to avoid the PR staff, but even in this case the PR staff may telephone later at night before the story is printed and ask the reporter not to publish it.

> Sometimes you get an exclusive story on an occasion, but get surprised when his [the official source's] manager or the PR person telephones you to say, 'don't use the story' (*Oman* reporter).

The majority of reporters, at all four newspapers, both the Arabic-language or English-language, private and government owned, reported facing such cases. The PR sources follow the news item that they want to publish from its initial submission through printing. If anything displeases them, they telephone the Ministry of Information telling them about the changes in the item or telephone the editor-in-chief. Sometimes they send a formal letter to the Ministry of Information, and the reporter will be questioned. Many reporters reported, especially in the Arabic-language government newspaper, that in such instances they have received attention from the Ministry of Information or from their news organisation.

Furthermore, if the reporter is the one who wants to obtain information from the PR source, he or she faces many bureaucratic obstacles. Some sources ask for a formal letter from the news organisation requesting an interview with anyone in charge in the organisation. If the source agrees to be interviewed, he asks to read the questions first. Normally reporters send questions with a formal letter to the PR staff and wait for a response. Many reporters showed me letters they had sent to sources asking to cover events or to conduct interviews. Many sources take a long time just to respond to the formal letter. Written answers were a normal response in all newsrooms during the fieldwork. It took one source six months to respond to one of these letters; others took three to four months. Some PR sources asked the reporter to show them the whole article before publication.

All the editors-in-chief agreed that an official source in Oman is powerful, and all news organisations have to print official news items. The editor-in-chief of *Oman* argued that the PR departments in government organisations handicap the creativity of the news organisations. The editor-in-chief of *Al-Watan* mentioned that,

> ... It's very important that you publish news if the minister met a guest; even if the news has no information...**this news is not important**. They [official sources] still don't give us information (emphasis added).

The editor-in-chief of the *Observer* made remarks similar to the others. However, he said, 'we try as much as possible to rewrite these news items. We call them official news stuff... We rewrite them in a western style of writing news. I mean we get to the point'. The editor-in-chief of the English-language, private daily jokingly argued that there is no need for reporters and also jokingly suggested having only two employees to receive official items that come from the sources at 8:00 in the evening to make them ready for printing.

6.2.1.1.3. Reporters

All four dailies have fewer than ten reporters in each domestic department, and these reporters have to cover all home news events around the country. In all four news organisations the shortage of news workers means that each reporter is responsible for covering at least five sources in all news organisations (see Appendix 12). None of the Omani news organisations has any specialist reporters. At the two Omani Arabic-language dailies, each reporter was responsible for covering specific ministry or government sources. However, the majority of reporters at the English-language dailies

called themselves 'general reporters'. When I asked what they meant by a general reporter, one reporter responded, 'General reporting, it could be anything except business and sport'. Another answered,

> Well I'm on the general desk. I am a general reporter; unlike business reporters, we have to cover all general news relating to health, relating to tourism, relating to the ministry of education and so many other areas, and so it depends on what events are taking place in the city (reporter at the *Observer*).

Two experienced foreign reporters argued that they can get exclusive news stories even given the limitations of the control of the ONA and the PR offices. This depends on the reporter himself and his experience. One of these reporters said about his policy of getting exclusive stories,

> One of my policies is that when I attend any conference with groups of journalists I don't ask [any questions]... If I did, everyone would take the news, but I let the minister talk and ... before he leaves I ask him my question alone (a reporter at *Al-Watan*).

However, many reporters argued that getting exclusive news is a very rare event for a reporter in Oman, even if you are a professional journalist. 'The people here [in Oman] don't want to talk' (a reporter at *Times*). To avoid similarity among newspapers, only one news organisation, the *Observer*, asks its reporters to submit at least four exclusive news stories in a week.

6.2.1.1.4. Correspondents

The last major category of news source for domestic news items at the two Arabic-language newspapers is correspondents around the country. Most of these correspondents

have no qualifications in journalism. Some of them attended a few training courses sponsored by the Ministry of Information. But, as reporters mentioned, these correspondents' writing needs to be improved. Most of the time, reporters rewrite the items that are sent by these correspondents. The two English-language dailies have no correspondents. They depend highly on the ONA news items. They can send their reporters to cover events that happen outside the capital, but I found this rarely happened, and only for big events related to government projects.

6.2.2. News selection

This part is going to discuss three main questions: First, how is the news selection process carried out in the four news organisations? Second, what is the role of reporters and gatekeepers inside the news organisations in selecting domestic news items? Third, what are the news values, and what are the news workers' views about these values?

6.2.2.1. Editorial meetings

Editorial meetings were not a common thing at the four Omani news organisations during my fieldwork. In fact, only three editorial meetings took place at all the dailies. Two of these meetings were in one news organisation (*Al-Watan*). The other one was at the *Observer*. If any big governmental event took place, like a national day, either the government or the private papers would hold an editorial meeting about how to cover that event. The reporters held different views about editorial meetings and the extent to which these are useful for them.

All the reporters at *Al-Watan* argued that editorial meetings are very useful, because meetings offered them the opportunity to obtain new ideas and follow many cases in the country. Nevertheless, they said that there is no fixed time for daily meetings because the reporters are very busy. The reporters are together all the time in a small newsroom, and they discuss issues between themselves everyday. The news editor follows up the reporters' news writing with the head of the department or by meeting with them individually. Most reporters at *Al-Watan* also meet the editor-in-chief individually or occasionally in meetings. All the reporters said that the editor-in-chief gives them new suggestions and ideas about domestic news c overage in each meeting. The editor-in-chief of *Al-Watan* spends most of his day at the newspaper office. He follows up every single thing in the newspaper. He holds many small meetings with different departments during the day, as well as with individual journalists. During my fieldwork, the editor-in-chief had one impromptu meeting with the domestic reporters in the newsroom. He came in one day suddenly and told the reporters they would hold a meeting. Two reporters did not attend the meeting because they did not know about it. The editor-in-chief talked in the meeting about many topics related to the domestic news department including mistakes that happened in the previous days, new ideas for ways to cover the news, following-up on news stories, and concentrating on issues that relate to the Omani people, not just official news items. He encouraged the reporters to cover issues related to the people in street and to discuss their problems. Directly after that, the head of the department asked the reporters for another meeting to discuss the editor-in-chief's ideas.

The head distributed the work that was suggested by the editor-in-chief among the reporters.

At *Oman*, the Arabic-language government daily, no meetings took place during my fieldwork in the news organisation. However, various individuals told me in interviews, that the newspaper's editorial council held a meeting daily at 2.00 pm. This council is called by the editor-in-chief (or news editor) and attended by the heads of all departments in the newspaper. At these meetings the heads of departments discuss the day's topics, future stories and any problems that face the journalists. However, the heads of departments who attended these meetings argued that these meetings were not useful, because no decisions were made to solve the problems that they discussed. 'No one cares if you did good job, but they [the administration] punish you if you made a small mistake' (reporter at *Oman*). All the reporters at the domestic news department complained of the long bureaucratic procedures for making decisions.

> Well I think it's a waste of time… We discussed important things, but no processes will put in place to limit the problems that were discussed. No feedback…I don't think there is an evaluation (Another reporter at *Oman*).

At the *Observer*, reporters held daily meetings together, as a group, but during my fieldwork, the chief reporter asked reporters to instead hold these meetings to be once in the beginning of each week (Saturday). As the chief reporter at the *Observer* explained to me, this was because most events the reporters were to cover happened in the morning (the time their daily meetings had been held). Another problem was that most of the reporters had no cars to transport easily from the news organisation to the places of

events, so they needed more time to reach these places than did those reporters at other

dailies who had cars.

All the reporters said that these meetings with each other are useful for them. At the

meetings they discuss the tasks of each reporter and what subjects need to be covered, as

well as the problems that they face in their work. The reporters and the editor-in-chief

also occasionally meet.

In contrast, no formal meetings took place at the other English-language newspaper

(*Times*). The majority of the *Times* reporters argued that there is no need for such

meetings, because they spend most of their time together in a small room discussing and

investigating subjects. A majority also cited the small number of reporters as a reason for

not meeting. Sometimes, *Times* reporters said, the news editor asks for a meeting, but

only to discuss major government events that the reporters have to cover.

6.2.2.2. The structure of gate-keeping

Most reporters at all news organisations arrive at the newspaper between 10:00 a.m. and

11:00 a.m. If any event needs to be covered before ten, the reporter goes to cover the

event and then comes to the news organisation to write up the item.

6.2.2.2.1. Arabic-language news organisations

At the Arabic-language dailies (*Oman* and *Al-Watan*), the reporter writes his report of an event by hand, and then submits it to the head of the department to check it and write a headline. If there is time, the head calls the reporter who submitted the news item and talks with him about the writing for the event. But if there is no time for that (and this was usually the case during my fieldwork, especially at *Oman*) the head makes the changes and then the reporter can see the changes the next day. If the news item comes by fax from a PR office, reporters usually make small changes to it. The reporters and editors read their newspaper and the other Arabic one to see if any official news item has been reported by one newspaper, but not by the other. At both *Oman* and *Al-Watan*, the management would question the domestic department if it neglected to report an official item.

> ... You do a comparison with the other newspaper [*Oman*]. If they publish an item that you didn't... If the headline in the other daily is better than yours. If you, for example, forgot to take a picture ... We concentrate on all government news items. So it's a problem ... if any ministry sent you a news item about a minister [who] moved and you didn't publish it (reporter at *Al-Watan*).

At both papers, around 3:00 p.m. or 4:00 p.m. a reporter (usually the head of the department) takes all the domestic news items to the designer. The reporter sits with the designer to design the domestic pages. After 4:00 p.m. most of the reporters can go home, unless an event needs to be covered in the evening. In this case, the designer leaves a space for the event and the reporter submits it to him in the evening. The central desk journalists then recheck all the domestic items. If they are unsure about publishing it, they submit it to the news editor, who is always there in the evening. The news editor, and

sometimes the editor-in-chief, usually comes in the evening to select the front-page news items and sits with the journalists, who suggest the front-page items. I had full access to attend these everyday small meetings about the front page in both Arabic dailies. The news staff had informal chats on every day in these meetings about the process for selecting news stories in general, and domestic news items in particular, to be on the front page. At *Al-Watan*, the news editor is the one who decides in the end what is going to be on the page one or the other pages, but sometimes he receives instructions from the editor-in-chief. For example, a news item was received from the ONA about a contract agreement between the ONA and another news agency. The news editor argued that the item should not be printed, because it was not that important for the reader. However, he received a phone call from the editor-in-chief instructing him to publish it (Tuesday, 8 May 2000). The news editor at *Al-Watan* is usually the one who writes the headlines for the front page. But he also asked the front-page journalists for suggestions. The news editor started the meeting by selecting, first, the suggested domestic news items to print, and then the international ones. Only very rarely during my fieldwork was the front-page of *Al-Watan* printed without one or more advertisements. Commercial or governmental advertisements cannot be ignored, except by the editor-in-chief himself. One day (Wednesday, 10 May 2000) I attended the front-page meeting, but the next morning, the design was different than the one selected at the previous night's meeting. When I asked the designer about it, he said that the editor-in-chief telephoned later in the evening around 11:30 p.m. and asked him to omit an advertisement from the paper.

At *Oman*, I found many instructions and kinds of information posted in the domestic newsroom about the reporters' work habits. These instructions were from the news editor, editor-in-chief, the board council director, official sources and the Ministry of Information. The reporters' work, during my fieldwork, mostly consisted of rewriting the materials that were sent by fax from different government organisations or by the correspondents in the regions. The fax machine was damaged during the period of my fieldwork, but from time to time reception desk of the newspaper and other departments submitted news items. Many telephone calls came from PR offices or from correspondents. These individuals made these calls to make changes in news items or to ask that a news item be covered by a reporter during the day. For example, one evening at *Oman* newspaper, his majesty gave gifts to some students at an event at the university. The central desk staff were planning to put the item on the front page, but the official source telephoned late in the evening and asked them not to publish the item. All the front page journalists were surprised, because it was a 'good event' (a news desk journalist at *Oman*) and they did not know why they could not publish it.

In another instance, a correspondent in a region telephoned (on Tuesday, 16 May, 2000) angry because the reporter who took the item from him made it shorter. The item was an interview with a governor. The correspondent also telephoned his own supervisor in the news organisation and the editor-in-chief. The editor-in-chief telephoned the reporter asking him about the case. The reporter explained to him his consideration of space and the quality of the material. The correspondent telephoned again to be sure that the editor-in-chief had telephoned the reporter.

