

## **ABSTRACT**

Title of dissertation: TELEVISION NEWS AND THE STATE IN LEBANON

Jad P. Melki, Doctor of Philosophy, 2008

Dissertation directed by: Professor Susan D. Moeller  
College of Journalism

This dissertation studies the relationship between television news and the state in Lebanon. It utilizes and reworks New Institutionalism theory by adding aspects of Mitchell's state effect and other concepts devised from Carey and Foucault. The study starts with a macro-level analysis outlining the major cultural, economic and political factors that influenced the evolution of television news in that country. It then moves to a mezzo-level analysis of the institutional arrangements, routines and practices that dominated the news production process. Finally, it zooms in to a micro-level analysis of the final product of Lebanese broadcast news, focusing on the newscast, its rundown and scripts and the smaller elements that make up the television news story.

The study concludes that the highly fragmented Lebanese society generated a similarly fragmented and deeply divided political/economic elite, which used its resources and access to the news media to solidify its status and, by doing so, recreated and confirmed the politico-sectarian divide in this country. In this vicious cycle, the institutionalized and instrumentalized television news played the role of mediator between the elites and their fragmented constituents, and simultaneously bolstered the political and economic power of the former while keeping the latter tightly held in their grip. The hard work and values of the individual journalist were systematically channeled

through this powerful institutional mechanism and redirected to serve the top of the hierarchy. The journalist's background and beliefs were irrelevant to this process. Finally, the study advanced a theory on television news grounded in the empirical evidence and focusing on modern news media as the redistribution and reorganization of communication.

# TELEVISION NEWS AND THE STATE IN LEBANON

by

Jad P. Melki

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## Advisory Committee:

Associate Professor Susan D. Moeller, Chair  
Professor Shibley Telhami, Dean's Representative  
Professor Emeritus Ray Hiebert  
Professor Linda Steiner  
Associate Professor Jillian Schwedler  
Dr. Carol Rogers

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## **PART I**

### **Chapter 1: Introduction**

#### **A. Introduction**

This dissertation is a case study that inquires into the relationship between television news and the state in Lebanon. It studies the interaction between the news sources, social and political elite, broadcast news journalists and the institutions and instruments that make up the television news industry, taking into consideration the cultural, political, economical and technological factors that impact the final output of these complex processes. In addition, the study looks into the role this final product plays in serving the dominant political powers and more broadly supporting, regenerating and maintaining the state.

Lebanon's small size and complex cultural and political landscapes offer a rich yet manageable case for a dissertation study. Lebanon was partly chosen because it is the home country of the researcher, who is fluent in its languages and cultures and intimately familiar with its news media industry. Furthermore, Lebanon's importance in international politics has recently been on the rise, especially after the major political upheavals that rocked Lebanon in 2005 and the Hezbollah-Israel war of summer 2006. Furthermore, many consider this small country a window to a broader Middle East and a bridge that links East and West (Schofield, 1999; Blandford, 2002; Castillo, 2002). The Middle East region has been for some time one of the main focuses of international affairs and scholarship due to its political instability, which has had major global effects, especially since 9/11. Understanding the underlying mechanisms that control television

news in Lebanon and their outcomes may give insight into those mechanisms in other Middle Eastern countries.

The purpose of this study is first to understand the channels of power that flow from the superstructure of what we call the state and reach deep down into the news media product—down to the single news story, picture and sound bite, and second to understand how this news product creates power assets for the political elite that control it and confirms, bolsters and recreates their dominance in society. Therefore, this study starts at the macro-level of society, analyzing the history of the development of television news and its main political-economic structures. It then moves to a mezzo-level scope focusing on institutions and departments that shape the behavior of its employees who produce the news under various pressures negotiating power arrangements and interacting with complex norms, ideas and technologies. Finally, the study zooms in to a micro-level analyzing the content of those institutions' final output: the newscast, its sources and stories, and the individual elements of those stories.

This analysis is guided by three research questions. First, what structural macro level forces in Lebanon's recent history resulted in the current organization and distribution of the television media industry in that country? Second, what mezzo level institutional factors and arrangements influenced and continue to shape the final product of a complex news media operation that engages hundreds of people from various backgrounds, cultures and political beliefs, thousands of complicated machines, and a highly volatile and sometimes explosive supply of raw material we call the news? Third, what are the underlying mundane processes that work at the micro level to generate, at

the macro level, the forces that support, maintain and enforce the structures and arrangements of power relationships in Lebanon?

Therefore, the first goal of this study is understand the nature of the effect of dominant political interests and social structures on the Lebanese broadcast news industry, and how this domination in return bolsters and reinforces those political interests and social structures by creating a news product that carries the ideologies, interests and agendas of those who control it. The second goal of the study is to develop a theoretical perspective and practical model to studying and understanding the news in a holistic societal context with regards to its relationship to the state. This theoretical perspective reworks current theories related to news and politics. It will first be informed by the New Institutionalism (NI) approach to studying news, but feed on several other theories developed in the field of comparative politics and political culture, especially Foucault's (1995), Mitchell's (1999) and Carey (1992). This theory will be inclusive of the various societal spheres—the cultural, political, economical, environmental and technological, and hence take society as a whole complete unit of life (Sa'adeh, 1939).

## **B. Overall Theoretical Lens**

Theoretical developments concerning the production of news in society have not attracted much attention in the past two decades (Ryfe, 2006, p. 135). In addition, most related studies and theories have come from outside the field of media studies (e.g. Nimmo and Mansfield, 1982; Rivers, Miller and Gandy, 1975). Recently a flurry of new theoretical and methodological approaches appeared on the scholarly scene under the aegis of New Institutionalism (Benson, 2006; Cook, 2005 and 2006; Bennett, Lawrence, and Livingston, 2005; Entman, 2006; Hallin and Mancini, 2004; Kaplan, 2006;

Lawrence, 2006; Ryfe, 2006; Sparrow, 1999). This study takes advantage of the latest theoretical developments initiated by New Institutionalism (NI) but reworks some of its assumptions to better fit the place and scope of the inquiry.

According to Ryfe (2006) New Institutionalism has diverse strands, but all NI scholars work within a “common framework for understanding social action” (p. 137). Ryfe summarizes this common framework in five key principles. First, institutions act as mediators between macro and micro level forces. This makes NI well positioned to explain the impact of macro social structures on the behavior of individual journalists and their products, and explains *why* and not only *how* news content is constructed in certain ways. Second, institutions “evolve in a path-dependent pattern,” which generates a “stickiness” quality that forces actors to follow dominant conditions rather than challenge and change institutional orders. This principle is key in understanding the uniform behavior of journalists working in news institutions, regardless their individual backgrounds and beliefs. Third, given the path-dependency factor, events that occur early on have a critical impact on the development of the institution, which brings to light the fourth principle that necessitates a focus on the “life history of institutions, from their initiation, through their elaboration, to their disintegration or reformation.” Finally, in the absence of major shocks, institutions reproduce and reinforce their orders and structures, bringing the importance of historic or “critical junctures” into focus. According to Ryfe (2006):

All new institutionalists examine the interaction of mezzo-level institutional variables with macro-level variables. All are sensitive to the historical genesis and evolution of these interactions. All see the outcome of these interactions as the



creation of what are variously called institutional orders, regimes, matrices, or fields. And, all seek to explain the impact of these webs on micro-level roles, identities, values, and behaviors (p. 137).

Three key aspects of NI inform this study. First, New Institutionalism offers a powerful alternative to sociological and political-economy approaches to studying news. Sociological theories and methods have long been the most powerful approaches to understanding social organization and production, while the political-economy tradition has effectively been used to explain the impact of macro structures on social institutions, especially economic factors. Neither approach, however, has been effective in explaining the complexities that link macro level forces to micro level orders and outputs, or in generalizing them across different organizations while accounting for variations from one organization to another (Ryfe, 2006). Political economists have often focused on economic imperatives to explain the news production process, but news is “more than an economic product.... [It is also] a professional, political and cultural product” (Lawrence, 2006, p. 226). In addition, while sociological traditions have been more interested in understanding social organizations that produce the news, they have paid little attention to the news product itself (Lawrence, 2006, p. 228). On the other hand, those who have focused on the news product—scholars in political communication engaged in content analysis of the news—have excellently been able to make generalizations about the dominant frames and underlying ideologies in the news content. But content analysis alone only indicates “what news journalists have selected over time, not how they have selected it” (Gans, 2004, p. 5). NI resolves the shortcomings of these pure content analysis approaches. Lawrence (2006) explains, “News is a process, not just a product.

News making is a social process of negotiation among reporters, editors, and various social groups vying for news access and control...” (p. 225). NI, therefore, positions itself as a mediator between theories that capture the macro-level aspects of news production and those that focus on micro-level routines and products, thereby allowing for a more holistic analysis and understanding of news in a societal context.

Second, many media scholars studying news have been influenced by normative approaches that view Western Democracy as the ideal version of modernity or focus on “politics” in its narrowest “elections process” form (Siebert, Peterson and Schramm, 1963). But even the non-normative theories are mostly products of highly developed “Western” societies and are often not applicable in most “non-Western” settings. For instance, some studies use transmission models that focus on “media effects” on political systems with specific legal, economical and cultural aspects and processes (McQuail, 2002; Jamieson and Waldman, 2006). Although NI theory of news was mostly developed by U.S. scholars or those who focus on U.S. news, its principles take into consideration the cultural, political and economic factors that influence and are influenced by the news institutions in question, therefore allowing for enough flexibility to transfer those theories to other societies. Hallin and Mancini (2004), for instance, assert that media systems emerge in ways related to the political, economic and cultural aspects of their societies. In addition, NI scholars not only put news in its social, political and cultural context but also consciously encourage the inquiry beyond U.S. news institutions. For example, Ryfe (2006) raises several empirical questions based on NI theory, including whether “news media in other parts of the world use the same routines and conventions” (p. 135) as U.S. journalists and what kind of outcomes could these routines produce. This is an especially

important point for this study because NI has often taken as a central assertion the homogeneity of news that is produced across various institutions of the same political-economic system. The recent wave of developments in NI theory reminds that homogeneity of news is a theory, not a fact, and that it should be “a beginning, not an end, of discussion” (Ryfe, 2006, p. 135; Entman, 2006, p. 215). As we will see in the coming chapters, news in Lebanon is anything but homogenous, a matter that can be linked to both mezzo-level institutional practices of news production and macro-level social, cultural and political factors of Lebanese society.

Third, NI reframes the debate on whether the news media influence the state or vice versa. Although most scholars agree about the existence of causal lines between the news media and the state, they differ on the direction of the dominant causal links and the power attributed to them (Postman and Powers, 1992; Adatto, 1993; Edward and Chomsky, 2002; Bennett, 2003). Four groups roughly emerge here: the first advocates the traditional “fourth estate role” of an independent powerful “watchdog media;” the second subscribes to “the lapdog view of media as largely submissive to status quo political and economic authority;” the third group views the media “as part of a power oligarchy in the system;” and the fourth advances a “guard dog perspective,” which views the media as a sentry for groups that control sufficient “power to create and control their own security systems” and not as a watchdog for the community at large (Donohue, Tichenor and Olien, 1995). The four perspectives differ significantly on the nature of the relationship between the news media and the state, but they have one more major point in common: their implicit acceptance of “the media” as a clear entity or sphere separate from the state. This is a necessary assumption before one could talk about the relationship

between the news media, on one hand, and the state, on the other. It leads to two traditional contradictory views in the field: either the media sphere is submissive to the political sphere, a stance taken mostly by Marxists and critical theorists, or the media sphere is in competition with the political sphere, a view mostly attributed to functionalist theorists (see Downing, McQuail, Schlesinger and Wartella, 2004). The same assumption is even more widespread in other fields and in popular culture and frequently leads to some watered-down dualistic debates about the news media being the villain or the victim, and indirectly to simplistic claims, such as the news media are liberal or conservative (Herman, 1999; Goldberg, 2001; Alterman, 2003). For one, NI serves as a synthesis to the opposing opinions of whether the media influences the state or vice versa. For instance, Cook (2005, p. 159) agrees with Bennett and Livingston (2003) that “the media are a product of politics and feed back in to influence politics as well.” This allows for a more comprehensive evaluation of how the causal links flowing in both directions serve to bolsters both the news media and the state, while often reinforcing and regenerating the status quo.

In addition, many scholars consider the weakness of NI lies in the vagueness of defining an institution. While a potential problem, this vagueness actually allows for more flexibility and diverse approaches and purposes (Ryfe, 2006, p. 136). Lawrence (2006) notes this tension among NI scholars when it comes to defining what counts as institutional. Lawrence suggests reworking a model introduced by Shoemaker and Reese (1996), where influences on news can be seen as a set of concentric circles, ranging from the smallest circle that represents attitudes, biases, reporting skills, etc., while the largest circles represent the economic, legal and cultural boundaries (p. 227). This proposal

serves as a starting point that fits both the mediating position of NI between macro- and micro-level forces, and allows for tracing the political influences on news and simultaneously the news influence on politics. But it needs to be reworked to allow for a more complex understanding of diverse institutional processes, by taking advantage of the vagueness and flexibility of the meaning of an institution instead of reaching a clear cut definition.

In fact, the vagueness of the concept of institution is an asset rather than a burden for this study. It allows for the introduction of a body of theories that remedy some of the disadvantages of New Institutionalism. One of these disadvantages is NI's taking for granted the "walls" that separate the institution from the rest of society (Cook, 2006, p. 160). The other relates to a main disagreement over whether economic or political macro-forces primarily mediate news routines (Ryfe, 2006, p. 138).

Both disadvantages are linked by the assumption of a clear "wall" or line of distinction between two entities. The first presumes that the news media are "sufficiently independent of other political actors that we should think of them as distinct" (Cook, 2006, p. 160). The second presumes that the state and its economy are clearly distinct and separate spheres thereby allowing for a clear differentiation between political and economic macro-forces as primary mediators of news routines. These assumptions, first, limit the scope of the analysis by taking as fact that political interests in society are distinct from—and possibly contradictory or competing with—economic interests. More importantly, the assumptions cut the possibility of a news media system embedded and integrated in the political and economic system.

Although several NI scholars have offered solutions to these problems, their proposals mostly dealt with the symptoms of these assumptions. Cook (2006), for instance, argues, “We need to approach the news media with attention to the institutional walls surrounding them *and* the ways the news making process includes actors on both sides of that wall.” His solution was to “step back from looking at the separate political institution of the news media as our object of focus and take a broader perspective on the entire process of political communication (p. 161).” This solution still takes for granted the “walls” that separate the journalist from the politician. In addition, this solution resonates with an approach that became popular in the field of comparative politics around the end of WWII, where the study of “the state”—which dominated the early years of the field—was rejected as too narrow, and the broader concept of “political process” was favored. This unsuccessful attempt lasted until the 1960s when calls for “bringing the state back in” arose, and a return to the focus on the state dominated (Mitchell, 1999; also see Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol, 1985). At the same time, the increased interest in culture that emerged in the 1960s culminated in a cultural turn in the 1980s that coincided with a diverse range of postmodern approaches and theories (see Steinmetz, 1999). Instead of turning back the clock and focusing on political processes—in this case the process of political communication as a whole, this study borrows from some of the innovative theories introduced by the aforementioned cultural turn and other postmodern approaches.

Mitchell’s (1995) innovative theory reframes our understanding of the similarly taken for granted concepts of the state and society, and the state and economy. Mitchell rejects the uncritical acceptance of the state as a concrete and coherent object clearly

separate from society or the economy, but, at the same time, he does not reject the concept of the state altogether in favor of an abstract conception like political process. According to Mitchell, the state is neither a real material entity nor an abstraction or ideological construct. “The line between state and society is not the perimeter of an intrinsic entity that can be thought of as a freestanding object or actor. It is a line drawn internally, within the network of institutional mechanisms through which a certain social and political order is maintained” (p. 83). This concept, when applied to the news media, not only resolves the problems mentioned above, but is also compatible with NI modes of analysis since it focuses on the “network of institutional mechanisms.” Mitchell’s theory brings into focus the micro-level analysis of routines, values and procedures, and allows for an analysis mode that generalizes these micro-level processes to the macro-level structures they generate, reproduce and maintain while simultaneously being influenced and shaped by them.

Mitchell’s conception, first, resolves the conflict in NI over whether economic or political forces are the primary influences on news production. This will become instrumental in analyzing Lebanese broadcast news media, which to a large extent is embedded inside the state and the economy, and the lines of distinction that separate it from politics and business, or that separates the political elite from the economic elite—both of whom control the news media, are extremely difficult to pin point. Second, Mitchell’s “mundane process” and NI’s micro-level analysis, which are essentially the same, will help give insight into the complex institutional mechanism and routines, and how those both serve the dominant political/economic interests while simultaneously working to bolster and regenerate their power.

Consistently with this general theoretical lens, the dissertation is divided into five parts. The first half of Part I has introduced the topic of research and the theoretical scope, while the second half focuses on methodology. Parts II, III and IV make up the body of the analysis, each focusing on a certain level of analysis. The metaphor of a video camera lens that starts from a wide angle and zooms in to a tight shot, while occasionally zooming out and back in to another scene, could help in understanding how these three parts are tied together.

Part II starts with a macro-level analysis mode of the Lebanese society and its media, focusing on cultural, political and economic issues related to television and news. Chapter 2 briefly outlines the key macro factors that have influenced the evolution and development of broadcast news in Lebanon. It focuses on the rich and often clashing cultures of this tiny country and discusses the characteristics of its confessional political system and how it evolved historically. Chapter 3 critically reconstructs the history of television and broadcast news in Lebanon, focusing on the major political and economic factors that shaped and molded this industry since its inception. This chapter covers Ryfe's (2006) third and fourth principles, which deal with the life history of institutions. It also discusses in detail ownership information gathered from original financial and legal documents not widely published in Lebanon.

Part III adopts a mezzo-level analysis mode to understand the key players in Lebanese television news production, namely the journalists, their institutions, values and routines. Chapter 4 begins by drawing a picture of the individual Lebanese broadcast journalist. It asks about his professional norms, values and personal ambitions. Chapter 5 puts the broadcast journalist in an institutional context trying to understand how the broad



media institution molds and shapes his behavior and output, focusing mostly on hierarchal structures in corporate environments. Chapter 6 adds external pressures and fears to the journalist's life, trying to understand the forces that influence her behavior and that may not necessarily originate from inside her institution or corporation. Chapter 7 zooms in to the news department in the corporate hierarchy and follows the mundane practices of the hierarchized newsroom and its practices. It also visits the issue of technology and studies the evolution of key instruments utilized in television news today, and how those instruments and technologies simultaneously make the production of content and the control of the message more efficient.

Part IV moves from the mezzo to the micro mode of analysis. Chapter 8 focuses on the raw material of news operations and the institutionalized filters that sort and arrange them. It outlines the dominant sources of news used in Lebanese television journalism and analyzes the elements of newsworthiness that filter them. Chapter 9 qualitatively analyzes the final product of the Lebanese broadcast journalist, taking apart the newscast, its rundown and script and zooming in to the individual television news story and its elements.

Finally, Part V summarizes the conclusions presented in the preceding chapters and draws the big picture of television news and the state in Lebanon.

### **C. Methodology**

This dissertation used a case study approach that integrated quantitative and qualitative approaches although qualitative methods dominated the study due to the nature of the ethnographic information gathered in the field (Creswell, 2003; Scholz and Olaf, 2002; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994; Zazie, Nerlich, McKeown and Clarke, 2004). Case

studies try to access and integrate a wide variety of data from various sources, depending on the case and its nature (Scholz and Tietje, 2002). This study gathers information from open-ended interviews, surveys, participant observations, direct observation and archival and historical records. It follows an embedded case design, which “allows for both qualitative and quantitative data and strategies of synthesis or knowledge integration” (p. 14).

This study uses two key strategies utilized in qualitative research. First, it engages in “thick description,” a term used by Geertz (1973) to point out the necessary approach needed to understand a phenomenon within its social and cultural contexts. Since the study focuses on a foreign country, it is necessary to delve into thick description of the phenomenon in focus to understand the nuances of the behavior of journalists and their institutions within the political, cultural and economic context of Lebanon (Pauly, 1991). Second, the study triangulates several methods, empirical material and theories to insure the “validity” and “reliability” of this predominantly hermeneutical study and to limit the bias of the researcher and his sources and increase the truthfulness of the study (Denzin, 1978; Creswell and Miller, 2000). Triangulation has often been encouraged in interpretivist studies and is essentially a natural fit and an essence of case studies (Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994).

The sites of this case study were television stations in Lebanon, with a focus on newsrooms, news departments and news operations. That included news department workers, technologies and processes. Between May and August of 2006, the researcher spent about two weeks at each of the four television stations studied. In the first two days, the researcher went around the various station departments conducting brief interviews

and observing operations outside the news department. The rest of the time focused on the newsroom and its operation. Two of the stations studied (New TV and Future TV) permitted unrestricted access to all employees and all departments. There, the researcher visited all the station's departments and interviewed as many employees as possible. At the other two stations (LBCI and TL), access was limited mostly to the newsrooms and their surroundings. In one of the latter stations (LBCI), access was even restricted to a select number of employees and a limited number of interview questions, and permission to record audio was rejected.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to observing news operations, the researcher spent time gathering official information about ownership, which was extremely difficult and time consuming in a country with no transparency laws and a business culture that closely protects ownership information. Furthermore, several Lebanese libraries and news archives were targeted for locally produced books, historical documents, news articles and studies relating to the subject of this study. Furthermore, the researcher spent time with audiences and observed their watching behavior and engaged in discussions about news and politics in Lebanon.

Furthermore, several newscasts were recorded on video tape during the time of the field research, while newscast rundowns and scripts were simultaneously acquired from the stations visited. The newscasts and their rundowns and scripts were later analyzed qualitatively (Riffe and Fico, 1998). In a handful of cases, original handwritten drafts of reporters' news stories were acquired along with the news directors' markings

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<sup>1</sup> At that same station, the manager in charge demanded to see all the questions that will be asked and went through the list accepting some and rejecting many others. The same manager was very strict in allowing movement or access to some employees and information. That resulted in less information gathered from inside this station and the reliance on more information from outside.

and corrections. Those invaluable documents literally showed the “traces” of power stretching from the top of the hierarchy down to the single word and sound bite. In one of the stations where the researcher entered officially as a news intern, all articles he wrote along with the markings and edits of the producers and news directors were also saved and later analyzed. Most importantly, several newscast rundowns, scripts and stories were analyzed while they were produced. The journalists creating and editing those stories and newscasts were simultaneously being observed and asked questions about their choices and decisions. The most revealing information came from questions asked to producers and news directors about their prioritization of news stories and from reporters about their reasoning behind the construction of individual stories. This process of triangulating interviews, observations and content analysis produced the richest and most valuable data for this study.

The original goal of this study was to study six stations. Unfortunately, the war that broke out on July 12 between Israel and Hezbollah led to some obstructions and delays in the work. The day originally slated to be the first for field investigation at al-Manar TV—Hezbollah’s TV station, was the same day the station was destroyed by Israeli air bombing.<sup>2</sup> Due to this situation, no field research was conducted on the premises of Al-Manar TV, which had granted permission to enter its stations just days before the summer war broke out.<sup>3</sup> In addition, some interviews were cancelled, while others were postponed due to the conflict. Several senior managers, owners of TV stations, politicians and political advisors were not interviewed because of this situation.

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<sup>2</sup> Thankfully, I was refused entry into al-Manar TV’s building just hours before it was hit.

<sup>3</sup> NBN did not grant permission at first, but contacts were being made to get access to the station. The war also eliminated that opportunity.

The author's work as a journalist during the war, however, helped in gathering some unique information and observations that added to this study in many ways.

The bulk of the information for this study came from depth interviews conducted with 97 participants. In the tradition of in-depth qualitative interviews, a set of "main questions" were prepared before the interview to keep the study focused. Then probes were used to "clarify and complete the answers" and to "signal the interviewees about the expected level of depth." Follow-up questions were simultaneously utilized used to acquire "the depth that is a hallmark of qualitative interviewing by pursuing themes that are discovered, elaborating the context of answers, and exploring the implications of what has been said" (Rubin and Rubin, 1995, p. 151; Lindlof and Taylor, 2002).

Most of these qualitative interviews were digitally recorded and lasted 30 to 90 minutes. All interviewed individuals were asked permission and explicitly consented to the IRB form. Most interviews were conducted inside the stations simultaneously while observing the news operation and in many cases while the interviewees were doing their job. Some interviews took place away from the work environment, mostly for follow-up questions, but also due to the sensitivity of some subjects and because some television institutions restricted access to those interviewees. Most of the interviewees were reporters, anchors, producers and newsroom managers dealing with the crafting and production of television newscasts and political programs. In addition to these in-depth qualitative interviews, politicians, media experts and regular audiences were informally interviewed.

All conducted interviews were transcribed and translated manually and then organized in Microsoft Word documents. Each translated interview was then read

thoroughly and dissected into different parts, each dealing with one aspect of the study. The dissected parts dealing with the same topic were then gathered from different interviews and organized into individual documents. Finally, each topical document was synthesized and recomposed into a coherent narrative, taking into consideration the dominant opinions and the variations in options from one person to another, and from one station to another.

In addition to interviews, the researcher gathered information using participant observation methods by extensively recording notes and maintaining a diary of observations throughout the time spent at the stations (Judd, Smith and Kidder, 1991). The researcher followed the “participant as observer method in which the group to be studied is made aware of the researcher’s role” (Reinard, 1998, p. 198). Like the interview data, the information gathered was also categorized into topics and grouped together accordingly.

Of the 97 interviewees, 75 were current television employees, while the rest worked at the Lebanese wire service (7), at stations that no longer existed (7), or at independent research companies that study TV markets (5). The 75 TV employees interviewed came from four television stations: New TV (23), Future TV (19), LBCI (14) and TL (19). Of these 75 employees and seven wire service employees, 73 worked in the newsroom, while the rest came from other departments, like programming and marketing. In addition, five participants had top management positions. Of the 73 newsroom employees, there were 28 reporters and/or correspondents, 13 producers, seven assistant news directors or executive producers, six anchors, three news directors and three

technical directors. The rest (13) were tape editors or other newsroom employees, like typists or language experts.

As for the distribution and demographics of the 75 television employees, the vast majority were Lebanese natives, and some of them held dual nationalities, mostly from Western countries. Thirty five percent of the newsroom employees had less than six years of experience. Twelve percent had been journalists for six to 10 years, and 30 percent had 11 to 15 years of experience. Twenty three percent had more than 15 years of experience. Only 26 percent of the journalists did not have a Bachelors degree, while the majority (57%) did. In addition, 17 percent had higher graduate degrees. Most newsroom employees at New TV and TL had relatively less experience and were younger than those who worked at Future TV and LBCI.

Most broadcast journalists who had college degrees graduated from the first branch of the Lebanese University (41%), which is located in western Beirut, while 16 percent came from the second branch of LU, which is located in the eastern part of the capital. This is consistent with what most participants confirmed about the first branch of the LU being the primary source of most print and broadcast journalists in Lebanon. The second in line after the two LU branches was the Lebanese American University (LAU), which graduated most of the technical and creative staff. The rest were distributed among the other private Lebanese universities. Only 30 percent of those college graduates had degrees in broadcast journalism, while almost an equal number (27%) had degrees in print journalism. Nine percent had degrees in other fields of media studies. The rest had degrees in political science, international affairs, Arabic literature, engineering, or computer science.

A Spearman's Rho correlation coefficient statistic (Figure 1) between years of experience and education level returned a value  $r_s(73) = -4.5$ ,  $p=0.0$ . Using the interpretation of Cohen (1988), this negative medium effect correlation suggests that journalists who had longer experiences most likely had lower levels of education and vice versa. In other words, most new comers to the world of broadcast journalism in Lebanon were college educated.

**Figure 1**  
**Correlations**

			Years of Experience	Level of Education
Spearman's rho	Years of Experience	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.447**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	75	75
	Level of Education	Correlation Coefficient	-.447**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	75	75

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

A cross-tabulation between years of experience and college major (Figure 2) shows that 40 percent of those who had print journalism degrees had less than 10 years of experience, compared to 64 percent of those who had broadcast journalism degrees. On the other hand, 60 percent of print journalism graduates had over 10 years of experience, compared to 36 percent of broadcast journalism graduates. This suggests that more new comers to the world of television journalism were getting degrees in broadcast journalism and reversing the older trend of studying print journalism and working in broadcast—which was noted by the many participants who studied print journalism and said they learned TV journalism on the job.



**Figure 2**  
**College Major \* Years of Experience Crosstabulation**

% within College Major		Years of Experience		Total
		Less than 10 years	More than 10 years	
College Major	Print Journalism	40.0%	60.0%	100.0%
	Broadcast Journalism	63.6%	36.4%	100.0%
	Other	44.4%	55.6%	100.0%
Total		46.7%	53.3%	100.0%

Religion remains a thorny subject in Lebanon. Most employees preferred not to reveal their religion and some even rejected talking about their political affiliation, although some did. In comparing religious identities and political affiliations of newsroom workers, New TV and TL had the most diverse body of employees. That was followed by Future TV which was moderately diverse. A substantial number of its employees, however, were supporters of the Hariri movement and politics. LBCI had the least politically and religiously diverse body of employees. By the admission of one of its top managers, most LBC employees are sympathetic or even supporters of the Lebanese Forces.

Most participants interviewed believed that Future TV and LBCI pay the highest salaries among all stations, while NBN and TL had the lowest. At the same time, the two former stations were the most competitive and hardest to get a job at, but they had the most prestige and gave the most valuable experience, especially if a journalist wants to work in other Arab countries. However, several participants noted there is a much better opportunity to grow rapidly and get quick promotions at the medium and small stations, especially New TV. Some participants estimated the range of salaries for a local reporter with two to three years of experience is \$600 to \$1200. Many of those interviewed were aware of the much higher salaries stations in the Arabian Gulf area offer and a substantial

number said they would accept a good offer if it came from an Arab gulf station, but wished they could make more money and stay in their country. Few seemed concerned about the current spike in political violence in Lebanon and the targeting of journalists. Some even sounded excited about the “change in routine.”

## **PART II**

### **Chapter 2: Key Factors in the Development of Lebanese Mass Media**

It is no surprise that the structure of Lebanese media ownership and control reflect the Lebanese society at all its levels. While most media can fairly be described as commercial and privately owned, they are also highly partisan and distributed among the dominant politico-sectarian powers. In addition, most media are equally, if not more, politically-driven as they are commercially-driven, due partly to insufficient commercial support but mostly to the awareness of their power in shaping public opinion. While many scholars agree that Lebanese media are “free,” a more accurate description would be diverse, partisan, competitive, and at times irresponsibly unrestrained and chaotic (e.g. Rugh, 2004). Furthermore, Lebanese media target niche-audiences that are mostly defined by religion, sect or political party. To better understand how ownership influences the production of news in Lebanon, it is important to first understand the defining aspects of the Lebanese society, especially the aspects that have influenced the evolution of its news media system. The following sections describe the Lebanese cultures, politics, economy, technology and other key factors of the society that influence and are influenced by the media.

#### **A. Culture and Politics: Lebanon, a Mosaic of Cultures in Flux**

In 1859, William M. Thomson, a Christian missionary in Syria and Palestine for 30 years, described the inhabitants of the “holy land” as follows:

The various religions and sects live together, and practice their conflicting superstitions in close proximity, but the people do not coalesce into one homogeneous community, nor do they regard each other with fraternal feelings.

The Sunnites excommunicate the Shiites—both hate the Druze, and all three detest the Nusairiyeh (Alawites). The Maronites have no particular love for anybody, and, in turn, are disliked by all. The Greeks [Orthodox Christians] cannot endure the Greek Catholics—all despise the Jews. And the same remarks apply to the minor divisions of this land. There is no common bond of union. Society has no continuous strata underlying it, which can be opened and worked for the general benefit of all. But an endless number of dislocated fragments, faults, and dikes, by which the masses are tilted up in hopeless confusion, and lie at every conceivable angle of antagonism to each other.... (p. 247)

“The Lebanon” can best be described as a mosaic of cultures in flux. Lebanon, a state half the size of New Jersey with a population of about four million (Lebanon, 2006), constitutes an impressively broad spectrum

of cultures, from the most liberal to the most conservative. The country’s landscape is even more remarkably diverse, ranging from mountains to valleys to coastal and inland plains, all of which can be toured in

Lebanon: Facts
<b>Capital:</b> Beirut
<b>Major cities:</b> Tripoli, Sidon, Tyre
<b>Land:</b> 61% urban; 21% agricultural; 8% forested
<b>Climate:</b> Mediterranean; Four seasons
<b>Area:</b> 4000 sq. mi.
<b>Population:</b> Aprox. 3.83 million
Table 1 Source: (Lebanon, 2006)

less than three days. A common saying in this four-season Mediterranean country is that you can start your day skiing in the mountains, spend your afternoon at the beach, and still have plenty of time to siesta before enjoying Beirut’s glamorous nightlife.

Lebanon is “perceived as one of the most liberal in the Arab[ic] world” (Schofield, 1999; Abouchedid, Nasser & Van Blommestein, 2002, p. 198) and “one of the most Western-oriented societies in the Middle East, where English and French are

widely spoken and Western trends avidly followed” (Blanford, 2002, ¶ 17). The Lebanese take pride in having the freest country in the region. Writers and scholars from around the Arabic world look towards Beirut to publish their controversial books. “If I can not publish it in Lebanon, then I cannot publish it anywhere in the Arab[ic] world,” complained Nawal Al- Saddawi, a prominent Egyptian scholar and feminist (Castillo, 2001, p. 4).

Lebanon as a state was the result of major shifts in international politics at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. After the World War II collapse of the Ottoman Empire that occupied most of the modern Middle East, the victorious Western European powers moved in and reshaped the political map of what they used to call the “Near East” or the “Levant.” Historically, this area encompassed

Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Jordan and Palestine and was called “Bilad Al-Sham” or the “Fertile Crescent” (Dajani, 2005; Hitti, 2002; Sa’adeh, 1947). Prior to the 1916 French-British “Sykes-Picot” Agreement to divide the area, “the Lebanon” referred to the mountain chain located on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean sea, in a country some still call Greater or Historic Syria (Beshara, 2007; Sa’adeh, 1947). After World War II, the French, who were given a League of Nations “mandate” over

Lebanon (1919-1943), established a puppet government there based on a feeble balance between the competing religious groups that dominated that tiny area. The French gave

<b>Lebanon: Official Religions</b>	
<b>Muslims (60% of population)</b>	Shiite
	Sunni
	Druze
	Isma'ilite
	Alawite
<b>Christians (39% of population)</b>	Maronite
	Greek Orthodox
	Melkite Catholic
	Armenian Orthodox
	Syrian Catholic
	Armenian Catholic
	Syrian Orthodox
	Roman Catholic
	Chaldean
	Assyrian
<b>Other (1% of population)</b>	Copt
	Protestant
	Jewish
	Other

Table: 2 Source: (Lebanon, 2006)

the Christian Maronites the upper hand in most state positions, since the Maronites were passionately pro-France (Lebanon, 2007). Some of the state's resources were shared with the Sunni Muslims and to a much lesser extent with the remaining religious sects, especially the Shiite Muslims and the Christian Orthodox.

This fragile construction, as many predicted, kept the country in a constant state of flux leading up to a devastating 17-year-long civil war, exacerbated by the creation of the hostile and expansive state of Israel at its southern border. The civil war that started in the mid 1970s left an estimated 100-thousand dead and even more injured and permanently handicapped. About one million people were displaced from their towns and villages and hundreds of thousands left the country permanently. The destruction of buildings, roads and other facilities and infrastructure were estimated in the tens of billions of dollars (Chomsky, 1999; Fisk, 2002).

After the end of the civil war (around 1990), a central government took control and was backed and stabilized by a friendly neighboring Syria and other Arabic countries, especially Saudi Arabia. That period witnessed the reemergence of Lebanon as a peaceful democratic state and the establishment of new laws and institutions that still shape and define Lebanon today. Meanwhile, religious sectarianism and political instability threaten to plunge the country back into civil strife at any moment. This sentiment was widely reiterated during some of the most recent political upheavals. Oddly, Lebanon's menace is also its main distinguishing characteristic and the source of its peculiar freedom, multiculturalism and diversity.