The structure of gate-keeping in the Arabic-language dailies is summarised in Figure 24.

```
┌─────────────────────────┐        ┌──────────────────────────┐
│ Source or correspondent │  ◄──── │ Correspondent or PR      │
└─────────────────────────┘        │ offices submit an item or│
            │                      │ reporter gathers the item│
            ▼                      └──────────────────────────┘
┌─────────────────────────┐        ┌──────────────────────────┐
│ Reporter                │  ◄──── │ Reporter makes changes   │
└─────────────────────────┘        │ in the item              │
            │                      └──────────────────────────┘
            ▼                      ┌──────────────────────────┐
┌─────────────────────────┐        │ Head of the department   │
│ Head of domestic news   │  ◄──── │ checks the item (style of│
│ department              │        │ writing, headlines,      │
└─────────────────────────┘        │ pictures)                │
            │                      └──────────────────────────┘
            ▼                      ┌──────────────────────────┐
┌─────────────────────────┐        │ Central desk checks of   │
│ News desk               │  ◄──── │ all domestic pages       │
└─────────────────────────┘        │ before printing          │
            │                      └──────────────────────────┘
            ▼                      ┌──────────────────────────┐
┌─────────────────────────┐        │ Front-page journalists   │
│ News editor or editor-in│  ◄──── │ select the important      │
│ chief                   │        │ domestic items for front-│
└─────────────────────────┘        │ page                     │
                                   └──────────────────────────┘
```

Figure 24: The structure of gate keeping in the Arabic-language dailies: path of a news item from writing through publication

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6.2.2.2. English-language news organisations

The work at the English-language news organisations was different from the work at the Arabic-language dailies. The English-language dailies have two main rooms: the reporters' room and the news desk room (at the *Observer*) and the reporters' room and editors' room (at the *Times*). At both newspapers, the reporters' room was for journalists who cover events in the field. The second room was for editing, making headlines, setting the design and layout, and gathering news items from agencies. At both dailies, reporters typed their own news stories and then sent them to the news desk room. The processes of gate keeping at the English-language dailies were similar to each other. The reporter covers an item in the field and writes it on the computer. He or she sends the item to the news editor at the *Times*, who sends it to sub-editors, who in turn write headlines, edit wording, and shorten or lengthen the piece. Then they return the item back to the news editor for rechecking. At the *Observer*, the news editor (or managing editor, as they call him) does not have the same role in selecting news items as at other dailies. Instead, at the *Observer*, the sub-editors have a direct relationship with the editor-in-chief, as they sit with him every night selecting news items. During my fieldwork, many sub-editors came in the evening to the editor-in-chief's office to ask about different subjects and how they should deal with them. Unlike at the Arabic-language dailies, I found no written instructions on the board or in files at the English-language dailies, but I did see some information for the reporters like telephone numbers and names of ministers or those who are on the government councils. Figure 25 shows the structure of gate keeping at the English-language dailies.
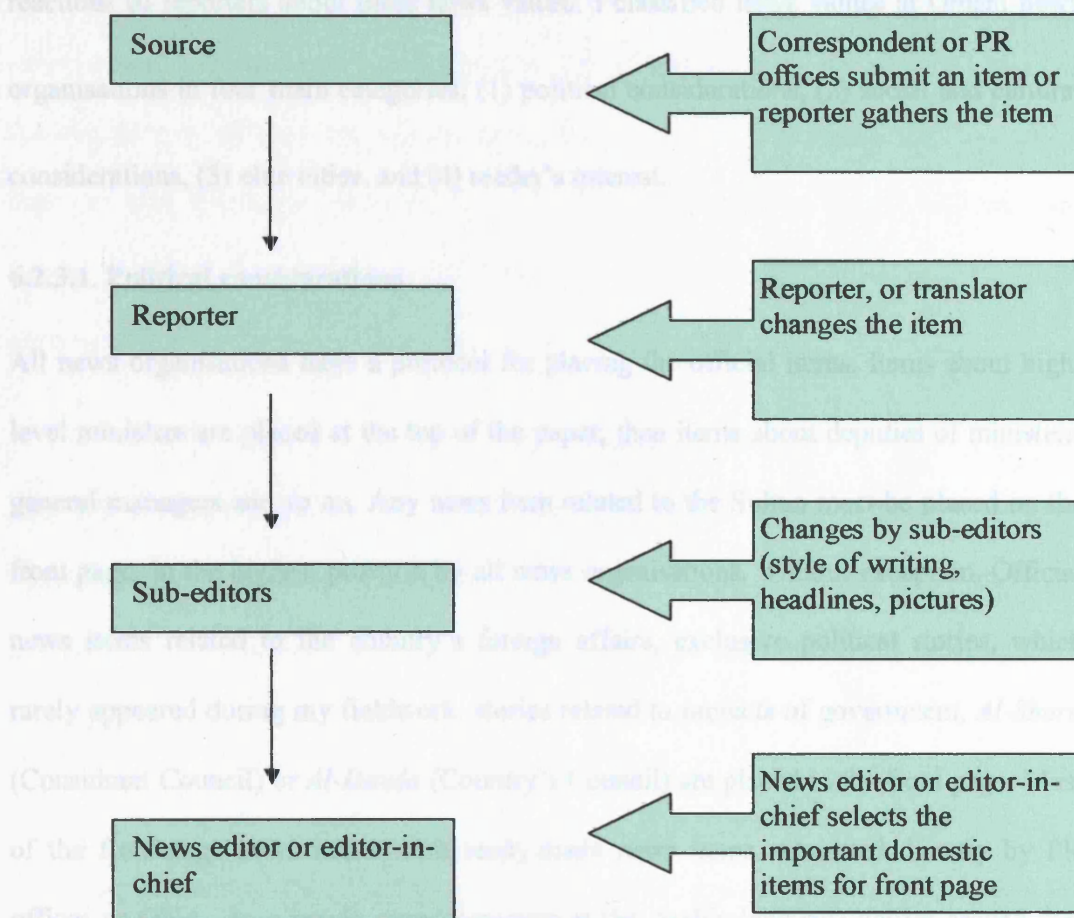
Figure 25: The structure of gate keeping in the English-language dailies: path of a news item from writing through publication

6.2.3. News values

I asked news desk staff, news editors and editors-in-chief about news stories and the

reasons for putting one item on the front page and others on the inside pages. Their

answers indicate the factors that affect the gatekeepers' decisions. I then looked at the

reactions of reporters about these news values. I classified news values at Omani news

organisations in four main categories: (1) political considerations, (2) social and cultural

considerations, (3) elite cities, and (4) reader's interest.

6.2.3.1. Political considerations

All news organisations have a protocol for placing the official items. Items about high-

level ministers are placed at the top of the paper, then items about deputies of ministers,

general managers and so on. Any news item related to the Sultan must be placed on the

front page, in the highest position by all news organisations, without exception. Official

news items related to the country's foreign affairs, exclusive political stories, which

rarely appeared during my fieldwork, stories related to projects of government, *Al-Shura*

(Consultant Council) or *Al-Dawla* (Country's Council) are placed in the front page. Most

of the front-page news items were ready-made news items submitted directly by PR

offices or ONA. As a result, many reporters at the Arabic-language dailies argued that

they do not do journalism work, but rather are employees who receive ready-made news

items produced by the PR offices in the ministries or by the ONA.

Other official news items are placed in the domestic pages of both the private and

government newspapers, as are news items that happen in the regions and are submitted

by correspondents. In fact, I found a competition among all the dailies in publishing news

items about officials and their activities. If any newspaper (private or government)

publishes a news item about a minister's meeting, travelling or departure and another

newspaper does not publish the item, the reporter or the department that does not publish

may get a punishment by the editor-in-chief or the Ministry of Information. Many interviewees, both gatekeepers and reporters, argued that the ready-made items related to the ministers or officials are not interesting for the reader; they argued that the reader wants to read something about his own life. Therefore, reporters try to find their own stories. However, they face many difficulties with sources in trying to do so, as we have already seen at the section about news sources.

The news editor of *Al-Watan* argued that there is no one who forces the news organisations to publish the government's activities, but he mentioned that these items have to be printed, because they are from the government sources and the newspaper has to keep them as important sources.

The editor-in-chief of the *Al-Watan* argued that official news items are not important for the reader because these items do not offer new information for the reader. He argued that *Al-Watan* is more interested in printing international news items than in printing national items, because items about international events, since news agencies report on them, are based on more sources, while the official Omani news events have one main government source (ONA). But they depend more on features, articles and columns to attract readers than on these official items.

The editor-in-chief of the other private news organisation (*Times of Oman*) w as more

direct in saying that the organisation is 'bound, not free to choose, [what it publishes] and

the Ministry of Information is the one which makes our policy'.

Thus, even the private newspapers have to publish items from government sources about

government activities. Although the news editor of *Al-Watan* and the editors-in-chief of

Al-Watan and the *Times* disapproved with reporting such events, the newspapers have to

keep their government sources.

At the government-owned news organisations, the situation is more complicated. The

reporters argued that official news items are not interesting for the reader because they do

not o ffer c omplete i nformation o n t hem, a nd t hey l imit t he r ole o f r eporter h imself i n

gathering domestic news items. Nevertheless, they (reporters) have to publish such items.

This view was widespread among reporters at one of the Arabic-language newspaper

(*Oman*). However, the editor-in-chief of *Oman* argued that government activities maybe

are not interesting for many readers; nevertheless, he said, the role of the newspaper is to

publish them. 'These events should be recorded, because the newspaper i s a historical

document'.

At the English-language government daily (*Observer*), the same values were mentioned,

but many reporters argued that government sources items are highly respected to by the

news workers and seen as important to publish. One experienced reporter at the *Observer* said,

> I think [the] difference is, there [in India] ...[the media culture is more] liberal. You are free to pass [publish] your story, you know, but here you have to think [about] m ore than one question before you [publish] y our story...I think the local journalists [Omani] do the job [journalism work].

The editor-in-chief of the *Observer* argued that staff at the paper try their best to bring readable news of domestic events. However, he said, this is made difficult by such obstacles as the limitations imposed by the government sources and the refusal of some of them to give information to the reporters.

6.2.3.2. Cultural and social considerations

The gatekeepers at the four news organisations considered Omani social and traditional values and religious beliefs to be of paramount importance. All news editors and editors-in-chief told me that events related to religion, Omani habits, Arabic traditional culture, and family values are covered w ithout criticism. Any d omestic news item with sexual connotations, or items about crimes, drugs, or fighting between different Omani groups could not be published in words or pictures.

> If you talk about press freedom, it's a different aspect. I mean we are not in a country ... [where] you can write anything you want. Here [in Oman] there are some instructions ... **It is not America, where you can write any damn thing....** Here there are instructions and it's under those instructions that we work (reporter in the *Times*; emphasis added).

Reporters get used to knowing the limitations of domestic news items --what should be published and what should not-- through their experience in the news organisations. Even

if reporters disagree or these values are different from their own values and cultural background, as is true for reporters at the English-language dailies, they accept these values. Reporters at English-language newspapers mentioned that they are in a society which has specific rules, and they just work under these rules. However, the majority of reporters at the Arabic-language dailies argued that they have to write about the critical problems that face the people in their daily life. They know the limitations of the society and they accept the Islamic values and cultural rules, but they believe that many topics, such as drugs or other social problems, should report on the Omani newspapers. The majority of reporters at the Arabic-language dailies argued that newspapers should focus on social problems and suggest solutions for the officials or individuals.

6.2.3.3. Elite cities

Another criterion for newsworthiness in the news organisations is whether or not the item is about an elite city. This can be seen by the number of correspondents other than reporters who cover the capital (Muscat). Other big cities such as Nizwa, Sohar, Salalah and Ibri were also highly covered by reporters. I found a big difference between Arabic-language and English-language news organisations in the number of correspondents that cover events outside the capital. Arabic-language newspapers depend on their correspondents, while the English-language dailies depend on ONA for their coverage. However, the common thing between them is that the official events of these cities were mostly covered more than the events related to normal people and their problems. One reporter at *Oman* during my fieldwork cited as an example, the fact that the paper's correspondent wrote a news story about water pollution in Bahla [an Omani city] after

getting the 'green light' from the news editor and the chief reporter at the domestic department. However, the editor-in-chief refused to publish it. Nevertheless, I was told that the news story was published on another day when the editor-in-chief was not there that night.

The majority of reporters mentioned that big cities in the country are highly covered by newspapers, especially when high-level officials in the government visit these cities.

6.2.3.4. Reader's interests

The majority of gatekeepers and reporters inside the news organisations argued that the selection of news items depends on the importance of that item for the reader. However, interviewees differed in how they defined importance. The majority of gatekeepers argued that importance means items that help many people in the society. Which means, they said, stories about big projects, and exclusive stories that are important to the reader's daily life and reader's problems. Reporters gave many similar examples of topics that they think interest the readers. These subjects are *Al-Shura* council news, big government projects, increasing oil costs, increasing salaries, social problems, and sport, especially football coverage. In short, everything relating directly to and affecting the reader's daily life. However, the majority of news workers mentioned that they cannot give the readers what they want because of a lack of information, the power of government sources in controlling information, the difficulties of access in many

government organisations, and the shortage of reporters who cover domestic news
stories.

The main question here is, how do these reporters and gatekeepers know about the
readers' interests in domestic news items? Table 28 shows the ways that news workers
get the readers' feedback about their domestic news items. Table 28 shows that the
majority of reporters at the Arabic-language news organisations obtain their feedback
about the interests of their readers from phone calls that come to the newsroom or from
reporters' conversations with their families and friends.

Means of feedback	Newspapers							
	Oman (n = 7)		*Al-Watan* (n = 16)		*Observer* (n = 7)		*Times* (n = 7)	
		%		%		%		%
Phone calls	1	12.5	7	87.5	0	0	0	0
Letter to editor	0	0	2	33.3	1	16.7	3	50.0
Friends/family	4	50.0	3	37.5	1	12.5	0	0
PR offices	1	33.3	0	0	1	33.3	1	33.3
Journalism sense	0	0	0	0	1	100.0	0	0
Public sales	0	0	1	100.0	0	0	0	0
Advertisements	0	0	1	50.0	0	0	1	50.0
Colleagues	0	0	1	50.0	1	50.0	0	0
No answer	1	16.7	1	16.7	2	33.3	2	33.3

Table 28: Ways reporters get feedback from readers

(Column percentages do not add up to 100% because reporters could give more than one response.)

Most *Al-Watan* reporters receive some of their readers' feedback by phone calls (87.5%),
while *Oman* reporters g et their feedback primarily from their daily c onversations with
friends and family (50%). Many English-language reporters, in contrast, have no direct
feedback f rom t heir readers. They used w ords l ike 'I think', o r ' no q uestionnaire w as
done', 'there is no page for readers', 'I think lots of people read [it]', 'we know what they

need. What their interests [are]…what they are looking for', 'I guess [it's] common sense to know what interests the people. [You can] smell the problems'. Most of them argued that Omani journalists get more feedback from readers than foreign journalists do.

Reporters at the *Times of Oman* obtain their feedback from the reader's page (50%), but the other English-language daily (*Observer*) has no reader's page to provide such feedback. Two reporters at the private newspapers argued that they get their feedback from the number of advertisements in the newspaper. If there are many advertisements, they argued, this means many people read the newspaper.

It can be seen that the reporters in general have no deep information about their readers. Although a few studies have been done about the readers of Omani newspapers (see the second section of this chapter on the topic of readership), the majority of the reporters, I found in my interviews, have no idea about them. None of the news editors or editors-in-chief, except at *Al-Watan*, mentioned readership studies. None of the reporters knows the numbers of their readers or the kind of subjects they like to read about. They depend on what they hear from friends or phone calls. However, the majority of reporters at both the Arabic-language and the English-language dailies said they would like to see studies done to help them get the readers' feedback.

6.2.4. Journalistic practices of *Al-Shura* case study

Although many reporters agreed that *Al-Shura* Council news items were of great interest to readers, reporters commented on the difficulty of collecting information about the Council. One reporter from *Oman* observed that while reporters were always notified of *Al-Shura* Council sessions, when they went to the specified location on the given day, they were told that the Council was going to send a prepared news item to all news organisations. 'We noticed that they wanted photographers only'. Sometimes reporters were asked to leave and receive the news by fax.

Many reporters were not happy with the *Al-Shura* Council news releases that were sent to the news organisations for publishing and to the worse, newspapers are obliged to publish everything that came from the *Al-Shura* Council. However, reporters could not attend the Council's sessions, normally held twice a year, between members of the Council and the ministries. Instead, reporters prepared news items on these meetings from cassette recordings of the meetings broadcast on Omani TV. Reporters and editors in all news organisations receive instructions (normally oral instructions) from the Ministry of Information regarding what is and what is not publishable.

According to three reporters for *Al-Watan*, the *Al-Shura* Council once invited journalists to cover a session between *Al-Shura* Council and the managers of private institutes. However, it turned out that the Council invited journalists just to hand them a ready-prepared news release. Moreover, newspapers did not receive news items about the

activities of the Council directly from the Council. The Council first sent its news items to the ONA, which in turn forwarded them to other newspapers.

One reporter from *Oman* told me how he tried to convince a staff member from the *Al-Shura* Council to allow him to publish an item about a new development, as a newly 'breaking' story. However, the source told him that he preferred to send it to the ONA, because, he said, when he sends the news to the ONA he is sure that it will be published in all daily newspapers. But if he gave the reporter, the news item would be published in one newspaper only.

6.2.5. Journalistic practices of the medical error case study

Although many news workers talked among themselves about the sudden death of the radio announcer, only *Times of Oman* dared to publish the story on its front page as a lead story. The story was published in coloured headline, reads "Death due to negligence or natural causes?" and a sub-headline, "Controversy over loss of life of Omani broadcaster in hospital". The newspaper made it clear that the public should know what happened:

> While the matter is still under dispute, what is in the public domain is that a patient has died. The case is still unknown. And the public is demanding that the authorities concerned should speak up. Especially, when they have not made a statement to this effect so far. The media has strongly campaigned to find the truth behind the matter, stressing that if it is a mistake, those who have blundered must be punished (*Times*, 30 May 2000: 1).

The next day (1 June 2000), the Ministry of Health replied in the *Times'* front page, lead news story, which ran with a colour headline "Dead man had serious disease, says Ministry of Health".

Omani broadcaster Abdullah bin Suleiman AlZedjali, who his relatives claimed had died owing to negligence by Royal Hospital, was apparently suffering from a "serious disease", the Ministry of Health revealed to the *Times of Oman* yesterday (*Times*, 1 June 2000: 1).

The editor-in-chief told me that the newspaper received many phone calls from readers asking them to write about the case. He said, some of these readers were angry and used very 'bad' language, but news workers could not publish information about the case, because they were afraid of the Ministry of Information. The editor-in-chief and the general manager of the *Times of Oman* told me that the Ministry of Information pressured the newspaper not to publish further details of the story, which they argue would have 'narcotic effect on the public'. Thus, the newspaper made no follows about the story.

Oman, the Arabic-language, government-owned daily, published the story in three column-articles. The first one was a '*nwafdh*'. Literally 'windows', this is a column-article which is published daily on the last page of *Oman* and is written by a different journalist each day. The column-article was written by a member of the newspaper's staff, and ran under the sub-headline "Medical Mistakes' File". The journalist used critical words in describing the case. He emphasised that the hospital's file of information on medical mistakes should be opened to protect citizens from similar mistakes (*Oman*, 27 May 2000: last page).

After two days, another journalist wrote on the same column-article (the *nwafdh*) under the sub-headline, "Does the doctor mean to make a mistake?" The columnist did not refer to the case directly, but discussed the possible reasons for such medical mistakes.

The third column-article, which was published in the same newspaper, appeared in the family supplement on 23 May 2000. This column-article was titled *"Mraya min Alwaqe"* (Mirrors from Reality). The sub-headline was 'Take care of our patients'. The writer mentioned another two cases of 'poor' medical practice in the Sultanate's hospitals. The writer asked who was the responsible for these mistakes and raised the question of what role the Ministry of Health should play in limiting these mistakes (*Oman*, 23 May 2000: 12).

Another journalist from *Oman* newspaper wrote a news story about the case, but in *Al-Hyatt* newspaper (an Arabic-language daily in London). When I asked this journalist why he did not publish the same piece on his newspaper, he replied that he was sure that the item would not be published the same way he wrote it.

Although I did not hear about any punishment received by those three writers who published the column-articles about 'medical mistakes', nevertheless, I was told by some reporters and gatekeepers inside the news organisation that they received instructions not to publish any further item related to the case. Many journalists from Oman mentioned that there are no clear-cut lines that can be applied to such critical cases.

Al-Watan published only one item related to the case, which was a poem from a reader. The headline was "to my friend Abdullah Al-Zedjali **who died with his pain**" (emphasis

added). The writer started the poem by saying, "You are not the one who was selected to die".

I did not find any item about the case in the *Observer*. Many reporters working for this newspaper told me that by experience they know what kinds of domestic news items will be published and what kinds will not. Therefore, they prefer to be on the safe side.

The two cases of *Al-Shura* Council and the medical error provided evidence about the difficulties of access to sources of information and the power of PR. offices in selecting the domestic news items to be published in the Omani newspapers. The two cases also showed the power of the Ministry of Information, which gives its instructions to the four dailies regarding what is and is not publishable.

6.2.6. Difficulties and suggestions

News workers at the four Omani news organisations offered me a number of suggestions concerning how they might avoid the difficulties discussed in the above sections. This section discusses these suggestions, which are summarised in Figure 26 and Table 29.
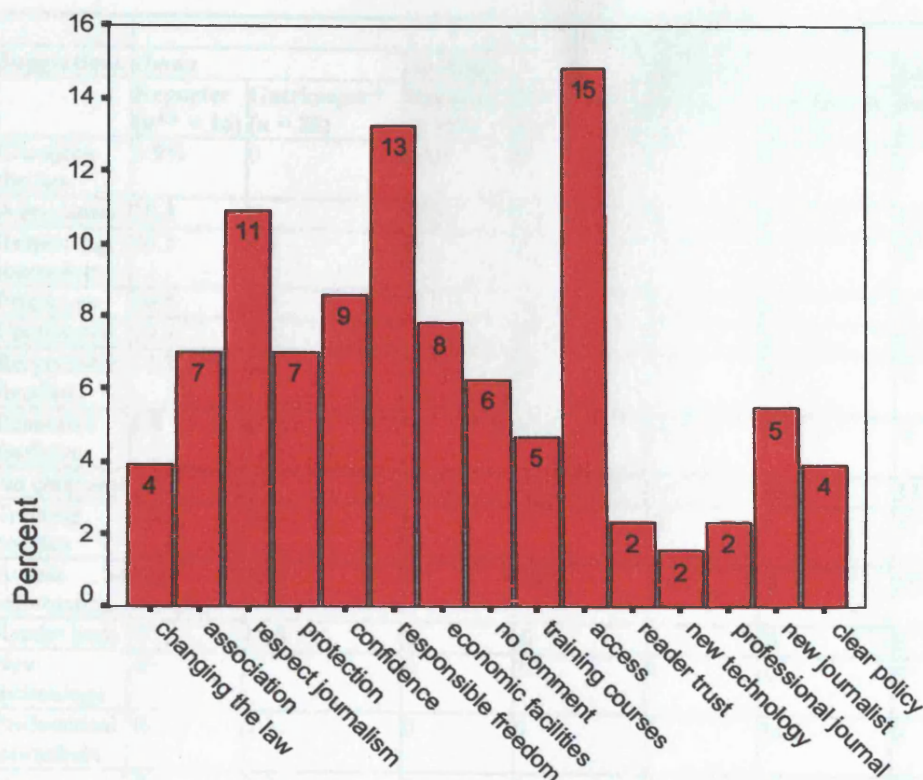
Figure 26: News workers' suggestions for developing Omani print media: What is the most important thing that could be done to improve the work in Omani newspapers?

6.2.6.1. Access to information

Because of the power of the official source, it is not surprising that the most frequent suggestion (14.8%) of reporters and gatekeepers at the Omani news organisations was that they should have more easy access to news information that is not channelled through the PR staff in ministries. They argued that reporters have a right to obtain the information that they want and to present this information to the readers.

Suggestions	Newspaper							
	Oman		Al-Watan		Observer		Times	
	Reporter (n** = 26)	Gatekeeper* (n = 20)	Reporter (n = 5)	Gatekeeper (n = 30)	Reporter (n = 14)	Gatekeeper (n = 7)	Reporter (n = 8)	Gatekeeper (n = 16)
Changing the law	6.9%	0	40.0	0	7.1	0	0	0
Association	10.3	0	60.0	3.3	0	0	12.5	6.3 —
Respecting journalism	10.3	5.3	0	20.0	21.4	0	0	6.3
Protection	10.3	5.3	0	10.0	14.3	0	0	0
Confidence	10.3	5.3	0	10.0	7.1	0	25.0	6.3
Responsible freedom	17.2	5.3	0	23.3	7.1	0	0	18.8
Economic facilities	6.9	10.5	0	10.0	14.3	0	0	6.3
No comment	3.4	0	0	0	7.1	28.6	37.5	6.3
Training courses	6.9	0	0	0	0	0	0	25.0
Access to information	17.2	15.8	0	20.0	21.4	0	25.0	0
Reader trust	0	15.8	0	0	0	0	0	0
New technology	0	0	0	3.3	0	0	0	6.3
Professional journalism	0	5.3	0	0	0	28.6	0	0
New journalist	0	5.3	0	0	0	42.9	0	18.8
Clear policy	0	26.3	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 29: News workers' suggestions for developing Omani print media: 'What is the most important thing that could be done to improve the work in Omani newspapers?'

*Gatekeeper= News desk journalists, news editors and editors-in-chief

** n= Numbers of suggestions under each category

6.2.6.2. Respecting journalists

Many reporters (10.9%) at all four dailies complained that the sources did not respect their professionalism sufficiently and that more respect was needed. There was no difference in this regard between private or government newspapers, English-language or Arabic-language. Reporters said that they could not have more direct access without more respect for journalists from officials, the Ministry of Information and the public.

Interviewees (both Omani and non-Omani) told me about many instances in which reporters had been punished by sources, including the Ministry of Information.

Many reporters at all four dailies mentioned that officials deal with their colleagues from newspapers in other countries very gently, whereas journalists who work for Oman newspapers get punishment and disrespect. Reporters at different newspapers mentioned the last visit of president Bill Clinton to the country as an example. After arriving at the airport, all journalists from Omani papers, and these journalists only, were told by police security at the airport not to cover the event and instructed to leave. None of them knew the reason.

6.2.6.3. Confidence

News workers at Omani newspapers suggested that the Ministry of Information and official sources should have more confidence in the work of journalists in Oman. Journalists who work at Omani newspapers, but are correspondents for other, non-Omani newspapers, told me that they feel 'comfortable' when they write for other newspapers, because they write with a confidence in themselves and they are sure that their articles are going to be published.

Some reporters argued that changing the PPL law is not enough, but the persons in the Ministry of Information and in news organisations' administrations need to be changed as well. New professional journalism leaders are desirable.

6.2.6.4. Protection and Association

Many reporters mentioned that no one, including the Ministry of Information, protects them if anyone wants to punish them. Most gatekeepers and reporters I spoke to at the two Arabic-language dailies, especially *Al-Watan*'s reporters (60%), talked about the need for a n independent association for journalists, as many countries have, to protect them and define their rights in dealing with their sources.

6.2.6.5. Economic facilities

Reporters, especially at the English-language dailies, argued that they face financial problems and said that their economic status is low compared with that of other reporters in neighbouring countries.

6.2.6.6. Training courses

Some reporters suggested the need for training courses inside or outside the country. The training and development department for both *Oman* and *Observer* (the government-owned newspapers) was very new; the only staff were a manager and his coordinator. There was no relationship between this department that serves both newspapers and the department of development and training in the Ministry of Information. The situation in the private newspapers was not better. Most of *Al-Watan*'s reporters get their experiences by working with experienced foreign journalists inside the newspaper. The general manager of the *Times of Oman* pointed out that there are no specific journalism institutes

to offer journalism training courses for new journalists. 'There are only general institutes, which give courses in computers or typesetting'. Sending a journalist abroad, he added, would cost the news organisation a lot of money.

6.2.4.7. Clear policy

Gatekeepers at *Oman* (26.3%) suggested that the Ministry of Information should review and clarify its general policy regarding the news organisations.

6.2.4.8. New journalists

Many sub-editors and news editors at the English-language dailies (*Observer* 42.9% and *Times* 18.8%) suggested that there should be more Omani journalists. They argued that Omanis would have more access to information and contacts in the Omani society than Indian reporters.

6.2.4.9. No comment

Some interviewees, especially those at English-language dailies, gave no comments or suggestions. They typically said the reason was that they were not the ones to make policy or that they did not know about the recent law in Oman.