Today, there are 18 officially recognized religious sects in Lebanon. The five largest sects are the Shiite Muslims, the Sunni Muslims, the Maronite Christians, the

Orthodox Christian, and the Druze—a sect usually but not always considered a Muslim sect. In Lebanon’s confessional political system, each sect is allocated a fixed number of parliamentary seats depending on its perceived share of the population. Top positions in the executive branch are also allocated according to sect. The president is a Maronite Christian, the prime minister a Sunni Muslim, the speaker of the house of parliament a Shiite Muslim, the deputy prime minister an Orthodox Christian, and so on. This arrangement remained an oral contract between the sects until the latest civil war. During the 1989 peace Talks, it was coded into the constitution (Traboulsi, 2007). While the Christians before that date controlled more seats in parliament, the Ta’if peace accord stipulated that Christians and Muslims share the parliament equally (See table 3 below). The sectarian division of political and public posts trickles down to the lowest positions and is both the source of many grievances and a defining factor in Lebanese life. What’s more, the sectarian allocation of jobs at lower levels does not rely on legal codes but on a deeply ingrained confessional mentality.<sup>4</sup> A case in point is the tradition that the head of the Journalists’ Union should be Christian, while the head of the Publishers’ Union should be Muslim. A clear indication of the instability of this system is the opposition of most groups to any true census that could reveal unfairness in the allocation of seats between the religions. As a result, most demographic statistics today are rough estimates that can be highly politicized.

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<sup>4</sup> See (Murphy, 2007, p. 38) for confessionalism in Lebanon.

<b>Allocation of Parliament Seats</b>			
<b>Religion</b>	<b>Sect</b>	<b>Pre 1990</b>	<b>Post 1990</b>
<b>Christian</b>	Maronite	30	34
	Orthodox	11	14
	Catholic	6	8
	Armenian Orthodox	4	5
	Armenian Catholic	1	1
	Protestant	1	1
	Other Christians	1	1
<b>Total Christian</b>		<b>54</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>Muslim</b>	Sunni	20	27
	Shiite	19	27
	Druze	6	8
	Alawite	0	2
<b>Total Muslim</b>		<b>45</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>Total seats</b>		<b>99</b>	<b>128</b>

**Table 3 Source: (Lebanon, 2006)**

It is important to note, however, that each religious sect is not necessarily a coherent political entity. In fact, most sects are dominated by more than one political party or “za’im”—the head of a historically feudal family, and more recently a returning expatriate who acquired immense wealth abroad. This explains why historically the most violent and bloody contests have been intra-sectarian and intra-religious, and mostly between “za’ims” attempting to consolidate their power over their sect (Fisk, 2002).

<b>Lebanon: Dominant Political Groups</b>					
	<b>Religious Affiliation</b>	<b>Name of party or movement</b>	<b>Ideological Affiliation</b>	<b>“Za’im”</b>	<b>Parliament Seats</b>
<b>Sectarian</b>	Muslim Shiite	Hezbollah	Islamic	Nasrallah	14
		Amal Movement	Pan-Arabist	Nabih Berri	15
	Muslim Sunni	Future Muslim Brotherhood	Pan-Arabist Islamic	Hariri various	36 3
		Progressive Socialist	Tribal right-wing	Walid Jumblat	16
	Christian Maronite	Free Patriotic Lebanese Forces	Lebanese nationalist Christian right-wing	Michel Aoun Samir Geagea	14 6
		Phalanges and Allies	Christian right-wing	Various	6
<b>Secular</b>	None	Syrian Social Nationalist	Pan-Syrian	Elected president	2
	None	Communist	Communist	Various	0

**Table 4 Source: (Embassy of Lebanon, 2006)**



This ordeal has rendered the common Lebanese citizen politically impotent. In fact, legally, before a Lebanese individual can be a citizen of the state, he has to be a “citizen” of his religious sect or remain marginalized. This has led to a system of clientelism,<sup>5</sup> where political power and economic wealth is divided among the ruling “za’ims” who are backed by their religious institutions (Beshara, 2006). This system leaves the public helplessly seeking favors for survival—from getting a job to paving the roads in their towns—from the ruling elite of their own religious sects.<sup>6</sup> In addition, the electoral system that is constantly reshaped to maintain the status quo and guarantee that traditional “za’ims” stay in power further exacerbates the problem. Lebanese citizens only elect deputies in their region and don’t directly elect the president, who is elected by parliament. This in effect makes elected deputies representatives of their sect—and only those who are in their municipality. They don’t need to campaign on a national scale and have no reason to feel accountable for citizens outside their municipality or to recruit loyalists among other sects, as long as they do not alienate them.

The few exceptions to this trend are the handful of secular political parties, who have yet to establish a strong foothold in the government. That is mainly due to the unfavorable electoral system that fragments their political base, which unlike traditional parties is not concentrated in certain regions and religions, but scattered across religions and municipalities. Each Lebanese party/sect ends up representing a small isolated piece of the national mosaic tableau. Each piece lives in a continuous state of anxiety, fearing

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<sup>5</sup> “Clientelism refers to the structuring of political power through networks of informal dyadic relations that link individuals of unequal power in relationships of exchange. In clientelistic structures of authority, power is vested in the top individual (the boss, sovereign, or head of clan) who personally decides how to distribute resources according to personal preferences.” (Brachet-Marquez 1992, p. 94)

<sup>6</sup> See Beshara (2005) for more information on clientelism in Lebanon.

from the domination of other groups, while the za'ims continue to be in a constant state of competition for a piece of the tiny national pie.

This constant state of anxiety and the confessional system have, furthermore, led the groups of this country to solicit foreign intervention at any moment they felt threatened or ambitious (Murphy, 2007, p. 38). Each religious sect, in fact, has been traditionally affiliated with one or more foreign powers. Each sect even conducts its own foreign policy and strikes alliances based on its own interests. In addition, the affiliation with those foreign powers surpasses politics and is evident at the cultural, religious, and even linguistic levels, with each sect encouraging almost total affiliation with its foreign patron. By the time Lebanon achieved its political independence from France in 1940s, each side had already become dominated by numerous aspects of a certain foreign culture. One example of this is the higher education system in Lebanon. A brief run through the origins of the main universities in Lebanon gives a glance into the whole situation.

Almost every Lebanese university can be linked to a religious establishment and/or a foreign religious missionary or group. The two oldest universities, the American University of Beirut (AUB; established in 1866 and first known as the Syrian Protestant College) and Saint Joseph University (USJ; established in 1875), were both established by foreign Christian missionaries. A Protestant group from the U.S. established the former and was in contentious competition with the European Jesuit Catholic missionaries, who founded the latter. This partly explains the persistent competition between the English and French languages among educational institutions in Lebanon. Moreover, due to their religious affiliations the missionaries attracted different groups

from the native population. The Jesuits found allies among the native Catholic and Maronite Christians, which caused a strong spread of French culture and language along with French political influence among the those two sects. Contrarily, the American Protestant missionaries mostly attracted the native Christian Orthodox and Muslim communities and pushed their cultural values into those communities, albeit with less success than their counterparts (El-Amin, 1997). A later addition to this mix, Al-Birr Wal-Ihssan group—a major Sunni Muslim institution based in Egypt, established the Beirut Arabic University in 1960. Primarily the product of the Nasserite Arab nationalism movement, this institution became the first major university with clear Arabic and Muslim undertones.

More recently established universities followed the same trend. The Lebanese American University (LAU: established in 1973 and first known as Beirut University College) had roots in the “American School for Girls, which was founded in 1835 by American Presbyterian missionaries” (“Historic Background,” 1998). The Notre Dame University (NDU: established in 1987) was first intended as a new branch for LAU but later became independent under the auspices of the Mariamite Maronite Church. Although this institution was established in the heart of the Maronite Christian region and affiliated with the Maronite Church, it had strong connections to the American Protestant (Presbyterian) establishment, which explains its favoring of English over French. There are about 40 other universities today, most of which have similar roots. The largest among them is the University of Balamand, which was established in 1988 under the patronage of the Christian Orthodox Church. The difference between this latter and the

preceding universities is that the Christian Orthodox Church is an indigenous religious institution (El-Amin, 1997).

The only major exception to this trend is the Lebanese University, established in 1951 as the first and only public university in the country. The founders of this institution intended it as a national integration machine—a tool for bringing together the diverse politico-religious and socio-economic groups. Early on, the Lebanese University focused on Arabic as the primary language of instruction, but later added some French and English courses. Unfortunately, the civil war all but destroyed this national institution and permanently scarred its primary purpose. The sharp divisions along politico-religious lines that emerged during the war reached down to the individual departments within the university, where almost every unit became divided into two or more “branches.” For instance, the prestigious Faculty of Information and Documentation (media studies) became two branches, each located in a geographic area isolated from the other and affiliated and controlled by the political powers in those areas. Today, one branch identifies with an English-Muslim-Leftist culture and is located in western Beirut, while the other branch associates itself with a French-Christian-Rightist culture and is located in eastern Beirut. In other words, the university that was envisioned as a melting pot became a contributor to the social barriers and politico-religious divisions. The question of “unifying the Lebanese university” remains one of the most controversially debated topics in Lebanese politics today.

The picture of religious division and foreign affiliation among Lebanese universities is even more sharply defined at the (K-12) school level. Due partly to this history, almost all Lebanese are bi-lingual since most schools and universities require a

foreign language. Schools at all levels use Arabic for the humanities and social sciences classes, while English or French dominates the natural sciences and mathematics classes. Lately, English has been introduced in most French schools at the intermediate level (Shaaban and Ghaith, 2002, p. 562). With the establishment of many Anglophone universities in the past 15 years, “English is starting to gain the upper hand over French and Arabic...,” despite a temporary decline in English proficiency during the civil war (Shaaban and Ghaith, 2002, p. 562; Mesce, 1999).

What’s more, Lebanese students do not stop at languages but also learn Western philosophies and cultures. The French introduced the “early foundations of Western philosophies of education in the Levant” as early as 1516, when the area was under Ottoman occupation (Abouchedid and Van Blommestein, 2002, p. 62). Moreover, due to high levels of immigration to Western countries, most Lebanese have adopted traits of Western cultures and traditions (Blanford, 2002). Most importantly, the constant flow of Lebanese students to European and American universities brings back a wealth of academic traditions and professional expertise to the country.

All this has contributed to keeping the pieces of the Lebanese mosaic further apart and colored with contradicting and divisive identities and cultures. This tableau, as we shall see in the later chapters, reflects the political and cultural identities of Lebanese broadcast news media institutions and their output.

### **B. Economics and Technology: Highly Skilled Professionals, Poorly Equipped Media**

From the earlier section, it is clear that some of the most important factors in the development of the Lebanese media are its unstable politics and diverse competing

cultures. Two more elements that cannot be separated from the political and cultural aspects are Lebanon's chronically weak economy and the poor state of its technological infrastructure.

Lebanon has a free-market economy with a strong social welfare system (Lebanon, 2006). Private ownership of most media outlets today is a direct result of the chaotic years of the civil war (1975-1990), especially for broadcast media. Since the end of that war, private media ownership has become one of the stable characteristics of this country. We shall see in the next chapter, however, that the correlation between political power and media ownership renders the separation between private and public media meaningless. To simply describe the news media as commercial and privately owned in a capitalist economy does not even begin to tell the story of the large impact of the economy on Lebanese media.

Lebanon, in its relatively brief history as a state, has always been dependent on external powers, whether for political protection, natural resources or economic aid. In addition, Lebanon imports most, if not all, of its high-tech equipment and depends on external manufacturers for parts, fuel and maintenance (Lebanon, 2006). That meant media technology has been imported from foreign countries for prices higher than that of locally manufactured equipment, beginning with the first printing press and ending with the latest computers and cell phones. The necessity to import media technology, as we shall see in the next chapter, was often used as a political weapon to influence media output.

Furthermore, Lebanon has one of the weakest economies in the Arabic world.<sup>7</sup>

While services, especially tourism, account for over two-thirds of the GDP, industry makes up only 21 percent—none of which is related to manufacturing technology or media equipment (Lebanon, 2006). Taking into consideration its huge public debt, high unemployment rates and a virtually stagnant economy, it is easy to predict the poor state of the media infrastructure in that country (See table 5 below).

<b>Lebanese Economy in Numbers</b>	
<b>GDP-purchasing power parity</b>	\$21.45 Billion (2006)
<b>GDP-real growth rate</b>	0.5% (2005)
<b>GDP per capita</b>	\$5,500 (2006)
<b>GDP composition by sector</b>	Services: 72% (2005) Industry: 21% (2005) Agriculture: 7% (2005)
<b>Unemployment rate</b>	18% (1997), 20% (2006)
<b>Population below poverty line</b>	28% (1999)
<b>Public Debt</b>	209% of GDP (2006)
<b>Exports</b>	\$1.88 Billion (2005)
<b>Imports</b>	\$9.34 Billion (2005)

Table 5 Source: (Lebanon, 2006)

Although roads, water, telephone and electric lines reach most urban and rural areas, the reliability of such networks is, at best, disappointing. Most towns, villages and city neighborhoods still rely on small privately-owned electric generators as backups for the intermittently available electricity. Just a few years ago, a similar system of mini telephone networks tied small communities until the government overhauled its telephone infrastructure and banned the tiny private enterprises. The cables that carried those small phone networks were later converted into cable TV carriers, mostly pirated from regional satellite services and offered for a fee of \$7-\$10 a month. Although local and international pressure was exerted on the government to regulate these illegal services,

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<sup>7</sup> Unlike Lebanon, many Arabic countries, especially in the Gulf region, were endowed with an overabundance of oil resources.

the few efforts made to rein them in were met by furious resistance from the hundreds of cable operators who stood to lose their source of livelihood. Their reaction was mostly due to political officials' intention of monopolizing the regulated cable system (Forrester, 2004; Sa'adeh, 2005).

Mostly affected by the poor media infrastructure is the Internet. Lebanon does not have a reliable and inexpensive high-speed Internet service. Although dial-up services are widely available, they are slow and expensive—especially after incorporating the cost of telephone connection. Efforts by local entrepreneurs to establish small networks of high-speed Internet services were not as successful as their cable TV predecessors, except in the main cities. Small businesses have tinkered with wireless and cable services, but are yet to succeed in drawing high demand, due to the high cost of the former and the strong will of the government to ban and regulate the latter. Furthermore, a planned nation-wide DSL Internet system that was projected for January 2006 has yet to start operating as of May 2007. Like many countries in the same situation, this has led to the flourishing of Internet cafés. Although the innovative spirit of Lebanese entrepreneurs has to some extent alleviated some of the problems caused by the weak economy and poor state of the technology, the country has still lagged behind the oil-rich Arabian Gulf states when it comes to embracing the information age.

Lebanon, however, has always had skilled labor in abundance, especially in the media industry. In fact, Lebanese media experts and journalists are almost ubiquitous in most Arabic media institutions, especially in the Gulf states. And Lebanese media experts are also leaving a mark on the international level. When the Pentagon awarded a \$96-million contract to Florida-based Harris Corporation to run Saddam Hussein's old



television and radio network, now called Al-Iraqiya, Harris chose the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation (LBC) as its main partner (Pincus, 2004).<sup>8</sup> Lebanese journalists are also playing a major role in Al-Hurra TV, the propaganda satellite news station funded by the U.S. State Department that broadcasts to the Middle East in Arabic. Al-Hurra's news director and many of its staff are Lebanese or Lebanese-American, to the point that at first Al-Hurra audiences did not know if it was an American or a Lebanese station (Schwartz, 2004). And when Syria solicited help from the United Nations to upgrade the journalism program at Damascus University and restructure its Ministry of Information, the UN recruited a Lebanese professor from the American University of Beirut for the task.

Lebanon has long prided itself on having one of the highest literacy rates among all Arab countries despite its war-ridden history and poor economy (UNDP, 2004). Lebanon has by far the largest proportion of schools and universities to its population. More importantly, media studies programs at the university level are in abundance, with at least 10 different programs with various focuses and specialties graduating some 1500 students every year.<sup>9</sup>

Lebanon's highly educated, highly skilled population has to some extent helped to balance out the country's economic and technological disadvantages. This has increased the capacity for establishing numerous media outlets and boasting the largest proportion of media institutions to its population in the Arabic world, especially for satellite TV,

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<sup>8</sup> This is partly due to LBCI's Christian identity and the historic alliance between its patrons (The Lebanese Forces) and the West.

<sup>9</sup> This information is based on a unpublished study by the author of this dissertation.

newspapers and advertising companies.<sup>10</sup> The main threat to this national treasure of professionals and experts is the tight job market which leads to dangerous levels of brain drain and human capital flight (Ozden, 2006). Beside that factor and the cost and access to the technology, the Lebanese technological capacity has been limited by two more factors, both economic but with strong political undertones.

First, Lebanon's small advertising market cannot possibly sustain even the current media companies. Regionally and internationally oriented institutions are more economically viable than media companies with an exclusively local audience. That has led many local media outlets (especially print media) to run at a loss and rely strongly on political funding—a major factor leading to their partisanship, according to an interviewed television executives (Interview 13a, June-July, 2006).

Second, the country's fragile politico-sectarian balance means that any emerging media concentration can easily upset the political stability of the country. As explained later, the main players in politics are themselves the main owners of the dominant media institutions. In other words, the political balance of power dictates a limit on media licensing and ownership and, in some cases, closure of certain outlets that upset the status quo, as in the case of New TV and Murr TV (see next chapter). What exacerbates this situation further is the confessional political system mentioned earlier, where major projects can be frozen indefinitely if a political group or "za'im" cannot satisfactorily gain from them. Many projects in the country are either monopolized by one politician or subcontracted to some loyal groups, with rumors of kick-backs and commissions

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<sup>10</sup> In fact, Lebanon has more newspapers than any other Arabic country, despite it having one of the smallest populations. In addition, until lately, Lebanon had been the hub of the advertising industry in the Arabic World, and one of its citizens (Antoine Choueiri) remains the godfather of this industry (see "Learning Everything," 2006).

reaching up to the highest echelons of power. One example is the projected DSL internet system, referred to previously. Several cable TV operators complained that a handful of politicians seek to shut them down only to monopolize the industry.

A side effect to this confessional system and environment of clientelism is what Lebanese commonly call “wasta” or “connections,” although the Arabic term has a negative connotation and usually means a help from a “za’im” to get someone a job or position in government. When it comes to getting a job, many Lebanese believe that merit and credentials take a back seat to “wasta.” This destroys the ambitions of the new generations and pushes them to travel abroad to fulfill their dreams. Those who stay behind are forced to beg for jobs and deal with poor work environments and unappreciative employers who have hundreds of replacement employees waiting in line. This point will become especially important when we discuss the power of the institution to shape and mold the behavior and output of even most if not all employees, even those who are fully opposed to its political line (see chapter six).

### **C. Other Social Factors: Lebanese programs, Dizzying Content, Disoriented Identity**

Several other social factors have also contributed to the development of the media in Lebanon. First, the geographic location of Lebanon, a virtual bridge between “East” and “West,” and its diverse cultures lead to a highly heterogeneous media output, varying from the religious to the secular and from the conservative to the liberal. In fact, Lebanese media offer a dizzying diet of programs, entertainment, news and services, both locally produced and imported from abroad. Anywhere in Lebanon, you can easily get access to the latest Hollywood movies, most international 24-hour news stations, local,

regional, and international television and radio programs, and most international and regional newspapers, such as the International Herald Tribune, Time and the Economist. The only limit to access is the poor infrastructure mentioned earlier and the occasional political ban on some publications.

Second, the long and well-rooted culture of freedom and democracy in Lebanon has also helped distinguish its media from many other countries in the region. Lebanese have historically embraced free speech, at times jealously and even abusively upholding principles of a free press. Although there were many instances of government violations of this freedom—especially during the civil war, the level of freedom and protection afforded journalists surpasses even many Western countries. In addition, the respect and prestige in which journalists are regarded—something widely shared throughout the Arabic world, gives the news media a level of credibility not common in many other countries. Lebanese journalists are expected to be experts in many domains, and their opinions and analysis are often given authority higher than that of politicians.

Furthermore, the Lebanese people are extremely political. They are avid followers of current local and international affairs, especially through television news. Lebanese respond to the media with passion that would shock American politicians, who complain of the chronic apathy of their constituents. The massive demonstrations that took place in 2005 and 2006 in downtown Beirut are a case in point. At a time when the country was split into two camps, each side was able to bring into the streets almost a third of the country. By some estimates, each side was able to marshal between one and one-and-a-half million people in a country of less than four million. That is comparable to the

Democratic and Republican parties turning out some 200 million people to demonstrate in Washington, DC. They will be lucky if that many people vote.

The down side of this Lebanese passion for politics is the inability of the country to handle such tremors due to the incoherent and often contradictory identities within the Lebanese society. Historically, there have been three major currents that define most loyalties and identities in the country: pan-Arab nationalism, pan-Syrian nationalism, and Lebanese nationalism. The first current runs strong in the Muslim Sunni community but also is strong among some seculars and leftists. The second current, which was dominant during the first half of the last century, has lately been limited to a few secular groups, most important of which is the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP). The third current, which was limited to the Christian Maronite and Druze communities in the 19th century, rapidly gained ground in the second half of the past century, especially since the former community had dominated government institutions throughout the pre-civil war era and put enormous resources and efforts to promote their identity. Further fragmenting these three identities are the additional sectarian and regional loyalties mentioned earlier. This lack of a singular identity among Lebanese has shaped media content and made it highly ideological and unambiguously partisan, as discussed later.

Moreover, this passionately politicized population has negatively affected news media output. In a country where “everything is politics,” journalists try to avoid any social issues affecting the public, lest they be politicized, and stick to covering the announcements and activities of politicians—a defining characteristic of the Lebanese newscast, as we shall see in chapter 10.

#### **D. Legal Aspects of the System: Free Press, Guaranteed Freedoms, Expensive Licensing**

As mentioned in the prior section, Lebanese laws guarantee free speech and protect freedoms of the press. Two major changes in media law have impacted the industry and helped define it: the media laws of 1962 and 1994. Before Lebanese independence in 1943, most laws were imposed by the Ottoman Empire and the French colonizers. The earlier laws were mostly geared towards controlling publication of anything that could harm the ruling Ottoman officials and the state and carried numerous penal codes ranging from monetary to temporary or permanent closure to imprisonment (Nassif, 2001, p. 4). After the Ottomans were defeated in WWII, the French redefined the press law in the country. The French laws, however, were not less stringent than their Ottoman predecessors—although ironically the supposed goal of the League of Nations mandate given to the French over Lebanon was to civilize and modernize the Lebanese and to introduce French principles of democracy and freedom. Curiously, one of the few restricting laws the French got rid of was the Ottoman law's minimum education and experience requirement for aspiring journalists (Nassif, 2001). After Lebanon became independent from French rule, a new legal code was created in 1948. It carried similar restrictions and penalties as the former laws and was frequently amended and updated, especially in 1962 and later in 1994—as the country recuperated from the destructive years of the civil war (1975-1990).

The 1994 law was virtually an amendment to the 1962 version, but more importantly it was a show of will by the government to enforce its press codes. What concerns us most is the part of the media law that defines and affects television news in Lebanon today.

The Ta'if agreement in 1989, which signaled the end of the civil war included a small passage related to the media. It stated that all media will be reorganized under the rule of the law and the framework of “responsible liberties” that will serve the objective of ending the civil strife in the country (The Ta'if Accord, 2006). Today, the Lebanese constitution states that Lebanon is a democratic republic established on the respect and protection of liberties, including freedom of expression and belief. Article 13 of the constitution further provides legal protection of the “freedom to express one’s opinion orally or in writing, the freedom of the press, the freedom of assembly, and the freedom of association....” (Lebanon Constitution, 1990)

Consistently with these constitutional guarantees, Lebanese press laws today have less stringent penal codes than before, and even those are not uniformly enforced. Many restrictions still exist, however. For instance, the press laws forbid the dissemination of any material that threatens national security and unity or insults top Lebanese officials, clerics or foreign heads of states. These codes were often ignored before and during the civil war, something that led to a more stringent attempt to control the media in the post-civil war era. Even then, however, many of these laws were blatantly violated by stations that had strong political backing, while those that were backed by weaker political groups were penalized for the slightest infringements, as we will see in the next chapter. A case in point is the section of the law dealing with foreign heads of state. While this law was upheld for certain foreign leaders allied with local political powers, it was openly violated with other leaders. This specific topic will be visited in chapter 10 when we analyze the coverage of a speech by Syrian President Basher al-Assad.

Some of the positive changes in the 1994 version of the law address the elimination of many of the harsh penalties allowed in previous versions. Those changes, however, did not come easily. In fact, the original version of the 1994 law provided the government the right to detain, fine and suspend the license of violators even before a court conviction, especially those who slander the president or incite sectarian strife. After wide protests from the press, the government backtracked and eliminated the pre-conviction penalties and the license revocation provisions and reduced the fines (Nassif, 2001). Other penal codes related to the dissemination of content that incites religious sectarianism or undermines the peace and reconciliation process after the civil war.

Aside from penal codes, the 1994 press law and its Audio Visual version addressed ownership regulations and licensing. In an effort to organize the chaotic scene that resulted from the civil war (see next chapter), the government enacted the audio-visual media law that ended the state's monopoly over broadcast media and offered the first regulatory system in the Middle East for private radio and television. The laws require any private broadcast stations that intend to disseminate political programming to obtain a legislative decree that grants a "class A" license. A media institution that does not intend to carry political programming can more easily get a class B license (Nassif, 2001). Although class A licenses allowed for newscasts and political shows, they stipulated that broadcasts should cover all or most of Lebanon—although the law was not clear on whether "most of Lebanon" meant most of its population or most of its land. Other provisions of the law dictated that each station must have shareholders from all religious communities and that no one person can own more than 10 percent of a station. This law was implemented in interesting and creative ways that rendered it obsolete, as



we will see in the next chapter. In addition, the law established a licensing board of 10 members, who were selected half by parliament and half by the cabinet of ministers (government). The board's job was to review license applications, verify that they meet legal requirements and give final recommendation to the cabinet, which then has the final word in rejecting the application or granting a 16-year license. The politically biased practice of the board and the cabinet in giving out licenses is thoroughly addressed in the next chapter.

Finally, the new broadcast media laws made the cost of acquiring licenses for a television station exorbitant. Dozens of stations that were running during the war could not afford to pay the licensing fees and ended up closing shop. The handful of stations that tried to merge their operations and barely met the excessive price tags, were overwhelmed by other excessive red tape requirements and the partisan mentality of the legislators. For instance, one of the requirements stipulates that stations had to have a viable and existing business operation before applying. As discussed in the next chapter, although New TV had been operating for several years and met this and most other requirements, it was denied licensing, while NBN was granted a class A license even before its station existed.

In sum, the current media law that was crafted to help the country exit from a destructive civil war offers some protections to journalists and the news media industry. It contains many provisions sensitive to the fragile equilibrium of the competing religious communities and forbids content that incites religious sectarianism or threatens the unity and stability of the state. Many provisions of the law are also aimed at halting the chaotic expansion of illegal media outlets during the civil war. The implementation of these laws,

however, offers a totally different story. As discussed in the next chapter, the political biased manner in which these laws were implemented led to the concentration of the television industry in the hands of a few dominant politicians and squeezed out numerous legitimate businesses and journalism institutions.

### **E. History of Lebanese News Media: Three Eras: Pre-Civil War, Civil War, Post Civil-War**

This section will briefly discuss the major historic periods that influenced the development of Lebanese mass media, in general. It will be divided across three eras and serve as an introduction to the next chapter, which focuses on the history of television and broadcast news.

The war that started around 1975 and ended around 1990 is the most commonly known but not the only civil war Lebanon had witnessed since its independence from French colonization in 1943. In fact, not peace and prosperity but rather war, conflict and instability characterize most of Lebanon's six decades of existence as a

<b>Major junctions in Lebanon's history</b>	
<b>Pre-civil war era</b>	
<b>Independence</b>	1943
<b>French troops leave</b>	1946
<b>State of Israel declared</b>	1948
<b>Civil war I (minor)</b>	1958-59
<b>Israel invades South Lebanon</b>	1967
<b>Civil war era</b>	
<b>Civil war II (minor)</b>	1975-78
<b>Syrians called on to "protect Christians"</b>	1975
<b>Israel invades more of South Lebanon</b>	1976
<b>Israel partially withdraws</b>	1978
<b>Syria takes partial control</b>	1978
<b>Civil war III (major)</b>	1980-92
<b>Israel invades; reaches beyond Beirut</b>	1982
<b>Syria and its allies begin gaining ground</b>	1985
<b>National Reconciliation Accord (Ta'if)</b>	1989
<b>Last battles of civil war fought</b>	1992
<b>Post-civil war era</b>	
<b>Relative stability under Syrian hegemony</b>	1992-05
<b>First democratic elections since 1975</b>	1996
<b>Israel withdraws from most of the south</b>	1999
<b>U.S. invades Iraq</b>	2003
<b>Prime minister Rafik Hariri assassinated</b>	March 05
<b>Major demonstrations break out</b>	April 05
<b>Syria withdraws;</b>	June 05
<b>Country on brink of another civil war</b>	July 05
<b>Elections reshuffles political alignments</b>	August 05

**Table 6**

theoretically independent state. Nevertheless, the latest civil war was by far the most destructive and the main defining factor of its present. So, for practical reasons,

Lebanon's modern media history is divided into three eras: pre-civil war, civil war, and post-civil war.

The first era spans from the founding and independence of the state of Lebanon and ends with the first fired shots of the civil war in 1975. That period witnessed the growth of an unregulated press, which consequently led to the first press laws, as discussed earlier. The first broadcast media were established during this era. No private television or radio stations were permitted at that time, however, and the government had monopoly over all electronic media.

Before the civil war, there was an estimated 400 valid licenses to publish periodicals, 50 of those were for daily papers. Most of those papers were highly partisan, a characteristic that remained stable until this day (Rugh, 2004). Contrarily, broadcast media had an official tone and were considered the mouthpiece of the ruling class. Although the government had a monopoly at that point over the television market, its two channels remained unprofitable up until the last few years before the civil war (Dajani, 2005).

The Civil War (1975-1990) not only halted the profitability of the broadcast media and the rapid expansion of the print media, but almost totally destroyed whatever development was achieved at that point. During the civil war only 15 dailies remained able to print regularly, but even those were interrupted every now and then due to violent clashes in their areas (Rugh, 2004). But while the printing press was on retreat, other media flourished. The fighting parties who took control of different regions of the country also took over the broadcast installations the government had erected and converted them into independent radio and television stations of their own. Those who

had the money bought new equipment from abroad and started broadcasting their own newscasts and programs. The estimates vary, but during that period some 25 television stations and hundreds of radio stations were broadcasting, albeit intermittently and to small regions of the country (Rugh, 2004; Dajani, 2005). It was also common to see one station frequently change hands depending on the fighting party's ability to maintain its military control over a region or even occupy other areas. This unfortunate state of affairs, nevertheless, ushered the beginning of private ownership in the Lebanese broadcasting arena.

Other trends consistent with war zones characterized the media scene during that era. While each part of the country was ruled by a dominant faction, none of these factions tolerated media opposition in the area they controlled. Furthermore, the wide spread of propaganda, closure or destruction of media institutions, and kidnapping, imprisonment or killing of journalists reached shocking levels. The gun, not the pen, had the final word during this era.

During the first four years of the post-civil war era (1990-1994) dozens of local entrepreneurs and returning expatriates started establishing media companies throughout the country. The government soon stepped in to bring order to the chaotic scene. The new press code, discussed in the earlier section, was created in 1994 and passed in 1996. That limited the total number of political papers to 25, including 15 Arabic dailies. Most dailies remained either openly or covertly tied to a specific political group or associated with a broad political direction or policy. But many papers switched allegiances when major political changes occurred or when their source of funding dried up. Some

remained somewhat consistent and backed their owners or stayed within one religious sect.

While violence was the main reason for the failing of numerous newspapers and magazines during the civil war, a new factor threatened to halt the fleeting expansion of both print and broadcast media after the war. Although the new laws succeeded in organizing the chaotic scene, they brought with them a hefty price tag for licensing. The financial requirements imposed by the new laws broke the back of many small media companies. Most newspapers had to seek financial backing and their alignments shifted constantly depending on the source of financial backing.

Rumors of journalists and institutions taking bribes are rampant in Lebanon today. Credible sources interviewed for this study have noted that they have engaged in bribing journalists and witnessed other politicians do the same. These sources, however, say that the process is more subtle and the word “bribe” does not reflect it. One parliament member said, “It is more like an exchange of favors,” in the form of cash, access to information or political appointment—a staple of the confessional system in Lebanon. At one point, a Lebanese Minister of Education declared that all Lebanese journalists can be bought and sold, which prompted a harsh reply from the Lebanese Press Syndicate.

During the last couple of years, major changes have again swept through this tiny country. The period following the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri witnessed numerous shifting in alliances at the political level, followed instantly with parallel changes in the media landscape. As the political elite and their followers became split into two major groups, so did the media, with a clear advantage to one group over

another. That brief period also brought back the era of assassination of journalists and put the country on the brink of yet another civil war. Numerous efforts at the moment are being spent to cope with the sudden political earthquake that struck the region.

The next chapter thoroughly discussed the development of television in Lebanon through these three eras. It focuses on the political, economic, technological and cultural factors that influenced the creation of the first television station before that war and the subsequent private stations established during and after the war.

### **Chapter 3: History of Lebanese Television and Broadcast News**

Many media scholars agree that media ownership is one of the key variables that influence the output of institution (e.g. Herman and Chomsky, 2001; McChesney, 1999). While ownership in the U.S. and Europe has evolved to the point where giant conglomerates with diverse businesses and global reach own the majority of mainstream news media outlets, the case in Lebanon is slightly different. Individuals, families and political parties still have absolute control over media companies in Lebanon, but that has been slowly changing lately with the spread of Satellite channels and the slow advance of multi-national corporations, especially those coming from Saudi Arabia and other gulf countries. While most Lebanese can fairly accurately tell which political figure “owns” which channel, official documents that back these claims are not easily accessible. In addition, not one manager (or employee) interviewed for this study divulged any ownership information—some were even offended and became hostile when asked. In Lebanon, ownership information is something to be closely guarded and most employees are kept in the dark about it. Even business reports in newspapers about shifts in ownership are vague and rare, and only seem to come out when they are linked to a law suit or scandal. The one place to get the information was the “Sijil al Tigari” or the trade department where owners register their companies. That means, however, sifting through hundreds of old dusty documents and lists of names that need to be double checked.

The following sections critically review historic documents and literature about broadcast media ownership and control in Lebanon. They analyze the available historic and financial documents, starting with the first two TV stations (CLT & Tele-Orient) that later merged into one government-owned station (TL). The first section highlights the

links of those early television stations to foreign ownership and control, a fact not sufficiently studied. The subsequent sections discuss the history of some of the war-era stations (LBCI and TLN) and end with the main television stations that still exist today.

#### **A. First Period 1956-1974: CLT, Tele-Orient and Foreign Influence**

May 28, 1959, witnessed the beginning of transmission for the first Television station in Lebanon. It was preceded by years of negotiations between the government and a group of Lebanese businessmen seeking license to broadcast (Dajani, 1971, p. 172). The two main businessmen, Wissam Ezz-El Dien and Joe Arida, received the first ever license to start a TV station with two channels in 1956, but their plans to start broadcast were delayed by the 1958 civil war (Boulos p. 29).

The 15-year contract between the newly founded *La Compagnie Libanaise de Télévision* (CLT) and the government stipulated that the station can broadcast educational and entertainment programming, and advertising should not exceed 25 percent of the broadcast time. The broadcasts should be under government scrutiny, and should not include programs which threaten public security, morals, or religious groups, or enhance the image of any political personality or party (Boyd, 1999). In addition, the agreement stated that “the company undertakes to broadcast free of charge news programs and official bulletins provided by the Ministry of Guidance and Information” (Dajani, 1979, p. 26).

Shortly after the debut of CLT, another company signed an identical agreement in 1959. It was called *Compagnie de Télévision du Libanaise et du Proche-Orient* or *Télé-Orient* (Dajani, 1979, p. 29). While CLT was built on a hill inside what was known during the civil war as Western Beirut, Tele-Orient was located on the outskirts of the



capital about 10 miles away in Hazmiye. This demographically Christian area was known during the war as Eastern Beirut. These locations will prove significant later during the civil war when each station symbolized the sectarian divide and represented one of the fighting sides.