6.3. SUMMARY

This chapter analysed and discussed the results of my interviews and observations in three main sections. Section one gave a general view of the four newspapers, discussing ownership and control and economic factors. I discussed how the government, by its direct and indirect support, controls the private and government news organisations. The study showed that the Omani organisations face difficulties in attracting readers in the country. There was an increase in the number of people reading non-Omani newspapers, which are widely distributed in the country.

Unlike all other studies of Omani media (Al-Mashikhi, 1994; Al-Kindi, 1995; Al-Mashekhi, 1996, Al-Hasani, 1996; Al-Murjan, 1997; Al-Shaqsi, 2000), my study shows that the PPL is not the only entity that governs the journalistic practices at Omani news organisations. Two facts support this conclusion: first, the majority of interviewees, especially at the English-language dailies, had not read the press law, and some of them were not aware of its existence. Second, those who have read the law believed that it is in need of updating, because it is an old law that has not kept up with the changes that happen daily in the journalism field and in the country in general.

Aside from the law's influence, there were many influences from different directions, which reporters seemed to treat as laws, including external influences such as the Ministry of Information, the official sources, and internal influences, such as the editor-in-chief, the news editor and the self-censorship of the journalist himself. I divided the

restrictions that I found at the Omani dailies into three groups: political, socio-cultural, and linguistic restrictions.

Section two analysed the journalistic practices inside the news organisations. There were many government sources, but very few general reporters to cover all the government activities. The arguments of the people who are in charge at the newspapers about the power of official sources did not differ from those of their reporters. However, this means that these news organisations must write whatever the source wants. Some pages were created completely by PR offices in ministries at the Arabic-language dailies, like pages on agriculture, education, and environment.

Although the PR departments of official sources censor their materials, there are many more gates inside the newspapers that news material must pass through. Sometimes the news editor and the editor-in-chief disagreed in evaluating the materials. This was obvious at *Oman* newspaper, for example. Many reporters mentioned that there is no set policy they can depend on. They do not know when their items will be published and when they will not. Therefore, many reporters prefer to take the safe approach, which is to write a 'positive' news item.

Nasser (1983) argues that sometimes the selection of news in the Arabic newsroom is influenced by what he calls the 'cultural bias of editors'. However, this was not clear in the four newsrooms in the behaviour of Omani or non-Omani gatekeepers, at least in domestic news selection. At the Arabic-language and English-language dailies, the

gatekeepers disapproved of the official, ready-made items, but they published them any way, for three different reasons: Firstly, there are not enough reporters to cover all the domestic news items in the country. Therefore, most of their domestic news items come from the ONA or are ready-made, produced by the government PR departments. Secondly, official sources can decide to give, or not give, the information to the newspapers. Third, all Omani newsrooms are guided by the political concerns of the Ministry of Information. This means that no one will protect reporters (or the news organisation) if they publish a 'negative' news item about any government organisation.

All the reporters argued that readers are more interested in domestic news items than in international news items. However, they are forced to publish the official ready-made news items in domestic pages, which are not interesting for the reader, from the reporters' point of view. Although some studies have focused on media's relationship with readers in Oman, the reporters do not know exactly who reads their newspapers. Most reporters and gatekeepers in the Arabic-language dailies depend on their friends and families to obtain reactions about what readers need. Many reporters and gatekeepers, especially at *Oman*, accept that they have very low numbers of readers, but feel they can do nothing about it.

This chapter analysed also the journalist practices on their coverage of two domestic case studies: *Al-Shura* Council elections and a medical error. The first case showed that, even though items about *Al-Shura* Council are of great interest to readers, reporters faced

many barriers in their attempts to cover the Council's items. Written instructions from the Council itself to the dailies telling them what, and what is not, should be published.

The second case showed that the *Times of Oman*, a private English-language daily, which had a small circulation and low readership figures compared with the other three dailies distinguished itself from other dailies by publishing the issue on its front page. It received a written reply from the Ministry of Health, which was placed on the front page of the newspaper as well. In contrast, the government Arabic-language daily (*Oman*) published three column-articles about the topic, but did not receive any written reply to be published from the Ministry of Information or the Ministry of Health. The reason behind this could be that the *Times of Oman* was the first to publish the story by interviewing the relatives of the dead man. In contrast, other newspapers scarcely touched the issue.

It can be seen from the suggestions of news workers that they face many difficulties and barriers in their work. Most of them, whether Omani or non-Omani, professional or inexperienced, argued that there is no respect for the journalist in Oman. They face pressures and barriers from official sources; and they are given no protection from the Ministry of Information. The foreign journalists argued that Omani journalists could gain access to the society and deal with sources in a better way. Nevertheless, Omani journalists face the same problems and difficulties that foreigners do. Most Omani journalists at the Arabic-language dailies believed that the readers do not trust the national newspapers.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion and Summary

7. Introduction

The main aim of this research was to study the factors that influence the domestic news content in four Omani news organisations. The two major components, which are the macro level of analysis and the micro level of analysis, helped to achieve the main aim. The political economy and cultural approaches explored the wider context of the environment under which these news organisations work. The social organisation approach, which focused on the internal factors that influence the news workers, complemented the previous political and socio-cultural approaches. It showed that there were many pressures facing the news workers in their daily practices for gathering and selecting news items. The previous chapters of interviews and observations have shown that the domestic news content of the four Omani daily news organisations is influenced by mass-communicator, social organisational, political and cultural influences. However, some influences affect on news production processes more than others. This chapter will discuss the results, list the main conclusions and make some recommendations.

7.1. Political economy approach

The central tenet of the political economy approach is that the people who have power (political, economic, cultural) are the ones who control or influence the mass media (Golding and Murdock, 1996, 1977; Herman and Chomsky, 1994; Tunstall, 1970, 1980, 1992; Epstein, 1975; Golding and Elliott, 1979; Murdock, 1980; Boyd-Barrett, 1980; Schlesinger, 1978, 1980, 1989). These powerful people dominate others through their ownership of media organisations. This small, powerful group may be a political power, such as the governments in most of the Arab and developing countries (Al-Jammal, 1991;

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Abu-Osba, 1997), or an economic power as in the Western capitalist countries. For example, in the United States, a few companies own the mass media (Abu-Osba, 1997). Herman and Chomsky (1994: xi), with their propaganda model, added to this approach the point that even the independent media in the capitalist, free-market countries like the United States serve the political elite. This means the media, in the end, support the political system under which these media organisations work:

> There are important actors who do take positive initiatives to define and shape the news and to keep the media in line. It is a "guided market system" that we describe here, with the guidance provided by the government, the leaders of the corporate community, the top media owners and executives, and the assorted individuals (Herman and Chomsky, 1994: xii).

As is clear from the discussion in chapter 2 (influences of media content) and chapter 3 (Oman and Omani Media), the political economy approach, as a Western concept, cannot be applied without qualification to the mass media in Oman. This approach concentrates on capitalist countries and the economic power of media owners and big companies more than on political power (see McQuail, 2000). However, political power is more effective than economic power in most developing and Arab countries (Al-Jammal, 1991; Abu-Osba, 1997; Abdulnabi, 1989; Abu-Zaid, 1986).

Media system in Oman is carried out under government control. In fact, the media organisations in Oman were established with the aim of helping the government to achieve its policies (see Al-Murjan, 1997; Al-Rawas, 1997; Al-Mashekhi, 1996; Al-Mashikhi, 1994). Oman is a country of small companies, and in such a country the government is more influential than the private companies. Omani laws that the government has established to organise the media system in the country. The three main

laws are: 1) the Publication Law (1975), 2) the Print and Publication Law (PPL) (1984) and 3) the Basic Statute of the State (BSS) law (1996). The BSS law (1996) refers to in two articles that 'The freedom of opinion and expression thereof through speech, writing or other forms of expression is guaranteed within the limits of the law' (article 29, chapter 3: 12). Article 31 says, 'Freedom of the press, printing and publishing is guaranteed according to the terms and conditions specified by the law' (article 31, chapter 3: 12). Although the BSS offers some freedom of expression for the press, this freedom must be within the limit of the laws that govern the media in the country, which means here the PPL (1984) law. This means no changes in freedom of expression for the Omani media even with the latest law (BSS). This study showed that the PPL law (1984), as well as the PL (1975) law, discussed what the journalist or the communicator should do or publish, but there were no discussions about the rights of these journalists. The two laws were very vague in many articles and could be treated in different ways.

All three methodologies (content analysis, interviewing, observation) employed in this study supported the last point. The results show that the government as a political power controls the product of media organisations in Oman.

The content analysis shows that political elites are covered very prominently by the four news organisations. The Ministers and government officials are the main actors in domestic news items (30% of $n = 1,991$). The newspapers highlight the government activities more than other domestic subjects in the country (e.g., political affairs, 6.6%, and economic affairs, 21.3%). Even in the case of subjects of strong interest to the public, such as the *Al-Shura* Council case (see chapter 5), the government officials were

frequently presented as actors (72.7% of n = 139) and sources (32.4% news items from the ONA). There were few differences in this regard between private or government-owned newspapers, Arabic-language or English-language newspapers, although sometimes the government dailies published contents critical of the government more than the private ones did (see, for example, the case of medical mistakes in Oman). *Oman*, for example, published three critical column-articles about the medical error, whereas *Al-Watan* published only one item (a poem by a reader referring indirectly to the case).

One of the weaknesses of the political economy approach, in studying ownership and control of news organisations, is that most patterns of ownership and control of media organisations that are discussed in the political economy approach are based on Western capitalist societies, which means they are different from those in the Arabian Gulf societies, such as Oman. Bearing in mind the differences between the Western capitalist societies and Oman as one of the Arabian Gulf societies which have only one political power (see chapter 2 and chapter 3), this study shows the differences between media ownership patterns in Oman and those in the West. The latter which depend on the interests of the owners as individuals on free-market competition, are not directly influenced by any political regime (see chapter 2)[1]. In a small country like Oman, which has only one political power, it seems normal to find the government playing an essential role in the media. The main aim of the Omani government regarding media is to use the mass media as a tool of national development (The Ministry of Information, 1996, 1998,

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[1] Some Arab news organisations, e.g. Al-Jazeera in Qatar and some Arabic-language daily newspapers in London, are influenced by the Western type of ownership.

2000). Nevertheless, the findings of this thesis show that only one message was allowed (the message selected by the government) at a time when the newspapers faced many problems in maintaining readership and circulation among Omanis inside the country. Government ownership was only one means of controlling the media. There were several means of indirect government control of the private dailies: long-term loans, the publication laws and the Ministry of Information's written or unwritten instructions. This is a reason that the Arabic-language, private daily concentrates more on publishing articles, comments, analyses about Arab countries than on domestic news and the English-language dailies concentrate more on international events than on domestic ones.

The quantitative content analysis and the qualitative analysis of interviews, observations and the documents gathered from the newspapers show how the political power in Oman controls the domestic contents of these news organisations. This is done through the Printing and Publication Law, which gives the government the right to grant or deny any news organisation in the country permissions to print any given news item. Other Arabic media studies have reported the same finding concerning the government-press relationship (Al-Jammal, op.cit; Abu-Osba, op.cit; Abu-Zaid, op.cit; Al-Mashikhi, 1994; Al-Mashekhi, 1996; Al-Murjan, 1997). Official censorship through the instructions and restrictions of the Ministry of Information was another face of government control.

One aspect of Herman and Chomsky's (1994) propaganda model is "news filters". According to this model, the media heavily depend on information provided by the government. In fact, in this view, official sources are the main ones news workers depend

on in their daily practices. The chapters of content analysis and interviews have shown this to be the case in Omani daily newspapers. Most news workers use official sources as a daily routine and consider these more dependable and accurate than the other types of sources in Oman. However, most of the Omani news workers observed in this study were aware that they were not doing professional journalism work. The journalists in Oman depend on ready-made governmental news because it is easier and safer for them, although they complained about this process and argued that it was not a 'real' journalism work. The Omani journalists did this because they were afraid of the Ministry of Information's punishments, and the professional non-Omani journalists argued that they were just workers and did what the administration requested. Abu-Osba (1997) argues that most foreign journalists in Arab countries are afraid that they may be sent out of the country at any time the owners want, and that this affects the nature of their news production.

In short, Omani private and government news organisations serve the ideology of the political power. The Omani Arabic-language and English-language newspapers are political projects serving small groups in power. This type of ownership, direct influence of politics on private and government-owned news organisations, was not in keeping with a Western political economy approach. Therefore, the political economy approach cannot be used without qualification to study Omani and Arab news organisations. The necessary adaptations include a greater emphasis on the political part over the economic part of the political economy approach (in contrast with many Western studies). Other

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factors need to be taken into consideration including the social and cultural context in which Omani news organisations work.

Regarding the second part of my application of the political economy approach, the economic element, the findings show that Omani news organisations are small businesses dependent on the government for direct or indirect support. Advertising is one of the main sources of income, especially for the private newspapers. The owner, especially at the private dailies, is the one who selects the news workers. In a media system like the one in Oman, the professionalism of workers is not as important to the owners as their loyalty and trustworthiness. For example, the non-Omani journalists employed by English-language newspapers (*Oman Daily Observer* and *Times of Oman*) have more experience and more formal qualifications in journalism than the Omani journalists. However, their influence in gathering, selecting and writing domestic news items does not differ from the influence of the young, less-well-trained Omani journalists.

Regarding economic abilities, there was a difference between the private dailies in this study. *Al-Watan*, the Arabic-language daily, had the highest circulation and the most advertisements. In contrast, the English-language daily (*Times of Oman*) faced many economic problems during the period of the study and had the lowest readership, circulation and amount of advertising. Nevertheless, the news workers at the *Times of Oman* were more experienced in the journalism field and came from different cultures than those at *Al-Watan*. However, journalists in both these two dailies face the same problems in gathering and obtaining news items.

The political economy approach was helpful in this research to understand the political environment in Oman and the press/government relationship. It gave us a general view of the political system in Oman and helped make it clear how a small group of elite (government) individuals influence the content of the media by written or unwritten instructions. However, the political economy approach could not show how the different social, political, ideological, and religious backgrounds of news workers may influence their news writing and selecting (Schudson, 1989). Another weakness of this approach in studying Omani media organisations was that it could not reveal the internal influences on news writing and selecting. This study shows the high level of control exerted by the political power over news organisations in Oman, but the political economy approach could not help clarify the relationship between the journalists and the sources, especially official sources. Nor could the approach identify the differences between the Omani and non-Omani journalists in dealing with this high level of control by government. Thus, the political economy approach alone is not enough to understand journalism work in Oman. Other approaches such as the cultural and social organisation approaches are necessary for a better understanding of the influences of media content in Oman.

7.2. Cultural approach

Many media studies argue that the cultural and ideological background of news workers affect their news writing (Curran, 1998; Curran, et.al, 1988; Hall, 1981; Schudson, 1989, 1996; Golding and Murdock, 1996). However, these media studies were done in countries that have similar cultural contexts and journalistic practices. The exception was

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the study of Golding and Elliot (1979) who studied news production in three different countries (Sweden, Ireland, and Nigeria). My study was different from all the previous news production studies, because it studied two different cultures, Arabic and Indian, in one country (Oman). I used the cultural approach to address the relationship between the news production processes and the cultural backgrounds of the news workers who produce the media news contents.

Oman, as an Arabic and Islamic country, has its own norms and traditions which are different from those of Western countries (see chapter 3). The oral and written instructions from the Ministry of Information in Oman preventing the use of words or photographs that have sexual connotations are an example of the influence of these traditions. These norms and traditions are mentioned all the laws that relate to media in Oman. The same traditions are mentioned in the laws of the other Arabic countries (Abu-Zaid, 1986; Abdulnabi, 1991; Abu-Osba, 1997; Nafadi, 1996). I found that the socio-cultural rules are treated with great respect by Omani and non-Omani news workers. The content analysis and interview results show that the protocol of inserting the names of prominent individuals in the domestic pages was nearly always observed. Moreover, the interviews and observations show that journalists were aware of these social and Islamic rules and values, even though some news workers did not believe in them (e.g. those who work for the English-language dailies).

Another manifestation of common social practices in Oman I observed was the influence of the social relationships between the people in the small society. For example, news

editors or journalists sometimes have to accept a news item or a letter to be published in the newspaper, because the writer is a relative or friend. This is an unwritten policy, but it is common as a cultural norm in Oman and shared by many other Arabic countries (see Nafadi, 1996; Abu-Osba, 1997, Abdulnabi, 1991).

This study identified three categories of news workers at Omani newspapers: Omani, non-Omani Arab, and non-Arab journalists (most of them from India). The content analysis findings show that the English-language newspapers (*Oman Daily Observer* and *Times of Oman*), which have Indian journalists, concentrated more on international news contents (especially Indian and Pakistani news items) across the various types of contents (i.e., editorials, comments and analyses, column-articles). These papers carried far fewer domestic news items than did the Arabic-language newspapers. Most of the domestic items they printed were news items, but not editorials or column-articles. This means that the opinions of these news workers about domestic events were not expressed. *Al-Watan*, which has a mixture of professional experienced Arab journalists and young, non-experienced, Omani ones, concentrated, especially in its column-articles, comments and analyses, on Arabic issues. *Oman*, which employs more Omani journalists, paid more attention to domestic news content. Thus, the coverage of Omani daily newspapers shows how different cultures influence the final news content.

The characteristics of news workers (i.e., education and experience), as many media studies have shown (see Shoemaker and Reese, 1991, 1996; McQuail, 1994, 2000), influence the news content. I expected that *Oman Daily Observer* and *Times of Oman*

newspapers would have similarities with Western media organisations, especially in that most of news workers in these two news organisations trained and worked in India or the West. Nevertheless, this study shows that non-Omani journalists at the English-language dailies go through the same procedures of censorship and control by the government or the editor-in-chief as their colleagues, as will be discussed later in the section on the social organisation approach. The news workers in these English-language dailies cannot express their own ideas or cultural background in domestic contents. Many foreign news workers told me during the fieldwork that each news worker could write about his own society or background. The analysis in chapter five showed that they wrote very extensively about events that happened in their own countries, but wrote just short news items about domestic events (see chapter five). My observations and interviews (see chapter six) show that the Indian journalists prefer to write uncritical news contents when dealing with Omani domestic events. All of them argued that Oman has its own culture, which is totally different from that of their own countries. They mentioned that they are just expatriate workers in the country and they accept its rules and culture. This, I believe, explains why they more frequently wrote about news in their own countries, rather than about domestic issues.

Many non-Omani journalists pointed out that the Omani journalists have more access to information from public or official sources. Thus, in the end, these foreigner journalists could not express their own cultural background at least in the case of domestic news items. Three main reasons are behind their argument: first, there was a set of written rules on publication law and an unwritten policy about Oman as an Islamic and Arabic

country. Second, the Omani journalists, as non-Omani ones argued, understand the society and the people in Oman more than the foreign journalists. Third, foreign journalists do not question the instructions from the administration as Omanis do. Many of them told me that they accept everything that the administration tells them to do.

Omani journalists, in contrast, argued that they could write about domestic issues in a way that goes with the cultural values of the country, because they knew their country and its traditions and values. In contrast, the foreign journalists said that although some of these cultural values were different from their cultural backgrounds, they did what they were told to do by the Ministry of Information or their editor-in-chief inside their news organisation.

The Arabic and Omani journalists at both Arabic-language newspapers were aware of the cultural and Islamic traditions. All of them chose not to publish anything violating these rules, because of the direct censorship from the gatekeepers inside the newspapers and from the Ministry of Information. The main problem that faced the Omani journalists, especially at the *Oman* newspaper, was that they did not know the limitations of these cultural rules. The interpretation of these cultural values differed from one person to another, especially when the law was not clear enough for the journalists.

In summary, the cultural approach, as suggested by Schudson (1989), was very useful to understand the influences of different cultures (Omani, Arab, Indian) on the final product. Where many foreign journalists were employed, i.e., at the English-language dailies, I

found many news items about India, Pakistan or Philippine. At the Arabic-language private daily, which has some non- Omani Arabic journalists, I found many more news items about pan-Arab issues than domestic news items. In c ontrast, *Oman*, which has more Omani journalists, published more domestic news items than the others. It was essential in this research to understand Oman as a society and culture. However, the internal processes of domestic news production could not be covered by the political economy or cultural approach. Therefore, I used the social organisation of news production as a third theoretical approach to study these processes.

7.3. Social organisation approach

Many media researchers (see McQuail, 1994, 2000; Shoemaker and Reese, 1991, 1996) argue that it is essential to analyse the acts of news workers (insiders) in their daily work to find out the processes of news production at their news organisations, in order to understand the influences of media content in any media system.

7.3.1. News Gathering

Although editorial meetings have been found to be significant in other news studies (Golding & Elliott, 1979; Nafadi, 1996), in the case of Omani news organisations, editorial meetings were not common. No daily, formal meetings were held at any of the four Omani news organisations. This is because they are small news organisations, with few reporters, compared with Anglo-American news organisations or many news organisations in the Arabic world. However, all three meetings that were held during my fieldwork were useful, according to reporters at *Al-Watan* and *Observer*. In the case of

Oman, the editorial meetings, which were held before my fieldwork, were not useful, reporters argued, because of the long processes required to reach decisions. *Al-Watan* and the *Times of Oman*, the private newspapers, did not face the same problem of long routines as the government news organisations, but there were no fixed meetings between reporters themselves or with the editor-in-chief at these newspapers.

The channels for gathering domestic news items at all four Omani newspapers in this study were very limited. The four main news sources for gathering domestic news items were (1) Oman News Agency (ONA), (2) public relation and information offices (PR), (3) reporters (who are fulltime workers inside the newspapers) and (4) correspondents (part-time workers who send news items from their cities). Omani news organisations understudy, private and government owned, were highly dependent on official sources (many studies of both Western and Arabic media organisations have found same result in their analysis; see Gans, 1980; Herman and Chomsky, 1994; Nfadi, 1996; Abdulnabi, 1991).

7.3.1.1. Oman News Agency (ONA)

The ONA was one of the essential sources for journalists at all news organisations without exception. This national agency was established to be the main source in domestic official news items (see chapter 3). However, many journalists were not satisfied with the way ONA works. They argued that the ONA competes with them in gathering domestic news items, especially because most government organisations prefer to give their information to the ONA instead of the newspapers. In a small country like

Oman with very few private organisations and companies, as compared with Western societies or many Arabic countries, the government supervises most of the projects in the country. This explains the power of the ONA among the newspapers. Another reason I found for this agency's strong influence on all media organisations in Oman is the shortage of journalists to cover domestic news items. In fact, the English-language dailies were heavily dependent on the ONA coverage because of the shortage of journalists. These two dailies had no correspondents around the country. The third reason for this situation is that the ONA was established as a main source for domestic news items at both private and public media in Oman. This point makes the sources, especially the officials, deal with the ONA more than the dailies.

3.1.2. Public relations and information offices (PR)

The second most prominent source of domestic news items in Oman, I found, is the PR offices. This source influences the domestic news content by producing what I called in this research 'ready-made news'. The findings of my interviews and observations explain the reason for the high percentage of news items that are reported without naming sources in all four of the dailies: Most of these items were ready-made news items. That is, they were prepared by the PR offices at government organisations to be published in the newspapers. Similarly, another study, which analysed the newspapers in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), found that the reason so many non-source items were published was that the newspapers printed the items prepared by the national agency without indicating the source (Nfadi, 1996: 312).

The difficulties of gaining access to information from the official sources, except from the PR channels, explain the similarity of the domestic content in all four dailies, as shown in the content analysis chapter. Although these offices were helpful in providing newspapers with news releases, they tried to publish the news items that expressed their point of view, not the journalists' points of view. Most of these items are just propaganda items for the government organisations. That is why, many journalists, especially the Omani ones, described the daily newspapers in Oman as a "big PR bulletin" for the government organisations.

7.3.1.3. Reporters

In a situation of monopolistic control of the domestic news items by the ONA and the PR offices, the role of the third news source (reporters) in doing a professional journalistic job of gathering news items was very small. The content analysis results emphasise this limitation by showing the high percentage of identical news items from the ONA or governmental organisations used by the various newspapers. The findings of interviews and observations also show that the main job for the reporters at the four news organisations is waiting at the news rooms for letters and faxes from government organisations and searching for the ONA bulletin to rewrite these items and make a few changes, such as to the headline or the lead sentence. In this situation, the journalists at all dailies, with very few exceptions, are 'employees' in organisations, not professional reporters who gather and select news items.

7.3.1.4. Correspondents

The fourth source of domestic news items was the correspondents of the Arabic-language dailies. (The English-language dailies did not have internal correspondents during the period of my study). The poor writing of correspondents is another reason that the role of reporters in gathering news items is so limited: reporters spend time reediting the items that are sent by internal correspondents, by writing headlines, shortening the item, or finding related photographs. This time could otherwise be spent in the field gathering more domestic news items.

In summary, news workers heavily depend on the national agency and ready-made news from the PR offices. Poor writing from correspondents leads to poor, domestic content in all daily newspapers.

7.3.2. News selection

Because of the limitation of the news gathering channels, the selection processes were also limited. Most items received from the ONA had to be accepted, as did most government news items. There were no differences between the private and the government-owned newspapers, or English-language and Arabic-language newspapers, in this respect.

Editorial meetings were not common at the Omani news organisations. Nafadi (1996) found a similar result in his study about UAE newspapers. These meetings are very helpful, not just for selecting items, but also in evaluating the daily work and long term

policy of the newspaper. The importance of editorial meetings is not just for evaluating the work, but also for rewarding news workers if they did well or reprimand them if they do not. Many journalists at all dailies mentioned that nobody thanked them if they do well, but many people reprimand them if they made a small mistake.

The findings of interviews and observations show the long process of decision-making routines at the government-owned dailies. In contrast the private dailies work with less bureaucratic processes. Nevertheless, both private and government owned papers face the same problems in routines for selecting news items and the same difficulties gaining access to information, not only from the official sources, but also from ordinary people.

7.3.2.1. News values

The content analysis and interviews show that all newspapers in Oman give the elite people, especially the political elite, prominence in their coverage. 'Names make news'; this journalistic rule was very obvious at all four dailies. A systematic protocol determined where the names of the officials should be placed in an item, starting with high government members and followed by ministers, deputy ministers, general managers and others. The value of the names, in many instances, was higher than that of the content itself. This protocol was practiced not only at the government owned dailies, but also at the private owned newspapers. Other studies of news values in Arabic countries have found similar results (see, for example, Nafadi, 1996; Al-Jammal, 1991; Abu-Osba, 1997; Nasser, 1983).

Elite cities were also one of the topics of high value at the Omani newspapers. The content analysis findings show that most news items concerned events and issues in the capital. The interviews and observation results showed that the main cities in the country were given more importance in the coverage than villages and 'minor' cities. This is because most government activities take place in the capital.

Although some news workers mentioned readers' interests as one of the news values, it appears that they do not know much about their readers. This finding is similar to that of other researchers (Nafadi, 1996; Tarabay, 1994; Abdulnabi, 1991: 225). Most of the news workers, especially the foreign ones, are not aware of the studies that have been done of readers. All the reporters, news editors and the editors-in-chiefs with whom I spoke said that readers are more eager to read domestic news items than international news items. However, at the same time, the news workers agree that they cannot reach the readers and present interesting news stories. In a situation in which no one protects journalists in Oman if they make a mistake, they prefer to "play it safe" by publishing news items from the PR offices or the ONA, or covering the achievements of the ministries.