Although less than a decade old, CLT and Tele-Orient started merger talks as early as 1965, and in October 1968 the two companies agreed to have a unified advertising sales representative (Boulos, 1995, p.123). Soon the two companies founded Tele-Management, which was 50 percent owned by Tele-Orient and 50 percent by Advision, the company that represented CLT's advertising and practically controlled it. According to Boulos (1995), a veteran CLT journalist and manager, the old guard in Advision quickly took over the top positions in Tele-Management and around 1972, Tele-Management became both the advertising representative and administrator for both companies. By that time, both stations were broadcasting mostly the same content and the newscasts (Boulos, 1995, p. 125-126).

In 1977, after the devastation of the first round of the civil war, the two companies were merged into Tele Liban (TL) and became half owned by the Lebanese government, while each of the original companies owned 25 percent.

Until that moment, there were no other TV stations in Lebanon. But that soon changed with stations mushrooming all over the country. The stories of those latter stations are covered in later section, but first we start with a critical revision of the history of the first two television stations in Lebanon highlighting the foreign role and the Lebanese government's hand in establishing, controlling and directing these stations.

### ***French Media Control and SOFIRAD***

The literature on CLT says it was the first non-government operated advertising-supported television station in the Arabic world (Boyd, 1999; Dajani, 2006; Boulos, 1995, p. 12-13). But looking deeper into the people, the companies and the circumstances behind the establishment and funding of Lebanon's first television company tells a slightly different and more interesting story.

From day one, the new station had the finger prints of the Lebanese government, and throughout most of its pre-civil war era existence, it was dominated by French state-owned companies like SOFIRAD and Havas. In fact, by 1961, a little over a year after broadcasting started, the French government became the largest stake holder in the company through a scheme of constantly adding liquidity to the capital-thirsty company (Boulos, 1995). By its third anniversary, CLT's shares were distributed as follows: SOFIRAD controlled 53 percent, a group of Kuwaiti businessmen controlled 12 percent, and a group of Lebanese businessmen controlled 34 percent (Obeid, 1996, p. 131).

This was the same business tactic used by French state-owned companies to take control of the 2000 or so "pirate" or "free" radio stations that sprung up throughout France in the first half of the twentieth century. "Unable to stop the proliferation of these popular broadcasting stations and unwilling to modify its own domestic system to compete effectively, the [French] government let SOFIRAD do the job" (Boyd & Benzies, 1983, p. 59). The process started with licensing those stations—collectively known as *Radio Peripherique*—and allowing them to compete for ratings and advertising revenue. A few years later, over half of the French stations found themselves in bankruptcy, and the rest were rapidly absorbed into a network controlled by SOFIRAD or

other state-owned holding groups (Boyd & Benzies, 1983). A similar model was implemented in post-civil war Lebanon, which will be covered below.

To be sure, the French venture into CLT was not simply a business investment by a private French company. The two main companies that controlled CLT much of its pre-civil war time, Havas and SOFIRAD, were fully state-owned and state directed. These two companies, which only later during the Mitterrand days went into private hands, were government organs that secured the broadcast media and kept them inline with the French government's policies (Nimmo & Mansfield, 1982, p. 14). In fact, according to (Ardagh, 2000), the French state controlled the broadcasting industry right from the start. "The Office de la Radio et Television Francaise (ORTF)... began life as a branch of the Postal Ministry, and in the post-[World War II] years, it depended directly on the Ministry of Information or the Prime Minister's office" (p. 487).

Although there is ample evidence that French companies like SOFIRAD controlled CLT, it is important to note that this control was far from being transparent and clear even to the veteran employees of that company. The invisibility of that ownership tells a more important story than the percentage of shares they controlled. For instance, before it became the biggest shareholder, SOFIRAD controlled CLT even during the early days of its establishment through the control of Advision, the Lebanese advertising company that had exclusive rights to sell CLT's advertising, and later had a monopoly over both CLT and Tele-Orient—two apparently competing television companies (Boyd & Benzies, 1983, p. 65). This complex scheme of government control over companies that controlled other companies made understanding ownership extremely difficult—something the French state seemed determined to achieve.

Therefore, it is imperative to delve a little further into French broadcasting policies and companies especially that they seem to have exported to Lebanon not only equipment and skills, but also control mechanisms, structures and traditions that still dominate Lebanon's television culture today. Moreover, France was Lebanon's post-WWII patron and it influenced every aspect of its modern state and economy. Understanding the French state's models of control gives insight into Lebanon's current models of controlling its media industry.

The relationship between the French financial holding company SOFIRAD (Societe Financiere de Radiodiffusion) and Radio Monte Carlo Moyen Orient (RMC-MO), the most popular foreign radio station serving the Arabic world, is a case in point. RMC-MO was established in the mid 1970s at the French government's request to beam news and entertainment programs to the Middle East and compete with BBC and Voice of America for Arab audiences (Boyd & Benzie, 1983, p. 63). The radio station was set up to transmit its programs in Arabic from Cyprus and was a subsidiary of Radio Monte Carlo (RMC)—a commercial radio company owned by SOFIRAD.<sup>11</sup> According to Zayani (2005):

Overnight, the dynamic free and modern tone which was derived from European commercial radio, captured Arab audiences who started to abandon the propaganda-ridden state radio. The presence of advertising was reassuring because of the perception that commercial radio cannot be at the service of the state. This was indeed a shrewd initiative on the part of the French. Behind the fig leaf of commercial radio was a station financed by SOFIRAD, a holding which

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<sup>11</sup> RMC originally was a propaganda vehicle for Germany during WWII. In 1982, SOFIRAD owned 83.34 percent of it, while the Principality of Monaco owned 16.66 percent (Boyd, 1983, p. 62).

was fully owned by the French state and whose directors were nominated by the French president. Ironically, Arab listeners and often decision-makers were unknowingly tuning in to French state radio (p. 54).

SOFIRAD's role started in 1943 when it was bought up by the Vichy government—the French government that collaborated with the Nazi occupiers during WWII (Smith & Paterson, 1998, p. 41). SOFIRAD's tentacles rapidly extended from Asia to Africa and parts of the Americas. It controlled in full or shared ownership of broadcast media companies with several Arabic states, like Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria (Kavanaugh, 1998, p. 92; Chalaby, 2005). But even when SOFIRAD had less than majority ownership of stocks, it still controlled a company through various business schemes. For instance, although SOFIRAD owned only 34 percent of “Europe No. 1,” it actually controlled up to 56 percent of the board of directors' vote through “double voting rights under various oral agreements” (Boyd & Benzies, 1983, p. 61). This tactic, furthermore, maintained SOFIRAD's consistent strategy of low profile and vague connection to the companies it controls. “This is evidenced, in part, by the fact that what minimal information concerning its activities exists is usually vague and often refers to SOFIRAD only as a holding company, without specifically delineating its interests or actions” (Boyd & Benzies, 1983, p. 57).

French government involvement in broadcast media operations outside its borders dates back to the 1920s when it was still one of the major European colonial powers (Nimmo & Mansfield, 1982). France established numerous broadcasting operations in its colonies, brought colonial personnel to France for training and sent French technicians and specialist to the colonies. The activity was both politically and commercially

motivated. French media companies would spread French propaganda and culture and help silence opposition voices, while simultaneously acting as a market for French broadcasting and high-tech products. And, while not always successful, the companies would even bring in advertising revenues, which in turn, would provide financial self-sustenance and further distance themselves from the French state through their commercial identity.

This strategy of invisible state ownership and suppression of critical voices was also implemented inside France through the same state-owned companies and across many non-media industries (Lewis, 1957). Post-war French governments traditionally suppressed even the little criticism that surfaced from the broadcast media, and although several liberals attempted to free the industry, “no Government would part with so valuable a weapon” (Ardagh, 2000, p. 486).<sup>12</sup>

### ***SOFIRAD and France in Lebanon***

This colonial French model is remarkably reflected in the early history of television in Lebanon. And although the information was extremely hard to find, reading between the lines reveals much of the evidence. The following paragraphs analyze historic documents and literature related to the means used by SOFIRAD and the French

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<sup>12</sup> Although there was pressure at the highest levels from opposing political groups to liberalize the broadcast media, Charles De Gaulle (1959-1969) and his successor Georges Pompidou (1969-1974) kept it in full check. Following his election campaign promises, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing (1974-1981) was the initiator of the albeit timid liberalization steps when he came to power. (Boyd & Benzies, 1983). Although he kept the state's monopoly over the industry, Giscard broke ORTF into seven smaller state-controlled bodies to encourage competition, and “did away with the Gaullist style of direct interference in TV” by giving editors more freedom to cover formerly banned stories like the Communist Party congress and opposition leaders. It wasn't, however, until François Mitterrand's (1981-1995) years that state monopoly was ended and TV's commercialization era began. “As a result, French television today still lacks prestige. It has long been despised by most education people—first as a tool of the state, today as a toll of big business” (Ardagh, 2000, p. 486-488).

government to control CLT and later Tele-Orient. The evidence is overwhelming and sometimes shocking, starting from minor issues, like purchasing land and equipment for the station, to major issues, like finding investors to fund the company and tracking the nationality of the CEOs and Chairmen, and the transfer of ownership from one company to another. The discussion is divided into eight points.

***First: Capital.***

In his classic book on television in Lebanon, Boulos (1995) attempts to write the history of CLT, a station he worked at for decades, was one of the first employees to be hired and reached the highest positions in its hierarchy. Boulos says, after receiving license from the government to establish CLT, Wissam Ezz-el Dien approached many people to invest in the company. Boulos vaguely discusses why some of them turned him down, but adds that the real investors were two members of the Syrian khomasiyat company, Rafik Sa'eed and the Jamil Mardam Beik. The two names never appear again in the book and no background about them was offered, but Boulos casually states that the two real investors appointed the French engineer Rene Ohri<sup>13</sup> to represent them in the board of directors. Ohri later becomes the CEO of the company and his name appears numerous times in the context of making important decisions for the station. Another investor, according to Boulos, was General Nawfal who became the first Chairman of CLT (Boulos, 1995, p. 30). Ohri's and Nawfal's roles are discussed further in below.

***Second: The land.***

After the matter of capital was settled, CLT then purchased land in Beirut owned by the French embassy. According to Boulos (1995), France was extremely interested in

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<sup>13</sup> The translation of the name from Arabic to English may have resulted in the wrong English (or French) spelling of the name.

CLT because it wanted to spread the Francophone culture, so it became a partner and was represented in the board of directors by several people, like Pierre LeFrank,<sup>14</sup> the CEO of SOFIRAD, Henri Dolbo<sup>15</sup> and Valentine Smith,<sup>16</sup> the general manager of the Lebanese-French Bank, and Mr. Delevin,<sup>17</sup> the director of the French Lycee school in Lebanon (p. 31).

***Third: French Chairmen and CEOs.***

It is frustrating that Boulos (1995) has details about the French control of the station scattered all over his book. He also barely hints that French companies like SOFIRAD that controlled CLT were directed by French executives who were nominated by the French president and maintained a close relationship with the French government (Zayani, 2005, p. 54). That is either because he was not aware of the information or because he was unwilling to clarify it. Nabil Dajani, on the other hand, clearly states that SOFIRAD entered the Lebanese television market early on by purchasing Advision, the advertising company that had monopoly over CLT's advertising and had partial ownership of CLT (Boyd & Benzies, 1983, p. 65). In other words, by controlling Advision, SOFIRAD controlled CLT.

By contrast, Boulos's description of Advision's role in controlling CLT didn't specify the French connection and a reader needs to tie statements from all around the book to reach that conclusion. Boulos even states the opposite about the Advision-CLT relationship.

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<sup>14</sup> The translation of the name from Arabic to English may have resulted in the wrong English (or French) spelling of the name.

<sup>15</sup> The translation of the name from Arabic to English may have resulted in the wrong English (or French) spelling of the name.

<sup>16</sup> The translation of the name from Arabic to English may have resulted in the wrong English (or French) spelling of the name.

<sup>17</sup> The translation of the name from Arabic to English may have resulted in the wrong English (or French) spelling of the name.



Some of the revealing details in his book include the history of Advision.

According to Boulos, when CLT was founded the board of directors decided to hire an external company to handle advertising. BSR (Business Services and Research), a Beirut-based public relations company headed by Samir Souky, was chosen for this task. BSR then established Advision to administer the work. Among the stockholders of BSR was Ghassan Tueinni, the owner of an-Nahar Newspaper today. Tueinni suggested to Wissam Ezz-el Dien to hire Mounir Takshi who then worked for Al-Hayat, the Saudi-owned pan-Arab newspaper. Takshi was one of the engineers of the “advertising merger” between CLT and Tele-Orient later, and when the two companies established Tele-Management to administer advertising for both of them, Takshi headed that company (Boulos, 1995, p. 189-190). Boulos continues, “To direct the first steps of Advision, the French company Media and Advertising was hired.”<sup>18</sup> That company sent the French manager Michel Cast<sup>19</sup> to provide supervision and consultancy. Cast used to work at Luxemburg TV. In a footnote, Boulos says, “There is no doubt that Cast had great influence on Advision. After he left Beirut in 1961, no one heard about him for years. Then I found out that he became the president of SOFIRAD, and therefore the president of CLT” (Boulos, 1995, p. 189). It is baffling why Boulos would choose to put this important piece of information in a footnote rather than highlight it. In addition, throughout the book, Boulos writes about Advision’s French top executives and owners without clearly stating that the company was fully controlled by SOFIRAD.

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<sup>18</sup> The translation of the company’s name from Arabic may not be accurate. The company’s name in Arabic is “I’lam wa I’lan.”

<sup>19</sup> The translation of the name from Arabic to English may have resulted in the wrong English spelling of the name.

Further statements by Boulos show that other (especially American and British) companies were also trying to grab a share of Advision, but the French and their Lebanese partners rejected those attempts. For example, when CLT faced capital shortage, an American investor Christopher Rin<sup>20</sup> offered to supply L.P. 600-thousand annually, but Wissam Ezz-el Dien rejected the offer and suggested an exchange in stocks between CLT and Advision, which supplied the former with L.P. 1.2M (Boulos, 1995, p. 189). Through this scheme, CLT became a 60 percent stake holder in Advision and BSR retained 40 percent, according to Boulos (p.62). Later in the book, Boulos states that it wasn't until 1974 that a non-French would head the company, when the French Pierre Roche<sup>21</sup> left Advision and the Lebanese Paul Tannous became CEO (Boulos, 1995, p. 140). What makes it even more interesting is that throughout its history CLT was suffering from losses while BSR and Advision were making lots of profit (Boulos, 1995, p. 189). In other words, the company that controlled CLT and was controlled by the French state was generating profit, while the Lebanese station was suffering from loss.

In his defense, Boulos (1995) notes the French tactic of constantly adding capital to CLT which “diminished the share of the Lebanese stockholders” (p. 107). He states that ORTF and other French companies were only small investors, at first, and adds:

But when ORTF was broken up into several companies, SOFIRAD and the Créange Group became interested in increasing the capital in CLT. But in the end, Sylvain-Fliora—[at the time Matra-Fliora; headed by the father-in-law of Créange] underwrote the capital..., which made them the majority stockholders.

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<sup>20</sup> The translation of the name from Arabic to English may have resulted in the wrong English (or French) spelling of the name.

<sup>21</sup> The translation of the name from Arabic to English may have resulted in the wrong English (or French) spelling of the name.

Suddenly, General Nawfal found himself a minority shareholder in the company, so he headed to France to negotiate with the new owners and found that [Matra-Floria] wanted to bring the SECAM color system into Lebanon to spearhead its effort of spreading it to the Arabic world. And that was the reason behind Floria's calculated effort of buying the majority stocks in Advision—later buying all the stocks, which led to the ousting of the Lebanese founder and head of Advision (Wissam Ezz-el Dien) with a French CEO... (p. 108)

This passage seems to reveal that Boulos had no idea about the relationship between SOFIRAD and Matra-Floria, the missile firm “that has stakes in just about everything”—from media to cars manufacturing to aeronautics and weaponry, according to Boyd & Benzies (1983, p. 67). Boulos seems to talk about them as two competing companies with purely commercial interests. Boyd and Benzies (1983) point that the president of Matra-Floria, Lagardere, had enormous political clout “because of the constellation being gradually built up around the media companies which SOFIRAD and Matra-Floria shared in ownership.

***Fourth: Less and Less Power for Lebanese Executives.***

Another trend revealed in Boulos's (1995) historic account of CLT was the role of the Lebanese executives. Those executives always had a strong connection to either the Lebanese or the French government or both, but seemed to eventually lose power to their French counterparts.

One of the main movers and shakers of CLT was General Suleiman Nawfal, who was one of the early investors in the company and the person who hired Boulos to work at CLT. General Nawfal was a Lebanese army officer with powerful political

connections in Lebanon and France. In addition, Nawfal received most of his army training and graduated from the French School of War (Boulos, 1995, p. 40). The general was also a member of the “Orient Troop,” which the Allies (mostly France and Britain) established in 1916 in the Arabic world to fight against the Axis countries, especially the Ottomans. Later, according to official accounts, Lebanese officers in the Orient Troop “formed the nucleus of the Lebanese Army” (Lebanese Army, 2007). While General Nawfal seemed to have the highest authority in the station during the early days, especially when he was the Chairman and CEO of the company, his power was quickly replaced by the increasing shares of the French companies and the French managers who were sent to run the company (Boulos, 1995, p.104). His authority became negligible during the last few years before his death in 1973 (p. 104-106).

Another major Lebanese player was the founder and brains behind the idea of the television station. Wissam Ezz-el Dien was the person who got the license from the government in the first place. As we saw above, Ezz-el Dien was ousted from his CEO position by the mid-1960s, although he remained a member in the board of directors. Things became worse for him after Advision signed a deal with Tele-Orient to take over its advertising operation. Ezz-El Dien strongly protested the move and argued that it was a clear violation of the agreement with TLC, which stipulated that Advision will not have any business with the competition. When the board disregarded him, he threatened to open a new station and submitted a licensing application. That generated an uproar against him, and CLT’s board quickly stripped him from all his privileges as a member of the board. Ezz-El Dien then pled with General Nawfal, whose authority had already been severely diminished, to no avail. So, he filed a lawsuit against the company, which

became a nightmare for them, until he withdrew it in 1977 in return for running SOFIRAD's interests in Lebanon (Boulos, 1995, p. 109).

***Fifth: Squeezing out the foreign competition.***

In November 1961, CLT and Time-Life signed an agreement to work together, and the latter became a partner in CLT's ownership (Boulos, 1995, p. 66-69). Boulos notes that CLT succeeded in attracting the Americans' interest in the company without alienating the French. He, however, adds that the person appointed by Time-Life to head operations in CTL failed miserably in his task, despite the big hope put in this agreement. Time-Life's representatives were hampered by the French executives and their Lebanese partners, and the Americans were quickly squeezed out of the company without making any worthy achievements.

In addition, the French managers of CLT early on created enormous obstacles for the station to deal with any non-French companies. For instance, one French CEO forbade the use of English when communicating with other companies, especially American companies. He decided that all communication should be in French, which severely slowed down the communication with American and German companies (Boulos, 1995, p. 94).

***Sixth: Buying Equipment.***

When it came to purchasing equipment, the board of directors quickly decided to purchase the fixed station from the French Thomson CSF (Boulos, 1995, p. 31). Thomson CSF was a major electronics and defense contractor, which was controlled by a French government-owned group called SOFINEL (Boyd & Benzie, 1983, p. 64). Thompson CSF was represented in Lebanon by Rafik Sa'eed and Rene Ohri—the same

engineer who represented the “real” Syrian investors in the board of directors, as mentioned earlier (Boulos, 1995, p. 31).

***Seventh: Running the Two Channels.***

If the former six elements point to ownership of the television company at the general level, the following stories point out how intricate and detailed the French plans were in running the station the way they wanted. Right before broadcasting started, there was a big debate about handling the operation of the two licensed channels granted to CLT. On one side were people arguing that each channel could broadcast a separate video and audio signal (one Arabic and one French). On the other side were people arguing that the two channels should broadcast the same video but different audio signals—also each in a different language. Boulos (1995) says that the latter was actually the original idea behind the design of the studio and the equipment, without explaining why or who was behind that design. So, it comes to no surprise that the French were advocating the latter approach, especially Rene Ohri. But the “fateful decision,” as Boulos puts it, went to the former approach, using channel Seven for Arabic programming and Channel nine for French programming. The decision was reached in May 1959, just days before launching. It is interesting that at no point did any of the debaters argue for two Arabic channels for this Arabic country.

But even with that apparently balanced solution, there were major discrepancies the way resources were offered to each station. Boulos (1995) says “with the decision to have two separate channels, our problems became bigger because originally the stations were built to broadcast one picture with two sounds.” One of those problems was the lack of appropriate facilities to produce local Arabic programming, which was exacerbated by

the fact that no other company was producing such programs at the time. That, however, only affected the Arabic channel, since there were more than enough French programs sent from France. To make things even worse, the French did not send any recording equipment until 1969, and it was not until later that they received a camera that could simultaneously record picture and voice. This meant that all local programming had to be produced and broadcast live, inside the studio, and with no ability to rerun the programs. This gravely impacted the quality and quantity of Arabic programs and news. Boulos notes, “All of the local programs were live.... It was impossible to produce a local show every night since we didn’t have enough people, from actors to singers to entertainers...” (p. 45). Boulos adds, “So, we decided to have every night a game show, or poetry reading, or a program called “To be Announced,” since we had no idea what its content would include” (p. 46). In addition, there were enormous opportunities for error when it came to producing those programs.

Furthermore, while the station was obliged to allocate an amount of time for French programming, it was not allowed to show English programs unless they were voiced over in French or prepared for a French speaking audience (p. 70). This limitation becomes even more absurd. According to Boulos, not only was CLT obliged to run French programs, it also had to pay for them:

To save money we only rented foreign movies instead of buying them, and we were not able to print subtitles on them, especially that no one else in the region can use them, so the only way to broadcast them was along with live audio commentary or translation. That was silly and often funny, but it was better than offering a show that no one understood (p.53).

### *Eighth: The Color Wars.*

Color television came to Lebanon in 1969 and with it a war of color standards. While the French were pushing for the SECAM color standard, the Americans were marketing the NTSC and the Germans promoted the PAL system.<sup>22</sup> Those were the dominant three systems that invaded world markets later.

This phenomenon of the “color wars” is a typical competition between companies who want to monopolize a new technology by using certain standard, like the VHS versus Betamax tape war and later the DVD-R and the DVD+R competition. While for the general public the choice between color systems seems confusing, inconvenient and frustrating, for the companies it is a critical business transaction backed powerfully by their governments to win the furious competition over world markets. The important point is that the more countries that adopt a certain color standard, the better for the companies that manufacture TV sets and equipment compatible with these standards. In other words, had France succeeded in spreading the SECAM standard throughout the Arabic world—which was the original plan behind pushing it in Lebanon, they would have had a monopoly over the TV set market in that region since only the French Thomson company produced them at the time.

According to Boulos(1995, p. 83-85), “the decision in 1966 to adopt the SECAM color system was discussed at the highest levels between the Lebanese President Charles Helou and French President General Charles De Gaulle.” The French were aiming to make CLT a model for all Arabic stations to use the SECAM color system. The problem was that the vast majority of local companies imported German and Japanese TV sets,

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<sup>22</sup> Later SECAM dominated France and the USSR, while PAL was the most wide spread around the world including Japan and most of Europe (except France), while NTSC remained the America standard...



which followed the PAL standard. This, of course, angered the merchants who later allied themselves with Tele-Orient. Tele-Orient, which was influenced by its British investors at first, wanted to push for the PAL system, but since the government signed a deal with the French to impose SECAM on all Lebanese stations, they had no choice. That, however, led the TV merchants and Tele-Orient to launch a campaign discouraging people from purchasing SECAM TV sets and claiming that Tele-Orient will soon broadcast in PAL. The Tele-Orient officials promoted the British Marconi TV set. At the time, TV sets were only equipped with one color system, so the campaign succeeded in delaying the spread of color TV among the Lebanese. A decade or so later, most TV sets in Lebanon would accept both PAL/SECAM and even all color system (including the American NTSC), but in the long run, the new TV stations that started popping up would follow the PAL system.

Although the French secured the political decision to market SECAM in Lebanon, they curiously delayed the shipping of the transmission equipment. That led one of the French managers of CLT (Giva<sup>23</sup>) to send a warning to Thomson threatening to adopt the American NTSC color system if they don't send the equipment immediately. The threat worked and Thomson sent the equipment, but the long awaited equipments were a major letdown, according to Boulos (1995):

When the new color equipment arrived, we were all struck with disappointment.

The car was only equipped with one camera, one tape player and no editing table.

That meant all we can do is broadcast a live camera shot of an anchor and

broadcast the films the French sent us. The car did not have one Tele-Cinema

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<sup>23</sup> The translation of the name from Arabic to English may have resulted in the wrong English (or French) spelling of the name.

machine that would allow us to broadcast all the other programs that we purchased (p. 85).

The French clearly followed the same tactic they had used when they shipped the first black and white equipment. Their goal was to guarantee their control over what could and what could not be shown. But this time Boulos and his colleagues had a different plan. Some of the Lebanese engineers came up with a crude invention that would solve the problem of broadcasting the non-compatible American films. With a loss of 20 percent of the picture quality, they would point the live camera to a dual-mirror that was receiving the color picture from an old Bell and Howell cinema camera (Boulos, 1995, p. 85-86). This innovative spirit to overcome the limitations imposed by the foreigners would be repeated several times.<sup>24</sup>

### ***What Can be Concluded?***

The real intention of the French government apparently was to have a fully-French channel with a nominal Arabic channel handicapped with insurmountable limitations. CLT was treated from the start as a French government organ for both profit and spreading French political influence and culture, under the pretence of “francophonism.” It was simply a modern tool for colonizing the Orient and spreading French political influence, products and culture. The next day after CLT began its first transmission, an article in the Paris newspaper Le Monde wrote:

The entry of the picture in a new style to the houses of Orientals, especially Muslims, will achieve a revolution that was started with Cinema and the intermixing of wars. The big operation of unifying traditions and customs and

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<sup>24</sup> Another interesting story was the inventive technique they used to be able to broadcast Arabic subtitles over the foreign films (Boulos, 1995, p. 70).

ways of thinking and feeling has begun.... France should reflect carefully on the meanings of this event, if we wanted to keep the position we have in a world that needs our spiritual values, but will not wait for us (Boulos, 1995, p. 40).

While this article may not necessarily represent the French government's policy, it certainly reflects a sentiment that tracks back to the early colonial history of France in the "Orient." It expresses the arrogance and pomposity of traditional colonial powers when it comes to their view of the subjected and colonized peoples. Despite that sentiment, the intentions and the fact that this project was spearheaded by the French government, the project clearly did not go through without local resistance. While the French succeeded at the start in controlling the station, they failed in the long run and even when they fully controlled it, there were many limitations and several major decisions that did not go their way. Later, CLT became a drain on the budget of France's Ministry of Exterior Affaires (Boulos, 1995) and it was not achieving its political and cultural goals. While several attempts were made by the French government to salvage its expensive investment, it quickly lost interest during the early years of the civil war, as we shall see.

In sum, CLT was not simply the first private commercial television station in Lebanon. It was a modern colonial tool introduced by the French state to spread its culture, maintain its political influence and sell its products.

### ***Tele-Orient, Britain and France***

What France did with CLT, the U.S. and Britain tried to achieve with Tele-Orient. Just the same way France was able to squeeze out the American investors (Time-Life) from CLT, however, it was also able to consolidate its power over Tele-Orient in a

relatively short period. As mentioned earlier, that was made possible through SOFIRAD's total control of Advision, which practically controlled CLT.

At the start, the American Broadcasting Company (ABC) partially financed Tele-Orient but the company later sold its share to a British organization and the Rizk brothers, a wealthy Lebanese family (Dajani, 2005; Dajani, 1979, p. 29; in Boyd, 1999, p. 72). Although Tele-Orient started broadcasting on May 6, 1962, secret talks of cooperation and possible merger with CLT started as early as 1965. General Nawfal, however, blocked the early merger efforts (Boulos, 1995, p. 120). Nevertheless, the two companies under the aegis of Ramiz Rizk<sup>25</sup> agreed to preliminary cooperation agreements and by October 1968, they agreed to have Advision as a unified advertising sales representative (Boyd, 1999). Rizk then founded Tele-Management to run the advertising for both companies. Tele-Management would later be headed by Rizk and owned 50 percent by Tele-Orient and 50 percent by Advision. According to Boulos (1995), the old guard in Advision quickly took over the top positions in Tele-Management, and by the early 1970s, Tele-Management became the advertising representative and administrator for both companies. By that time, and in order to offset competition for the limited viewers and financial resources in Beirut, both stations were broadcasting mostly the same content and a unified newscast produced in Tele-Orient's studios (Boyd, 1999; Boulos, 1995, p. 125). So, less than a decade after its founding, Tele-Orient for all practical reasons was controlled indirectly by the French.

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<sup>25</sup> Ramiz Rizk was an engineer from a wealthy Lebanese family who worked as a representative of the British Marconi company but also had close relationship to the French Thomson company. He worked on buying stocks of Tele-Orient and later became the Chairman, and negotiated with the government to merge the two companies and start Tele Liban (TL). Soon after Rizk became GM he went in to a prolonged conflict with John Abu-Jawdi (who owned 55 percent of Tele-Orient at one point and was the chairman of the company), and in April, 1968, Rizk purchased all the stocks owned by the Abu-Jawdi family, and became the chairman himself (Boulos, 1995).

There is no point in delving into details about the American and British role in the founding of Tele-Orient, especially that it had a relatively brief history as a company separate from CLT and its French owners.<sup>26</sup> In addition, by the time the French took over Tele-Orient, the civil war was quickly approaching, ushering the decline of French influence over Lebanese television and the beginning of Lebanese state ownership and control of both CLT and Tele-Orient.

### ***The Lebanese State, CLT and Tele-Orient***

If the first and major piece of the puzzle was the French state control of CLT and later Tele-Orient through capital, technology and business tactics and partnerships, the second major piece would be about those partners, who happen to be major players in Lebanese politics. In fact, whatever part of CLT was not controlled by the French state seemed to be dominated by the Lebanese state through “private” investors and directors who almost always ended up in top government positions.

To start with, the original license between the government and the two private businessmen gave the government vast powers over the company, especially in the area of news and political programming. In fact, the agreement stipulated that any news or political programming will be provided and closely monitored by the government. In section seven of the agreement, the government had the right to monitor the TV network’s content through employees from the Ministry of Information. Those employees had the right to “monitor all programs and films before they air, and they have

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<sup>26</sup> It is worth noting that unlike CLT, Tele-Orient from the start used Standard Arabic in their programs. In addition, the equipment they purchased from the British Marconi company were more advanced and flexible, especially in the ability to record local programs and add Arabic subtitles to foreign programs. This led to Tele-Orient’s success in exporting recorded programs to the Arabic World, especially the Gulf region, and their ability to run American and other foreign programs and then resell them to the Arabic Market (Boulos, 1995).

the authority to change and eliminate any parts that contradict with the agreement” (Boulos, 1995, p. 30). Further details about censorship and government intervention in TV news are discussed later.

When it came to CLT’s Lebanese movers and shakers, in addition to General Nawfal and Wissam Ezz-el Dien (both mentioned above), many of the members of the board of directors were prominent Lebanese politicians. Many of those even had strong connections with the French government. Some of the board members even became presidents and ministers in the Lebanese government. For instance, Paul Tannous, who became the first non-French CEO of Advision, was a presidential advisor to former President Charles Helou (Boulos, 1995, p. 102-13). Helou himself was a member of the CLT’s board of directors before he became president in 1964 (Boulos, 1995, p. 12). President Helou was highly influenced by Charles De Gaulle’s approach to using Television to propagate his messages to the public (Smith & Paterson, 1998, p. 41). In fact, he was the first president to take advantage of television to present his speeches (Boulos, 1995, p. 12).

Another person, Lousiane Dahdah got a doctorate in economics from the University of Birmingham, and was appointed the General Manager of the Ministry of Building under Minister Emil Boustany, who had the main influence in appointing Dahdah as member of the board of directors at Tele-Orient. Dahdah was quickly able to become CEO of the company. He later became Minister of Foreign Affairs and was the only civilian in the military government appoint by President Frangieh in 1975 (Boulos, 1995, p. 113). According to Boulos, Lousiane Dahdah said the founding of Tele-Orient came as a reaction by those who wanted to get into the board of directors of CLT but

were not allowed access. One of those people was George Nakkash. Nakkash was an engineer (studied in France) turned journalist who founded the French L'Orient newspaper. He was a frequent critic of the government, which landed him in jail several times. Still, he later became an ambassador to France and a Minister while Helou was president. (Boulos, 1995, p. 114)

According to Boulos (1995), the decision to give a second TV permit was made on political basis. Two groups applied for TV permits after CLT was established, and since the first permit was given during President Chamoun's tenure, the government of his political opponent Rashid Karami quickly gave them both permits. Shortly after, the two groups merged and started looking for funding. The main Lebanese financiers were influential bankers with strong political ties. Emil Boustani was the founder of the KAT building company and Banque de l'Industrie Et Du Travail. He was elected to parliament and became a Minister several times. The Abu Jawdi brothers (John and Elia) were rich businessmen who made their fortune in South Africa and founded the Al-Bank Al-Lubnani Lil-Tigarat. The Assaf Family (headed by Tawfik Assaf) brought Pepsi Co. into Lebanon and founded the Bank of Lebanon and the Arab World. Tawfik Assaf was also elected to parliament and appointed minister several times.

Later, in 1977, when CLT and Tele-Orient merged and became Tele Liban (TL), Dr. Charles Rizk became the Chairman of the new company.<sup>27</sup> Dr. Rizk has a long career in government that includes Minister of Information and Minister of Justice. But TL has a different story than CLT and Tele-Orient, since it was 50 percent owned by the Lebanese

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<sup>27</sup> TLC's license was set to expire in 1974, while Tele-Orient's in 1977, and because the government was willing to renew the license but with additional stringent conditions, like stricter monitoring of newscasts and news programs, the two companies ganged up and put pressure on the government. The government gave TLC a one year extension without additional conditions (Boyd, 1999).

state. With its establishment, employment decisions and appointments became highly politicized. The chairman was directly appointed by the government for three years, in addition to a “government representative,” who had almost equal authority as the chairman and was often the general manager of the Ministry of Information. More details on TL are discussed below.

This gives a quick profile of the Lebanese owners and managers of CLT and Tele-Orient. Most of them had high political appointments and had substantial business ventures in the country and strong relationships with the French state. During the war, the French influence almost disappears and the grip of business financiers and owners gives way to the control of politicians and militias, as we see in the next section.

## **B. Second Period 1975-1990: TL, Illegal Stations and the Civil War**

### ***The Civil War and the Establishing of TL***

While from the start, both CLT and Tele-Orient were faced with tight budgets and an audience not large enough to support two stations, both companies began to stabilize financially in the early 1970s, as the audiences and local television production industry started to grow. At that point, both stations were almost operating as one, broadcasting mostly the same content and a unified newscast. The financial boom, however, did not last long and was severely hit by the 1975-1976 wave of the civil war. Although both stations continued to broadcast under dire conditions, they both lost a great deal of money and whatever equipment was spared destruction from the bombing further deteriorated due to lack of maintenance and funds (Boulos, 1995; Boyd, 1999; Dajani, 2001).

During the first months of the war, both stations tried to stay neutral and a unified newscast was broadcast by both stations. To do so, however, stations had to at times



ignore even the heaviest fighting, and go on airing regular news as if nothing was happening. This strategy was discontinued on March 11, 1976, when a Sunni Muslim Lebanese Army officer, Brigadier Aziz Al-Ahdab, forced his way into CLT and televised his “Communiqué No.1,” demanding that the Lebanese president resign and proclaiming himself the new ruler of Lebanon. Right after the statement was read, workers at Tele-Orient, which had been until then carrying CLT’s signal, cut the transmission.

Al-Ahdab’s precedent didn’t pass unnoticed by Christian factions supporting President Suleiman Frangieh. Shortly after the Brigadier aired his statement, supporters of the Maronite president, hearing about the occupation of CLT by “Muslims,” took over Tele-Orient, which was geographically in Eastern Beirut. From that moment on, the two major fighting groups in the civil war used each of the stations—along with radio stations they also took over—to propagate their messages and exchanging insults and threats (Boulos, 1995; Boyd, 1999; Dajani, 2001).