7.3.3. The Print and Publication Law (PPL)

Earlier studies of Arabic and Omani media (Al-Jammal, 1991; Abdulnabi, 1991; Nafadi, 1996; Abu-Zaid, 1986; Abu-Osba, 1997; Al-Mashikhi, 1994; Al-Mashekhi, 1996; Al-Rwas, 1997; Al-Murjan, 1997; Al-Kindi, 1995; Al-Shaqsi, 2000; Al-Hasani, 1996) found that Print and Publication Laws control the media in Oman and other Arabic countries. However, my study suggests that other influences exerted more control on news workers

than did the PPL. Most of the news workers at the dailies said that the instructions and restrictions from the Ministry of Information, editors-in-chief and heads of departments control the daily work at Omani news organisations. This is the reason, I believe, that many journalists are confused when selecting or writing news items. Their confusion results because the instructions differ from one time to another and depend on persons at the Ministry of Information and how they evaluate the news items. There is no clear policy that all journalists follow.

7.3.4. Difficulties facing the news workers

Al-Jammal (1991: 63) argues that the press associations in the Arabic countries were established very late in comparison with Western societies, because the political powers in Arabic countries do not want these parties or associations. He argues that he does not expect countries that have not yet established such associations to do so for three reasons: 1) the governments forbid the independent organisations, 2) the journalists are still not aware of such associations in other countries or 3) journalism work in these countries is still new. The interviews with the news workers, reporters and editors, Omani and foreigners, confirmed that there is no protection for journalists in Oman. The news workers work under pressure from many sides: the first source of pressure is the reader who, the journalists said, does not trust the newspapers, and so follows the foreign newspapers. The second source of pressure is the officials who, in the journalists' experience, prefer to deal with correspondents for non-Omani newspapers and give them the information they need. The third pressure comes from their news organisations' administrations, which ask them to work hard and at the same time cannot protect or

encourage them. Personal financial pressures, especially for the news workers at the private dailies, social problems are other daily pressures that the journalists work under in Omani news organisations.

It can be seen, from the above, that it is important to use the social organisation approach with the political economy and cultural approach. The social organisation approach cannot be used precisely as it is in a Western context. This is because of the differences in culture, political systems and qualified journalists in the West comparing with new media organisations in Oman. It was necessary to understand the nature of Omani news organisations and the access to these news organisations.

7.5. The study's contributions

This study makes several contributions to Omani media studies, Arabic and news production studies in general.

This study is the first to analyse Omani news organisations from inside, by discussing internal and external influences on news contents. It shows, unlike other Omani media studies (e.g., Al-Rwas, 1997; Al-Mashikhi, 1994; Noor Al-Deen, 1994), that Omani media works under authoritarian media theory (see McQuail, 1987, 1994, 2000). This means that the news organisations, both private and government owned newspapers, were extensively influenced by the political group in power. There was direct and indirect censorship from the Ministry of Information on the Omani daily newspapers. Noor Al-Deen (1994) argued that Omani media enjoy more 'freedom' than the media in many

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other countries. However, this study s hows that t he journalists face many p ressures in expressing t heir v iews a bout a ny c ritical i ssues. T hese p ressures are n ot j ust f rom t he Ministry of I nformation, but also from the administration of these newspapers and the readers (who do not trust the national newspapers, according to the news workers) and from the journalists themselves, who practice self-censorship in their writing and selection of domestic news items. F or all these reasons, the media in Oman cannot be placed, under social responsibility media theory as Al-Mashikhi (1994) argued or under development media theory, as Al-Rwas (1997) argued.

This study is one of the very few studies (see chapter 2, influences on media content) to analyse the pressures that face journalists inside Arab media organisations. Most of the previous studies were about theoretical frameworks (Drwish, 1998; Abu-Osba, 1997) or analysing journalism work in the Arab world by macro-level analysis. This study shows the importance of doing more news production studies about Omani media and Arab news organisations to gain a better understanding of the insider influences on news content. This study is the first Omani media study, to the best of my knowledge, to analyse the role of PR offices in handicapping the journalists in their efforts to find sources or information. Many Arab macro-level studies have shown that the governments in the Arab world are the main barriers to the future development of journalism work. This study accepts the last point, but also shows that many other influences (such as the society's c ulture, which d iffers from Western societies, and the journalists themselves, who accept any instructions without discussion) also work as barriers to the development of media work in Oman as a developing Arab country.

This study also shows the importance of using the three theoretical frameworks (political economy, cultural and social organisation approaches) together in analysing influences on media content in general and to use these approaches in analysing news production in Arab news organisations in particular. It is important to use these three approaches together, because they give a better understanding of news production processes of media organisations in Oman than using them individually.

The three main methodologies that were used in gathering the research data were very helpful. The content analysis has the advantages of allowing large amounts of data to be analysed in this thesis. The two samples of analysis helped to achieve the main aim of the thesis. The first sample identified general characteristics of domestic media messages that are published in the four Omani newspapers. The second sample of the content analysis gave a closer insight into how news workers in Omani dailies gather and select two domestic incidents that happened during the fieldwork. However, one of the weakness of the content analysis method was that it could not being adequate in terms of explaining news production and journalistic practices and pressers. Therefore, I used the other two methods to cover this weakness. For example, many news items had an unnamed source. By using the content analysis only, I could not find the reasons for that or what these sources could be. By using participant observation analysis in newsrooms and interviews with news workers, I found that most of these items were given to the dailies by the PR offices in government organisations.

The semi-structured interviews were used in this thesis to obtain data related to journalist characteristics, the journalist/source relationship, the journalist/reader relationship, organisation characteristics and societal-level factors, such as journalism education and training, government communication policies, and publication laws in Oman. Some of the news workers asked me not to mention their names, and many of them insisted on the confidentiality of their comments. In order to enable the interviewees to talk freely I decided to limit my use of quotations and have not mentioned interviewees' names. Another weakness of this method, as any interview, was that I could never be sure about the accuracy of the recorded responses. However, comparing the results of content analysis with those of participant observation decreased the limitations of interviews.

The third method (participant observation) used in this study was very exciting and challenging, as Cottle (1998) described it. The advantage of the observation method in this study was that it allowed me to observe the subject (journalists) under study in the actual environment, and this a close picture about the working practices of journalists within the specific organisational framework and arguments of each individual newspapers. However, one of the weaknesses of this method was that some reporters were suspicious of my presence in these newsrooms, especially in the first days of the fieldwork. Observation analysis was not a tradition in the Omani organisations. However, after a few days reporters became comfortable in dealing with me and provided me with detailed information and documents. The daily difficulty in gaining access to the government newspapers' offices was another obstacle, but I got used to it after a few days. Another difficulty I found at the *Times of Oman* (private English-language daily),

was that inside the newsroom, the reporters usually spoke to each other in their own language (Urdu), which I did not know well.

Although I use a Western model (McQuail's model of media organisations), I aware that I am analysing news organisations that work in a different society with a different political, economic and cultural system. Thus, I used the three main approaches (political economy, cultural, and social organisation approaches), through McQuail (1994, 2000) levels of analysis's model with taking into consideration my country's cultural, political, economic and social system. I chose this model because there is no Arabic theoretical model that analyse news production processes in media organisations (see chapter 2: influences on media content). In fact some Arabic researchers have suggested using the same levels of analysis described by McQuail (1994, 2000) in analysing influences of media content in the Arabic world, but concentrating on Arabic society's culture and different political and media systems (Drwish, 1998: 9-35; Abu-Osba, 1999b: 293-312). Due to the lack of indigenous approaches, this study examined the applicability of the Western-oriented media theories and models to an Omani context. But in this study I also added my own categories of analysis to categories and models that were used in previous news production studies (see chapter 2: influences on media content).

7.6. Suggestions for future research

This research has pointed out several issues related to the influences of media content that could be the focus of future research:

1. This study analysed the influences on domestic media contents in Oman. It shows many issues relating to the factors that affect the processes of news production among the Omani and non-Omani news workers. Another study needs to be done concerning the influences on international news contents. The study shows that the media in Oman, especially the English-language dailies, concentrate on international news items. Thus, a comparative study of the influences on domestic and international news contents will be useful. Many foreign journalists, as the content analysis and interviews show, analysed international issues and cases, while they avoided discussing domestic issues. A study focusing on influences on international news content is essential to find the reasons that make these journalists concentrate on international news items to be analysed and covered.

2. Most news workers in this study argued that the readers do not trust the national press in Oman, whether private or government-owned. This study of news workers and some previous studies show that people in Oman read other media to satisfy their needs. A study about the readers in Oman at this stage is essential to find out the reasons for the 'poor relationship' between the press and readers. Readers can give signs and ideas to develop any newspapers' plans by their suggestions. These researches about readers' interests need to be done by media organisations individually and by other private research centers.

3. This thesis showed that there are very few studies were done about news production processes inside Arab news organisations comparing to Anglo-American studies (see

chapter 2: influences on media content). From this research, it has been shown the worth of using combined macro and micro level analysis to find out the difficulties that face news workers in their daily work. Research on internal and external factors that influence the news production processes will help to understand the relationships between news organisation and the society, sources of revenues and information, owners, pressure groups, internal procedures, and audiences.

7.7. Summary

Some results, as discussed in this chapter, were similar to the findings of research into news production in the West or in some Arabic studies. But this study shows the importance of taking into consideration the context of Oman as a society and culture, for gaining more understanding of media work. Each country has its own rules and values, which may differ from Western concepts. Although I used Western approaches in analysing news production processes in Oman, it was essential in this research to use these approaches flexibly in the Oman context and environment. The three methods of the study, content analysis, interviews and observations, help to give a close picture about the journalism work in the country. This thesis shows the importance of using news production analysis to study Omani news organisations from inside. This is because the study found many new results that are different than the previous Omani media research, especially on the relationship between Omani news organisations and sources of information and revenues. The relationship between journalists themselves and journalists and news editors or owners is another new results that this study added. This study also was the first who dealt with English-language dailies by focusing on daily

work of journalists and the difficulties that they face inside and out side the news organisation. Some findings also differ from the findings of other Arabic and Omani media studies, especially with regard to the PPL and its role in controlling the daily work at news organisations. This study presents a clear picture about some internal and external influences on media contents in Oman as a developing Arabic country.

APPENDIXES

APPENDIX 1: DEFINING ANALYTICAL CATEGORIES

I.   TYPE OF CONTENT

1. **Lead news story:**   the main news story above the fold of the front page of the newspaper (Shah, 1987).

2. **Other news story:** other news stories, but not lead ones.

3. **Leading editorial:** the newspaper's official opinion and position towards a specific issue or event. The newspaper signs it, or else it comes without a signature (Shalabi, 19: 551).

4. **Column-article:** column-articles written by one of the newspaper's editors, reporters, or reader presenting his/her point of view about an event or person. These articles are published in a specific position and have a specific main headline.

5. **Comments & analyses:** articles that explain, interpret, criticise an event or express a viewpoint about it (ibid: 197). Unlike column-articles, comments and analyses have varying headlines and positions in the newspaper.

6. **Feature:** an idea or case that is collected by a journalist about a subject that concerns people in the society. The journalist interviews people who are affected by the topic and try in the end to suggest a solution to the case or problem. The coverage is usually made up of pictures and words together (ibid: 362 and 825).

7. **Letter to the editor:** letters that are sent by readers to the editor(s) in the newspaper and carry comments, problems and suggestions. From such letters, journalists can know about their readers (ibid: 558).

8. **Poetry or (short story):** any item that comes as a poem or a short story. This type of item is popular in the Arabic-language dailies more than the English-language ones.

9. **Interview:** News items that present information in a question (interviewer) and answer (interviewee) format about a case or a specific subject (ibid: 515).

10. **Illustration:** any separate illustration that is not included in a news item, but comes as a separate item (e.g. photograph, caricature, maps, diagram, drawing).

11. **Classified advertisement:** an advertisement that is published with other advertisements in the classified pages. Each advertisement concerns a kind of good. Similar advertisements are collected and published together (ibid: 177). These advertisements are paid for by institutions or audiences.

12. **Commercial advertisement:** any advertisement that is published by companies or institutions to spread information about their goods in the dailies (ibid: 21). Any advertisement that is placed by a newspaper in its own pages is excluded from this category.

13. **Governmental advertising:** any advertisement that is published by the government to spread ideas (e.g., health warning, traffic warning) to the readers (Watson & Hill, 2000: 3).

14. **Public Services:** an item that serves readers, (e.g., information about the weather, places to visit around the country, or radio and TV programs).

15. **Press release:** a publication that is published by an organization or company for distribution it to the newspapers, news agencies and TV and radio stations to be used as a source for them. Its purpose is to distribute propaganda about the organisation (Shalabi, 1994: 762).

16. **Other:** any other type of item that is not included in the above categories.

II. Home/international news content

1. **Home news:** any item that is related to Oman. This means any news item about an event happened inside the country or home news that happened abroad and was covered by the Omani news organisations (Shalabi, 1994: 575; Shah, 1987: 193).

2. **Arab news:** Any news item that deals with the Arab countries except Oman.

3. **International news:** Any news item that deals with the other countries except the Arab countries.

4. **Other:** any other type of item that is not included in the above categories.

III. Location of home news items

1. **Home news at capital (Muscat):** any news item about an event that happened in the capital of Oman and was covered by the dailies.

2. **Home news at other regions (*Willayat*):** any news item that covers other regions, but not Muscat.

3. **Home news abroad:** any news item about Oman that happened outside the country and covered by the dailies.

4. **Other not specific:** Home news, but without a specific place. For example, an item that covers an event that happened in the capital and other regions in the same time (e.g., celebrations of the national day or the 'Sultanate is going to face many challenges in the age of globalisation').

IIVI: Topics of domestic news items

1. **Political Affairs (PA):** any item which deals with the country's policy, royal decrees, the head of state's greetings, ministerial conferences, the state consultative council (*Al-Shura*), exchange visits between presidents or ministries, diplomatic affairs, ambassadors, political relations with other countries or regional and international organisations.

2. **Armed services (AS):** a news item about military operations, skirmishes, and celebrations of the army of the Sultanate of Oman.

3. **Economic (EC):** a news item about industries, the money markets, banks, commercial organisations, economic projects, or economic problems.

4. **Social Affairs (SA):** a news item about women and children, family relationships, divorce or marriage, unemployment and suicides.

5. **Police (PC):** a news item that deals with Royal Oman Police (ROP) activities and news of crimes, e.g., theft, stealing, drugs, court cases, and juvenile delinquency.

6. **Religion (R):** a news item about religion matters, e.g., a symposium or seminar.

7. **Education (E):** a news item about students, the university, colleges, schools, teachers, symposium or seminar in the education field.

8. **Sport (S):** a news item about all kinds of games, youth camps, sport clubs.

9. **Science & Technology (ST):** a news item of new technology, inventions, and laboratories.

10. **Health & Medicine (HM):** a news item about medical matters, hospitals, medical centres, diseases, and surgical operations.

11. **Arts & Literature (AL):** a news item related to artists, works of arts, symposia or seminars regarding arts or literature.

12. **Agriculture (A):** a news item about agriculture or fish, or any item about a topic that relates to these two sectors, such as trees' diseases or fishers' problems.

13. **Environment (E):** a news item about the environment, pollution, or tourism in Oman.

14. **Media (M):** any item related to the media, journalism or news organisations.

15. **Other:** any other news item that is not included in above categories.

V. Actors

1. **Head of the state:** any item that relates to the head of state.

2. **Ministers or other government officials:** any item that relates to ministers, deputy ministers, ambassadors, o r any other high-level o fficial in the g overnment (general manager and above in any government organisation).

3. **Religious Body:** any item related to person, who deals with religious affairs.

4. **Workers or Industry:** any item relates to employees, workers in industries, companies, private or public organisations.

5. **Journalists:** any item related to journalists, editors or any workers in news organisations.

6. **Academic, Scientists:** any item related to academic persons, scientists or lecturers in universities.

7. **Ordinary citizens:** any item related t o ordinary citizen that is not i ncluded in the above categories.

8. **Teachers, Students:** any item related to schools, students and teachers.

9. **Businessmen:** any item relates to businessmen, business groups or managers of private organisations.

10. **Sports figures:** any item related to sport figures (e.g., players, coaches).

11. **Police & army figures:** any item related to police figures, commanders or army officers.

12. **Artists:** any item related to artists, painters, writers, actors, or photographers.

13. **Actor cannot be identified:** any item in which no actor could be identified.

14. **Other:** any other item that is not included in the other categories.

VI. Type of sources

1. **Organisation staff:** the source is one of the reporters, journalists or editors who work for the newspaper.

2. **Correspondent:** the source is one of newspaper's private correspondent and reporters that is not in the news organisation, but work to cover events that cannot be covered by the papers' reporters. Offices of the newspaper that are distributed around the country are included in this category.

3. **Reader:** an ordinary reader who is not a specialist in a specific issue.

4. **Specialist:** a specialist in a specific field (e.g., doctor, engineer) whose field is written under his/her name.

5. **ONA:** a news item from Oman News Agency.

6. **Agencies:** Arabic news agencies (such as: Middle East News Agency (MENA), Kuwait News Agency (KNA) or international news agencies such as Reuters, agance France press (AFP),: associated press (AP).

7. **Unspecific sources:** a news item without any sources.

8. **Other:** any item that is not included in the above categories.

VII. Priority of items

A. Place of item

1. **Front page:** any item that is placed on the front page of the newspaper.

2. **Last page:** any item that is placed on the last page of newspaper.

3. **Inside page:** any item that is placed on the inside pages of the newspaper.

B. Format of item

1. **NCC:** news item with colour headline and colour picture.

2. **NCH:** news item with colour headline and black-&- white picture.

3. **NCP:** news item with colour picture and black-&-white headline.

4. **NB/W:** news item with black-&-white headline and picture.

5. **NC:** news item with colour headline, but without picture.

6. **N:** news item with black-&-white headline without picture.

7. **P:** photos that are published as news by themselves and not as attachments to a written news item.

8. **Other:** any other item that is not included in the previous categories.

Appendix 2: Coding schedule of content analysis

Content analysis coding schedule (1)	Case no. ☐☐
(General characteristics of the Omani press content)	

PRESS COVERAGE OF DOMESTIC NEWS CONTENT IN OMANI NEWSPAPERS

NEWSPAPERS:

1. *Oman*

2. *Al-Watan*   ☐☐

3. *Oman Observer*

4. *Times of Oman*

DATE -MONTH-YEAR   ☐☐☐☐☐☐

TYPES OF CONTENTS: ☐☐

1. Lead news story   2. Other news story   3. Leading editorial   4. Column-article

5. Comment & analysis   6. Feature   7. Letter to the editor   8. Poetry (or short story)

9. Interview   10. Illustration (i.e. maps, diagram, cartoon, drawing...) 11. Classified

Advertisement   12. Commercial Advertisement   13.Govermnetal Advertisement

14.Public service   15. Press release   16. Other

HOME/INTERNATIONAL CONTENT
   1.   Home news   ☐☐
   2.   Arabic news item
   3.   International news item
   4.   Other

SPACE OF GOVERNMENTAL ADVERTISMENT (cm/c)   ☐☐☐☐☐

SPACE OF COMMERCIAL ADVERTISMENT (cm/c)   ☐☐☐☐☐

Characteristics of Domestic news item only

PRESS COVERAGE OF DOMESTIC NEWS CONTENT IN OMANI NEWSPAPERS

NEWSPAPER:

1. *Oman*

2. *Al-Watan*

3. *Oman Observer*

4. *Times of Oman*

DATE -MONTH-YEAR

PLACE OF HOME NEWS ITEM:

1. home news at the capital

2. home news at other regions

3. home news abroad

4. home news without specification

MAIN TOPIC OF DOMESTIC NEWS ITEMS:

1.PA   2.AF   3. EC   4.SA   5. PC   6.R   7.E   8.S   9.ST   10. HM   11. AL

12. A   13. E   14.M   18.Other

SECOND TOPIC

MAIN ACTOR:

1. head of the state   2. Ministers or other government officials   3. Ambassadors and Diplomats

4. Religious Body   5. Workers/social orgainsations   6. Journalists   7. academic, Scientists   8. ordinary

citizens   9. teachers, Students   10. Businessmen   11. sports figures   12. Police & army

13. artists   14. actor cannot be identified   15. other

SECOND ACTOR

TYPES OF SOURCE:

1. Organisation staff

2. Correspondent

3. Reader

4. Specialist

5. Oman News Agency (ONA)

6. Agencies

7. Unspecified sources

8. Other

Place of news item:

1. front-page   2. last-page   3. inside-page

News items' format

1. NCC   2. NCH   3. NCP   4. NB/W

5. NC   6. N   7. P   8. Other

Appendix 3: INTERVIEWS QUESTIONS

I. JOURNALIST/EDITOR BACKGROUND

1. Name:..

2. Age: ....

3. Sex: ....

4. Nationality: ....

5. Educational background: ....

6. How many years have you been working at this newspaper?

....

7. How many years have you been working as a journalist?

....

8. Did you work for any Omani news organisation before you came here? If yes, where and for how long?

....

II. QUESTIONS TO JOURNALISTS

1. How can you explain your relationship with news sources? To what extent do you have an interaction with your sources?

2. To what extent do that you trust the information that is brought from news sources? (i.e., do you contact another source or take the information for granted?)

3. The official domestic news items normally come from departments of information in the ministries and the Royal Divan, the Oman News Agency (ONA), which is the main source of domestic news in Oman. To what extent does that affect your work?

4. Do you usually get reactions from your sources, especially in the case of not publishing the news item?

5. From your point of view, what elements make editors decide not to publish the news item?

6. How can you describe your relationship with the editor? Does he/she ever distort your news story? If he did, what were the reasons and what did you do?

7. What is your definition of news worthiness in the domestic news?

8. To what extent do the organisational routines (deadlines, time and space) affect your work?

9. From your experience, what are the prohibited news stories to publish in Omani news organisations? How do you know that? What do you think about that?

10. The researcher noticed that there is a lack of domestic news compared with the international news. What are the reasons for such a situation, do you think?

11. What do you think about the Print and Publication Law?

12. What do you think about the general policy of communication in Oman?

13. How often are you assigned to cover domestic news topics?

14. In your opinion, what should be the role of the journalist in Oman?

III. QUESTIONS TO NEWS EDITORS

1. How many editorial meetings do you hold each day and who attends?

2. How do the journalists know about the decisions of editorial meetings?

3. What kind of problems faces you in the newsroom as you work to deadlines?

4. Which are the main factors, from your point of view, that affect the selection of news, and what are the reasons for that?

5. What are news values in domestic news content, and to what extent do those affect your choice of items?

6. Who has the final decision in selecting which news to publish? Can you explain the hierarchy of authority in the news organisation?

7. How can you describe the relationship between you as editor and the journalists or correspondents?

8. To what extent are you involved in shaping domestic news content (ignore, change or publish as the items come from journalist)? And what are the criterions in your action (newsworthy, professionalism, political, economic, societal factors)?

9. How do journalists react when someone distorts his/her news story?

10. To what extent is your staff specialised in the issues that they cover?

11. From your experience, what are the prohibited news stories to publish in the Omani news organisations? Are there any differences in domestic and international news coverage? What do you think about that?

12. I noticed that there is a lack of domestic news compared with the international news. What are the reasons for such a situation, do you think?

13. How do you usually get the feedback from the audience?

14. Do the journalists know their audience? If yes, how? If not, why, and how do they produce the news content?

15. In your opinion, what should be the role of the journalist in Oman?

IV. QUESTIONS TO EDITORS-IN-CHIEFS (OWNERS)

1. Can you explain the general policy of your news organisation?

2. Who sets the general policy of the news organisation?

3. What do you think of the print and publication law?

4. Do you set any rules, beside the Print and Publication Law, to your staff? If you do, when do you do so?

5. To what extent does the ministry of information have authority in deciding the policy of the paper?

6. Who has the final decision in publishing the news item?

7. To what extent do the laws affect the content of the newspaper?

8. To what extent do the annual government grants affect the content of the domestic news? Can you continue publishing without this grant?

9. To what extent do advertisements influence the news content?

10. What percentage does the figures of circulation contribute to the revenues of your newspaper?

11. On 1 May 1996, all the dailies increased the prices of the issues. Why was that? And

does that affect the circulation figures? To what extent did this decision influence the

quality of the news content?

12. Are there any readership figures for your newspaper?

Appendix 4: General notes of interviews

Interviews' no.	*Al-Watan* news organisation					
	Time	Period	Day	Date	Place	Notes
1	2: 14 pm- 3: 40 pm	84 minutes	Mon.	7-5-00	D.N.R.[1]	
2	2: 30 pm-3: 05 pm	35 minutes	Tue.	8-5-00	D.N.R.	
3	11:30 am-12: 30 pm	60 minutes	Tue.	8-5-00	D.N.R.	
4	1: 20 pm-2: 15 pm	55 minutes	Wed.	10-5-00	D.N.R.	
5	11:20 am-1: 00 pm	80 minutes	Wed.	10-5-00	D.N.R.	Economy
6	2: 30 pm-3: 40 pm	70 minutes	Tue.	9-5-00	D.N.R.	
7	2: 30 pm-3: 30 pm	60 minutes	Wed.	10-5-00	D.N.R.	
8	5: 00 pm-6: 30 pm	90 minutes	Fri.	12-5-00	D.N.R.	Sport
9	6:00 pm-6: 30 pm	30 minutes	Thurs.	11-5-00	D.N.R.	Final desk
10	9:30 pm-10: 15 pm	45 minutes	Wed.	10-5-00	D.N.R.	Final desk
11	3:05 pm-4:30 pm	75 minutes	Thurs.	11-5-00	His office	Top editor
12	8:15 pm-9: 45 pm	90 minutes	Sun.	22-5-00	His office	Editor-in-chief. Many delis
	Oman news organisation					
13	1) 12: 40 pm- 1: 03 pm 2) 1:00 pm-2: 15	1) 20 minutes 2) 75 minutes	1) Sat. 2) Tue.	1) 21-5-00 2) 21-6-00	D.N.R.	Head domestic 2 meetings
14	12: 15 pm 1: 00 pm	45 minutes	Mon.	15-5-00	D.N.R.	The head now
15	2:15 pm-3: 30 pm	75 minutes	Sat.	20-5-00	D.N.R.	
16	2: 00 pm-2:	30 minutes	Sun.	22-5-00	D.N.R.	