Al-Ahdab’s attempted coup was an insignificant event politically and historically, and was later ridiculed for its utter failure, but the significance of his move was in dragging the Lebanese broadcast media into the civil war and taking it out of its, until then, nonpartisan status. A veteran TL executive noted, “After al-Ahdab’s coup attempt, it became routine practice to break into TL’s newsroom and demand the announcement of a statement or the reading of a proclamation” (Interview # 3a, June-July, 2006). In addition to sending their announcements, he added, “They would dictate what the station can say and cannot to say, but they would never write the newscast. It was always written by journalists working for the stations.”

From that moment on, TLC took the side of The National Movement (Al-Harakat al-Wataniyyat), while Tele-Orient sided with the Christian president. Also, from there on, Christian employees stopped coming to the station's building located in western Beirut—although all employees continued to receive their salaries. The Christian head of CLT (Paul Tannous) also stopped coming to the station, and a Muslim manager became the de facto general manager of the station (Boulos, 1995, p. 104-106).

In 1976, a new government was elected, backed by a Syrian-dominated peacekeeping force that entered the country to separate the fighting factions. The lull allowed the owners of the stations to retake control over their companies, but only for a brief time until the civil war re-escalated in 1980. During that period of calm, the contracts with CLT and Tele-Orient were reaching their expiration date and renegotiation with the government was pursued. Owners of the companies wanted the government to invest in the stations to offset the devastating cost of destruction caused by the war. At the same time, President Elias Sarkis found himself in need of a strong media system to strengthen his power. The government, however, did not have the money to start a TV station, and its radio station (Itha'at Lubnan) was losing popularity to the opposing radio station (Sawt Lubnan).

The opportunity arose for the government to take advantage of the situation and negotiate favorable conditions. So, in 1977, the government, SOFIRAD, and Tele-Orient reached an agreement to establish a single national television system known as "Tele-Liban" (TL). The agreement stipulated that the government would own 50 percent of the new company, while SOFIRAD and Tele-Orient would each own 25 percent. TL's capital was raised to 30-million Lebanese Pounds (\$6M at the time) and the company had

a 12-member board, six of which were appointed by the government and the rest elected by the private owners of the company. Tele-Mangement remained the sole advertising representative and was headed by two directors each appointed by the two private companies.

Although the former two companies were now considered one organization and had one name, the fissure between the employees and managers of the old stations remained deep. This was exacerbated by the fact that the new TL was still operating and transmitting from two separate facilities, each located on one side of the divided capital. Until this day, employees refer to the two buildings according to their geographic location: TL Hazmiye (formerly Tele-Orient, from here on TL2) and TL Khayyat Hill or Tallet el-Khayyat (formerly CLT, from here on TL1).

On May 16, 1977, the newscast was reunified, but one of the ironic solutions for balancing work and politics was to weekly switch the origination of the main Arabic news program between the two facilities, a policy that kept each building fully equipped to produce and transmit programming independently. This weak unity oddly resembled the feeble structure of a society gearing up for 10 more years of civil strife and carnage (Interview # 3a, June-July, 2006).

With the establishment of TL, the Lebanese government now had direct control over all television operations, and at the beginning of 1979, Dr. Charles Rizk, the General Manager of the Ministry of Information, became in effect the CEO of TL. As the hostilities resumed in 1980, the new company again faced the threat of destruction, bankruptcy and disintegration, and soon enough each station restarted broadcasting separate newscasts, each backing a political side. Around the same time, the French lost

all interest in TL, especially after it decided to stop broadcasting on the French channel nine. The stations also became the focal point of the conflict and considered strategic sites to occupy, and even turfs for the fighting factions, especially in TL1. A veteran TL executive tells a revealing story:

Between 1980 and 1988, there were numerous vicious battles among the local groups fighting to take over TL (TL1). The television building was a symbol; if you take over TL, it means you have controlled Beirut. There were no other TV stations at the time, so TL was an important asset used to broadcast their points of view. In one of the battles that we sarcastically called the battle of al-Alamein (the two flags),<sup>28</sup> the Progressive Socialist Party led by Walid Jumblat wanted to put its own flag on TL's building in Khayyat Hill and the Lebanese Army intervened and replaced it with the Lebanese flag. This routine kept on going back and forth for five days. At that point, the country was split in two, and it was standard practice that parties from one side would hit TL's building in the opposing area and vice versa (Interview # 3a, June-July, 2006).

Interestingly, throughout the war, the staff and management of TL never changed, and it was—at least officially—under one management structure and chairmanship. Only for a very brief period did General Michel Aoun—who attempted to take over Beirut in the final days of the civil war—create a second board of directors, but even then, the staff of TL in both stations remained the same. According to the executive mentioned above, when a party would take over the station, they would dictate their own policy on the same

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<sup>28</sup> Al-Alamein was the famous battle in 1942 between the Germans, led by Rommel, and the Allies, led by Montgomery, fought on the northern coast of Egypt. It was one of the most decisive battles of World War II, which led to the Allies' victory over the Axis. The word Al-Alamein in Arabic literally means "the two flags."

employees, but they would not bring their staff. Since there were two physical locations for TL, one on each side of the divide, employees would choose which building to go to. The environment would dictate itself, according to the executive. “If, for instance, someone was working here (TL1) and another party he was opposed to took over the station, that person would stop coming to this station and will start working in the other station (TL2).” He added:

If he decides to stay, he will have to abide by the controlling party’s policy. But in general the people would usually be supporters of the party that controlled the station where they work. If they were supporters of the Phalanges, for instance, they would most likely be working in Hazmiye station (TL2). If they were supporters of Amal, they would work in Tallet el-Khayyat (TL1). And, in many cases, they would be enthusiastic supporters of the side they are working with (Interview # 3a, June-July, 2006).

As for the neutral employees, unfortunately, the divide early on also became sectarian with most Christians working at TL2 and most Muslim employees at TL1. “A few Christians remained in the latter, especially the leftists and secularists, but little or no Muslims worked in TL Hazmiye (TL1)” (Interview # 3a, June-July, 2006).

With little or no advertising revenue directed towards TL in the unstable environment of the civil war, it is no surprise that the station suffered financially. Nevertheless, all employees—even those who stopped coming to work—continued to get paid even during the worst days of the war. Although all received their paychecks from the same source (The government Bank: Banque Du Liban), there was, however, no stable budget allocated for fixing equipment and purchasing programs. Everything

depended on personal contacts between top management and prominent politicians, according to a veteran TL executive. “We once went to the Prime Minister and told him about our plight, and he immediately withdrew \$10-thousand and gave it to us to spend on TL operations” (Interview # 3a, June-July, 2006). But the scarce money meant no upgrades or maintenance, and most of the equipment quickly deteriorated. In addition, there were accusations that Tele-Management was making a profit while TL was on the brink of bankruptcy, and ideas were floating around about closing down Tele-Management.

To make things worse, by the mid 1980s, the station lost its monopoly over the television industry to illegal TV stations that were sprouting all over the country, many of which took over TL’s 21 relay stations outside of Beirut and turned them into regional transmission units for their own newscasts. More details about these stations are provided in the next section.

By 1988, the civil war was slowly coming to an end and most of the fighting groups were engaged in peace talks that finally produced the Ta’if Peace Accord.<sup>29</sup> On the battleground, Syrian troops backed by the Lebanese parties who signed the accord were slowly taking control of the country. The last battles to be fought would be over the control of Eastern Beirut, which was dominated by the Christian ultra right-wing militia the Lebanese Forces (LF) and General Michel Aoun’s portion of the Lebanese Army. Still, TL got its share during those final battles. Although at that point TL was transmitting the same programs, the newscasts were separate. TL2 (Hazmiye) sided with the Christian General Aoun, while TL1 (Tallet el-Khayyat) sided with the Muslim Prime

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<sup>29</sup> The Ta’if accord is the peace agreement between warring factions that officially brought the country out of war. It was signed in Ta’if, Saudi Arabia.

Minister Selim al-Hoss—and the Syrian backers and their local allies. When Aoun and the LF were fighting, it was TL2 versus LBC, one of the newly established illegal stations (see next section).

Economically, it was the most distressful period of the war. While the country was looking forward to emerging out of a destructive civil war, the Lebanese currency began its precipitous collapse. At the beginning of the civil war \$1 US was worth about 2.3 Lebanese Pounds (LP). By the end of 1980s, the US dollar would reach L.P. 2100.<sup>30</sup> At the same time, TL's board decided to increase its capital, but the French declined to underwrite because of the uncertain political situation. So, their share went down to less than one percent.

Here, there are two conflicting stories. One account says that TL put 32 percent of the stocks on the market, and Wissam Ezz-el-Dien purchased all those shares (Boulos, 1995). The other account suggests that they were bought by President Amin Gemayel (1982-1988) for \$300-Thousand. The later story continues that Gemayel sold his shares in 1992 to Prime Minister Rafik Hariri for \$6-Million, making an obscene profit. The latter story was associated with accusations of widespread theft and corruption by President Gemayel (Interview # 3a, June-July, 2006). Whatever the truth, the Hariri Group ended up buying all the shares from the private sector. So, by 1992, the government and Hariri each owned 50 percent of TL. After the war ended and the divided country was reintegrated, all employees were unified in one place in Tallet El-Khayyat (TL1), and the Hazmiye building was used as a studio for producing programs, but all news was produced in Tallet el-Khayyat's building.

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<sup>30</sup> Between 1980 and 1983 the exchange rate fluctuated between 3 LP and 5 LP to the dollar. On February 11, 1987, the currency crossed the 100 LP pound level only to be trading at about 250 LP by the end of that year and quickly climbing up to 2100 LP, then stabilized at 1500 LP to a dollar most of the post war years.

Later in 1994, the government bought Harrier's share and TL became 99 percent owned by the government. In order to keep its standing as a commercial company rather than a public institution, the government left a board of directors to run it and kept one out of the 100 shares as privately owned (Obeid, 1996; Interview # 3a, June-July, 2006).

At the end of 2000 the government of Prime Minister Hariri<sup>31</sup> decided to "reorganize" TL. According to a veteran TL executive, "The announced reason was that there was a lot of loss and mismanagement. In reality, there was a political struggle." He explains that the government of Hariri decided to stop TL's operations, and indeed the station was closed in February 2001, and all its employees were laid-off and given pensions. He added:

When they rushed into reopening it after just three months (May 25, 2001), the Hariri government hadn't done any reorganization and it was the final blow to TL. Everything was lost: advertisers, employees and audiences. Today TL is at the bottom of the list when compared to other TV stations (Interview # 3a, June-July, 2006).

Although TL is still running today, there are two opinions about what to do with it. One side questions the merit of having a public television. Backers of former Prime Minister Hariri say that modern countries today no longer have public TV stations, but President LaHood's side says the country should have a public TV station when six privately owned stations dominate the industry (Interview # 3a, June-July, 2006). The Hariri government at one point did propose privatizing the company by selling it, but it

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<sup>31</sup> Hariri would dominate the economic and political arena in Lebanon in the post war period. He was backed internationally by Saudi Arabian and Western economic interests and locally by Syrian military power. Rafik Hariri, a rich businessman with both Lebanese and Saudi citizenship, would become Lebanon's prime minister and major financier throughout most of the post war years until his assassination in February 14, 2005. He was Prime Minister from 1992-1998 and from 2000-2004.



didn't work because "no one was interested in paying millions of dollars for an old dinosaur that is running a loss when they can pay much less to launch a new satellite operation."

### ***TL's Newsroom Today***

TL's newsroom and news department today symbolizes the impoverished state most government institutions in Lebanon are characterized with. Its equipment is outdated and in bad need for repair and updating. The work process is chaotic and inefficient and a political and sectarian mentality rules the newsroom.

TL's newsroom culture differs from the other private station in that the news director is frequently changed but the employees remain the same. However, the privileges of those employees change depending on who is in power. As mentioned later, TL's employees fall and rise depending on changes in government. Their official ranks rarely reflect their real power in the department. As is the case with any public institution in Lebanon, employees who happen to be associated with the political side that runs the institution are usually given more power and prestige by their superiors, while the privileges of those opposed to that political line are taken away. Change starts with the prime minister and the cabinet of ministers, especially the minister of information, and trickles down to the news director. One participant noted, "When Fouad Seniora became Prime Minister after Rafik Hariri's assassination in 2005, he brought Ghazi el-Aridi as Information Minister. Automatically, Aridi installed a News Director from the pro-government side (March 14 side)." The participant added, "The News Director he appointed used to have that same position before Rafik Hariri lost his position as prime

minister. He also used to be a supporter and media consultant for Hariri” (Interview # 7c & 8c, June-July, 2006).

### ***The Birth of “Private” Lebanese TV***

#### ***Illegal stations during the war: An overview.***

The phenomenon of illegal broadcast media operations goes back to the 1958 civil war. When the 1975 civil war broke out, the groups that established illegal radio stations back in 1958 practically wiped the dust off their radio transmitters and resumed broadcasting, but only few of them survived. Unlike radio, however, illegal television stations were new to this war. Their story is slightly different, due to the expensive equipment required and the sophisticated skills needed to run a television operation. This section focuses the discussion on two stations: TLN and LBC—the first because the author of this study had a close and personal connection to it, and the second because it became the dominant TV station in the country and still exists today. Other illegal stations not visited in this section include Hezbollah’s Al-Manar TV, which was born out of a hostage swap in late 1987 between Iran and the France. According to Fenyvesi (1987) and Boyd (1999), in addition to military equipment that went to Iran, the deal included a complete television station for the Iran-backed Lebanese Hezbollah paramilitary group. The plan was to set up the station in the Bekaa Valley. An Israeli-backed station also started broadcasting early in the war and was associated with the Evangelical Christian Network CBN. Most of its content was Israeli propaganda targeted at the Christian communities in South Lebanon. It was destroyed in 1983 but rebuilt quickly with Israeli assistance (Boyd, 1999). The station was not widely watched, especially that South Lebanon was mostly Muslim and the station broadcast in English.

By early 1990, there were up to 40 TV stations that broadcast intermittently in Lebanon, but most of them did not last long, as discussed later (Boyd, 1999, p. 88).

The next section covers the oral history of TLN. Due to the personal connection of the author of this study to that station, and due to the rareness of historic documents relied upon for this section, the tone of the conversation will be mostly in the first person singular. On purpose, the author brings himself into this section to slightly highlight the subjective view of this oral history.

### ***Illegal stations during the war: TLN***

It was July 11, 1984. I had just turned 10-years-old, but I remember those days so vividly due to the fear and anxiety surrounding them. We had just arrived from a long day at the beach, where my (extended) family celebrated my birthday. Around 7 p.m. that evening the whole family sat around a small battery-operated TV set my father put outside because of the severe heat that day. The apprehension was clear on my uncles' faces. They were nervously looking at their watches awaiting the 8 p.m. newscast. My father told them, "If the Marada air their news tonight, then everything is OK. If they don't, we need to think about moving our families to a safe place in Tripoli" (Interview # 92a, May, 2006).

The Marada were a paramilitary group led by former president Suleiman Frangieh, a Maronite Christian za'im from a nearby region called Zgharta. The Marada controlled all of Zgharta and important parts of al-Koura region where we lived. Al-Koura, however, was a bastion of the Syrian Social-Nationalist Party (SSNP), a pan-Syria secular party founded by Antun Sa'adeh in 1932.<sup>32</sup> More importantly, Koura had a television relay antenna installed in the town of Fih back in 1963 by the owners of CLT

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<sup>32</sup> More on SSNP, see (Beshara, 2007)

(Boulos, 1995, p. 32-33). The antenna at that point belonged to the government and was used to reflect TL's signal from Beirut to cover North Lebanon. Its signal reached even further north deep into Syria.

The Marada had been intermittently broadcasting their own newscasts and some programs since June 1978, after the "Ehden Massacre," where Bachir Gemayel, the leader of the Phalanges militia, sent a group of his men—led by Samir Geagea and Elie Hobeika—to kidnap Tony Frangieh—son of President Suleiman Frangieh and Gemayel's arch-rival for the presidency. Tony Frangieh was killed in that operation along with his wife, three-year-old daughter and some 30 other members of his guard (Johnson, 2001. p. 119). The Marada at first were using a radio and television antenna located on a mountain peak called Aitou. After Bachir Gemayel's election in 1982, the Marada resumed consistent broadcasting of their newscast using the Aitou Antenna.<sup>33</sup> But since the signal was weak and unreliable, they started using the Fih antenna instead. According to a former employee of that station, the Marada would record their newscast in a studio in Zgharta and have their militia men drive the tape to Fih for airing at 8 p.m. The rest of the time, the antenna would reflect TL's regular programming (Interview # 91a, May, 2006).

The problem was that Fih was in the heart of al-Koura and the Marada had to drive for an hour through SSNP controlled areas to deliver the tape. Although the two parties had been allies (both allied to Syria), a conflict ensued between them. One of the reasons for that conflict was the control of the Fih antenna.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> The Marada also had a radio station that broadcast from Aytou, a mountain top near Ehden, and were using the antenna to broadcast their TV signal, but it took week to reach a wide area. That was probably the main reason why they needed to utilize Fih's antenna. Their TV broadcast from Aytou lasted until the early 1990s, when the government shut down all the regional TV stations (Interview # 91a, May, 2006).

<sup>34</sup> The political reason behind the conflict was that Robert Frangieh, Suleiman's second son who commanded the Marada militia, was convinced that Lebanon is about to be divided into smaller states, and

It was past 8 p.m. and the Marada's newscast had not aired yet. Apparently, the SSNP men blocked the Marada delivery jeep. Everyone around us was on edge. People suddenly jumped out of their seats. Some screamed. "Calm down!" my uncle yelled. The heat coming out of a gas-fueled lantern had shattered the mirror that was only millimeters away from it. We all laughed, but that didn't pacify the fear.

Conflicting rumors were viciously circulating keeping us tense. One story would talk about a settlement between the SSNP and the Marada.<sup>35</sup> Another story would describe a military buildup on the outskirts of our town. Bterram was adjacent to Fih and a necessary point of passage to reach the television transmitter. All those stories would be delivered by SSNP members who were swarming around our home since my family was a known SSNP supporter, and my father was the political head of the party in our town. It was surreal for most of the kids. We didn't take the threat seriously at first. What's the most that could happen?



he wanted to guarantee that the Frangieh clan secured a sizable chunk of the area around them. His plan was to first take over Koura from the SSNP and then attack Batroun. Robert convinced his father Suleiman of the plan and both thought that taking Koura would be a walk in the park. The other reason was Koura's rich soil, its cement factories and the Antenna in Fih.

<sup>35</sup> There was actually a negotiation process moderated by the communist party going on, and George Dib, the SSNP head in Koura, struck a deal with the Marada. The top leadership thought the deal was in effect a surrender, and rejected it. Dib was instantly replaced by a military officer (a.k.a. Abou Ali Khaldoun) who quickly organized the local SSNP militia and ordered them to fight.

The answer came in the form of a volley of bullets from the eastern side of town, just two miles away. That was it. The battle had begun. There was shooting all around. The women and children evacuated from the west towards Tripoli, driving through Fih. Some men stayed behind to defend the town. The ensuing days were hard to bear. In Tripoli, we had no connection with my father and uncles. The only communication method was newspapers, most of which were outdated and full of Marada propaganda. Since their leader was a former president and had numerous government and media contacts, TL and other news media sided with him against the SSNP. The other sources of information, the most common in wars, were the rumors carried by alleged eyewitnesses. Those were especially disheartening. I remember my mother collapsing several times after hearing that my father was killed. At least twice we read his name in the obituaries, only to hear later from a friend who just came from the battlefield that he was still alive (Interview # 90a, May, 2006).

By the third day, stories of the Marada winning the war and taking over vast regions of Koura started flowing in. We were in disbelief. My aunt would always say do not believe them. She later forbade anyone from coming into the house or reading newspapers, unless they had “good news” (Interview # 89a, May, 2006). Nothing was certain. No one knew who was winning and who was losing. No one had any proof of anything. That changed the next evening, when the neighbors were yelling for us to turn the TV on. And there it was: the flag of the SSNP on the screen with their anthem playing in the background. That picture of the flag on TV instantly wiped out our fear. Suddenly, we were ecstatic. Everyone around us was celebrating and preparing to go back home. It would be another week, however, before we returned home.

In reality, the battles were still raging and the outcome was far from certain, according to an SSNP field officer (Interview # 93a, May, 2006). The story of how TLN was born in the middle of that chaos is most fascinating and intimate to me since my father had a pivotal role in triggering its launch. Just a year before the battle began my father had been tinkering with the idea of starting a small video production shop to tape weddings and other social occasions. He had spent all the money he saved in Australia on buying equipment for his studio. When he felt that our town would be overrun by the Marada, he grabbed whatever equipment he could and threw them in his car before retreating towards Fih. Here is the rest of the story as my father tells it:

Around the middle of the war, I talked to Issa Al-Ayyoubi—whose brother was shot the first day of the war triggering the whole thing. I told him, we have a camera and the station in Fih is still under our control. Why not use it? At the time, we got news that the Marada were claiming full control of Fih, and that they promised Suleiman Frangieh [their leader] to resume airing their newscast that evening. That was not true, of course. We were in Fih, and the Marada were not able to even reach the outskirts of the town, but they did control most of Bterram (my town). Ass'ad Herdan,<sup>36</sup> SSNP's military head, was about to launch a major thrust into Bterram, from Fih. That was to be the most intensive battle of that conflict, where Tha'er fell.<sup>37</sup> We quickly talked to Zuhayr Hakam, [SSNP's top political officer in North Lebanon]. He was excited about the idea, especially that

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<sup>36</sup> Assad Herdan later became the most powerful man in the SSNP and represented the party in parliament and became a Minister throughout most of the post-civil war period.

<sup>37</sup> Tha'er (real name Atef El-Danaf) is the SSNP resistance fighter who was famous for digging a tunnel under his prison cell and escaping Israeli captivity along with several of his comrades. He is also known for leading devastating attacks on Israeli soldiers.

the military push was already underway, and we were receiving good news about it (Interview # 92a, May, 2006).

Hakam wanted to counter the Marada's propaganda, especially that SSNP leaders were pressing for any tangible victory to use in the negotiations with the Syrian mediators. According to Hakam, TL and most of the mainstream media in Lebanon were siding with the Marada and disseminating false stories about their victories and the defeat of the SSNP. My father said:

He (Hakam) told us to act quickly. So, we got into the car and started recording the events. We taped SSNP members flashing the victory sign in Fih, and then in Bterram, and then further down in Bechmezzine and Amioun (See map above). We were right behind the fighters. Whenever they advanced, we followed. It was swift, the Marada were retreating rapidly. They were shocked. They didn't expect the resistance. I had a huge JVC camera that was hooked to a bulky Telefunken video recorder. They were very heavy and required a lot of light and power, and the quality of the picture was bad because we recorded on VHS tapes. We were not certain that the victory was final. There were rumors that the Marada are preparing a counter-offensive. The Syrians at that time halted our advance after Amioun and we were concerned they will side with the Marada and attack us. To make things worse, there was no electricity in Koura because of the destruction, and we were running out of batteries. So, we rushed back to Tripoli, swinging by Bterram to get the rest of the equipment we needed. We set up a make-shift studio in a safe apartment there. Al-Ayyoubi quickly scripted an announcement attacking the 'feudal Frangieh clan' and trumpeting their defeat in the face of the



‘SSNP heroes.’ We topped his announcement with a shot of the SSNP flag that was hanging in the room. We then drove the tape up to Fih in time for the evening newscast. People in Koura were not able to watch it because the electricity was down, but people in Tripoli, Zgharta, Akkar and even in Syria saw the whole thing. The next day we broadcast another shot of the SSNP flag, this time outside in the middle of the towns the Marada claimed they controlled. After that it was pictures of fighters flashing victory signs all the way (Interview # 92a, May, 2006).

While the airing of the flag on TV was uplifting for the SSNP, it was demoralizing for the Marada supporters who were still receiving false news of their men advancing. One of the common tales of that time was that Frangieh was hysterical when he saw the SSNP’s flag on the screen instead of the newscast his men promised him. The tale goes on that the first static flag made him feel bad, but it was the second shot of the flag flying over Koura towns that devastated him. More reliable reports talk about discrediting the Marada in the eyes of their Syrian allies during the negotiations process (Interview # 93a, May, 2006).<sup>38</sup>

That same day, the SSNP shelled Frangieh’s palace in the middle of Zgharta with the reinforcements that arrived from Akkar, the Bekaa valley and south Lebanon—all of which were stalled by a Syrian blockage on Koura. The Marada had no chance after that. The Marada lost the psychological battle, and they were about to be overrun by

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<sup>38</sup> Right after the SSNP started advancing, an envoy from Syria arrived at Frangieh’s palace asking him to halt the attack. Frangieh reportedly asked for another 24 hour window to finish the attack and the Syrians granted him the time. The next day, the SSNP started broadcasting pictures of their fighters flashing the victory sign in around Koura towns. The envoy, citing the pictures broadcast by the SSNP, then told Frangieh that Syrian President Assad “wishes” that a cease fire would take place immediately. When Frangieh tried to request more time, the “moufad” cut him saying “The president’s wishes are demands.”

reinforced SSNP fighters—who later threatened to invade Zgharta, but the Syrians halted their advance (Interview # 93a, May, 2006). A week after it all started, and after things calmed down and the SSNP regained full control over Koura, my father moved the studio back to Bterram and started producing the nightly newscast on a daily basis. In the first month, “we were all excited and volunteered to work. We were working around the clock and thought we can go on like that, but we were burnt out very quickly. The task required an army of men backed by a bank,” my father said. He added, “When we figured out how much time and money this will take, we asked the party for financial backing and started hiring people.” The party financed the station the first year. After that, money from advertising started pouring in, and TLN didn’t need the support anymore (Interview # 92a, May, 2006).

The studio of SSNP’s new TV station would remain on the first floor of the building we lived in. The amateur studio was revamped into a crude newsroom. All the news and programs were produced in that basement-like flat by a crew of 20-25 non-professionals.<sup>39</sup>

The first few weeks of broadcast, TLN followed the Marada’s model by only broadcasting a newscast in the evening while relaying TL’s signal the rest of the time. That quickly changed when the enthusiastic TLN founders found themselves surrounded by many directors and actors cut from Beirut and desperate for work. Within a few months, the station started producing its own local programs using whatever resources it had available. TLN also struck deals with the numerous movie renting shops in the area. In many cases TLN borrowed movies in return for free advertising. Sometimes, the

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<sup>39</sup> Since I knew more than any of the employees how to work the equipment and wire the machines, I spent most of my childhood working with them.

movie merchants used to get pirated copies of the latest movies before they were even introduced in the cinema. So, the TLN programs attracted a wide audience from the start, especially given that VCRs were only starting to become common in households.

TLN used to run almost any movie or series it could lay hands on. At first, it couldn't afford a staff to monitor and censor the foreign videos before broadcast. Since I was an avid movie watcher and was fluent in English, they informally asked me to help them out. My only task was to briefly tell them what the movie was about and watch out for sexually explicit scenes. I was barely 11-years-old—far from having the maturity to monitor anything. So, many of the long movies I didn't like to watch would go unmonitored, and the next day after broadcasting, I would get angry looks from the programming director who had to deal with the complaints. But given the liberal and secular ideology of the SSNP, complaints would mostly come from the extremist Muslim Sunni Tawheed party in Tripoli. And since the SSNP was in an ideological and military conflict with them most of the time, they would ignore their calls. Later, however, the SSNP's leadership complained that many movies had scenes that promoted Zionism and the state of Israel. My job of monitoring American movies was terminated, and a more mature person was hired. This process of monitoring programs (especially foreign productions) is a staple of Lebanese Television today, as discussed in the next chapters.

TLN played many Lebanese and Egyptian series and ran numerous American movies, especially Westerns, best sellers and WWF wrestling matches. Among the popular foreign films were the *Thorn Birds*, *The Far Pavilions*, *Tuareg The Desert Warrior*, Charlton Heston's *El Cid* and the 1939 classic *Gone with the Wind*. As for the cartoons and children's programs, they used to play anything they could get. They once

played cartoons our cousins in Australia recorded on a VHS tape. That's how crude the operation was.

Some of the locally produced programs included political analysis and political talk shows that followed the newscast. One long lasting talk show was called "Highlights on Events" (Adwaa' A'la al-Ahdath) which would analyze major political issues and invite politicians and experts as guests on the show. TLN used to also tape local theatrical plays, which were in abundance. It also got the popular Abu Salim troop to shoot several series for a comedy show. In addition, TLN covered numerous religious events for both Muslims and Christians (Interviews # 92a, # 94a, # 95a, May, 2006).

Old programming grids show that the station had a consistent daily schedule starting with cartoons and kids' programs at 4 p.m. and then leading into an hour worth of American wrestling shows, followed by a Lebanese series either copied from TL's signal or produced by TLN. After that came the newscast, followed by a foreign series and then the broadcast would be concluded with a "Long American Movie." On weekends, the broadcast would sometimes start at 11 a.m. with locally produced cultural programs and documentaries of local towns and communities.

While entertainment talent was in abundance, journalistic skills were severely limited. The station had bad need of workers who could write and produce a newscast, and the early hiring process at TLN was far from rigorous. Kamal Nader, an SSNP official who had good language and oratory skills and a decent appearance on camera, was the first to be hired. Nader tells the story of his hiring:

They summoned me to your father's house, and there on the spot they told me, you will be anchoring the newscast from now on, starting tonight. I wasn't ready,

so I borrowed a suit and tie from your uncle. I remember I had to read the newscast sitting on an old straw-chair that had a big hole in the middle. They put a pillow beneath me so I don't slip into the hole. I also remember that the blue background behind me was a bed sheet someone had volunteered. It was embarrassing but it looked OK on TV, and that's all that mattered (Interview # 94a, May, 2006).

Then, TLN hired an anchorwoman. S. Melki was still in high school, and her Arabic skills were mediocre, because she had spent five years abroad without any formal Arabic schooling. But she photographed well on TV and had a fabulous voice. The most important requirement, however, was that she had the courage to put her face on SSNP's television screen, and therefore put her life in danger; she became a target for militias and parties opposed to the SSNP and could no longer venture outside of al-Koura since almost all the surrounding regions and the routes that connected them were controlled by hostile political groups and militias. Her mother begged her not to do it, to no avail. When Melki asked the kids in neighborhood to go find her some makeup, her mother cried out: don't tell anyone about this. Her father sarcastically added: and tell everyone not to turn their TVs on anymore.

By end of 1985, TLN had five news anchorwomen and two news anchormen. They also had added three news editors, and some 20 technicians, producers and managers. The anchors read the handwritten news script off papers stacked on an old rickety desk and were surrounded by a mess of equipment, furniture and employees. But that didn't matter. The camera would zoom in on the neatly dressed news anchors, and the people would only see an articulate professional journalist reading the latest news. In

reality, most of them had no professional journalism training. They learned the profession on the job. Sometimes, the camera man had to record the same news segment over and over because a new anchor could not get it right. That created problems since TLN used VHS tapes, and overusing them meant reducing the quality of the picture and even ripping the tape apart. That would be a disaster, and meant that they had to record the newscast all over. To make things worse, the newscast was often recorded close to the 8:00 p.m. deadline. The men who had to make the 15-minute drive from Bterram to Fih to deliver the tape for broadcast sometimes got into car crashes because the recording didn't end until 7:50 p.m.

At the beginning, the studio walls were not adequately isolated and audiences could hear the echo of the news anchor's voice from the inside and the noise of kids playing from the outside. No one knew how to fix this problem, so the solution was to stop anyone from playing outside after 5 p.m. The neighborhood kids used to despise the station for that policy.

Most of the technical workers hired at the beginning had no idea what they were doing, and my father, who barely had a year of experience in taping weddings, would train them on the equipment. In addition, the studio's production facilities were amateur home-video grade, at best. There were no mixers, graphics generators, multi-cameras or even sound mixers. The first three months, the news was shot on a camera hooked to a VCR that would often jam. When two anchors needed to alternate, the cameraman would stop recording, switch the anchors, reframe the camera shot, and start recording again. The shot transition would look jumpy because the anchors were sitting in the same seat in front of the same background. VCRs back then used to take several seconds to start

recording after pushing the button. That meant the anchor's first few words would sometimes be cut off.

At first, there was no ability to voice over video pictures, so the newscast was basically a talking head interrupted by rare segments of footage without any commentary. That changed when TLN purchased a VCR that could insert pictures without erasing the sound or vice versa. The person recording the newscast was virtually the camera operator, editor, producer, floor manager and technical director, all at the same time. He would even record the advertisements on the same tape of the newscast.

My father was responsible for most of the advertising operations, except for a short period when they unsuccessfully outsourced TLN's advertising to an SSNP member who had strong business connections. During the final years of broadcasting, another SSNP member became responsible for all the business and administration tasks and took over the accounting and management of commercials. My father handled the production part throughout the whole period, however. It is worth noting that, at first, advertising on TLN was extremely cheap, and people who had never before dreamt of advertising on TV rushed to take advantage of the affordable rates. Some ads reviewed by watching the recovered tapes included small and medium sized shops, bakeries and restaurants that can barely afford to run a print ad today. The one commercial most people remember was for a small clothing store in Tripoli that became extremely popular. Al-Amoudi was famous for always appearing in his ads and ending them with the slogan "Nehna Natreekon" (We are awaiting you). The slogan became so popular that the station was sometimes called the Nehna Natreekon TV. The production quality of ads during the early days was also amateur at best, but in time they became better. Some of them were only a cardboard shot

of the name of the business. Others were long video shots of people shopping at a certain clothing place. Some of those ads lasted two full minutes. When the rates eventually went up more national and international brands started appearing. Those companies had the budgets to produce their own high quality ads. Among the big brand advertisers were the Lebanese Lottery and Hayat Soaps.

The condition of the transmission facilities in Fih was slightly better than that of the studio equipment, especially that those were professional grade hardware that belonged to TL. Still, TLN constantly had technological problems because they didn't have the money or expertise to maintain the station. Sometimes, they would go for days without transmission until an engineer was sent from Beirut. Later, the Syrians started sending engineers to fix the station, and it became much more reliable after that (Interview # 92a, May, 2006).

During the first three months, there were no fax machines or even telephones, let alone news wires and computers. So, TLN used newspapers and radios as a source for national and international news. They monitored stories on three radio stations: Sawt El-Sha'eb,<sup>40</sup> Sawt El-Watan<sup>41</sup> and Sawt El-Jabal.<sup>42</sup> Each day, one of the news editors came in early and recorded several radio newscasts on audio tape and read the newspapers. Then he would transcribe the stories from the radiocasts and rewrite them for the news anchors. Later, the newsmen started relying more on correspondents throughout Lebanon to phone-in their reports. At that point, the station also hired several photographers who covered local stories in North Lebanon (Interview # 92a, May, 2006; Interview # 94a,

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<sup>40</sup> Leftist (Communist) radio station.

<sup>41</sup> A pan-Arab Nationalists (Nasserites) station.

<sup>42</sup> Progressive Socialist Party's station; Controlled by Walid Jumblat and directed by Ghazi El-Areedi.



May, 2006). They also had by then three SSNP “intellectuals” working on writing the newscast. Two of them were professional journalists.

Half the newscast would always cover local stories—meaning stories from North Lebanon, especially Koura, Tripoli and Zgharta. Those local stories included many public events, sports activities, expositions, local political speeches, arts, religious festivals, public issues about electricity problems, telephone shortage and bad roads. Lebanese Prime Minister Rashid Karami used to constantly appear on the newscast, mainly because his temporary headquarter was in nearby Tripoli. Some of the early newscasts were overtly ideological and included quotes and statement from the SSNP’s founder, but the station would always speak about the party in the third person. In addition, TLN allocated substantial time to non-political news. It covered many local stories that were ignored by TL and LBC, who would mostly focus on national politicians and events in Beirut (Interview # 94a, May, 2006). This trend still persists today and areas outside of Beirut are rarely given media attention, as will be discussed in later chapters.

The newscast did not have a fixed length, so there was no pressure to fill the “news hole.” It usually started at 8 p.m. but went anywhere between 15 and 55 minutes. I distinctly remember one day the anchor saying: “Good evening and Happy New Year. Nothing much has been happening today, and we don’t have any important news to tell you about tonight. We hope you enjoy the rest of the evening and the final days of the holiday. Good night.” Nadir said that whole preceding week, they were burnt out producing stories about Christmas and New Year and simply had no energy to write a newscast on New Year’s day. That was probably the shortest newscast in the history of Lebanese television.

The beginning generic of the newscast was basically a shot of a tableau painted by a local artist and placed behind the news anchor. The tableau had a cedar and an artistic rendering of the SSNP symbol along with the words “Newscast” and “TL from the North,” all in Arabic. Aside from that, the station didn’t display many SSNP symbols. They used to even start and end the broadcast with the Lebanese national anthem and flag. The party also decided against calling the station the “SSNP TV” because they wanted to target a broad audience, according to several accounts. Since their signal didn’t reach beyond North Lebanon, and they were using TL’s antenna, they called it “TL from the North” or TLN (Interview # 94a, May, 2006).

Nadir says that since the coverage reached a highly diverse area—Sunni and Alawite Muslims in Tripoli and Akkar, Maronite Christians in the Mountains and Batroun area and Orthodox Christians in Koura—“we tried to target a broad audience. We used neutral and polite language even when talking about our opponents.” Although the Lebanese Forces were SSNP’s sworn enemies,<sup>43</sup> “we would always address their leader as ‘Doctor Samir Geagea the leader of the Lebanese Forces.’ We never used derogatory language. We even avoided using the term ‘Firkat al-Touyou’ [which was the actual name of an LF military company] because the term ‘Touyou’ is considered offensive” (Interview # 94a, May, 2006).<sup>44</sup>

Nadir was the main anchor and in effect the news director of TLN. At first, he was responsible for the station’s political stance. But in late 1985, the SSNP appointed two political supervisors (Hassan Ezz el-Dien and Zuhayr Hakam). According to Nader, the supervisors did not interfere in the details, but they often called and requested to put

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<sup>43</sup> Especially because SSNP members were reportedly behind the assassination of Bachir Gemayel.

<sup>44</sup> Touyou is the plural masculine word for goat but it is also used as a derogatory term to describe someone who is stupid and/or stubborn.

someone on air for an interview or to highlight a certain story. Kamal says “we rarely ever made political mistakes since those writing the newscast were either SSNP members or sympathizers, so they understood where the party stood on all issues” (Interview # 94a, May, 2006). According to Nader, among the rare times the supervisors did complain was during the coverage of America’s first war on Iraq:

We were very critical of the American military campaign, but we were also Syria’s allies, and Syria had troops in that war fighting alongside the Americans. We got a lot of pressure from the party who was receiving complaints from the Syrians. Hassan Ezz el-Dien told me that’s not right; we can’t maintain that kind of coverage and not anger the Syrians. He asked us to tone it down, but communication between the party’s leadership and the station was slow, and by the time we felt the pressure, the war was already over (Interview # 93a, May, 2006).

This trend of Syrian officials contacting the head of the TV stations and not the individual producers of the newscasts will also be seen when discussing the other TV stations in Lebanon.

It is important to note that TLN was far from being the most popular station in the area, let alone in Lebanon, but its newscast commanded the same attention as that of any other station, especially before LBC’s signal reached North Lebanon (1987). There were very few stations that could reach our area before that. But the main reason for the power of the newscast was the political status of the SSNP. Locally, the party controlled Koura and had a strong presence in surrounding areas like Akkar and Tripoli. Nationally, the SSNP was a rising star in the Lebanese National Resistance Movement (LNRN), which

was operating in south Lebanon against the Israeli occupation. The party captured the spotlight in 1985 when it dispatched a wave of “martyr operations” against Israeli troops that occupied the Southern half of the country at the time. The high point was when several female members of the SSNP were part of those operations. The “women martyrs” captured international attention, and TLN played a big role in promoting those operations, by being the first to announce them and run programs about their funerals, families and towns. TLN at that point became the official station of the Lebanese National Resistance Movement, which was credited with forcing the Israelis to withdraw from the country.<sup>45</sup> In late 1985, when the party got into military battle with the “Tawheed” Islamic party in Tripoli, the station became a key player in the psychological warfare and the main propaganda organ for the party. According to Nader:

During the Tripoli conflict, we launched a media war against them. We produced reports on their savage and backward behavior, which ruined the beautiful city. We criticized their fanaticism and their abuse and misinterpretation of Islam for political ends. We highlighted how the historic city of Tripoli has retreated economically and culturally since they came on the scene. We also called on the people of Tripoli to rise up against the fundamentalist group and take back their city. At one point in the war, when our side was losing we put a lot of effort into elevating the morale. We were in a battle, and our station was the secret weapon they didn’t have. They wanted to create an Islamic fundamentalist state in Tripoli, and we were opposed to that, and opposed to the division of Lebanon into

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<sup>45</sup> The Lebanese National Resistance Movement included the SSNP, the Communists and several leftists and Islamic parties, including Amal and Hezbollah. The latter would play a minor role at the beginning but later would monopolies the resistance, blocking other parties and taking credit for all the achievements.

sectarian mini-states. That was our justification for using propaganda (Interview # 94a, May, 2006).

While the first three war events pushed TLN forward and serious talks about expanding its operation and funding were underway, the fourth event would almost destroy the station. It would certainly put an end to any hopes of converting it into a professional Television.<sup>46</sup> In mid September, 1987, the SSNP was embroiled in an internal struggle. One side was allied with Yasser Arafat's PLO, while the other with Syria's al-Assad regime. The Syrian-backed "Tawarek" (Emergency) group launched an internal coup and took over most of the towns in Koura, including Bterram. The town of Fih was split in half, and tensions between the two factions made the route between Bterram and the Fih antenna extremely dangerous. The TV operation stopped for several months, especially after the Syrians stepped in and closed our studio.<sup>47</sup> The SSNP's division or what was commonly known as the "Inshiqaq" dealt a forceful blow to the moral of SSNP supporters throughout the region. The party that had been on a streak of victories and a champion of resistance against Israel was now engaged in a campaign of internal assassinations and coups.

The station would, however, restart transmission after six months and stay on air until the Ta'if Peace Accords was signed, and the war was officially over. Nader remembers "the last reports I filed were from Eastern Beirut. It was the first time in 17 years I had ever been there. We visited places we were never allowed to set foot in

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<sup>46</sup> The SSNP was planning a major revamp of the equipment and hired an SSNP member who worked at TL to supervise the plan (Samir Abi-Nassif). The effort was cut short by the internal conflict and eventual division of the party.

<sup>47</sup> They Syrian army blocked the doors and windows of the studio with metal sheets and posted four guards around it. That period was most devastating for my family because we couldn't get access to the equipment my father made a living from.

during the civil war and interviewed members of the Phalanges and other politicians who were formerly sworn enemies, and now are our allies” (Interview # 94a, May, 2006).

In the last four years of operation, no efforts were made to expand the station, mainly due to internal conflicts within the SSNP. After 1992, the station tried to go on, but there was no money available and the cost of acquiring a license from the government was prohibitive. So, the SSNP decided against it, and TLN was closed for good. The transmission station was handed back to the government and the studio went back to being a small production facility for taping weddings and social events. It still exists today.

The story of the rise and fall of TLN to a large extent mirrors the history of broadcast media in Lebanon. Television in Lebanon was introduced from the outside, but later its equipment and institutions fell prey to the militias that controlled the ground locally. Television in Lebanon was also a product of the battles between its sects and political groups. That certainly applies to the history of the next illegal station: LBC.

### ***Illegal stations during the war: LBC***

Today the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation International (LBCI)<sup>48</sup> is the number one TV station in Lebanon and its Satellite channels are popular throughout the Arabic world, especially its entertainment programs. The LBC group has evolved over the years into a complex corporation with various media assets, sub-companies and ventures with regional and international partners. LBC’s birth, however, comes from a different era. The station started as an illegal organ of the Phalanges Party, a right-wing Christian political party established in 1936 by Pierre Gemayel. Although LBC started broadcasting in August 23, 1985, plans for its establishment date back to the early days of

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<sup>48</sup> Formerly known as LBC (Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation).

the civil war. To better understand the factors that shaped today's LBC, we need to visit some of the events related to the Phalanges Party and its militant offshoot the Lebanese Forces.<sup>49</sup>

By 1977, the Phalanges had already established two radio stations in Lebanon: The Voice of Lebanon (in Eastern Beirut) and Free Radio of the Voice of South Lebanon (Boyd, 1999, p. 76). Now, they wanted to add a TV arm to their communication arsenal, especially that their access to TL was blocked by the government. Boulos (1995) notes that around 1978 Bachir Gemayel—the son of the Phalanges Party founder and, at the time, the leader of the party's military wing known as the Lebanese Forces—mentioned that he was seriously working on establishing a television station (p. 153).

A few years later, the Phalanges Party officially registered the LBC as a company on November 3, 1980<sup>50</sup> (Phalanges v. LBCI, 1995). That was preceded by rumors that the station would illegally start broadcasting using channel 12, which prompted the Chairman of TL Dr. Charles Rizk to quickly order equipment that can transmit over the vacant channel and foil the Phalanges' plans. Shortly after that, on July 22, 1980, Dr. Rizk was

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<sup>49</sup> The Lebanese Forces (LF) started as a loose military coalition of Christian parties that opposed the alliance of Palestinians, Muslim and Secular parties. The main Christian groups who came to an agreement in mid 1976 were: the Phalanges Party, The National Liberal Party, Al-Tanzeem Party and the Guardians of The Cedars. They were led by Bashir Gemayel and other representatives of the parties. Later, Gemayel would attempt a bloody "unification of the arms" and assassinate the heads of his allied parties in order to consolidate his power over them. At that point the LF became considered the military arm of the Phalanges Party. After Gemayel's death the LF would witness a series of internal coups and would sever all relations with the Phalanges and become independent under the leadership of Samir Geagea.

<sup>50</sup> According to a lawsuit filed by the Phalanges Party against LBC and its Chairman Pierre el-Daher, it was registered as a limited liability company under the name "The Lebanese Company for Production and Distribution of Radio, Television, Cinema and Theater S.A.L." The registration number is 42836. The names of its owners were the following members of the Phalanges Party: John Beshara Nader, Alexandar Gabriel Gemayel and Saseen Mousa Karam. The lawsuit also includes an signed document by the registered owners that "the actual ownership of the all the shares of the company goes to the Phalanges Party," and that the names of the registered owners is only "souwariyat" (titular or imaginary).

kidnapped by Gemayel's militants and forced to resign (Boyd, 1999; Boulos, 1995).<sup>51</sup>

Simultaneously, Prime Minister Huss advised the Murabitoun, a Sunni Muslim party, to acquire equipment that can broadcast over channel 12 in order to interrupt the Christian party's transmission into their areas. That didn't deter the Phalanges, and LF members were ordered to occupy a government building in Eastern Beirut and start installing the equipment they purchased from Italy and Germany (Boulos, 1995). The Phalanges, under the political supervision of Karim Pakradouni—a veteran Phalanges leader, spent the next three years readying the station for broadcast (Phalanges v. LBCI, 1995).

Bashir Gemayel was anxious for LBC to start transmission quickly as he positioned himself as a serious presidential candidate—after implementing a series of bloody assassinations that eliminated his lead Christian competitors. But by the time he formally launched his presidential campaign, TL had opened its doors to Gemayel, and he shelved the LBC project. In August 1982, and with the backing of Israeli tanks, Gemayel was elected president, but as fast as he rose to power, his power ended when a bomb killed him three weeks later. With his assassination and the succession of his brother Amin Gemayel to the presidency, the project of launching LBC was further postponed.

In March 1985, an internal coup led by Samir Geagea and Elie Hobeika took over the LF and marginalized the role of the Phalanges—now dominated by President Amin Gemayel. As a consequence of that coup, the LF put its hand on LBC since its militia now controlled most of Eastern Beirut (Phalanges v. LBCI, 1995). To formalize its control of the station, the LF registered another company using the same trademark on

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<sup>51</sup> He was released the same day and submitted his resignation from TL, which prompted a strike at the two TL stations. Dr. Rizk's resignation was rejected, however, and he resumed his job in the same capacity (Boulos, 1995, p.137-140).



July 15, 1985 (Phalanges v. LBCI, 1995). The LF's need for a powerful media outlet to consolidate its power and the political and military events during that year expedited the launching of the station, and it started its trial transmission on August 23, 1985 ("About Us," 2007). The success was almost instantaneous. The new station had a modern look and superior picture and sound. It broadcast American and French programs—albeit mostly pirated shows that were captured through satellite dishes (Boulos, 1999). Another important factor in LBC's success was its decision to run as a commercial station targeting a broad audience, rather than as a political mouthpiece of the LF. Aiding that decision was the LF demand that the new station become self-sufficient only a few months after its launching (Boulos, 1999).

When LBC started broadcasting in 1985, the government warned all the advertising companies from working with the illegal station, which spread anxiety among those companies. But quickly, the advertising industry got together and created a pressure group to negotiate with the government. The warnings were later ignored and LBC over time captured the biggest chunk of the advertising revenue in Lebanon, and it still does today (Boulos, 1995, p. 141-142).

Despite their declared policy to target a broad audience, from the start, the new leaders of the LF paid close attention to its political message. Although Karim Pakradouni was handed the political supervision of the station, Geagea and Hobeika would closely monitor it and the latter would constantly send feedback on what should be changed (Boulos, 1999). As for managing and administering the station, Pakradouni summoned a young Lebanese engineer from the U.S. and asked him to run the new TV company. Pierre el-Daher arrived shortly after transmission debuted but quickly became

and still is today the name and face behind LBC. Later, he would also become the official owner of LBC and the person who had the final word in all matters relating to the station, as discussed below.<sup>52</sup> The reality of his power, however, is much more complicated and the vague evidence doesn't support a clear cut conclusion. From the following paragraphs, however, we can get a better picture about the role of el-Daher and his relationship to the LF and other local and regional politicians and financiers.

A lawsuit filed by the Phalanges Party in 1995 presented a document signed by el-Daher stating that he was only “a nominal owner of LBC and that he is ready to give up his shares to any side indicated by Mr. Pakradouni” (Phalanges v. LBCI, 1995). Other documents in the same lawsuit further supported the case that LBC was really owned by the Phalanges Party and was taken by force by Lebanese Forces militants (Phalanges v. LBCI, 1995). Despite the compelling evidence in this lawsuit, Pierre el-Daher, as discussed later, remained on top of the company even during the worst political and economic turmoil the country went through.

By early 1987, Samir Geagea—the Phalanges who launched a coup against Amin Gemayel and became shared leadership of the LF with his co-conspirator Elie Hobeika—would have ousted his former ally Hobeika and consolidated his power over the LF. From that moment on, Geagea became a fixture on LBC's screen, especially during the conflict between the LF and General Michel Aoun's portion of the Lebanese army (1988-1990). As mentioned earlier, when Aoun and Geagea started the “war of cancellation,” TL2 and LBC went into a war of words. Both stations produced propaganda clips and ads to discredit the other side and demoralize its supporters. Many people still remember

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<sup>52</sup> Before the new media law was enacted Pierre el-Daher had in his name 98 percent of the shares, while his wife Randa Saad el-Daher and Maroun Oscar Jazzaar each owned 1 percent.

the vicious campaigns launched by both sides, although LBC was by far more powerful due to its superior equipment and talent. During those days, the two leaders almost daily appeared on their stations after the evening newscasts and addressed the public indirectly through a “press conference” setting, answering the questions of sympathetic reporters. Some of those sessions were over an hour long and many Lebanese, especially Christians, follow them closely. Aside from the long press conferences with Geagea, LBC aired video bulletins that used to promote the LF and invite people to join its party, showing men in military fatigues and playing patriotic songs. Their unforgettable slogan was “Haytho La Yagrou’ al-Akharoun” (Where others dare not venture).

The Aoun-Geagea war quickly came to a stand still with no clear victor and was replaced by a wider military conflict between Aoun and the pro-Ta’if accord forces backed by Syrian troops and Saudi political cover. By early 1990, the battles came to an end signaling the beginning

of the peace period. Aoun sought refuge in France and the LF and its leaders started their precipitous collapse and lost their control over Eastern Beirut, in the face of the advancing Syrian army and its Lebanese allies.

LBCI (Ownership in 2006)	
Pierre Youssef el-Daher:	9%
Marcel Youssef el-Daher (Pierre el-Daher’s brother):	10%
Randa Saad el-Daher (Pierre el-Daher’s wife):	1%
Rula Kamil Saad (Randa Saad’s sister):	10%
Rema Saad Nikolitch (Randa Saad’s sister, living abroad):	10%
Iman Saad Issa-el-Khoury (Known as Yara; Randa Saad’s sister):	6.7% (owned 10% in 1996)
<b>Total: 46.7%</b>	
Salah el-Dien Nitham Ossayran (represented by Pierre el-Daher):	4%
Tele-Jour Company (represented by Pierre el-Daher):	2%
Investcom Holding Company (represented by Pierre el-Daher):	4%
World Media Group (represented by Rula Saad):	2%
<b>Total: 46.7 + 12 = 58.7%</b>	

**Table 9 Source: (LBC, 1996, 2004, 2006).**

Around the same period radio and TV stations started to mushroom around the country, all trying to take advantage of the immediate post-war chaos period before the government released its new media regulations (Boyd, 1999). So, on June 15, 1992, the

renamed Lebanese Forces Party (LFP) registered yet another company calling it the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation and putting 99 percent of the stocks in Pierre el-Daher's name (Phalanges v. LBCI, 1995; Sfeir, 1997).<sup>53</sup> That move, along with el-Daher's other deals and business schemes, insured the continuity of LBC after the outlawing of the LFP. In fact, on March 23, 1994, the LFP was formally banned and its leader was arrested and thrown in jail (Sfeir, 1997).<sup>54</sup> The future of LBC was uncertain, and several political forces wanted to put their hand on it, but el-Daher had no plans to give it up. When the remnants of the Phalanges Party appealed to the courts in an attempt to retake control of LBC, el-Daher allied himself with powerful members of the new ruling elite and gave them big chunks of his shares. Their influence, however, would prove to be only limited and only lasted for a short period. Throughout that period, el-Daher's control of LBC's board of directors, although slightly weakened, remained almost absolute.

Minutes of LBC's stockowners' regular meeting on November 26, 1996, shows that el-Daher's shares were only nine percent, but that reading is misleading since most of the other shares belonged to close family members, political associates and other companies controlled by el-Daher (LBC, 1996). Nevertheless, there was a substantial share of the stocks controlled by major politicians who were in power during the post-civil war era. Among them are Suleiman Frangieh and Issam Fares, each controlling 10 percent.<sup>55</sup> In addition, their allies controlled almost another 10 percent bringing their total

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<sup>53</sup> Another document states that Pierre el-Daher owned 99.998 percent of the shares while his wife and Maroun Oscar Jazzaar each owned 0.001 percent (lawsuit, fares).

<sup>54</sup> Geagea was accused of implementing bomb attacks, instigating sectarian violence and committing political assassinations, among other things.

<sup>55</sup> Both Suleiman Frangieh and Issam Fares were members of parliament and had ministerial positions. They were considered very powerful politicians, the former due to his strong ties with Syria, and the latter because of his enormous fortune—only second to Rafik Hariri at the time.

to slightly under one third of the shares. While this distribution gave the impression of a company with multiple investors and satisfied the new legal stipulations that no one person (or his dependents, including his wife) can own more than 10 percent of a media company, the reality was that el-Daher's vote in the board of directors' meetings reigned supreme.

Looking closely at the rest of the owners, it is clear that they are nominal owners fully directed by el-Daher. While el-Daher and his wife (Randa Saad el-Daher) owned 10 percent, each of his wife's three sisters (Rula, Reema and Iman) also owned the same percentage. In addition, his brother Marcel el-Daher also controlled 10 percent. That practically puts 50 percent of the shares under Pierre el-Daher's command. Furthermore, Pierre el-Daher's wife was representing another shareowner worth four percent, while her husband represented Investcom, a holding company controlling another four percent. That brings the total up to 58 percent, but it doesn't even include another five percent controlled by el-Daher's political allies, especially Maroun Oscar Jazzar. Voting records (LBC, 1996, 2004, 2006) corroborate that these relatives and associates always voted consistently with Pierre el-Daher, even when it was against their personal interests (Issam Fares and Issa Nasser v. LBCI and Pierre el-Daher, 2002).

Even a decade later, records show that Pierre el-Daher's control over the company did not diminish. According to the records filed May 24, 2006, the following were the main owners of LBCI:

It is worth noting that some records show Maroun Oscar Jazzar (controlling 4.4% in 2006) represented Rema Saad Nikolitch, and even once his name was written in the slot representing Marcel Daher but later scratched. That shows Jazzar as an insider and

close associate to el-Daher's family (LBC, 1996, 2004, 2006).<sup>56</sup> In addition to having them control the board of directors, el-Daher had his family members in key management positions. His wife and her sister (Rula) head the programming and operations departments.<sup>57</sup> El-Daher's wife, commonly referred to as "el-Sheikha"—feminine for Sheik, has always been his right hand in running the institution, and her word is never to be questioned. Several participants casually noted that they sometimes contacted "el-Sheikha" for important matters when the "el-sheikh" (Pierre el-Daher) was not available, and she would give them the appropriate directions, especially for matters dealing with the entertainment and programming side of the operation. The news department, however, had a slightly different situation. The top positions there were given to veteran LFC members who worked at the station during the war and some who came from LFC's radio station, The Voice of Lebanon. But controlling the board of directors and the key managers is only half the story when it came to el-Daher's shrewd tactics.

After the government banned the LFP, its surviving members quickly redistributed the many companies and assets their party controlled in an attempt to hide them from the government. Aside from the media assets, the LFP controlled buildings, schools, a network of social services and numerous commercial companies and businesses. Even three years after the banning of the party, the "loose" assets were estimated to be worth \$70-Million—not including media assets. The LFP sold and

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<sup>56</sup> A separate search also shows that there is an Oscar Jazzar who was the head of Radio Monte Carlo which is owned by the French SOFIRAD, which was mentioned in the earlier sections. Although one could suspect that Maroun Oscar Jazzar is Oscar Jazzar's son (Since the middle name in Lebanon is the father's name), no conclusive evidence could be found to confirm the relationship.

<sup>57</sup> I cannot forget how much fear their names would send into the souls of the employees when I used to work at LBCI.

registered companies in the names of loyal individuals and deposited the money in foreign banks (Sfeir, 1997). But it didn't stop at that.

LBC was the crown jewel of the LFP, and the evidence so far suggests that it was always owned by the LFP or the Phalanges party and that it was never a truly private company. No documents that track the source of capital that initiated the station were recovered, but it was widely rumored back then that the Israelis contributed a big part of the assets and funding and shipped the equipment to the LFP for free. That is not certain, but quite likely, given the strong relationship between the LFP and Israel, especially with Bachir Gemayel and Samir Geagea.<sup>58</sup> Regardless the source of capital, the association between the LFP and LBC was always common knowledge.

The available evidence strongly suggests that Pierre el-Daher and his family and associates were the nominal owners who secured the continuity of LBC after the civil war. The instantaneous change in their newscast's tone immediately after the LFP was banned and again after it was reinstated and its leader freed in 2005 add to this certainty. That does not mean that el-Daher has no power whatsoever over the station or that he is simply a name on record. On the contrary, el-Daher is the most powerful man in the station, aside from his superiors in the LFP. Of course, when they were in jail or exile, he quite possibly was the number one person, but right after Geagea was released, his free reign was diminished. The many recent stories of scuffles and conflicts within LBC corroborate that (Interview # 80a, June-July, 2006). The stories talk about conflicts between "el-Daher's people" and the "LFP people" inside LBC. It is not clear what the conflict was about, but it seemed to have ended with a settlement between el-Daher and

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<sup>58</sup> The LFP used to send its members to train in Israel and used to get military and financial support from the Israelis. There is certain evidence that Gemayel and Geagea went to Israel and had close relations with Israeli military leaders, especially Ariel Sharon.

Geagea, where some top positions in the news department were given to LFP members. Of course, at the same time the deal was made, el-Daher made sure the media cover his announcement that the LBC was not controlled by the LFP, in a move to keep the traditional apparent distance between the station and its real patrons.

Furthermore, el-Daher made a fortune for himself from LBC, and his interests are closely tied to that of the institution and the LFP. So, on one hand, el-Daher is the representative of the LFP entrusted in running and maintaining the company. On the other hand, he is the shrewd businessman and media expert who protected and led the company in dire circumstances and was even able to expand its operations and status, while at the same time building a name and fortune for himself and for LBC.

It is interesting to delve further into the smart tactics el-Daher used to insure the survival of LBC because these tactics shed a light on the operation of the other broadcast news institutions discussed below. The main three approaches el-Daher used were, first, as mentioned above, to ally himself with powerful local politicians by giving them a share of the company's ownership and profit, second, to break the company into components owned by separate offshore companies he fully controlled, and third, to bring in foreign investors that provided capital, markets and, most importantly, political cover. Let's further analyze each one of those approaches to understand the intermix of business and local and international politics in the broadcast media industry in Lebanon.

First, as mentioned earlier, right after the war was over and the LFP was banned, el-Daher brought in two powerful politicians into the company: Suleiman Frangieh and Issam Fares.<sup>59</sup> By that move, el-Daher insured a political cover by pro-Syrian politicians for the historically anti-Syrian institution. It is important to note that those pro-Syrian

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<sup>59</sup> It is not clear if those two politicians were imposed on the company or if el-Daher invited them.



politicians were more likely imposed rather than chosen by el-Daher, and future events do support that hypothesis. However, whether they were imposed or not is a negligible matter. First, even when el-Daher was at his weakest position, Fares and Frangieh were not able to overcome his control of LBC. Still, el-Daher got political cover he needed from them by insuring the continuity of the company. Nevertheless, Fares and Frangieh were able to impose some compromise that served their interests, but after long battles in the courts and on the ground.

Two lawsuits by the two politicians against el-Daher provide much insight into the business schemes he used to marginalize their role and the expectations they had in return for the political cover they provided. The first lawsuit addresses el-Daher's violation of an agreement between the two parties that would allow the plaintiffs to appoint a political supervisor for the newscasts and political programs. The supervisor's role was to insure that the "political line" of the institution was consistent with that of the two pro-Syrian politicians. The lawsuit stated that Fares and Frangieh's "right to supervise the news and political programs is a natural and legal right, and is the least any politician can expect when sharing ownership of a TV company, since that affects the political stance of the company" ("Returning Lawsuit," 2001). Apparently, the lawsuit was filed after el-Daher blocked their representative (Nadir Sukkar) from practicing his work as a News and Political Programs Supervisor.<sup>60</sup> In the lawsuit, el-Daher argued that he was forced to sign the agreement, which dated back to July 7, 1995, and that the agreement in the first place violated the laws that regulate trade and business organizations. The judge sided with el-Daher concluding that the "illegality of the

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<sup>60</sup> When I was working at LBC, it was widely whispered among the employees that Sukkar was a representative of the "Syrians" who insured that the news will toe the line. Fares and Frangieh, of course, were strong Syrian allies at the time.

violations was not clear” (“Returning Lawsuit,” 2001). The same day the outcome of the lawsuit was announced, a brawl broke out between LBC’s managers, who were loyal to el-Daher, and the security guards of the station, who were loyal to Frangieh. The conflict escalated, and the Lebanese army had to interfere arresting several employees (Abi-Najm, 2001a). Three days later, and after negotiations between el-Daher, Frangieh and Fares, a settlement was reached and the arrested employees were released (Abi-Najm, 2001b; Abi-Najm, 2001c).

In an even more revealing lawsuit, Fares complained about el-Daher’s “ilusive business schemes” and “bad-intentioned dealings” that may have defrauded the plaintiff (Issam Fares and Issa Nasser v. LBCI and Pierre el-Daher, 2002). This lawsuit sheds more light on el-Daher’s business schemes, which brings us to the second tactic of establishing a series of off-shore companies that would take over important components of the institution (“LBC Expands,” 1997). By doing so, el-Daher both moved the company away from the control of outsiders and insured his full control over important parts of the company.

One of the offshore companies el-Daher established was the Lebanese Media Company (LMC). The goal was to have this company own other companies which will control important components of LBC. So, on August 28, 1996, he signed an agreement on behalf of LMC with a third party (unknown foreigner) to establish the Lebanese Media Holding (LMH). LMC would own 51 percent of LMH, and the latter would have full ownership of LBC SAT Ltd., LBC Plus Ltd., and PAC Ltd, a production company.<sup>61</sup> Those three companies are officially considered separate from LBCI, but in practice they share the same buildings and to a large extent, the same staff and equipment. In fact, LBC

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<sup>61</sup> The 49 percent of the shares left are probably owned by Saudi Prince Al-Walid bin Talal.

SAT's employees receive paychecks from PAC.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, while LBCI and LBC SAT each have separate studios and control rooms and anchors, the newsroom and much of the equipment and news material are shared. The reason for the separate studios has more to do with the timing of the newscasts and aesthetics than with the corporate structure. Both newscasts are produced in the same building, on the same floor.

In addition to the mentioned companies, el-Daher established XYZ Ltd. Its purpose was to acquire the ownership of LBC's films and programs library. XYZ would then transfer the library to LMC in return for stocks in that umbrella company. El-Daher alone owned 51.43 percent of XYZ (*Issam Fares & Issa Nasser v. LBCI & Pierre el-Daher*, 2002).<sup>63</sup> The lawsuit filed by Fares and Frangieh protested the way el-Daher executed this transfer. In the details, el-Daher was not only able to transfer the control of the Library to an off-shore company he safely controlled, but was able to only pay \$1.2-Million out of the \$9.3-Million XYZ agreed to pay. In a twist of events, since Pierre el-Daher practically controlled both companies, the board of directors at LBC voted in favor of decreasing LBC's capital in the amount owned and absolving XYZ from paying the loan in cash. The agreement included a stock swap between LBC and XYZ, which kept el-Daher's status intact in both companies.

The third tactic implemented was bringing in foreign investors from Saudi Arabia, the second patron of post-war Lebanon (the first being Syria) and the main backer of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri—the financial ruler of Lebanon (the Syrians being the security rulers). The first deal was struck with multi-billionaire and member of the

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<sup>62</sup> When I used to work in LBC SAT's newsroom, my paycheck came from PAC. This matter used to confuse my colleagues and we used to always raise the question: who are we really working for?

<sup>63</sup> This company is registered in the Grand Cayman island—a place known historically a pirate haven and presently as a haven for off shore companies who want to avoid paying taxes in their countries. I personally checked its registration records of XYZ when I happened to be on a trip visiting the island.

Saudi ruling family Prince Al-Walid bin Talal, giving him a 49 percent stake in LBC SAT. Later in 2006, LBC announced its merger plans with Rotana, a company also controlled by bin Talal (“Merger Plans,” 2006). In addition, at the eve of the U.S.-Iraq war in March 2003, LBC partnered with the influential Saudi-owned Al-Hayat Newspaper to establish a news powerhouse to its coverage of the war (Humsi, 2003). These transactions not only provided much needed liquidity to the company but also opened the biggest Arabic advertising market to LBC and brought the political protection of the Saudis and indirectly strengthened the relationship with Saudi’s local allies, especially Hariri. Of course, that also brought in Saudi influence, a fixture in Arabic media today. This point will be revisited later.

All these reveals the extent of the struggle between el-Daher who wanted to maintain his control over the station and the two politicians who had powerful positions in government and many state tools at their disposal. It shows that the legal and political system can provide some protection against powerful government interests—in this case against Fares and Frangieh, but at the same time it doesn’t provide full insurance but a mere obstacle to direct manipulation of those politicians. Of course, el-Daher was not simply a powerless citizen awaiting government protection. He also had tools at his disposal, but politically he was much weaker than his rivals during that period.

Throughout the post-civil war era, LBC adopted a conciliatory and pro-government, and consequently a pro-Syria, tone. While the LFP’s name was banned from the news media, most of the pro-LFP employees remained working there with the same positions. It was not difficult for LBCI to maintain a somewhat objective tone during that period, since they had always been crafty in their newscasts, as discussed in the later

chapters that deal with news content. Unlike most other television stations, LBC always maintained an appearance of objectivity in their newscasts. That tone changed after the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in 2005 and the end of the Syrian political hegemony over Lebanon. LBC quickly made a U-turn, first siding with the “Cedar Revolution” and then returning to its original LFP line, especially after Samir Geagea was released from prison and the ban lifted off his party.

LBCI’s news operation is a state of the art machine that brings together the highest end in technology and the most talented staff. Its newsroom is superbly well-run and its newscast is widely watched, even by opponents and non-constituents, as discussed later. This rise of LBCI to some extent resembles that of TLN, but its survival and continuation, especially in regards to the business and political schemes employed by el-Daher, more closely resemble that of TL.

Today LBCI remains the number one station in the country although its Chairman had lately voiced concern that the other stations are becoming more and more serious competitors, and that it may soon lose dominance over the big chunk of advertising revenue to those stations. Who are those other stations and how did they start is the focus of the next section.

### C. Third Period 1992-2000: New Media Law

#### *Transition Period (1990-1994)*

During the transition period that separated the signing of the Ta'if accord in October 1989, and the passing of a new broadcast media law in October 1994, up to 40 unlicensed televisions (and 180 radios) were either actively broadcasting or working on establishing their own facilities in Lebanon (Boyd, 1999; Obeid, 1996). Table 10 below presents the names of 38 stations that registered their company during that period. It also shows the region they were broadcasting from (Obeid, 1996).

Most of those stations terminated their operations by 1992, after the government requested from all Lebanese

	TV Name	Region
1	TV one	Greater Beirut
2	CVN	Greater Beirut
3	Voice of Lebanon TV	Greater Beirut
4	Antenne Plus	Greater Beirut
5	MTV	Greater Beirut
6	Sigma 90	Greater Beirut
7	Kilikya	Greater Beirut
8	Al-Manar	Greater Beirut
9	Beirut TV	Greater Beirut
10	Green Lebanon TV	Greater Beirut
11	ICN	Greater Beirut
12	Future TV	Greater Beirut
13	Arabic TV	Greater Beirut
14	Consumer TV	Greater Beirut
15	Wave Trust Network TV	Greater Beirut
16	ITN TV	Greater Beirut
17	TVS	Greater Beirut
18	LBC	Greater Beirut
19	C33	Greater Beirut
20	IBC	Greater Beirut
21	Cable Vision	Greater Beirut
22	Tripoli TV	North Lebanon
23	City TV (Madina TV)	North Lebanon
24	Peace TV	North Lebanon
25	Ehden TV	North Lebanon
26	Knowledge TV (Ma'rifat)	North Lebanon
27	North TV	North Lebanon
28	Arabic Broadcasting Corp.	North Lebanon
29	TLN	North Lebanon
30	Times T.F.	South Lebanon
31	Elisaar TV	South Lebanon
32	Lebanese Arabic TV	South Lebanon
33	Lebanon-Love TV	South Lebanon
34	TV Services Company	Bekaa (East)
35	Bekaa TV	Bekaa (East)
36	Baalbeck TV	Bekaa (East)
37	Sky TV	Bekaa (East)
38	Al-Hilal TV	Bekaa (East)

**Table 10 Source: (Obeid, 1996, pp. 149-152)**

factions to stop regional broadcasts and promised to unify all the broadcasting industry.

The rumored idea was that the government was going to shut down all stations and give back the monopoly to TL, something TL's contract with the government stipulated and was theoretically not supposed to end until 2012 (Sakr, 2001). In addition, most of the dozen or so TV stations that did manage to survive past 1994 were forced to shut down

by the government after they were declined license. In fact, only four private TV stations were given “class A” licenses in 1996. Those were LBCI, which was viewed as a Maronite Christian station influenced by Ministers Suleiman Frangieh and Issam Fares (see prior section); Future TV, a Sunni Muslim station that belonged to Prime Minister Rafik Hariri; NBN, a Shiite Muslim station controlled by Speaker of the House Nabih Berri; and MTV, an Orthodox Christians station controlled by the brother of Minister Michel Murr (Sakr, 2001; “New Licenses,” 1996). Each of the TV stations also received permits for a “class A” radio station. As mentioned earlier, “class A” licenses allows for the broadcast of news and political programs, while a class B license only sanctions entertainment programs.

Hezbollah’s radio and TV stations were given a “special” license to broadcast “news of the resistance until the end of Israeli occupation of South Lebanon.” Al-Manar TV and Radio Nour were not allowed to broadcast any other news or political content (“Approving Licenses,” 1996). After a political struggle, Tele-Lumiere, an unlicensed Christian religious station was also allowed to broadcast, supposedly as a counter balance to al-Manar TV (Sakr, 2001).