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[1]Domestic News Room

	30 pm					
17	1:00 pm-1: 45 pm	45 minutes	Fri.	14-5-00	D.N.R.	
18	10: 45 am-11: 15 am	60 minutes	Mon.	23-5-00	Feature dept	
19	11: 30am-1: 00pm	90 minutes	Mon.	19-6-00	Sport	1 hour delay
20	10: 00pm-11: 16pm	46 minutes	Mon.	23-5-00	His house	Final desk
21	7: 00pm-7: 50pm	50 minutes	Sun.	19-6-00	Meeting Rm.	Final desk
22	10: 00am-11: 12am	72 minutes	Tue.	18-7-00	His office	Training & planning Was a news editor
23	8: 30 pm-11: 00pm	150 minutes	Tue.	26-5-00	His office	Top editor
24	9: 16 pm-11: 20pm	126 minutes	Sun.	13-5-00	His office	Editor-in-chief
Observer news organisation						
25	1: 05 pm-12: 20 pm	45 minutes	Tue.	23-5-00	[2]R.N.R.	The head
26	1: 40 pm-2: 15 pm	35 minutes	Tue.	23-5-00	R.N.R.	
27	3: 20 pm-4: 00pm	40 minutes	Wed.	24-5-00	R.N.R.	
28	3: 00 pm-3: 30 pm	30 minutes	Wed.	24-5-00	R.N.R.	
29	1: 35 pm-2: 05 pm	30 minutes	Wed.	25-5-00	R.N.R	12.20pm-1.05pm
30	4: 30 pm-5: 00 pm	30 minutes	Wed.	24-5-00	R.N.R.	
31	5: 00 pm-5: 35pm	35 minutes	Wed.	24-5-00	R.N.R.	Economy reporters
32	3: 20 pm-4: 00 pm	40 minutes	Thurs.	25-5-00	R.N.R.	Sport
33	12: 00 pm 12: 30 pm	30 minutes	Sat.	27-5-00	N.D.[3]	Translator
34	12: 20 pm - 12:00 pm	20 minutes	Sun.	23-7-00	N.D.	A New member
35	3: 00 pm-3: 30 pm	30 minutes	Thurs.	25-5-00	N.D.	
36	2: 00 pm-2: 35 pm	35 minutes	Thurs.	25-7-00	His office	News editor
37	9: 30pm-11: 00 pm	90 minutes	Tue.	24-5-00	His office	Editor-in-chief
Times of Oman news organisation						
38	5: 00 pm-5: 30 pm	30 minutes	Sat	11-6-00	Waiting place	
39	6: 00 pm-7: 10	70 minutes	Mon.	5-6-00	R.N.R.	

[2]Reporter's News Room
[3]News Desk

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	pm					
40	11: 30 am -12: 10pm	40 minutes	Mon.	5-6-00	R.N.R.	
41	3: 30 pm-4: 30 pm	60 minutes	Tue.	6-6-00	R.N.R.	
42	11: 30am-12: 35pm	75 minutes	Wed.	7-6-00	R.N.R.	–
43	12: 55 -1: 50 pm	55 minutes	Wed.	7-6-00	R.N.R.	
44	11: am-11: 20am	20 minutes	Tue.	6-6-00	Library	Translator, Ph.D. holder
45	5: 10 pm -5: 50 pm	40 minutes	Wed.	7-6-00	N.D.	
46	6: 30 pm-7: 20 pm	50 minutes	Thurs.	8-6-00	R.N.R	
47	5: 00 pm-5: 35 pm	35 minutes	Sat.	3-6-00	His office	Top editor
48	10: 00 am 11: 45 am	105 minutes	Thurs.	1-6-00	His office	General manager
49	12: 10pm-1: 30pm	80 minutes	Wed.	31-5-00	His office	Editor-in-chief
Total		**2,913 min = 49 hrs, 27 min**				

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Appendix 5: main actor/ source in Omani daily newspapers

Appendix 6: main actor/format in Omani daily newspapers
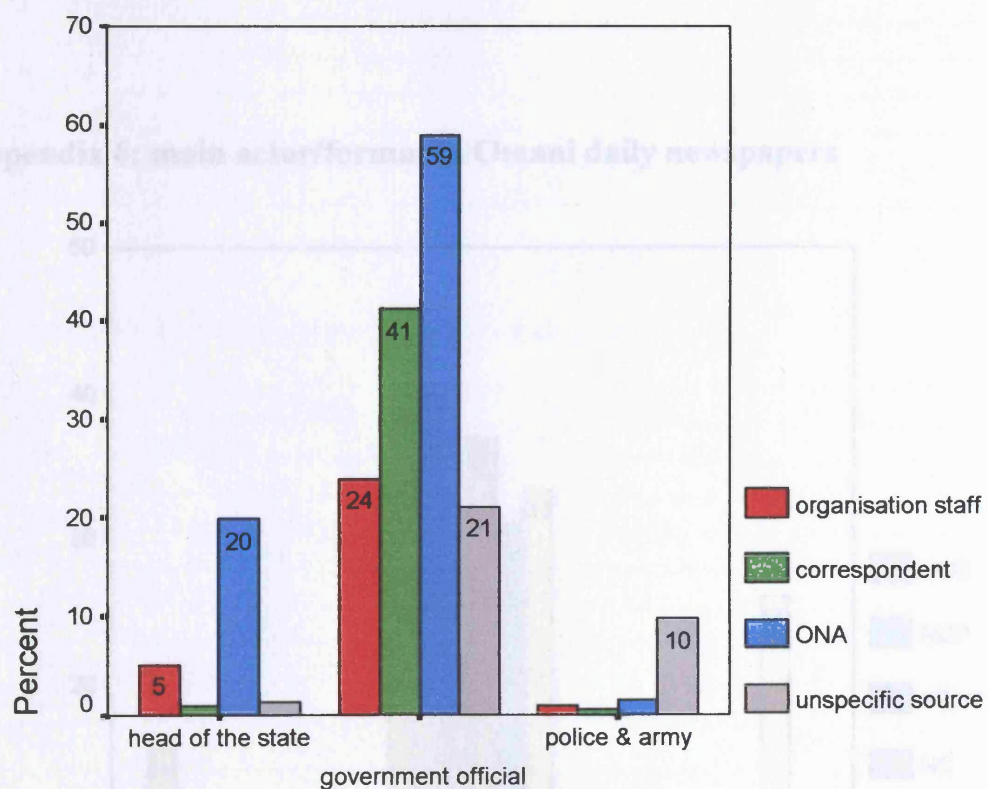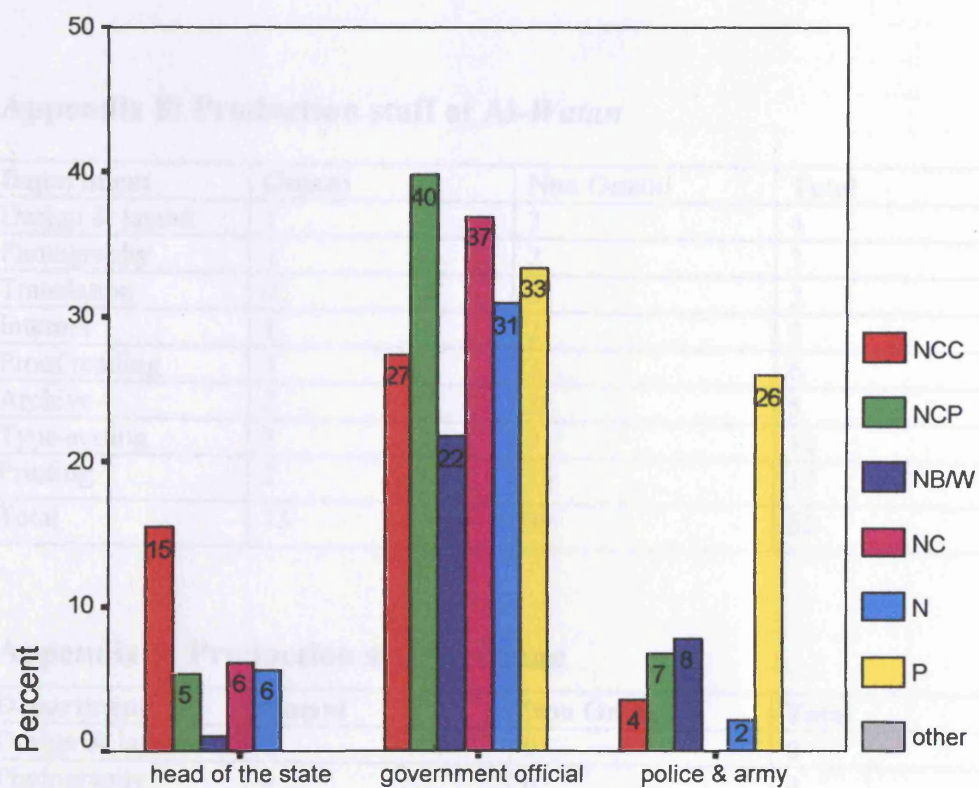
Appendix 7: Administration workers at *Al-Watan*

Department	Omani	Non Omani	Total
Editor-in-chief's secretary	0	1	1
Administration	2	2	4
Advertisements	2	13	15
Finance	1	6	7
Transports	1	4	5
Gate	0	3	3
Total	6	29	35

Appendix 8: Production staff at Al-*Watan*

Department	Omani	Non Omani	Total
Design & layout	1	3	4
Photography	1	2	3
Translation	0	2	2
Internet	1	2	3
Proof reading	3	3	6
Archive	2	3	5
Type-setting	3	9	12
Printing	2	15	17
Total	13	39	52

Appendix 9: Production staff at *Oman*

Department	Omani	Non Omani	Total
Design & layout	6	0	6
Photography	4	0	4
Type-setting	16	0	16
Montage	11	0	11
Proof reading	5	0	5
Archive	3	0	3
Total	45	0	45

Appendix 10: Internal correspondents for Arabic news organisations around the country

City	*Oman*	*Al-Watan*
Muscat	18	0
Suhar	1	1
Gaalan bni bu Hasan	2	1
Al-Mudhibi	1	0
Al-Qabl	1	1
Al-Kaml Walwafi	1	1
Smad Alshan	1	0
Al-Awabi	1	1
Bhla	1	1
Al-Musina	1	1
Gaalan bni bu Ali	1	1
Dma Wltaieen	1	0
Nizwa	2	1
Al-Gabal Alakhdar	1	0
Al-Hoqien	1	0
Barka	1	2
Al-Burimi	1	0
Al-Suwiq	1	1
Al-Hamra	1	0
Bdyah	1	0
University	2	0
Brkt Almuz	2	1
Samael	1	0
Ibri	1	3
Izki	1	1
Quryat	1	0
Adm	1	1
Ibra	2	1
Lwa	1	0
Nkhl	1	1
Musyra	1	0
AlRustaq	1	2
Dhnk	1	1
Ynql	1	1
AlKhbora	2	0
Shm	1	0
Mnh	1	1
Bushr	1	0
Sur	3	1
Quryat	1	1
AlAmrat	1	1

Ras Alhd	1	0
Tiwi	1	0
Wadi bni Khalid	1	1
Alashkhra	1	0
AlSeeb	1	1
Mhdh	1	0
AlGazr	1	0
Hima	1	0
Wadi bni hni	1	0
Dba	1	0
Bdbd	1	1
Wadi Almuawel	1	1
Snaw	1	0
Taqh	1	0
Dhofar	6	1
Mqshn	1	0
Gbhat	1	0
AlGrbia	1	0
Twi Ateer	1	0
Murbat	1	0
Thmreet	1	0
Muhot	1	0
Aldqm	1	0
Rkhyoot	1	0
Dhlkout	1	0
Mdhi	1	0
Mdinat Alhq	1	0
Sdh	1	0
Shnas	0	1
Fanja	0	1
Mgees	0	1
Musndam	0	1
Hima	0	1
Total	101	38

Appendix 11: International correspondents at *Oman* and *Al-Watan*

Country	*Oman* correspondents	*Al-Watan* correspondents
Cairo	15	3
Damascus	14	2
Beirut	2	0
Baghdad	1	1
Kuwait	1	1
Moscow	1	1
United Arab Emirates	1	0
Alquds	1	0
Algeria	1	0
Bonn	1	0
Bahrain	1	1
Tunis	1	1
Rome	1	0
Washington	0	2
London	0	1
Amman	0	2
Ramalla	0	1
Yemen	0	1
Istanbul	0	1
Tehran	0	1
Total	42	19

Appendix 12: Reporters' main sources

Interview no.	*Al-Watan* News Organisation
	What are your main sources?
1	General
2	Ministry of High education + civil service Ministry + Ministry of residing + Omani Communication Company + Ministry of Communications + Institute of banking studies and Omani housing bank.
3	Ministry of education + Ministry of Transportation + Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Oil
4	Ministry of Interior + Royal Oman Police (ROP) + Ministry of Justice + Ministry of Religion's affairs + Muscat Municipality + Region's Municipality + Others!
5	S.Q.U. + Ministry of Social Affairs + Ministry of Health + Consultant Council (Al-Shura) and Ministry of Information (*They don't want us to write about them*).
6	Ministry of Watering places + Ministry of Electricity + Ministry of Interior + High committee of Conferences +The commercial Court.
7	All economic organisations in the country government owned or private sectors.
8	All Sport organisations.
	Oman News Organisation
13	Ministry of Interior + Country's Council (Al-Dwla) + Consultant Council (Al-Shura) + Ministry of residing + Omani housing bank
14	Ministry of Region's Municipality + Health Ministry + Royal Oman Police (ROP) + Ministry of Legality affairs
15	Omani Telecommunication Company + Ministry of Communication + Muscat province + Ministry of Watering places
16	Ministry of Education + Ministry of High Education + Ministry of Social Affairs + S.Q.U.
17	Ministry of Electricity and Waters + Ministry of Civil Service + Muscat Municipality + High Committee for City Planning
18	Economic organisations
19	Single and group games
	Observer News Organisation
27	"General reporting -- it could be anything except business and sport"
28	"Well I'm in the general desk. I am a general reporter, unlike business reporters, we have to cover all general news, like [those] relating to health, relating to tourism, relating to Ministry of education and so many other areas and so it depends on what events are taking place in the city"
29	"Well the main focus of my area is to generate local stories [about] Oman … also in between I also do business stories.. government Ministries, education.. mainly development stories"

30	General reporting
31	General reporting
32	General reporting
33	All business sectors
35	All sport events " We are two, both reporting and sub-editing...unlike Arabic sport sections, we do the pages.. design the pages and layout"

Times of Oman News Organisation	
41	"Well I'm doing general reporting because we don't have a specialisation as such.. This started maybe three or four years [ago] only, but before we didn't have specialisation. All journalists have to cover general reporting, but now you know we have sections.. business some two years back.. but I'm still in general reporting"
42	General reporting
43	Tourism + Ministry issues + Social affects and general reporting
44	"Covering business news and doing general reporting as well". " In a small country like Oman, we cannot concentrate on a particular subject". He compares the situation with India "few sources, few banks and small business".
45	"No, only business reporter. I don't do general reporting".
46	All sport activities

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