The National Council for Audio Visual Media, a newly established government body mentioned earlier, rejected the applications of 47 TV and radio stations, most of which were considered in opposition to government (“Approving Licenses,” 1996). The political discourse about the 1994 media law was rooted in the 1989 Ta’if accord that brought the country out of the civil war. The new state was supposed to “reorganize” the media, but what it did was “redistribute” them. According to an interviewed executive at one station, “The discussion quickly turned into a confessional distribution scheme,

and the main political leaders pushed for apportioning the broadcast media among themselves and limiting access to outsiders” (Interview # 13a, June-July, 2006). The process in which the government “reorganized” the broadcast industry in Lebanon reveals the power of the state in redistributing power generating assets in the favor of powerful government players. It is worth delving deeper into this process of redistribution from its inception.

Right after the war was over, the government promised to organize the broadcast medium and hinted that it will not allow private broadcasters but bring the country back to the pre-civil war era when the government had a monopoly over broadcast media. That angered the broadcast industry and the plan was withdrawn. Still, the measure partially worked since many stations terminated their operations heeding the government’s call.

The second step was coming up with a new audio-visual media law that produced three governmental bodies that were supposed to be independent and separate from the government. Those bodies were: The National Council for Audio-Visual Media (NCAVM), The Association for Organizing TV and Radio Transmission, and the Committee for Establishing Model Bylaws and Practices. The first group was responsible for accepting and rejecting applications from broadcast media companies and assuring that those granted licenses stay within the boundaries of the laws in the future. The second was made up of technicians and engineers and was responsible for deciding the maximum number of stations that can feasibly be allowed licensing, along with other technical matters. The third group focused on regulations that relate to the content and process of production.



While the three groups were staffed by professionals from the industry, they had no legislative or executive powers. They were only advisory bodies, and all their recommendations had to be approved by the Cabinet of Ministries (the government). The appointment of members in these bodies was highly politicized and sectarian, just like any other governmental appointments in Lebanon. The three bodies did give the impression of independence from government, but in effect were working for and influenced by the same powerful politicians who created their associations and appointment them. That was clear in the recommendations they presented to the Cabinet, as discussed below.

The government did not miss an opportunity to promote the independence of those bodies and shift any blame or criticism to them. For example, when the Minister of Information announced the new licensing decision, he was faced with a barrage of questions accusing the government of distributing the licenses among its own members. Minister Farid Makari, a close Hariri associate, constantly referred back to the NCAVM, stressing that it was an independent body and highlighting the technical, scientific and economic aspects of their decisions. When pressed on why the licenses were practically divided among the dominant government officials, he rejected that “false logic” and referred to the new media law that stated that no one person can own more than 10 percent of a station. Hence, he concluded that government members who got permits were actually a minority compared to those who were outside of government. He said that the licenses were given to both those in power and outside of power. “Therefore, it can not be said that only those in power got licenses” (“The Cabinet,” 1996). The Minister was suggesting that out of each license only 10 percent was owned by a

government official, while 90 percent was owned by the non-government officials. That, of course, was ridiculous if we take into consideration that the other owners were relatives and close associates to those politicians, as discussed in the case of LBCI above, and as we will see in the case of the other stations below.

The argument that the “10 percent law” prevented a monopoly by the powerful and rich was repeated frequently by several other officials and even in government-sponsored studies. For example Obeid (1996, p. 140) suggested that the “10 percent law” made the broadcast media in effect owned by “middle class Lebanese” and rejected the criticism as “logically flawed.” He added that the laws, regulations and independent bodies that supervise them insured that “capital will not interfere in the broadcast media’s role in effecting democratic life” (Obeid, 1996).

The fact that the new law stipulated that companies should make public information about the names of the stockholders and the percentage each person owned did not make much of a difference since the companies closely guarded that information, and it seems that journalists at the time did not bother putting the extra effort to verify the accuracy of the information or to compare it the original documents—which were readily available in several governmental departments, including the NCAVM. An-Nahar, which is considered the most prestigious newspaper in Lebanon, boasted about publishing the names of the stockholders “although some of them were cautious and kept silent about the information” (“Full Names,” 1996). An-Nahar, however, ended up only publishing the names without the shares for each person. It even didn’t highlight the familial relationships between the stakeholders and in some cases published inaccurate information (“Full Names,” 1996). In an October 4, 1996, article, an-Nahar buried the

names of Rafik Hariri's family members at the end of the list. It used the last name of Hariri's wife Nazik as a stockholder rather than using both her maiden name and her husband's last name as is customary in legal documents ("Nazik Audeh" instead of "Nazik Audeh Hariri"). The same article listed the three sons of Minister Issam Fares as share holders in Future TV when they were actually share holders in LBCI, and their names did not actually appear in any post-1996 official document reviewed by this study. The way it was presented gives the impression that the Fares family controlled Future TV. The fact that An-Nahar has substantial business transactions with Hariri-owned media and non-media companies raises serious questions about its integrity. Furthermore, an-Nahar did not highlight the familial relationship between Pierre el-Daher and two of his sisters-in-law, which explains the mistaken impression during that period that Ministers Suleiman Frangieh and Issam Fares owned the station (See the prior section on LBC).

Furthermore, the NCAVM was far from neutral in its decisions. It clearly adopted a double-standard in treating the license applicants by interpreting laws inconsistently, applying them to one case and ignoring them in others. To elaborate, three laws and regulations were in play in most of the decisions to give or deny permits. For clarity, we will call these laws: the common ownership law, the religious, familial and regional concentration laws, and the feasibility laws.

First, the common ownership law stipulated that a person cannot own shares in more than one broadcast media company. In the case of stations that violated this rule, the assembly could choose which company to reject for licensing. In other words, if someone owned shares in company A and company B, the NCAVM could choose to

deny the permit of A or B. Both LBCI and New TV (and many others) violated that rule by having “common owners” with Radio Sawt el-Ghad (Voice of Tomorrow) and Radio Delta, respectively. In LBCI’s case, its permit was passed, and the onus of the violation was put on Radio Sawt el-Ghad, but in New TV’s case, the onus was put on the TV station and not on Radio Delta (“Summer and Winter,” 1996). This trend reoccurred numerous times, but in some cases, this rule was totally ignored, such as the case of MTV.

Second, the religious, familial and regional concentration laws include laws, by-laws and regulations that encourage diversity in media ownership and content and forbid concentration of ownership in one religion, region or family.<sup>64</sup> This law was scandalously violated for every single licensed station. According to a petition submitted by New TV to the Cabinet of Ministries, the owners of the four stations were summarized as follows:

- Nine out of the 19 owners of NBN were Shiite Muslims and had personal and political allegiance to Speaker of the House Nabih Berri.
- 85 percent of the shares of MTV belonged to members of the Murr family or people who work for that family, and more than 70 percent of the owners were Orthodox Christian. In addition, most of the owners came from the same town of Bteghreen.
- 55 percent of LBCI’s shares were owned by Maronite Christians (70 percent by Christians from various sects) and Pierre el-Daher and his family owned more than 50 percent of the shares.

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<sup>64</sup> In addition, some stations were denied permit (al-Manar TV and Voice of Lebanon Radio) because most of the shareholders belonged to one political party.

- 59 percent of the Future TV's shares were owned by Sunni Muslims, and the rest of the owners were Rafik Hariri's employees, including a political consultant and a chief of staff.

All the information provided in this New TV document was consistent with the documents this study independently obtained and analyzed.<sup>65</sup>

Third, the feasibility laws deal with the financial, technical and administrative requirements of a station that are aimed to insure its survival. While the NCAVM rejected the licenses for numerous applicants citing inadequate facilities and equipment, it granted Speaker of the House Nabih Berri a "class A" license for both his TV and Radio stations (NBN). The government immediately confirmed that decision although neither of the stations was established yet ("The Cabinet," 1996). A senior manager at New TV complained "they denied us a permit on that basis although we had a complete running operation for years, while NBN was given a permit based on two pieces of paper and a blue print" (Interview # 13a, June-July, 2006). In addition, when NBN got its permit only \$300-Thousand of the \$16-Million required capital was actually paid (NTV document).

In addition to these three points, several other laws were treated in a double standard. For example, one regulation stated that the owners of a media company should be designated by a person's name. LBCI had several companies that owned stocks. Most of those companies were represented by Pierre el-Daher and their real owners were not revealed in the licensing documents (see prior section on LBCI). Furthermore, there was documented evidence that Prime Minister Hariri himself was interfering with the NCAVM's practices. For instance, the NCAVM first recommended permit to Radio

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<sup>65</sup> The religions of the owners, however, were not based on official identity documents but on human informers.

Voice of Lebanon, stating that there were no violations or reasons to deny the application, but the Council of Ministers returned the application to the NCAVM telling them to “meet again and find reasons....” Some parliament members got hold of the original approved document and protested the violations, to no avail. In the end, Voice of Lebanon was denied license (NTV 1, n. d.). Another interesting matter relates directly to Rafik Hariri’s foreign patrons—Saudi Arabia. According to another New TV document, the Saudi-owned Middle East Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) was granted permit without submitting any application to the NCAVM. It also stated that seven of the members of the Council of Ministers testified that the subject was never presented in the Council’s meetings, yet the company received permit even before it established any of its offices in the country (New TV 2, n. d.).

When the NCAVM was grilled by journalists about its practices, it simply presented the criteria it followed in approving and rejecting licenses, citing the law and the analysis of the engineers who recommended a maximum of five TV stations and 18 radio stations be allowed to transmit due to limited spectrum (“The Text,” 1996). By that, they ignored the real issues and shifted the blame to the law and the “experts.” The argument sent the journalists in full circle: first, the government referred the decision to the “independent” NCAVM. Second, the assembly referred justified its decision based on the expertise of the engineers and the law, which was created by the government in the first place. In the end, the government got what it wanted and was able to fairly justify the process, with limited protest.

After the cabinet announced confirming the licenses of the four “class A” TV stations (and four “class A” and eight “class B” radio stations), it ordered the rest to

immediately halt broadcasting any news or political programs. It gave them less than three months to either reapply for licensing or liquidate their assets (“The Cabinet,” 1996). That led to protests from the broadcast media industry, especially those who did not get permits. Two-hundred journalists held a sit-in protesting the government decision that would in effect put them out of work by forcing the closure of all but four TV stations and 11 radio stations. Most of the stations slated to be closed were considered opposition stations and the measures were regarded as a government clamp-down on opposing voices and on free speech. (“Journalists hold sit-in,” 1996).

### ***The Stations That Survived***

It is only fair to say that each of the TV stations in table 10 above have a unique story that represents an important aspect of the history of Lebanese broadcasting. Due to limited space and resources, however, only the stations that survived the 1996 media law will be discussed below. Those stations are: Future TV, Murr TV, NBN and al-Manar TV. In addition, New TV’s unique history is covered since it was able to fight an uphill battle and finally get its permit when Rafik Hariri briefly lost his position as prime minister (“Journalists hold sit-in,” 1996). Lastly, Orange TV, a new station that lately got a permit after its owner General Michel Aoun returned from 15 years of exile in France, will be quickly and briefly be covered.

#### ***New TV***

New TV was established in 1990 by the Lebanese Communist Party after its success in Radio Sawt el-Sha’eb (Voice of the People). It started broadcasting in June 16, 1991, and Hanna Saleh was its Chairman (Boulos, 1995). Between 1993 and 1994, a group of businessmen with ties to the communist party purchased the station. One of the

main stockholders who remains the most powerful person in the company today is Muhamed Tahseen Khayyat, the current Chairman and CEO.

A senior director at New TV said the station was owned by Radio Sawt El Sha'eb, which in turn was (and still is) owned by the communist party. So, at the start New TV was the organ of the communist party in Lebanon. After the majority stake was transferred to independent investors, however, it moved away from the communist party—which now owns less than one percent of its stocks. The main reason the communist party sold its share,

according to the senior director, was the lack of financial ability to cover the cost of running a television operation. Even their radio station, he said, is struggling financially today, and they had to shut down their newspaper for the same reasons.

According to the same senior director, New TV's board members

are: Tahseen Khayyat, Abdallah al-Zakhem, Nizar Younis and Sa'dallah Mezer'ani.

Table 11 below lists the names of the stockholders in 1996 and 2006. Notice the change in shares for Muhamed Tahseen al-Khayyat, which went from 28 percent to 10 percent during those periods. In addition, Adnan al-

<b>New TV's stock owners :</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>2006</b>
Muhamed Tahseen al-Khayyat	28.23%	10%
Adnan al-Khayyat	10%	*
Salah al-Khayyat	10%	*
Hassan Afeef al-Bawab	12.76%	5.01%
Marwan Ahmad Kalou	10%	6.69%
Muna Sidawy (Muhamed el-Safadi's wife)	5%	3.65%
Khalil Abdou Abu el-Shawarib	*	10%
Muhamed Karim Kamel Mrouwit	*	10%
Muhamed Farouk al-Awni	*	10%
Rida Ali Esma'il	*	7.91%
Abdallah al-Zakhem	*	6.69%
Nizar Younis	*	6.69%
Yassine Nehme Ta'me	*	3.34%
Amar Holding Company	*	3.34%
<b>Total</b>	<b>75.99%</b>	<b>83.32%</b>

**Table 11 source: (New TV, 1996, 2006)**

\* The documents had missing information for the marked stockholders.



Khayyat and Salah al-Khayyat each owned 10 percent in 1996. The data is missing for 2006, but it is most probable that they owned the remaining 17 percent in 1996. It is clear from this table that the current owners of New TV were either former members of the communist party or close associates, and that al-Khayyat family leads the group. In addition, several of the listed people are mostly nominal owners.<sup>66</sup>

The same senior director interviewed said “new owners of New TV had their own political affiliations, but the station is not controlled or run or owned by the communist party anymore. New TV has employees from all religions and regions....” Although his statement is true, it misses the fact that the dominant new owners are either former members of the communist party or had close ties to it. In addition, although New TV does truly have a diverse body of employees at the lower levels of the corporate hierarchy, most of the top and middle managers have strong ties to the communist party, as the interviews revealed. This does not, however, make the station a political organ, mainly because it is actually stronger than the party itself—whether financially, politically or otherwise. Since the fall of the USSR, the communist party in Lebanon had lost its main sponsor and source of funding and became politically impotent and divided. This could partially explain the ease and flexibility of New TV’s distancing itself, at least apparently, from the political line of the communist party. Nevertheless, if one station deserves praise for its staunch dedication to criticizing and highlighting government violations and corruption, it is definitely New TV. The fact that it may remain loyal to the communist ideology or even the communist party does not diminish its achievements. New TV’s constant criticism of the corruption in politics has both earned it the loyalty of its audiences and the scrutiny and obstructions of the government.

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<sup>66</sup> This, however, could not be independently verified at the time.

When the government approved the new media law, New TV fought an uphill battle to obtain licensing. It submitted its application and appealed the rejection decision several times, to no avail. According to a New TV senior director:

We had launched numerous political activities and protests, and got jailed several times for our actions.... until we realized that we can't go on.... On July 26, 1997, we received notice to close the station, and at midnight, we broadcast a message saying 'we will abide by the government's decision, but we will never say goodbye.' During the closure period, we changed the name to 'The New Company' and became a production company selling entertainment programs and music videos. At the same time, New TV filed a lawsuit with the Advisory Council (Magliss al-Shoura) requesting to rescind the government's decision. We tried to get other stations to join us in the lawsuit but they all resigned to their fates. So, we pursued the legal option on our own. Rafik Hariri was prime minister back then, and no matter what we did, we couldn't get the license. But around the end of 1999, the 'Advisory Council' rescinded the government's decision and gave New TV the license to broadcast, and in April 10, 2001, New TV restarted broadcasting this time both via land stations and satellite (Interview # 13a, June-July, 2006).

When asked why the Advisory Council—a legal body that appoints a judge to follow certain government violations—waited all this time before deciding to revoke the Cabinet's decision, the senior director explained that the Council finally realized that it was a political decision and not based on legal judgment. "The decision to close New TV was political because we were critical of the government, and we were exposing all the

corruption and violations.... So, when they took into consideration those facts, they gave us back our license.” The senior director, however, did not point out that the Council’s decision came almost immediately after Rafik Hariri was replaced by a more sympathetic prime minister. This makes the latter decision to grant permit also political and not a sudden awakening in government conscience. The reality of the matter is that the new Prime Minister, Selim al-Hoss, was a staunch opponent of Hariri’s policies, and it was in his interest to grant license to New TV—a staunch critic of Hariri. Today, the licensing situation is different, explained the senior director:

Anyone who has the financial means could get a license any time. The government’s main justification before was the limited spectrum. This argument has fallen apart with the advance of digital and satellite technology. Today you can have 100 stations in that spectrum if you broadcast digitally. Of course, the government’s real reason to close stations was to stifle competition and silence opposition, but they used the technical reason to justify their actions (Interview # 13a, June-July, 2006).

New TV is known in Lebanon not only for its opposition to the government, but its criticism of Syria even before Syrian troops withdrew from Lebanon. When Syria still had its hegemony over Lebanon, most media adopted a soft tone towards the Syrian policies. After the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and the subsequent withdrawal of Syrian troops, the taboo was lifted and the mainstream media went overboard in criticizing Syria and blaming it for all its ills—as discussed in subsequent chapters. But New TV did it when the Syrian army was still in control of the country. That brought them credibility and sympathy from a wide range of audiences. It also

brought down on them the wrath of both the Lebanese and the Syrian governments. According to the same New TV director, “They used to follow our newscast word for word. Once, we said something about [Lebanese Director of Public Security] Jamil El-Sayyed, and they came and closed our station for two days...” New TV’s CEO and Chairman Tahseen Khayyat was also jailed once. “They accused him of being an Israeli collaborator, which is unconscionable. 24-hours later, it was clear the accusations were pure fabrications, and he was released,” the director said. Similar stories of politician persecution are discussed further in chapter seven. It is worth noting here, however, that one of New TV’s reporters interviewed for this study was recently arrested for an investigative report that accused the government of obstruction of justice and fabricating testimonies. Firas Hatoum was arrested on December 19, 2006, after working on an investigative report where he entered and taped the home of one of the key witnesses in the assassination of Hariri (“Firas Hatoum,” 2007). Mohammed Zouheir al-Siddik was one of the main witnesses to link Syria to the assassination of Hariri but later admitted that he fabricated the whole story, which discredited and embarrassed the international investigation team. Hatoum’s investigative report revealed the conceit of al-Siddik and hinted that he may have been bribed by anti-Syrian groups who are currently in power. Four days after his report aired, he was detained along with his cameraman and driver. Hatoum was released on bail six weeks later but still faces up to eight years in prison under the criminal law of which he was charged, although similar journalistic violations are normally charged under the press law (“Two TV Journalists,” 2007). Many organizations, including Reporters Without Borders, condemned the government’s actions calling it “politically-motivated” (“New TV Reporters,” 2006).

Despite similar conflicts with the government, New TV today is trying to be a “third option” between the pro and anti-government stances, with a tilt towards opposition. Its political programs on government corruption are popular and highly controversial. New TV remains the main critics of Hariri’s capitalist policies in Lebanon and brand themselves as defenders of the weak and the impoverished. New TV summarizes its political line as “Arab nationalist opposed to all politics that aim at putting down the Arabic citizen’s values and weakening his sense of belonging and wasting his identity” (brochure, New TV). It is a staunch opponent of Israel and Western foreign policies, especially U.S. actions in Iraq and the rest of the Middle East. Today, New TV’s satellite broadcasts reach North and South America and Australia, in addition to the Arabic world.

### ***New TV’s Newsroom***

New TV has a somewhat dated newsroom, especially when it comes to equipment and administrative structure. Production facilities outside the newsroom are much more advanced, however. The newsroom crew is mainly made up of reporters, who write most of the stories; producers who putting the preliminary rundowns for newscasts and write some script; the anchors, whose sole job is to read the script on air; a typist, who types the stories and readies the rundown on the computer; an “Arabic teacher” who corrects grammatical mistakes in the script and adds the needed notations; an oratory consultant, who trains and monitors the reporters and anchors; an assistant news director<sup>67</sup> and a news director.

News Director Salma al-Bassam, who can only be described as a dynamic workaholic superwoman, runs the newsroom as a field officer almost around the clock.

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<sup>67</sup> The assistant news director is possibly the daughter or a relative to the CEO/Chairman.

Al-Bassam is the only female TV news director in Lebanon. Unlike most other news directors interviewed, she is engaged in all the details of crafting the newscast and even doubles as a producer for the main evening newscast. Al-Bassam is constantly on-call when she is not in the newsroom. Her producers said they call her constantly to get her consult on important matters, especially matters of a political nature. One producer said she calls her on average six or seven times a day. When she is in the newsroom, al-Bassam rarely sits in her office and is often working from the producer's desk, which is open and accessible to all newsroom employees. Reporters and producers have casual and constant conversations with her. She listens to their concerns, questions, and requests and often engages with discussions about disputed topics. This highlights the democratic atmosphere in the newsroom, where the director is more viewed as a close and trusted team leader, rather than a distant authoritative manager. The downside of this micromanagement and field officer style, however, is inefficiency, which is exacerbated by the lack of the modern technical facilities.

As of July 2006, the newsroom did not yet have the computerized rundown and news script operations used at LBCI, al-Manar TV, and to a lesser extent at Future TV. This meant, reporters handwrote or typed and printed their stories and physically brought them to the news director or producer for checking. It also meant all the stories had to be handed to a typist to enter them into "Studio Win Pro." Add an "Arabic teacher" who checks the script for grammatical errors, and you can imagine how chaotic and inefficient the process can become.

To maintain control over the final product, the news director needs to put enormous time and effort into the details of the production process. Despite that, many

elements which the news director would have preferred to exclude or reframe would find their way into the news script during this chaotic process. The following are some notes taken June 15, 2006, right before the 7:40 p.m. newscast aired (Friday June 15, 2006):

- 7:22 p.m.: The newscast is only 18 minutes away and the news director is under a lot of pressure. She still has to write the “introduction” to the newscast and finalize the rundown, which has been ready for some time now, but still needs finalizing. Simultaneously, she is listening to the radio for the latest breaking news and fielding questions from reporters and anchors.
- 7:27 p.m.: The news director moves to the typist’s room and tells the typist how to order the rundown. The assistant news director is standing next to her suggesting changes.
- 7:30 p.m.: The script starts printing.
- 7:31 p.m. Problems! One story is missing from the script. Then, a second story is missing. The typist rushes to add the missing stories. The “Arabic teacher” interferes. He spotted a word that doesn’t sound right. He instructs the typist to correct it.
- 7:32 p.m.: The anchor grabs the available printed rundown and news script and rushes down to the studio (which is four levels below). The director and typist are still working on the missing stories. The assistant news director asks about the newscast introduction and tells the typist to change the order for two stories in the rundown.

- 7: 35 p.m. The typist is under tremendous pressure. A third story is missing! The reporter responsible for it is summoned. He voices the story to the typist while she writes it in the script.
- 7:37 p.m.: The typist and the news director finalize the introduction and other minor missing information. The script reprints.
- 7:38 p.m. The typist rushes down with the script to the teleprompter.
- 7:40 p.m. The newscast airs on time. The news director monitors it from the producer's desk.
- 7:50 p.m. The news director reviews news releases and prepares next day's calendar.
- 8:00 p.m. The news director monitors the competition's newscast (LBC). She then calls the control room and kills two stories.

To put things into perspective, American newscast producers can be rebuked if the script was not printed by the deadline, which is often one hour before the newscast aired. Despite that policy and the fact that most American newsrooms have cutting edge technology, the deadline pressure is still intense in those circumstances. You don't need to be a journalist, however, to imagine how nerve-racking the experience was for New TV's news crew. This signifies the advantage of technological advances and the convenience of macro managing and modern corporate hierarchal structures. This point will be discussed more thoroughly in subsequent chapters.



### *Future TV*

Future TV was established by the Hariri Group in February 1993 and remains today the mouth-piece of the Hariri establishment.

<b>Future TV's owners :</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>2003</b>
Bahia al-Hariri (sister)	10%	10%
Nazik Audeh al-Hariri (wife)	10%	10%
Saad el-Dien al-Hariri (son)	8%	8%
Baha' el-Dien al-Hariri (son)	8%	8%
Walid Shafik al-Hariri (nephew)	7.3%	7.3%
Ghaleb Abdul-Latif al-Shammaa'	10%	10%
Mustapha Razayan	1.66%	1.66%
<b>Total:</b>	<b>54.96%</b>	<b>54.96%</b>

Table 12 clearly shows that the

**Table 12 Source: (Future TV, 1997, 2003).**

Hariri family tightly controls the company. Hariri's wife, sister, two sons and nephew own 43.3 percent of the shares. Adding Ghaleb Abdul-Latif al-Shammaa', a close confidant of the Hariri family, brings the total to 53.3 percent. The list also includes Mustapha Razayan, the Chairman of the Hariri-owned Mediterranean Bank; Habib Sabbagh, Hariri's main partner in Consolidated Contractors Company of Lebanon (CCC); and a long list of associates, partners, employees and political allies (not included in the table). The ownership of the company did not change throughout the years, even after the assassination of Rafik Hariri. It is interesting to note that Rafik Hariri himself never had a stock in his name on record, yet there is no doubt that he had the final word in every decision ("Arabic Media Tycoons," 2005).

In addition to Future TV, the Hariri family also controls Radio Orient and Al-Mustaqbal Newspaper (Future Newspaper). In addition, several news sources reported an investment frenzy by the Hariri group during the 1990s in other Lebanese and Arab media companies, including one third of the shares in an-Nahar Newspaper. The same sources reported that Hariri made substantial investments in as-Safir and ad-Diyar

Newspapers. Moreover, rumors of a Hariri's systematic approach to hiring, sponsoring and even bribing journalists are rampant in Lebanon. Several interviewed journalists said they have personally seen "envelopes of cash" being distributed to journalists, either during a foreign trip on his private jets, where he invites journalists, or in other circumstances. None of the people interviewed admitted to taking money from Hariri, though. Other reports talk about Hariri making substantial investments in media companies or research centers that promise not to be critical of Hariri and his policies.

Ownership of Future TV is certainly not the only factor that influences the station. Several employees explained that they often had regular meetings with Rafik Hariri in his Palace, both as individuals and as part of a group of employees. "All the staff used to go up and we would have an open discussion with him, especially about major political changes." The meetings occurred almost every month, and some Hariri himself used to come to the station. This didn't stop after Hariri's assassination and his son Sa'ed followed the same practice (Interview # 14c, June-July, 2006).

### ***Future TV's Newsroom***

Unlike the rest of the stations, Future TV's news department is housed in a building separate from the rest of the company. The entertainment and programming departments are miles away from the news building, which is located adjacent to the Saudi Arabian Embassy in Beirut's Rawshi area and just a few blocks away from Kraytem—where Hariri's posh home is located. Hariri bought the land where the station stands today in late 1989. It used to have a gas station and a villa right above it. Future TV's news department building was built in place of the gas station, and the villa, first, became a center for the main groups and consultants who worked with Hariri—from

media to political to economic and cultural teams. Later the villa became the Saudi Arabian Embassy of Beirut (Interview # 14c, June-July, 2006). This story symbolizes the close Hariri-Saudi tie rather than provides evidence for any political claims.

A veteran employee and founding member of the news department noted that the beginning of the station was tied to the beginning of the “Rafik Hariri political project.” Future TV “escorted the ascent of Hariri to the prime ministry. We (Future TV) were always one step behind him” (Interview # 14c, June-July, 2006). The same employee tells the story of the early days of the station:

When we first started, the media team used the villa to direct and launch the nucleus of the first Hariri media project. Ali Jabber was chosen to lead this effort and to establish the TV station as CEO.<sup>68</sup> Jabber was a correspondent for the German News Agency. I think Hariri chose him because of personal acquaintance and because he was [like Hariri] from South Lebanon. Plus he studied in America and Hariri always sought out competency and ability. He attracted people from all sects and religions based on merit and knowledge. I was among the first few people Jabber contacted.... We immediately started accepting applications, buying equipment, and training reporters and producers.... Hariri, of course, had access to a lot of money, and that helped speed the process.... At that point we were going into the Ta’if accord era and Hariri’s clout was rising in Lebanese politics. As political events developed, we started covering them and the newscasts and the station started to expand. The political events also gave us

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<sup>68</sup> Ali Jaber was the first chairman/CEO and is not working with Dubai Sat TV in the United Arab Emirates. Dr. Nadil Mula is now the chairman/CEO.

justification to get more money for equipment and staff (Interview # 14c, June-July, 2006).

In 1993, the station started broadcasting short recorded news reports without any anchors or reporters. In 1994, they started running programs. The next year they had a variety of entertainment, news and political programs “and that’s when we became a regular TV stations.” Later (around 1997) Future TV started broadcasting via Satellite to the Arabic world, and then to America and other areas around the world (Interview # 11c, June-July, 2006).

Given the vast financial power of Hariri, Future TV’s newsroom is a little underwhelming. Although the production equipments were among the most advanced in the country, the newsroom equipments come in third behind al-Manar TV and LBCI. The editing equipments are a mix of old linear and new non-linear machines, but they still use tapes rather than digital video servers, like LBCI and al-Manar TV. Although the news crew has much more computers and advanced software than New TV, they don’t seem to be interested in utilizing its full potential. Many reporters at Future TV still handwrite the story and physically take it to the assistant news director for typing and printing. The few reporters who type their stories, do it in MS word and then copy/paste the text in a news software called “Bulletin,” which gives access to the script for anyone on the computer network. Despite the fact that the news director can easily get access to the computer text, the reporters still print the story out and physically takes it to him for checking.

Rashid Fayed, a recently appointed news director, seems to be determined to change that antiquated practice.<sup>69</sup> One of his memos urged journalists to type rather than hand-write their reports. Although Fayed has only recently started working at Future

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<sup>69</sup> Abdel-Sattar el-Laz was the first News Director. He is now with Saudi-owned Arabia TV.

TV's newsroom, he has been with the Hariri group for a long time. In fact, he was the PR head of the Solidaire—the controversial corporation controlled by Hariri and put in charge of rebuilding downtown Beirut after the war. He is also a veteran journalist and had worked in the print media, especially with as-Safir and an-Nahar Newspapers (Interview # 14c, June-July, 2006).

Although Fayed is the head of the news department, he still leaves the minute-to-minute management of the newsroom to his second-in-command Imad Assi. Assi is a veteran Future TV employee who started as a reporter when the station first opened. Unlike other stations where reporters go to the news director to get their stories approved, reporters at Future TV deal with Assi when it comes to content. That may be because Fayed is still getting acquainted with the process. For a while before Fayed came, Assi was acting news director, and the position was left vacant.

Before the assassination of Hariri, Future TV had its satellite newscast separate from its local newscast. Today, they are identical. In addition to the Arabic newscasts, Future TV offers three other newscasts, in French, English and Armenian. Each newscast has an independent crew that reports to the news director. Like New TV, but to a lesser extent, Future TV's employees are from a variety of religious backgrounds. Although many of those interviewed were sympathetic to the "Hariri cause," not all of them were members of the Tayyar al-Mustaqbal (Future Current)—Hariri's main political body.

Like LBCI, Future TV's reporters were more experienced and tended to be older than their peers at TL and New TV. The observed airing of the newscast was relatively efficient and smooth, except for some minor glitches with tapes that tend to occur in those situations. Unlike New TV, the news crew at Future TV didn't need to worry about

printing the final script and rundown. The “Bulletin” software was accessed in the control room and the studio and could be instantly changed from the newsroom. There was no running around with the scripts, and if any story was missing or a text needed to be changed, any reporter or news managers could do it from their own desk, even seconds before the story airs. The software then automatically updated the changes and everyone engaged in the production process saw the changes and act accordingly. Still, Future TV’s “operations department” had to receive all the tapes from the editing team and organize them chronologically and then physically bring them down to the control room. A “tape operator” then had to put the correct tape and push “play” at the signal of the Technical director, who was sitting at the mixer. This created an extra step and often caused problems, especially when the tape operator ran the machine late or if a tape was misplaced. The new video servers, used at LBCI and al-Manar TV solved that problem.

### ***MTV***

MTV or Murr TV was controlled by the Orthodox Christian al-Murr brothers, Gabriel and Michel. Michel al-Murr inherited his family’s political position and became a member of parliament, a minister and later a deputy prime minister. Gabriel, on the other hand, oversaw the family’s business and built a media empire starting with several successful radio stations (Radio Mount Lebanon, Radio Nostalgie and Hit FM) and ending with the MTV (Ahmed, 2002).

In the early 1990s, MTV was able to become the second or third most watched channel in Lebanon with a stream of provocative entertainment programs that addressed some social taboos in the country. It also dedicated substantial time to popular American and French shows. At the start, MTV was purely an entertainment station and did not

have a newscast until September 1994. Its political line was moderate and pro-government given its relationship with Michel al-Murr (Ahmed, 2002). That quickly changed when his brother Gabriel decided to move into politics and align himself with his brother's opponents, especially the emergent Christian group known as "Qurnet Shahwan."

The two brothers got into a major dispute during a by-election in June 2002, where Michel al-Murr's daughter Marina ran against her uncle Gabriel for a fiercely contested parliament position in the Matn area (Ahmed, 2002). The uncle won the election by a slim margin but was accused of violating the media law by using MTV to promote his election campaign. The court cited Article 68 of the media law, which forbids the use of broadcast media to promote or advertise on behalf of political candidates. As soon as the judge issued an order to close the station in September 2002, government troops surrounded MTV's facilities and forced a shut down. The Lebanese High Court confirmed the decision later by denying the station the right to appeal the closure decision.

Of course, there was more to the story than the legal violation. While most observers agreed that MTV truly did violate the law, they also agreed that other TV stations did the same but were not punished. In fact, there was a clear political motive to this legal action. MTV did not only turn against its main political patron Michel al-Murr but also moved away from its pro Government line, in an effort to capture the Christian opposition audience which had been dominated by LBCI. The station also became critical of Syrian interference in Lebanon and broadcast some shows that might have impinged on some social taboos in the country.

The closure of MTV caused the loss of jobs for some 450 employees, according to the station, and was widely protested in the country (“The State,” 2003, p. 93). Several professional associations staged strikes and some political groups even went down and protested in front of the station only to be pushed back by government forces.

When it comes to ownership records, MTV is probably the most tightly held family-owned station in Lebanon. As mentioned earlier, the majority of its owners not only came from one sect and one town, but also from one family. Table 13 shows that MTV was solely at first a family business owned by the Gabriel al-

<b>Murr TV (MTV)</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>2003</b>
Gabriel Elias al-Murr	60%	7%
Jihad Gabriel al-Murr	10%	10%
Michel Gabriel al-Murr	10%	10%
Carol Gabriel al-Murr	10%	10%
Carl Gabriel al-Murr	10%	10%
Walid Rida al-Solh *	-	10%
Imad Darwish Mustapha Teher	-	5%
Nadim Henri Tawtal *	-	4%
Charles George Abu-Adal	-	1%
Kamil Gibrael Mnassa	-	1%
Khalil Nami al-Khazen	-	1%
Joseph Phillip Sarkis	-	1%
<b>Total:</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>70%</b>

**Table 13 Source: (MTV, 1996, 2003)**

\* Did not attend the stockholder’s meeting.

Murr and his two sons and two daughters. After the new media law was confirmed, the shares of Gabriel’s children did not change. However Gabriel’s 60 percent stake was distributed among close associates, employees and relatives. Despite that, the Murr family alone remained in direct control of 47 percent of the shares. The documents acquired have a list of 51 shareholders, most of which have less than one-tenth of a percent registered in their name. More importantly, the company’s stockholders meetings reveal that only 11 out of the 51 shareholders signed the attendance sheet, making the other owners strictly nominal. Ten of the attendees are listed in table 13. The only two major stockholders who did not attend are marked with an asterisk. This reveals that in effect al-Murr family still had the controlling vote after the changes in ownership.



The most interesting shareholder outside the Murr family is Walid Rida al-Solh who owns 10 percent but does not attend the shareholder meetings. According to several newspaper accounts, al-Solh is the Lebanese name of Saudi Prince al-Walid bin Talal, who has both Lebanese and Saudi citizenship (Ahmed, 2002). Also note that Ghassan Zaydan is the official attorney for the company.

MTV remains closed today although there were many reports of its reopening in the past two years, especially after the assassination of Hariri and the Syrian withdrawal from the Lebanon. Ironically, the same political powers that MTV backed and whom are in power today, don't seem to be interested, or at least in a rush, to allow it to go on air again.

### ***NBN***

When NBN was first established, it was jokingly called the "Nabih Berri Network." Its real name is the National Broadcasting Network, although Nabih Berri, the leader of the Shiite Muslim Amal party and the Speaker of the House of Parliament, does in fact control the station. Unlike the other stations, NBN has a vast number of stockowners that, at first glance, gives the impression of a diverse public ownership. Looking closer at the attendance sheet for the stockholders' annual meetings, it becomes clear that most of them either never attend

<b>NBN (Main board voters)</b>	
<b>Naser Safiy el-Dien</b>	
Owens:	18210 (3.6%)
Votes:	18332 (2.4%)
Represents:	27471 (5.5%)
<b>Represents votes: 36854 (4.9%)</b>	
<b>Mustafa Al-Haggar</b>	
Owens:	36100 (7.2%)
Votes:	36200 (4.8%)
Represents:	111695 (22.3%)
<b>Represents votes: 163390 (21.8%)</b>	
<b>Abdallah Farran</b>	
Owens:	30552 (6.1%)
<b>Votes: 49104 (6.6%)</b>	
<b>Ahmad Hussein</b>	
Owens:	47404 (9.4%)
Votes:	59808 (8%)
Represents:	91772 (18.3%)
<b>Represents votes: 116680 (15.6%)</b>	
<b>Ahmad Muhamad Fathi Al-Safadi</b>	
Owens:	34615 (6.9%)
<b>Votes: 50050 (6.7%)</b>	
<b>Kasem Sweyd:</b>	
Owens:	45000 (8.9%)
<b>Owens: 45000 (6%)</b>	
<b>Total: 61.6% of the vote</b>	
<b>Table: 14 Source: (NBN, 2003)</b>	

or are represented by handful of members. In addition, several stockowners have voting rights sometimes double the proportion of their stock shares.

Tables 14 presents the voting power of six out of the 36 stockholders. These stockholders either directly control or represent a total of 61.6 percent of the board's vote. Several legal experts interviewed explained that these names are either members of Berri's Amal party or close associates, although there was no time or resources to investigate beyond that. In any case, Nabih Berri's control of NBN is not disputed by any stretch of the imagination. It is a well known fact among the ruling elite and the general public.

NBN did not permission to conduct research on its premises because the station was undergoing major restructuring. At the time this study was conducted, news of a Kuwaiti investment group investing in the NBN was circulating. During the same period, NBN's newscast was renamed City TV.

NBN is known to hire close associates of Nabih Berri and the Amal party. Several interviewed journalists said they were former employees at NBN. Most of them said they left NBN because of the low pay and partisan atmosphere. The studio visited was under reconstruction, and NBN seemed to be building a modern newsroom and adding advanced machines and computers.

### ***Al-Manar TV***

Al-Manar TV was established by Hezbollah and remains the party's main media organ. Since Hezbollah started as a guerilla group and is strongly associated with military resistance against Israeli occupation of south Lebanon, the stereotype of the rag-tag militia may suggest an unprofessional crude operation. The humble building that used to

host the station before it was destroyed by Israeli bombing in July 2006, and the location of the station in the impoverished southern suburbs of Beirut (al-Dahyeh) certainly reinforces that stereotype. The moment you walk into the building, however, it is a different story. Al-Manar TV, in fact, had the most advanced and most professional newsroom in Lebanon—both in

equipment and staff.<sup>70</sup> The newsroom use cutting edge production and news gathering equipment and software. Like LBCI, their videos are all stored on serves eliminating the need for tapes. Newsroom reporters and producers each had their own computers with access to news wires, videos, graphics, the rundown and the newscast script. In sum, al-Manar TV's newsroom rivaled that of any

<b>LCG (al-Manar TV)</b>	<b>2005</b>
MP Mohammed Hassan Ra'd	10%
Sultan Khaleefat Assa'ad	9.7%
Youssef Ismai'l Al-Zayn	8.5%
Mohammad Mahmoud Haydar	8.2%
Ahmad Hady Mustapha al-Mazboudi	7.1%
Abdul-Jalil Kasim al-Khusheimi	6%
Shiekh Ahmad Tawfeek Ezz el-Dien az-Zein	5.3%
Kamal Elias Haddad	5%
Hassan Deeb Hijazi	4.5%
Ali Mohammed Daher	4.2%
Abbas Mohammed Muzannar	4.1%
Youssef Nasri Smahat	3.35%
Mohammed Hassan Muhsin	3%
Elias Gergis Salim Nasrallah	3%
Naji Nabih Ghanem	3%
Amin Mohammed Shary	3%
Ahmad Hamed al-Bardan	2.65%
Mohammed Afif Ahmed	2.35%
Hassan Nitham el-Dien Fadlallah	2.35%
Ra'eef Ra'eef Khoury	2.35%
Naser Hussein Akhdar	2.35%
<b>Total:</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 15 Source: (LCG, 2005)**

American network news operation. A clear testimony to the advanced state of this operation was the continuous broadcasting of that station even during seemingly impossible periods of the Hezbollah-Israel war. Heavy Israeli bombardments did not

<sup>70</sup> After insisting that I go on a quick tour of al-Manar TV's building, the PR representative hesitantly agreed on condition that I cannot interview anyone until the formal approval came from the administration. We got into the access-by-key-only elevator that seemed to have a lot more buttons going underground than those leading to the upper floors. The PR person then walked me through the huge newsroom and studios of al-Manar. I was overwhelmed by the advanced equipment and extremely busy crew that barely had time to glance at the stranger walking through their station. Just a few days after the official approval came, the Hezbollah-Israel war broke out and the station was wiped out by the Israeli bombardment of the southern suburb of Beirut.

succeed in stopping al-Manar TV from broadcasting its newscasts and political talk shows, to the point that the station ran the slogan “al-Manar, the inextinguishable flame.” The station’s survival and continuous broadcasting throughout the war was a major factor in the Hezbollah’s success in its war with Israel between July 12 and August 15, 2006.

Unfortunately, that same war made further investigation of al-Manar TV’s operation impossible. Right after the station granted the permission for this study, the war had already been underway. In fact, the day that was supposed to be the first day of field research at al-Manar TV was also the day it was hit and destroyed by Israeli bombing.<sup>71</sup>

As for al-Manar’s ownership, table 15 summarizes the major shareholders of the company which is officially registered as the Lebanese Communication Group (LCG). LCG was established on January 13, 1997, but the operation of al-Manar TV and other media outlets preceded that date.

It is interesting to note that all except one of the owners attended all the meetings on record, as is substantiated by their own signature. That is true for all the documents reviewed and that go back to 1997. This may suggest that the registered owners are not merely nominal individuals but active members of the corporation. In addition, all the documented meeting show those decisions were taken unanimously without any

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<sup>71</sup> That day, I had a morning appointment at the Ministry of Information. Many stories about an escalating conflict between Hezbollah and Israel were circulating. I was concerned but too excited to cancel my trip to al-Manar TV, although the traffic was eerily light. Still, the stories did not sound too bad since military conflicts between the two have been taking place intermittently for over two decades. When I arrived, there was an increased number of guards around the building. I explained that I have permission to enter the station and conduct research. One of the guards politely told me it’s an emergency today, and that I should return some other time. After protesting several times, the guard rejected my appeals and turned me back. Hours later, I watched on television Israeli jets pounding that same area, destroying al-Manar TV’s building along with many other Hezbollah establishments and residential buildings that filled al-Dahyeh. I spent the following 34 days covering the conflict with various Arabic and Western media, especially with Yahoo! News’ Kevin Sites in the Hot Zone.

dissenters. Although the owners didn't changes between 1998 and 2005, the initial list shows 39 owners, with shares that are less than 3.6 percent per person. Of course, most of the shareholders are known members of Hezbollah. Like NBN's case, Hezbollah's control of al-Manar TV is not a disputed fact.

### ***Orange TV***

Orange TV had not started broadcasting when this study was conducted although it received its license on June 22, 2006. Its story is interesting because it does not divert from the prior stations whether in its ownership or political affiliation despite the fact that the station was given license to broadcast after the latest political changes in the country which led to the withdrawal of the Syrian army and a major shift in government policy. In addition, the politician who controls this fledgling company (Michel Aoun) has made fighting corruption in government a major part of his political agenda, yet when it comes to establishing a TV station, it is the

same old story.

According to Orange TV's founding records, Michel Aoun, his daughters and their spouses alone own 40 percent of the company, with the rest controlled by close members of his political party al-Tayyar al-Watani al-Hurr (Free Patriotic Movement or FPM).

<b>Orange TV</b>	<b>2005</b>
Michel Aoun	10%
Claudine Michel Aoun	10%
Shantal Michel Aoun (Baseel)	9%
Jubran Baseel	1%
Miray Michel Aoun (Hashem)	9%
Roy Elias Hashem	1%
Abbas Hussein Hashem	4%
Natheer Ghandour Dakkash	10%
Pierre Maroun Salwan	10%
<b>Total:</b>	<b>64%</b>

**Table 16 Source: (Orange TV, 2005)**

Orange TV was slated to start regular programming in February 2007, but the summer war between Israel and Hezbollah delayed the plans, according to a station managers. Still, they hope to start broadcasting soon.

The company has already established its corporate hierarchy and is hiring and training employees at all levels. The few managers briefly interviewed were cautious to state that the station will not be a political organ of the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) although they did not distance themselves from it.

At this point, Roy al-Hashem, Michel Aoun's son-in-law, is the CEO of the company, officially known as al-Lubnaniah Lil-I'lam. Jean Aziz is the News director. Both Aziz and al-Hashem were not interviewed.

What is unique about Orange TV is that any Lebanese citizen can go online and purchase company shares ([www.otvinvest.com](http://www.otvinvest.com)). The minimum allowed purchase only costs \$100 or 10 stocks at \$10 per share. This move to increase the company's capital by \$40-Million may impact the percentage of shares owned by Michel Aoun and his family but will not likely diminish his control over it. That is mainly due to a business scheme that separates the stocks of the actual station from that of the other sub-companies that own different components of the station—something already visited in the case of LBC (see above).

### **D. Conclusion of Chapter 3**

Chapter three can be summarized into three points, each dealing with one of the three eras covered. The first era witnessed the introduction of television to Lebanon. The first television station was intended to be a propaganda machine for spreading French political influence and culture in the country, while simultaneously turning up profit for the its French owners and their Lebanese partners. Throughout most of its pre-civil war existence, CLT (and later Tele-Orient) was dominated and controlled by French

organizations like SOFIRAD, which historically served the French government by dominating and running local French and international media companies. The French shared some control of CLT with their Lebanese agents, most of which were government and state officials. The French used numerous tactics in keeping the station under control. Those tactics included overwhelming the company with capital and thereby controlling its shares, positioning French executive at top positions in the station—or in the companies that controlled the station, keeping a tight control over the technologies used, and squeezing out any foreign or local competition. The power of SOFIRAD, however, lay in its invisibility and not only the control tactics it used. This invisibility was achieved by running CLT as a commercial entity. That way, CLT was providing both profit and political power for the French and their Lebanese agents. More importantly, the approach made CLT appear separate and independent from both French and Lebanese states.

At the beginning of the civil war, the French lost interest in controlling Lebanese television, and the government tried to rein in the television industry, but with little success. During the civil war many television stations appeared on the Lebanese stage, taking advantage of the weak central government and little or no state control over its broadcast equipment, which was dispersed around the country. The civil war created the opportunity for private stations to emerge and dominate the television market in Lebanon. Most of those stations were born as outcomes of violent conflicts, and were used as propaganda instruments to serve their political patrons during the war. Both these facts remained true after the civil war, except the violent conflicts were replaced by legal and political battles.

After the end of the civil war, the Lebanese government forced the closure of most private television stations in the country. The government used three main tactics to achieve this goal. First, the government claimed that it will reorganize the industry and asked stations to stop operating until the new law came out, spreading rumors that TL will be given back its monopoly over the industry. That took care of most stations which thought that all private operations will be halted. Second, the government imposed an exorbitant licensing fee that broke the back of the most of the other stations that remained. Finally, the few stations that were able to afford the licensing fee and meet the tough demands of the new laws were faced with regulators and governmental bodies that served the powerful interests dominating the state. The regulators, supervising bodies and experts hired to fairly evaluate and approve licensing based on merit and legitimate business and technological standards, ended up using double standards in dealing with the stations, thereby serving the interests of the government officials that appointed them in the first place. More importantly, those groups legitimized the take over by government interests of the media industry by posing as neutral and independent arbitrators and experts.

In the end, the government filtered and forced out the vast majority of television stations, while smoothing the way for a handful of stations directly controlled by the dominant politicians and za'ims in the country. Today, the television industry is divided among these dominant politico-sectarian elites. The new laws that were created to organize the television industry after the war actually redistributed it in their hands and secured their monopoly over the television market.



### **PART III: BROADCAST JOURNALISTS, THEIR VALUES, INSTITUTIONS & WORK**

In the earlier sections, we covered the general political, cultural and economic factors that shape the Lebanese media and then focused on the history of broadcast journalism and the institutions that make up this industry and the political forces that control it. The analysis so far has been at macro level. This and the next part of the study deal with the operation of television news at the mezzo and micro levels.

Before moving on to the details about how broadcast news in Lebanon operates and what the major factors that shape its output are and how that relates to political interests and the state in Lebanon, we need to have a better picture about the people who work in this industry. What are their stated professional values and ambitions and how do they practice and pursue them? How do their institutional hierarchies and practices influence and shape their work and output? What instruments do they use to facilitate their work and how do these tools impact their final product?

Part III will attempt to answer these questions in four separate chapters. Chapter 5 focuses on the norms, values and ambitions of broadcast journalists, including the concepts of objectivity neutrality. Chapter 6 addresses the effect of the institutional hierarchy on the TV journalist's work and attitude towards her company and her profession. It also deals with how journalists practice and implement the values addressed in chapter 5 and how they learn the policies and practices of their institutions. Chapter 7 presents the fears, external pressures and obstacles that impede the broadcast journalist's work and shape his product. Finally, chapter 8 captures the daily work of the broadcast journalist inside her institution and focuses on the roles of each position and the amount

of power that position gives the individual. This chapter also addresses the instruments and tools used in TV news. This includes both TV technologies, like video storage, and news instruments, like the newscast rundown and the script.

## Chapter 4: Professional Norms, Values and Ambitions

In this chapter we discuss in detail the professional norms of Lebanese broadcast journalists and how they define, perceive and implement those professional standards. According to Bennett (2003, p.162-163), “Professional norms are those moral standards, codes of ethics and guidelines about inserting one’s voice and viewpoint into a story that enable journalists to make personal decisions.” While those professional norms are often used as tool to justify the work of journalists, they are often influenced and shaped by internal institutional and external political, economic and cultural factors. To be sure, professional norms and values differ from one institution to another, but when it comes to news values, there are usually common principles and ideals that dominate each society and are usually taught to aspiring journalists in schools and universities.

All the participants interviewed were asked about their journalistic values and professional norms and standards. “Al-Mawdou’iyat” or “Objectivity” was the most salient term in their responses, followed by neutrality or “Al-Heyad,” balance and truth. The latter three were often conflated into the meaning of objectivity, which seemed to symbolize and summarize the professional norms and values of Lebanese journalists. Therefore, in the following paragraphs, we will mostly focus on the meaning of the concept of objectivity and use it interchangeably with professional norms.

## **A. Definition of Objectivity**

Defining objectivity, believing in it or in whether it exists and practicing it are three separate matters. So, we start with how the participants interpreted the meaning of objectivity. Most journalists had a rather simple and somewhat vague definition of that term.

First, objectivity meant balance. It meant presenting “all opinions and sides and not excluding anyone.” The journalists, however, were not talking about “all sides” related to a story or the general public here. “Anyone” meant any politician or major political side. Objectivity in that sense means including all politicians. This point will become clearer in the chapter 10 that shows how the bulk of TV news stories are statements and announcements from a handful of major politicians.

Second, objectivity meant not leading people into thinking one way or the other, but stating the facts and letting people decide. This meant “simply relaying the story as it is” and “presenting what there is on the ground and letting people decide.” Of course, this definition was almost always followed by a statement explaining that even “simply stating facts” is not so simple and there is a huge margin to play around with when it comes to the way you write those facts. This point will be further explained below in how journalists practice objectivity on a daily basis.

Third, objectivity meant neutrality and non-alignment. “The reporter should put his own emotions and convictions aside,” noted one participant (Interview # 1c, June-July, 2006). As a journalist, “you shouldn’t be a side in any political debate. You moderate a debate and don’t take a political stance or back a certain political group” (Interview # 15c & 17c, June-July, 2006).

In addition to these three major definitions, some participant viewed objectivity, analysis and opinion as not necessarily contradictory or mutually exclusive. As one journalist put it, “objectivity is limited to the internal pieces of the story.” That does not include the “introduction” to the newscast—or sometimes even to the individual story, which could be fully analytical and opinionated. Both introductions to newscasts and to individual stories will be extensively discussed in chapter 10. But for now, objectivity, to this group, is achieved even when opinion and analysis are included in the story, as long as the journalist tells the audience the truth. “I don’t fabricate things. And although I have some analysis pieces and commentary in the introduction, that is simply stating the opinion and perspective of the station, and the audience can agree with it or reject it,” explained one participant. So, analysis and commentary are permissible and not contradictory to objective journalism as long as the journalist doesn’t fabricate facts.

A small group suggested that objectivity is a way of protecting oneself, one’s job and one’s image. One anchor noted “sometimes, for example, if you invite a certain politician to your show, some people associate you with that politician and label you as his supporter. I faced that several times and suffered from it.” The solution to that problem was to be “as objective as possible in my shows and try to invite all the sides, so that the show will be for everyone, not colored with a certain political ideology or side” (Interview # 9a, June-July, 2006).

Similarly, objectivity to some is a way out of the contradiction between a journalist’s own beliefs and convictions and political direction of her station. One producer explained, “even if something is not serving the political agenda of my station, I can still indirectly include it and write it in a certain objective manner and get away with

it” (Interview # 6d & 1e, June-July, 2006). Here objectivity is used as a leverage to increase the margin of freedom for a journalist in the face of her institution’s interests. It is a compromise between the institution’s interests and that of the journalist. One reporter elaborates:

Let’s say I am personally against a certain politician and the station supports him. I can get out of this contradiction by being objective. Objectivity solves this problem. If I include something negative about him—along with the positive, I can say because I am an objective journalist. Of course, if the station’s political line is consistent with mine, that will make life much easier. That will make it easier to look for bits and pieces of news that may harm that politician and not bother about including the positive parts (Interview # 1c, June-July, 2006).

On the extreme side of the last two views are a small number of participants who viewed objectivity simply as a clean suit a journalist wears to hide his real intentions. These journalists rejected the whole concept of objectivity. It is more of an image that directly relates to credibility in the audiences’ eyes. This opinion represented a minority of views, but is nevertheless important because members of this group tended to be senior journalists with more authority than the average reporter. Their views are further discussed below.

In sum, objectivity to most Lebanese broadcast journalists meant balance in presenting major political opinions, stating the facts and not inserting personal opinions and neutrality and non-alignment by moderating the different sides in the story and not becoming one side or another. In addition, some Lebanese TV journalists considered objectivity and opinion and analysis are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Other viewed

objectivity as a tool to protect oneself and as a way out of the contradicting interests inherent in the job. A small minority rejected the concept of objectivity and considered it an external dress used to enhance the credibility of the journalist in the public's eyes by covering his real intentions.

### **B. Do You Believe in Objectivity and Does it Exist in Lebanon?**

Defining objectivity and believing in it and in whether it exists in Lebanon were distinct matters in the eyes of the participants. There were four distinguishable groups here. They are divided between those who believe in objectivity and those who simply oppose it. The former group, which made up the vast majority of participants, is subdivided into three groups: those who believe that there is some level of objectivity in Lebanon but is certainly unacceptable; those who see that objectivity does not exist at all in their country; and those who have an alternative understanding to how objectivity reveals itself in Lebanon. None of these participants claimed that objectivity is implemented at an acceptable level in Lebanon, and aside from expressing their disappointment with the status of objectivity, those who accepted the concept presented various understandings of the obstacles and limitations to implementing objectivity in their country.

First, the vast majority of journalist interviewed both expressed a strong belief and commitment to objectivity and a deep disappointment with the practice of journalism in their country, which they described as mostly partisan and hardly objective. Those tended to believe there are minimal levels of objectivity and remained optimistic about

achieving higher levels in the future. In addition, those participants rejected the way broadcast news is produced in their country. One reporter complained “I am opposed to the way newscasts are filled with opinion... They are supposed to be objective and present the facts and let people decide. People are not idiots, and we shouldn’t tell them how to think about things” (Interview # 8a, June-July, 2006). Although these participants clearly described their disillusionment with the concept of objective and neutral news when it came to application in Lebanon, they were slightly optimistic about the possibility of striving for an acceptable level of objectivity. One reporter noted “before I became a journalist, I used to see things from outside as an audience. I used to think about news as presented objectively and neutrally. But when I became an insider, I was shocked to find that there is very little objectivity and neutrality in this country.” The reporter added, “of course, [my station] is much better than other stations although it still doesn’t achieve an acceptable level of objectivity, but at least we try” (Interview # 15a, June-July, 2006). This sentence regarding other stations conveys a point echoed by many others. In fact, even those who thought objectivity and professional standards do not exist at all in Lebanon still believed that their station was doing a better job than all other stations.

Although the second group believed in objectivity equally as much as the first group, it reflected a distinctive idea about its existence in Lebanon. One participant whose opinion reflected the general sentiment of this group believed “objectivity only exists in the classrooms. As soon as you graduate, it’s gone” (Interview # 1b, June-July, 2006). This group was not only deeply disappointed with this state of affairs but also pessimistic about prospects of changing it. One reporter from this group noted, “There is



no such thing as objectivity in Lebanon, including my station” (Interview # 10c, June-July, 2006). She then presented an alternative standard in place of objectivity: “Here we have something called truth. We don’t make up news, which is not necessarily true for other stations. And although we don’t have objectivity, we do try to cover every major politician and don’t simply ignore things.”

Third, aside from these two groups of opinions, a few participants presented an alternative understanding of how objectivity works in Lebanon: as a total outcome of the whole news media process in the country. In other words, the collective output of all the newscasts in Lebanon could be considered objective, but not each individual station or journalist. In a sense the onus of objectivity here falls on the audience, not the station or the journalist. One producer explained, “In Lebanon, if you watch all the channels, you can consider the whole picture as objective, but if you watch one or a few, you don’t get an objective picture...” She added, “Here most people know who controls each station and how that will impact the news. That helps them understand the big picture in an objective manner” (Interview # 6d & 1e, June-July, 2006).

This concept actually captures the audiences’ practices of watching several newscasts every night in Lebanon and is corroborated by audience studies and scholarly studies.<sup>72</sup> It is certainly possible because stations start their evening newscasts at different times. By the time the first newscast is done with its top stories, the audience can switch to the next station. On any night in Lebanon, you can watch the first 10 minutes of at least four evening newscasts, and the concept of total output objectivity may be acceptable if not for one problem: The newscasts reflect only a handful of dominant

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<sup>72</sup> The two main companies that conduct audience research in Lebanon are IPSOS and Information International. Both companies shared private and unpublished information with the author of this study.

powers of the country. Unless the opinions of smaller political groupings and minorities are reflected in that system, this idea is lacking. This point will be revisited in chapter 10.

Fourth, echoing some of the sentiment of the latter group but in a more pronounced manner is a smaller number of participants who even rejected the possibility of any objectivity level in news in Lebanon. This group had a pessimistic view of the situation. They tended to be veteran journalists who have witnessed years of war and destruction and even considered themselves loyal to the institutions they work at and followers of its political line. To them, “You can’t have objectivity in Lebanon. You are presenting a political message and transmitting someone’s opinion and targeting a certain audience that you want to grab. You can’t be objective and still keep that audience in your grip” (Interview # 10c, June-July, 2006). This sentiment reflects a disturbing view of the journalist’s role in society as a propagandist aiming to “grab” or “capture” a certain audience and deliver it to the political patron of the station, whose opinion is being transmitted. In many ways, this sentiment mirrors the goals of U.S. broadcast media to “capture” an audience and deliver it to advertisers. In Lebanon, however, the political projects of the station take priority over its business interests, although they are not necessarily distinct.

This group, although a minority, had a strong role in manufacturing news in Lebanon because they occupied relatively high positions in the newsroom. They tended to view the news media arena as a battlefield of interests and saw themselves as loyal fighters in that war. They blamed the whole system but, unlike those who expressed frustration about the situation and tried hard to be objective, they saw their actions as justified natural reactions. The following reporter reflected this sentiment:

There is no objectivity in Lebanon, starting with me... You can't be objective in the face of a media system that constantly attacks you. For example, we once ran a story about [a local politician] who gave an expensive gift to the wife of a [foreign leader]. We called it a bribe and based it on [that foreign country's] law. [The station owned by that politician] responded in a very hurtful and demeaning way. When someone attacks you and your credibility and honesty, you can't simply respond by saying: well you might be right about something, but here's the other side of the story. You are compelled to attack back in a nonobjective manner (Interview # 1c, June-July, 2006).

This group even justified its action not only morally but also journalistically claiming that the nonobjective approach was necessary to uncover the non-objectivity of others. "When I look at [other stations], I don't believe what they do is called journalism. I don't want to be like them, but at the same time we have to do something so people won't blindly follow them." Ironically, the necessity to be nonobjective is even justified in the name of objectivity. "When you see that the media around you are not objective, you are compelled to be the same to show that others are not objective. And that, in a way, is being objective" (Interview # 6b, June-July, 2006).

Furthermore, all participants mentioned so far, even the few who were slightly optimistic about the existence of objective and professional standards of news in Lebanon, rejected the possibility of "absolute objectivity," whether in Lebanon or anywhere else around the world. Objectivity here took on a scale measure with a goal of striving to achieve the highest level but it was first necessitated by the active pursuit of

objectivity and was not simply a measure on a scale for everyone. One anchor elaborated on this point:

Objectivity is relative. If you take its basic principles, absolute objectivity does not exist in Lebanese media or in the West. In addition, some Lebanese media actively pursue and approach objectivity, but no one reaches absolute objectivity... But for other stations, the whole concept doesn't apply. These stations work for their political goals without any regard to objectivity. It's not that they are not objective. Their goals preclude objectivity in the first place (Interview # 15c & 17c, June-July, 2006).

To sum up, there were four groups of opinions when it came to the belief in objectivity and whether it existed in Lebanon. The first three groups shared the opinion of believing in objectivity and agreeing that its practice somewhat exists in Lebanese TV news, but they differed on how it exists and its future prospects. The first group was optimistic about its existence and thought journalists work hard to achieve high levels of objectivity, while the second was pessimistic about any future improvement in its practice. The third group viewed objectivity a holistic concept that reveals itself at the general level and is achievable by watching all TV newscasts in Lebanon. The last group rejected the possibility of any objectivity level in Lebanese TV news and even justified their non-objective practices as necessary to uncover the non-objectivity of others.

### **C. Obstacles and Limitations of Objectivity**

Aside from their opinions about objectivity, the participants also presented various understandings of the obstacles and limitations to implementing objectivity in

their country. There were two major groups here, each with some variance in their views. The opinions here should be viewed as a scale starting with people who believe that journalists are objective at the individual level but face numerous external obstacles, to those who believe that journalists cannot be objective at any level.

First, the larger group believes that most journalists are and strive to be objective at the individual level, but there are external forces that prevent their efforts, including institutional pressures, social divisions and the nature of the trade. Many participants in this group ridiculed the idea of objective journalism in Lebanon when all news stations have clear political affiliations. One reporter noted “simply when you say a station has a political line, it contradicts with the concept of objectivity.” He added:

[My station] has a political line, and that line might be right, and I might even be convinced it is right, but that doesn’t make it a neutral observer looking at the events from a distance and presenting the facts. Each station has an opinion presented at the top of the newscast in the introduction and inside the newscast (Interview # 5a, June-July, 2006).

Others in this group described their frustration with the lack of professional standards and dismissed the viability of objective news in Lebanon blaming the problem on a divided society and a confessional media system that mainly serves its patrons. Those tended to believe that journalists can and often try to be objective at the individual level, but structural limitations and social constraints forbid them from achieving that. To them, journalists in practice are not objective, but not because they don’t want to be so. It is because their institutions impose it on them. One producer elaborates on this point:

When it comes to crafting a story and broadcasting or publishing it, I am convinced that nowhere in Lebanon, both in print and broadcast, do we have a commitment to professional standards and principles. The reason is the major political and sectarian problems we have in this country. Professionalism takes a backseat to political campaigns, defending an ideology and marketing an economic project... And this is something that we as journalists suffer from (Interview # 3d, June-July, 2006).

Some participants in the first group blamed the nature of the craft for limiting the possibility of achieving objective news writing. They highlighted the dynamic nature of language, the process of story selection and ordering, and the inherent importance of top stories in a newscast.

No matter how objective I try to be, I will influence the story by using certain terms, labels and sentence constructions. For instance, instead of saying the Israeli Defense Force, I would say the Israeli occupation. Isn't that a stance? If there was a story about a factory polluting the area, I can run it at the top of the newscast and present it objectively and professionally. But isn't that also taking a stance by giving salience to a story that affects a certain politician—whether that politician owned the factory or was a minister responsible for stopping its polluting practices? (Interview # 2c, June-July, 2006).

Most members of the second group were skeptical about the idea of an objective journalist, even at the individual level. Those believed that all journalists have certain religious and social backgrounds and political beliefs which color their views and roles. One news director said “objectivity is a goal you strive for, but there are numerous things

that come in your way. In the end, people are a complex system of emotions, tendencies, interests and all these come in the way of objectivity.” He added, “Even ignorance comes in the way of objectivity. If you are not aware of the details of some situation, how can you be objective about it?” (Interview # 80a, June-July, 2006).

A variations to the idea expressed in the last quote was that objectivity is tied to cognition and varies from one person to another depending on their mental capacity and open-mindedness. One senior reporter explained:

Objectivity depends on the skills and cognitive abilities of the journalist, especially in Lebanon. We live in a diverse, multi-religious and multi-identity state. As a person, you tend to belong to one side or another. As an objective journalist, you have to take yourself out of your milieu to understand the big picture... The more educated and liberated from the religious, cultural and ideological constraints, the more professional a journalist can be (Interview # 7c & 8c, June-July, 2006).

Still others were skeptical about the separation between a person’s journalistic role and other roles in society. To them, the intimate relationship between media and politics and the role of the journalist in presenting a political narrative makes it impossible for him to remain objective.

You cannot separate the journalistic role of the reporter from his political and social roles. A journalist is practicing a political role when he delivers a political report. Today the media have become a primary player in the political game. Journalism is the spearhead of politics. Rest assured if there were no media, no politician would bother delivering a statement or uttering a word. Politics has

become a kind of parade. So, when you cover a story or relay a politician's statement you are being part of the game (Interview # 6b, June-July, 2006).

This frank view was shared by several participants, and it strongly relates to the nature of the news content in Lebanon, which as mentioned before is predominantly official statements, delivered daily by a dozen or so politicians (See Chapter 11 for details). This also hits on an important common belief among journalists that “everything in Lebanon is politics, even if it was a story about potholes or garbage.” In the end, some politicians “will take it personally and feel the station is attacking him,” one producer commented. This sentiment perpetuates another similar belief that everyone in Lebanon is politicized, and many journalists believe that all their colleagues are in fact politicized—some even admit that openly. When asked how many of her colleagues are politicized, one reporter answered: “all of them.”

Even I consider myself politicized, but I consider myself moderately politicized. Others are extremely politicized. There is nothing wrong with being politicized. Every person has and should have his own political beliefs and views. But there is a difference between moderately supporting Hezbollah, for instance, and fanatically supporting Hezbollah (Interview # 7c & 8c, June-July, 2006).

Another reporter described her experience when she had to write a story about the assassination of a political leader she strongly supported.

When [he] was martyred, my reaction was very extreme. I had a nervous breakdown and lost my temper. Everyone knew from there on that I know the person closely. [He] was like a second father... I started wondering how I can write this story objectively. I wrote the story with a lot of passion, and the editors



did not take anything out—maybe because he was on the same side politically. If I was working with another institution opposed to [his] politics, I probably wouldn't have been able to write it the same way (Interview # 2d, June-July, 2006).

This quote captures the interaction between professional values, personal beliefs and the institution's politics, especially in extreme situations.

In sum, there were two dominant views when it came to the obstacles to objectivity in Lebanon. On one side of the spectrum, most participants believed that most journalists are objective at the individual level, but cultural, political and social constraints obstruct their pursuit of professional values. On the other side, some participants believed that journalists cannot be objective at all even at the individual level, given their personal beliefs, inclinations, abilities and backgrounds.

#### **D. How Do You Practice Objectivity?**

When it came to the practice of objectivity, most participants were sure to state that achieving a high standard of objectivity in practice is an extremely difficult task. Many even had difficulty explaining how they practiced that ideal and suggested that objectivity is a loose concept that could easily be manipulated without excluding an illusion of objectivity to characterize their work. Several participants noted and demonstrated that they have a large margin to work with and still claim that their work is highly objective.

In addition, most participants highlighted an interesting concept about objectivity in practice—as a mechanism that works at the detail level and even at the seemingly most

insignificant bits and pieces of the single story. This practice included necessary and routine decisions a journalist had to make regarding placement of the story in the newscast; placement of ideas in the story; picking and choosing words; emphasizing one thing and de-emphasizing another; etc.

Here is how some journalists explained what steps they take to insure achieving an acceptable level of objectivity. At the newscast level, one producer said “I include in the newscast all the events and activities of the day without excluding one politician or another. If there was an opinion I wanted to express, I include that in the newscast introduction or put it in a separate story” (Interview # 6b, June-July, 2006). Another producer noted “I try to give each side a fair amount of time and don’t ignore certain sides of the story. If someone was very critical, I try to tone it down and take out the sensationalized words and be very smooth and diplomatic” (Interview # 20c, June-July, 2006). From the two comments, one can clearly see that practicing objectivity is, first, strongly tied to fairness in presenting all opinions—that is, opinions of all politicians. Second, implementing objectivity includes separating personal opinion from opinions and statements of the newsmakers, and, third, keeping the language as neutral and as little sensational as possible.

At the story level, one reporter explained “I include the main elements of a news story (Who, When, What, Why, Where, How). I try to include the facts and keep the rest of the story construction as neutral as possible. I try to keep the introduction nice and attractive but without influencing the context of the story” (interview # 6b, June-July, 2006). Aside from the vague notion of keeping the construction neutral, the reporter’s implementation of his professional standards was to stick as much as possible to

answering the basic journalism questions and presenting the facts or statements as they were without influencing the context of the story, especially in the introduction. Another reporter explained the vague idea of achieving “objectivity by simply relaying the news to people” and allowing them to “decide for themselves”—an interesting line that reminds of Fox News’ (<http://www.foxnews.com/>) “We Report. You Decide.” The reporter elaborated further:

Let’s say yesterday [a major political figure like] Walid Jumblat said he supports the armed Lebanese resistance, and today he is saying he is opposed to it. I don’t say that he is contradicting himself in my story. I present his statements each day as they are, and people will know that he is contradicting himself without me telling them (Interview # 2c, June-July, 2006).

This is an interesting example that hints to two points that need further explanation. First, Walid Jumblat, a major Druze Za’im<sup>73</sup>, is well known in Lebanon for constantly flip-flopping and often making contradicting statements. The contradictions of this controversial figure are often highlighted and even juxtaposed by non-sympathetic media outlets, but are often ignored by sympathetic outlets. This reporter’s solution of “letting the people decide”—whether intentionally or not—plays in favor of that politician. It further highlights the difficulty of applying the ideals of objectivity in Lebanon. This example, however, doesn’t capture the wide margin a journalist has in writing a story and claiming it is objective. The following producer elucidated on this matter:

Let’s say someone says something pro or anti Syrian. We can either put it at the top of the newscast, or in the middle or not run it at all. We can run it as a full

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<sup>73</sup> See Chapter 3 for the meaning of Za’im.

five-minute package or just downgrade it to a Voice Over. Also, there is a lot of margin in terms of how you write the story. You can pick and choose from what they said. You can put certain statements at the top of the story, others at the end, and others just exclude all together (Interview # 2d, June-July, 2006).

This producer highlighted a well known problem in news production: the inevitability of selection. Regardless how important the information or who is delivering it, there is limited space and time in TV news, and the vast majority of news content never airs. This matter will be revisited in Chapter 10.

On the side, a very interesting point was revealed while discussing the practice of objectivity. Most journalists drew a clear line between local news, on one hand, and regional and international news, on the other hand. For the latter, the whole concept was meaningless and most journalists didn't feel obliged to put any effort to be objective. In fact, one reporter frankly explained:

I try to be as objective as possible in local news... but when it comes to Iraq or Palestine, I can't be objective. I can't, for example, see the pictures of a young Palestinian girl's body on the shores of Gaza and write objectively about it. It's impossible. I might even be emotional and strengthen the ambiance so people would cry and see the extent of Israeli cruelty and murder. We don't hesitate to label the U.S. and Israel as occupations. We call a Palestinian resistance fighter a martyr (Shaheed) but an Israeli a casualty (Kateel) (Interview # 6b, June-July, 2006).

Consistently, an assistant news director outlined the station's policy regarding this matter. "When it comes to regional and international news, especially America's

occupation of Iraq and Israel's occupation of Palestine, we don't hesitate to state our opinion." She added, "We are strict about this. We have one enemy. It is Israel and we are against the U.S. policies and practices in the Middle East" (Interview # 4a, June-July, 2006).

This sentiment was widely echoed by most participants. The only exception was a few reporters from one major station that historically had a political connection with Israel when it occupied Beirut in 1982. Those reporters thought that labeling Israel and the U.S. as occupation was not objective, but said they do it most of the time because they don't want to be seen as unpatriotic.

Aside from the comments of this group, almost all journalists who work more often with international news topics reflected a sense of freedom and loose restrictions when compared to working with local news. An assistant news director responsible for the Arabic world and International news section of the newscast said her work is "free from the restrictions and implications of local news." She added, "This has given me a lot of political space, meaning there is no local news that imposes on me certain limits" (Interview # 3d, June-July, 2006). There was one big qualification to this shared opinion. There is no exemption from the "restrictions of local news" if the story was about Saudi Arabia or Syria. Almost every participant agrees on that matter; Saudi Arabia has always been and remains a red line. As for Syria, the restrictions apply mostly before their withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005. This directly related to the strong local political influence of the two countries and will be further explained in chapter 7.

#### **E. Conclusion to Chapter 4**

## **Groups of Journalists: Many Struggling Professionals, a Handful of Willing Propagandists**

As mentioned earlier, the majority of participants used the term “objectivity” to represent professional standards and values. Objectivity was defined as balance, neutrality, non-alignment and sticking to the facts. Some participants saw that objectivity was achievable even if opinions and analyses were inserted in the stories. Others suggested objectivity was simply a way of protecting the image and career of a journalist and avoiding the discrediting accusation of being biased. Similarly, some considered objectivity as a practical solution for the contradiction between a journalist’s own political beliefs and that of the station. Finally, a handful of participants rejected the concept of objectivity and even considered it a means to deceive the audiences by hiding one’s real intentions.

When it came to believing in professional standards and whether they existed in Lebanon, most Lebanese broadcast journalists strongly believed in the professional standards and values symbolized by ‘objectivity’ but were simultaneously frustrated and disappointed with the existence of objective journalism in their country. Still many of them remained slightly optimistic about the prospects of striving for objective journalism in the workplace. Four groups of broadcast journalists emerged. Three of them believed in objectivity and one simply opposed and rejected the whole concept. The first group believed there is some level of objectivity in Lebanon but is certainly unacceptable. The second group saw that objectivity does not exist at all in their country and was mostly pessimistic about any positive change in the future. A third and small group presented an alternative understanding to how objectivity reveals itself in Lebanon—as a total

outcome of the whole news media output. Finally, the fourth and smallest group simply rejected the concept of objectivity and viewed the role of the journalists as a propagandist serving the political project of the station's owner. In addition, none of the four groups claimed that objectivity is implemented at an acceptable level in Lebanon, and they all clearly rejected the possibility of "absolute objectivity" and viewed the concept on a scale and not categorical.

Furthermore, participants presented various understandings of the obstacles and limitations to implementing objectivity in their country. The majority of participants believed that journalists are and strive to be objective at the individual level, but there were external forces that prevented their efforts, including institutional pressures, social, cultural and religious divisions and the nature of the trade.

When it came to implementation of the professional standards, most journalists admitted that achieving a high level of objectivity in practice was extremely difficult, and that there was a large margin to play with and still claim objectivity. Consistently, most journalists explained that objectivity in practice worked at the detail level and the almost insignificant parts of the story, starting with word selection and ending with positioning of statements and stories. Based on the examples given, participants seemed to practice objectivity by including the statements of all or most politicians from different sides; by separating personal opinion from the statements of those politicians; by keeping the language used as neutral and non-sensational as possible; and by not influencing the context of the story, especially with the introduction of the story.

Interestingly, several participants noted that the standards of objectivity were mostly practical at the local news level, but are out of the question and don't apply when

it came to regional and international news. Overall, practicing objectivity in Lebanon focused on political news and on treating politicians fairly, but seemed to ignore other sorts of stories and players. This reflects the nature of TV news in Lebanon and will be further discussed in the chapter 10.

Based on the aforementioned opinions regarding objectivity, its existence in Lebanon and the details of its practice, participants were categorized into two groups, each further divided into two subgroups.

### ***The Struggling Professional Journalists: Pessimists and Optimists***

The first and dominant group made up about 80 percent of the participants. They were called the *struggling professional journalists*. Those journalists were strongly committed to the concept of objectivity and strove to achieve the highest standards possible. At the same time, they were disillusioned about its implementation in Lebanon and many of them believed that it only existed in classrooms and not in newsrooms. They believed most journalists are honest professionals who strive to be objective but are blocked by their institutions. They also believed that a journalist's social, political and religious background plays a big role in negatively affecting the pursuit of objectivity. Finally, this group was made up of junior and young journalists who tended to work at the smaller TV stations.

The struggling professional journalists can also be divided into two subgroups: pessimists who think objectivity is almost impossible in Lebanon given the institutional, social and political pressures, and optimists who see that many individual journalists do achieve an acceptable level of objectivity and professionalism. The pessimists, however,



make up the vast majority of this subgroup. The pessimists are appalled by the way the news is presented and reject it.

### ***The Willing Propagandists: Overt and Covert***

The second group made up roughly 20 percent of the participants. Those were called the willing propagandists and were also divided into two subgroups: the overt and the covert. The overt willing propagandists were honest about their rejection of the concept of objectivity, whether in theory or in practice. Even if they believed that a certain level of objectivity was possible, they rejected it because everyone else around them was not objective. Some of them frankly stated that their job as journalists was to serve the political line of the institution and had no problem calling themselves propagandists. This subgroup tended to include older and more experienced journalists of relatively senior status. They mostly worked at the larger stations and included a few top newsroom executives. Some of them expressed disgust at the status of journalism in Lebanon, but they saw the whole picture as a political game, and saw themselves as players in that game. They played to survive and prosper. The smarter they were at the game, the better for them individually and for the institution they work at. The following participant summed up the opinion of this group:

You have a very-very-very wide margin to play your political game and in an indirect way without even appearing that you are doing anything wrong. This is what you call propaganda. The smarter you are in practicing it, the more you succeed as media in affecting public opinion, and the more you succeed in keeping your political project widely spread among the publics, and the more you

keep public opinion convinced about this project (Interview # 15c & 17c, June-July, 2006).

The covert willing propagandists, on the other hand, were the smallest subgroup and constitute only a handful of participants. Those tended to be PR personnel worried about the image of their station. They also tended to be senior or top newsroom managers and obviously loyal and strongly connected to the upper echelons of the institution, which almost always is a head of a political grouping as discussed in chapter 4. Members of this subgroup presented themselves as committed to objectivity and described themselves and their institutions as highly objective and professional while condemning all other stations as biased. Simply put, they claimed to maintain the highest standards of objectivity and professionalism while everyone else did not. The reason this subgroup is included among the willing propagandist is because their statements were so contradictory and their words were clearly picked for publicity. Most of their opinions were not included in the analysis above.

## **Chapter 5: The Broadcast Journalist and the Institution**

### **A. The Power of the Institution**

Chapter four described how small groups or individuals with ties to politico-sectarian interests own and tightly control broadcast media institutions in Lebanon. But running a TV station and guaranteeing that its output is in conjunction with a certain political direction, let alone generating profit or minimizing loss, can not only be achieved through simple ownership or control of an institution. In this chapter, we delve into the details of the mechanisms of control that assure the political, economical and aesthetic quality of the final product in a large and complex TV news operation. We briefly start with the nature of corporate or institutional media.

The firm or the company or the corporation or the institution is a mainstay of our time. It is the main entity that drives economic life and controls much of everything around us, including raw material, employment and means of production. Chomsky considers corporate structure inherently undemocratic and even fascist in its up-down structure. In corporations as in a fascist system “power goes strictly top down, from the board of directors to managers to lower managers to ultimately the people on the shop floor, typing messages, and so on. There's no flow of power or planning from the bottom up.” He adds, “People can disrupt and make suggestions, but the same is true of a slave society. The structure of power is linear, from top to bottom, ultimately back to owners and investors” (Chomsky and Barsamian, 1994).

Bakan (2004) goes further and argues that “the corporation is a pathological institution, a dangerous possessor of the great power it wields over people and societies” (p. 2). In his conception, “the corporation is an institution—a unique structure and set of

imperatives that direct the actions of people within it.... [Its] mandate is to pursue, relentlessly and without exception, its own self-interest, regardless of the often harmful consequences it might cause to others” (Bakan, 2004, p.2).

Theories of corporate governance have long tackled the persistent problem of control in capitalist institutions, especially when it comes to “agency problem” or to translate the desire of owners into cooperative action by employees (Demsetz, 1988, p. 25). This includes “internal organization of the firm, the role of monitoring, and particular compensation methods...” which are put in place to minimize employee “shirking” (p. 25). Demsetz’s (1988) analysis of this problem focuses mostly on productivity and output, which in most industries is a commercial product with little or no political aspects. However, broadcast news institutions, especially in Lebanon, have to deal with this additional political aspect, which only exacerbates the agency problem.

The classical solution for the agency problem is, of course, to have someone monitor employees. In turn, that monitor is monitored by someone else above him, and so forth, till we reach the top of the hierarchy. Demsetz (1988) explains that in a classical firm the top monitors need to have more rights, powers and incentives than those below them in the hierarchy for the system to work.

It is this entire bundle of rights, (1) to be a residual claimant; (2) to observe input behavior; (3) to be the central party common to all contracts with inputs; (4) to alter the membership of the team; and (5) to sell these rights, that defines the ownership (or the employer) of the classical (capitalist, free-enterprise) firm (p. 125).

Demsetz (1988) then goes further to identify other more economic ways to solve this problem. One relevant point is “technological development.” In his example of the technological development of efficient central sources of power—which made it economical to perform weaving in proximity to the power source, he points out that while monitoring productivity “which now involved interactions between workers... became more difficult though contact negotiating cost was reduced, while managing the *behavior* of inputs became easier because of increased centralization of activity” (p. 127). In this sense, technology was an instrument for efficient control and effective solution to the agency problem, not only a tool for production.

The purpose of this study is not to delve into the negatives or positives of corporatized media, but to highlight the important role of corporations or institutions—which encapsulate specific structures and hierarchies, organizational units, distributions of wealth and forms of human relations—in controlling and directing the enormous apparatus needed to produce today’s broadcast news products.

Although this study does not disagree with Baden and Chomsky’s conceptions of corporations, it also does not take for granted the top-down flow of power in a corporate environment and for sure does not consider it automatic or even constant. In addition, broadcast news and media products, in general, are different from the typical products of the industrial corporations cited in their studies. To be sure, the news product is a highly volatile being fraught with cultural, political, technological and commercial elements. Controlling the raw material, means of production and producers of the news product engages much more than corporate hierarchy. It needs wider structures, socialization processes, stringent monitoring and certain social arrangements. In the next few chapters

we visit these factors and see how the careful arrangement of technological means, social processes, corporate hierarchies and social structures work in tandem to control and direct this behemoth we call a TV news operation.

This study also does not take for granted the corporation as an entity clearly separated from its surrounding environment. The media corporation is not taken for granted as an autonomous entity. Like Mitchell's (1999) state, its borders are drawn internally within the network of institutional mechanisms through which an order is maintained. As we shall soon see, those lines of distinction are often blurred, and deeper investigation reveals that they may actually pass through the heart of what we might otherwise consider as outside the realm of the media corporation and inside the domain of the state or the economy or culture. This vagueness generates the necessary illusions and power resources needed for the Lebanese media corporation to serve its political patrons.

Let's start by investigating the structure of the Lebanese TV institution, in an attempt to identify the processes that maintain it as a unit. We have already established the top-down conception of the typical media corporations, and this is fully applicable in Lebanon. None of the media institutions studied had a different model. Even New TV, the station originally established and still commonly associated with the communist party and dominated by its ideology, strictly followed this structure. Undeniably, the stations did vary in their internal cultures and levels of flexibility, especially when it came to relations between managers and employees. As we shall see later, New TV had the most flexible and open culture in its newsroom, but that related more to the personal preference of the news director and in no way undermined the top-down structure. Journalists in that station were able to openly discuss and even argue their point of view

about a news story, but this down-up challenge never rose to the level of affecting the institution's strategy and political direction.

## **B. Monitoring and Self-Monitoring**

The Lebanese TV station, generally, has two major units: the news department and the programming department. According to the head of programming at one station, the rest are “much smaller departments that in one way or another serve or belong to these two big departments.” Although this study rotates around the news department, we will start by visiting the programming department in this section because it offered a simpler model to understand and was void of much of the political aspects of news.

In general, the programming department is responsible for all non-news material that goes on air, from scheduling to acquiring and producing. One of the main purposes of having a programming department separate from the news departments is the separation between news and entertainment, or what is often referred to as the separation between “political and non-political programs,” since news in Lebanon is by definition political content (Mellor, 2005). One head of programming noted that her relation with the news department is only in scheduling. “I have no political background or responsibility. So, when any political matter arises, I refer it to the news department.”

But the separation between entertainment and news is not always so clear. The same programming director explained “the programming department can't deal with

politics and the news department can't deal with entertainment, but sometimes there are social programs that may invite politicians or touch on some political issues.” In that case, the entertainment program host contacts the news department and gets their permission for the guest. The news department, in that case, also writes the outline to the program and lists the questions that can be asked and those that shouldn't be asked. Alternatively, when political programs invite actors or singers, they have to communicate with the programming department. Both the news and the programming departments are also in touch with the advertising department in matters that may affect advertisers.

In one incident that confirmed this collaboration process, an entertainment program invited a politician, and the host asked some political questions which almost got the station in legal and political trouble. The programming director noted that “the show was live and we couldn't stop it, but we edited out the questions the next day for the reruns. After that mistake, all entertainment hosts have become very careful about communicating with the news department.”

The most interesting unit in the programming department is in charge of making sure that almost everything that goes on air meets the required quality level. More importantly and more relevant to this study, this unit makes sure that all the content airing doesn't break any law and doesn't cause any political or cultural problem. The head of the “monitoring” or “screening” unit at one station considered her department to be the “nervous system of the institution... We are responsible for monitoring everything that goes on air, including locally produced political and entertainment programs, advertisements and every program we purchase from outside.” The department pre-monitors all taped programs and has the power to cancel or edit them for content. Live



shows, however, are recorded and monitored after they air. Newscasts are the only programs not monitored since they have their own screening mechanism, as we shall see later.

But monitors in this unit have numerous other tasks. On a daily basis, they are responsible for timing shows, queuing up tapes for airing and writing reports for each tape that gives the needed information for those who air it. That includes the length of the show, the in-points and out-points, the controversial content or “bad” quality sections that need to be skipped, and the places where advertisements should run. Their work is guided by the programming schedule which is delivered to them well in advance. As for the “monitoring” part of their daily work, they usually start with tapes that aired the day before, watching them all in full and filling forms for each show. Then, they watch the soap operas, cartoons and other entertainment series that will air soon. Aside from the daily work, this department also screens programs the station is interested in buying or renting. The monitoring department writes reports about those shows recommending that they purchase them or not.

Their work is guided by two elements: the station’s policy and a three-page document with instructions sent from the Lebanese General Security Service—a government department belonging to the interior ministry and responsible for matters of national security, passport and border control and monitoring and censoring the media, among other things. The monitors at a TV station follow the directions from the General Security Service regarding program ratings and cutting out content deemed illegal or forbidden.

Monitoring and filtering programs, however, does not stop here. Despite all the systematic and rigorous monitoring by the dozen or so employees in each station, the Lebanese General Security Service (GSS) has to actually review and approve almost all content before it goes on air. According to one participant, “almost everything should go through the Security Service before airing, from video clips to locally produced programs, except for live shows and newscasts... Any foreign production should get their OK, regardless.”

All participants said that most programs submitted to the GSS are accepted with little or no censorship instructions because the stations are familiar with what will pass and what will be blocked. Still, substantial amounts of programs don’t pass, as one participant noted.

We once submitted a documentary and they rejected it. We learned later that there was content offensive to some religious beliefs and to Arab nationalism. Sometimes they reject it because they say there was material that encourages terrorism or promotes Zionism. If there was a small segment in the show, they send us the censorship sheet to cut the certain scene. They also send us the rating of the program.

This brings up an important matter about the independence of a TV station or the media corporation, in general. If the majority of programming passes through the government filters, can we still assume that a TV station is simply a commercial entity independent from the state? It gets more complicated and important aspects of business interests and cultural values come into the picture when we look deeper into the mundane processes of this monitoring and filtering activity.

Furthermore, the monitoring unit and the bigger programming department simultaneously monitor both the technical and content aspects of programs. This simultaneity is an important matter that will be revisited later when we note the inseparability between the technical and content aspects in news production in chapter seven.

### ***Monitoring What and for What Purpose?***

To better understand the intermixing between social, political and commercial aspects of the goals of TV monitoring, we need to look further into *what* is being monitored and *for what purposes*. We start with the latter. According to several participants, there are two main purposes to monitoring beside the legal purpose mentioned earlier:

1. For commercial purposes: First, to insure there is no conflict between programming content and advertising content; second, to position programs effectively against competing stations; and third, to guarantee an acceptable quality of picture and sound for audiences.
2. For political and cultural purposes: To insure that content confirms to the station's political line and to make sure it does not offend audiences' tastes or beliefs.

### ***Commercial Purposes: Fast-food is Not Unhealthy***

Most media scholars are aware of the practices of media institutions that try to avoid offending their advertisers since they are often the only source of revenue. There are numerous examples of advertisers pulling their ads from a publication because of a critical story about them. But few scholars have pointed to how systematic and rigorous

some media institutions are in making sure that a conflict between them and their advertisers doesn't arise in the first place.

Several participants interviewed talked about incidents where the station cancelled a program or episode because of a potential problem with an advertiser. In one incident, an entertainment show host who often gives nutritional advice brought up the unhealthiness of fast food products and specifically named a fast food restaurant, which happened to be an advertiser at that station. The monitoring department spotted the comment and immediately contacted the advertising department, which recommended not running the show. Alternatively, if a program had a placement ad, the station doesn't run it unless the advertising company pays for the commercial. That includes news stories. One news director actually noted that she sometimes needs to get permission from the advertising department in case a story was considered "free advertising."

***Political, Cultural and Legal Purposes: No Gays, No Pigs, and No Jews***

The same show host, in the example above, also often criticizes political figures. Whenever such comments are spotted, the monitoring department also contacts the news department or management before they run the show. One participant explained that her station tries to keep any political content within the news context and cut out any political content from entertainment, even if it was critical consistent with the station's policy: "Even insults against Bush or other prominent international politicians would not pass. Or, let's say, a documentary talks about the high level of poverty in America despite its constitution and bragging of human rights—that would still not pass," said one programming manager.

More interesting is the criteria for monitoring political and cultural elements of a program. When asked about the top five things they actively search for aside from picture and sound, the majority of monitors interviewed answered the follow: religion, Zionism, drugs, nudity, obscenities, and violence.

Most participants said that content offensive or disrespecting religious beliefs will not make it to air. Given the various religious beliefs in Lebanon, the list of things “offensive” becomes long and detailed. Of course, any comment criticizing any religion is deemed offensive, but even symbols, animals and shapes that are deemed offensive in some religions raise a red flag in the monitor’s mind. For example, according to several participants, a scene with a pig appearing in it is usually cut out since that animal may offend some conservative Muslim audiences.

If there was anything about pigs, even in a cartoon show, we try to cut it out, especially if it will go out on the Satellite channel because it reaches conservative Gulf area countries like Saudi Arabia... There was once a documentary called the “funniest animals.” Whenever a pig appeared, we used to note the scene and the tape would not air on the Satellite station unless the scene was edited out.

The issue of religion is the most sensitive for all stations. One participant clearly put it “if there was anything making fun of any religion, it won’t pass. Whether it was Christianity, Islam, Judaism or Buddhism, it just won’t pass.”

Zionism was another red flag in most monitor’s minds. Any content that promoted “pro-Zionist ideas” was slashed, but the monitors were clear to differentiate between Zionism and Judaism.

Anything that promotes the Zionist cause or Israel is cut out, including any book or product or company or historic documentary. Our monitoring is related to the Zionist cause and not to the Jewish religion, though. For instance, sometimes we get an historic documentary about ancient civilizations, and they say that the land of Palestine belongs to Jews. We take that scene out because it is simply a piece of propaganda that promotes the Zionist cause.

When it came to sexual content, obscenity, violence and drugs, it mostly depends on the audiences and the legal rating of the program, which is designated by the GSS. The general rule is that some violence, obscenity, and minor sexual scenes are tolerated for later shows. There are some exceptions, however: “Homosexual scenes are absolutely prohibited in any category. Scenes of sexual violence are also banned. In addition, they can talk about drugs, but no pictures of drugs are allowed.” The same applies to obscenities: “the words ‘dog’ or ‘shit’ would pass “...your mother’ would never pass. The F-word passes sometimes, but only in late night shows. “

### ***Institutionalizing the Monitor and Generalizing the Monitoring Model***

The complex system of monitoring mentioned earlier remains incomplete if the monitors themselves didn’t follow instructions or shirked their duty. This brings up the point of insuring that employees will work in harmony to achieve the same end. As mentioned earlier, the monitors have no written instructions to follow, except for the three-page rating sheet created by the GSS. How do monitors learn their job and what guarantees that they will follow instructions, aside from the obvious threat of being fired?

It is fascinating how new employees learn a company’s policies through both an intentional systematic process and an unintentional random set of interactions, often

referred to as socialization or acculturation. The former is more interesting to delve further into because the latter exists in almost any workplace—or any human community for that matter. So, to differentiate it from the “natural” or random or unintentional process of socialization, we will use the term *institutionalization* to refer to this process. Furthermore, unlike socialization which deals with the whole system of beliefs, institutionalization focuses mostly on the actions and output of the employee without necessarily altering or affecting beliefs.

The fact that the monitoring department doesn’t deal with news content, especially local news, allows for easier understanding of the institutionalization process by eliminating interaction and contradiction between personal political beliefs and the institution’s political line. In other words, the process here deals more with technical issues and whenever there are political issues, they are clear cut and easy to spot. This cannot be said about news.

Talking to the employees at the monitoring departments, you can easily and quickly sense a trend. The longer an employee has been at the station, the higher their status in that department and the more responsibility they have. There is nothing new or interesting in that fact, but what is important is the common trend across different stations and the highly systematic process employed in institutionalizing those employees before they move to higher positions. To delineate, a senior monitoring department employee explained how a newcomer learns the institution’s policy:

If a new person was hired, they usually start monitoring the easiest programs: cartoons. That’s because cartoons tend to have very little content that many contradict our policy. At first, more senior workers double check all their work....

Later, we let them work on simple documentaries about nature and animals, which also have little problematic content. After a while, they can start working on feature films and more complicated documentaries, which require the most amount of accuracy. But political and historical documentaries are usually reserved to the most experienced people (Interview # 1b, June-July, 2006).

In addition, most monitoring department workers noted that “everyone who starts in programs monitoring, later becomes an assistant director and then a director of entertainment programs.” One program manager pointed out the advantage in that promotion track. Since the monitoring department can’t practically monitor live shows, a director who is running the show who has had extensive experience in the monitoring department is more likely to catch “problematic content” than a director coming from another department.

For example, we once had a program about sexually transmitted diseases, and the guest doctor was talking about pre-marital sex. That’s a term we cannot air. Because the director used to work in programs monitoring, she stopped the recording on the spot and re-taped the segment. That saved us a lot of work since we would’ve had to edit it out and maybe even send back for re-shooting (Interview # 1b, June-July, 2006).

This promotion track seems to be a constant trend in Lebanon. Very few people are hired straight out as directors, unless they have extensive experience and a big name. Every station “prefers to build its directors and filter them starting in the monitoring department,” according to the head of programming in one station (Interview # 1b, June-



July, 2006). This insures adherence to policy along with a high level of quality in production.

In addition to becoming directors, since they are also responsible for deleting controversial content, monitoring department workers also replace tape editors when needed. “So, through our daily work, we become highly knowledgeable of every aspect of the content that airs” (Interview # 1b, June-July, 2006). That includes knowledge about the technical quality as much as the acceptable content. In fact, the monitoring employee is both a technical and a content monitor in addition to being an administrator. Here is one employee describing her training process:

When I started working here, they taught me how to run the equipment and told me about all the prohibitions and instructed me on how to fill the forms for each tape and read the rundown. Then, they first started giving me cartoons to monitor. After I would finish six or seven episodes, someone more senior would go over those tapes and monitor my work. The first two to three weeks, they didn’t air anything that I worked on, but after that bit-by-bit the programs I monitored started airing (Interview # 2b, June-July, 2006).

The multi-tasks of the monitoring department workers and the systematic manner in which superiors monitor their work to insure both the content and the employee’s adherence to the policy. In other words, this department monitors both programs and employees, who in the long run produce programs for the station. More importantly, the system allows the employees to master the numerous intricate details of their job with minimal errors. A senior monitor confirms this notion:

It is very rare for something to pass without us catching it... Although there are many things we need to be careful about, we learn them bit by bit, and usually the employees that have been here for a while oversee and teach the newcomers, and, of course, top management monitors us and gives us feedback... (Interview # 1b, June-July, 2006).

When something does slip through the cracks, however, “it’s usually related to the monitor’s religion,” one senior employee said. “Some things are considered taboo in one religion but not in another. So, it is harder for some monitors to catch them, and they might slip, but those are usually minor errors” (Interview # 1b, June-July, 2006).

Consistent with the newsroom workers as we shall see later, employees in the monitoring department are heavily reliant on their superiors at first. Later, however, they internalize the policies and their work becomes almost automatic and unconscious. One experienced employee said:

We used to contact management and get their feedback constantly on almost everything, but after a while we were able to make our own decision without getting back to them because we know now what goes and what doesn’t, and we understand what they want and don’t want (Interview # 1b, June-July, 2006).

But even for newcomers, this systematic institutionalization process is relatively fast and efficient. “The first week was very hard,” a junior monitor noted. “Working with new equipment and different policies, I was lost, and I asked many questions. Later, as I got used to running the equipment and understanding the policies, it became automatic and second nature.” The same employee said that in a matter of a few weeks, her questions became minimal and “now I help the newcomers,” June-July, 2006).

All this is an indication that the system seems to perfectly and efficiently regenerate itself on all levels. Furthermore, this “filtering” process helps solidify the institution’s policy in practice and generalizes it across all the output of the station, with little concern about employees’ personal beliefs. As we shall see later, this process is more efficient than institutionalizing the newsroom employee, mainly because their work deals little with current local politics. So, when asked about contradictions between their personal beliefs and the institution’s political line, monitoring department workers had no difficulty in dealing with them. All participants felt there was no overlap between their personal beliefs and their work, since they don’t work in news. The most that could happen is a politician the monitor dislikes might appear on a show, one monitor noted. “I still follow the instructions and protocols I use for every show, even if that politician attacks people I support or beliefs I follow” (Interview # 2b, June-July, 2006).

This is not necessarily applicable in newsroom situations, where the “instructions and protocols” are broad and vague when applied to the highly fluid content of news. In addition, monitoring department employees, unlike journalists, tend to be apolitical or at least not as interested in politics. Even participants from that department who were at total odds with the stations policy had no problem dealing with it, especially when balancing costs and benefits. One senior monitor explained:

I am not at all close to the political line of this station.... Each station has its policy, but when it comes to personal religious beliefs and personal political affiliation, none of the stations interfere with that... Now, there are smaller things that I might differ with when it comes to those policies, but I have to follow them,

and [the owner of the station] could be watching, as he usually does. If something wrong airs, I will be held responsible (Interview # 3b, June-July, 2006).

The last sentence in this statement highlights the awareness of the monitor that she herself is being monitored by the highest superiors. This point will be even more pronounced among newsroom employees when we discuss that matter below.

What was also consistent with the newsroom employees was the view that the institution's policy is in general not negotiable, except for minor details.

You can't cross or ignore the policy because it's a huge media institution, a lot of money is engaged, and important people are responsible for it. You can't simply have your own policy, but there are small things that you can convince them about.... As for the general guidelines, you can't negotiate or ignore them (Interview # 3b, June-July, 2006).

In sum, the monitoring department employee is efficiently groomed into becoming a technical and content monitor of programs, along with becoming a future monitor and groomer of newcomers. In addition, most monitors in the long run become program directors, engaging in the production of content for the station, and throughout their work, they are consciously aware that they are monitored by the highest superiors. This generalizes the monitoring model to the whole institution and assures that the product and the producer all toe the line instituted by the institution's owners.

### **C. Institutionalization in the News Department:**

The systematic and intentional institutionalization process covered above works the same way in the news department, but it is more difficult to observe, partly because it

is much more difficult to employ. The newsroom employee, in the first place, is usually highly politicized and is attracted to this job because of her interest in politics (See Chapter 8 for details). In addition, news is a much more volatile material than entertainment programs, and it almost defies any clear-cut rules and policies. News content changes constantly and frequently, while entertainment programs remain constant for long periods. Still, like monitors, journalists also have a similar promotion track to achieve, for example, a reporter wanting to become an anchor or political show host. Unlike monitors, however, senior journalists are not as closely engaged in the process of grooming newcomers. This task seems to be given only to the news director and the newscast producers (See Chapter 9 for details).<sup>74</sup> Nevertheless, there seem to be parallel stages in which the broadcast journalist passes through and, like the monitor, starts working with simple material before progressing to more complex work. One newscast producer summarized the process:

When I started working here, I was not allowed to be responsible for the political aspects of the story. Back then, I also didn't get to produce important newscast. I was only allowed to do the early morning show and late night show. Even then, I wasn't doing the newscast on my own but with a lot of supervision (Interview # 7b, June-July, 2006).

And the same way monitors internalized the policy, broadcast journalists automatically adapted to it too. In addition, their personal beliefs become external to the work process and in some cases were even altered and changed in accordance with the

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<sup>74</sup> Nevertheless, a handful of newly hired journalists did mention that they received help and support from more senior journalists. One new comer noted, "Since I've only been here for seven months, I feel a lot more comfortable when others who have been here longer check what I write" (Interview # 20c, June-July, 2006).

institution's political line. A handful of participants even gave up any political beliefs mostly because they were disillusioned with politics after they got an inside peak. One reporter commented:

When I first came here, I was trying to direct every story in consistence with my own personal beliefs.... I no longer think that way, and I am no longer convinced of any political ideology, especially after I've gone into the field and interacted with politicians and leaders and seen them on air and off air, and observed how they behave. They've lost that aura that surrounds them when you see them on TV.... I've changed a lot in the past year and no longer deal with things on a personal level. I now deal with events as stories and separate my convictions and beliefs with little or no effort (Interview # 5a, June-July, 2006).

But even the most tenacious opponents of the institution's policy who never changed their convictions and beliefs were constantly calculating the costs and benefits of working for their institution, and their end product was almost identical to that of the loyal employee, as we shall confirm later. Those journalists seemed to have a constant internal struggle but felt trapped in doing things they are vehemently opposed to, but were somehow able to do it on a daily basis.

Given the complexity of the process added by the political nature of news, in the next two sections, we will cover how broadcast journalists learn the institution's political line and then delve further into how they deal with contradictions between their personal political beliefs and those imposed by the station.

### ***Learning the Institution's Political Line***

Throughout the time spent conducting interviews, there was one glaring term that every single journalist mentioned frequently: the “institution’s political line” (khat al-mou’assassat al-siyassi) or the “institution’s policy” (siyasat al-mou’assassat). To emphasize, the institution’s policy is not a policy for conduct or promotions or salaries. This was strictly politics—the official political allegiance and identity of the station. Although the general identity and broad political line of each station are fairly known to the Lebanese public, each company had a more complex set of internal policies that directed the employees to work for a common political goal. These policies should not be understood as a general coherent mission statement, but they rather encompass many unofficial bits and pieces, and they work on the detail level to achieve a coherent output at the general level. What’s more, none of these policies were formally introduced to new employees and only one station had any written document addressing them. Even that small 10-page-booklet, however, was not widely distributed and barely stated the “broad lines that everyone knew” before they even came to the station. As one reporter put it:

When I started working here, I learned the institution’s political line from minor details. They don’t set up a meeting for you and explicitly explain the political direction of the station, and they don’t give you anything to read. There was a booklet they once distributed before I started. I never got a copy, and I know from my colleagues that barely anyone read it. Even those who did, barely anything about it stuck in their minds (Interview # 5a, June-July, 2006).

Another reporter echoed the opinion of most respondents by explaining how the written document barely taught her anything new. And like most other participants, she

described learning about the institution's policy as an informal process that works at the detail level over a long period of time.

No one tells you about it. But once they did give out a small 10-page-booklet explaining our stance on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the U.S. occupation of Iraq. But that only gave the broad lines that I already knew. I learned the important details much earlier from the daily work process. For example, I once had a story about Israel and wrote "minister of defense." The news director underlined that and told me we don't recognize that Israel has a minister of defense. Israel has a "minister of war." And that was my first interaction with that policy, and bit-by-bit I learned from similar examples, over time, building a good understanding of the station's policy (Interview # 6a, June-July, 2006).

Interestingly, the vast majority of participants regarded the learning process as something random and unintentional. On its face, it does seem that way, but the consistency in the answers and the context of learning suggests something systematic and intentional occurring. This conclusion will become clearer in chapter eight.

### ***Learning Tools: The Newscast***

Five elements summarize how journalists learn the political line of their institution. First, watching the newscast and especially listening to the introduction of the newscasts seemed to be the primary source for understanding the institution's political line (see Chapter 11 part B for details the newscast introduction). This learning tool is especially important for newcomers. "When you start working in a station, you have to watch the newscast to see your work and compare it to others. Simultaneously, you are



listening to the newscast introduction every day and absorbing how they think,” one reporter noted (Interview # 5a, June-July, 2006). Another reporter explained:

When I first came, I learned the main political line mainly after watching some of the station’s newscasts. At the general level, I quickly learned that we support Pan-Arab nationalism. But I also learned many simple and seemingly insignificant things. For instance, we use the word “occupation” to describe the U.S. and Israel. No one tells us about this (Interview # 6b, June-July, 2006).

But the newscast also is a tool for journalists who have been there for along time, especially to sense any policy changes, as one reporter confirmed:

As a reporter, I watch the station’s newscast everyday, and from that I understand the system and know if there was any change in the political line. It’s like a needle in the veins. On your own, bit-by-bit, you learn who they support and who they oppose... No one really tells you about it (Interview # 6a, June-July, 2006).

The comment about the needle in the veins is most interesting here and shows the power and invisibility of this tool in immersing the individual broadcast journalist into the institution’s policy. This is the gist of the “stickiness” of the institution.

### ***Learning Tools: Daily Work Routines***

Second, many participants said they learned the station’s political line from their *daily work routines*. This could be a fleeting comment from a producer or news director, or a reporter’s story that never aired, or a word added to a correspondent’s story. There are many “small things” in the daily routine that can give a journalist the signals bit by bit without direct or explicit explanation from the superiors, according to one senior reporter:

They would stick certain words to your report, and you might hear some comments from them. For instance, when the Syrians were withdrawing, I covered the story from the field.... Whenever I wrote “the Syrians,” they changed it to “the retreating Syrians.” After a while, you start understanding the exact way they want the story to be written (Interview # 2d, June-July, 2006).

Consistently another senior reporter from a different station noted “there are many small things that help you understand how they think and how things work,” and continued:

For instance, the first time I covered a press conference, the news director asked me on what basis did I ask a certain question. Later, I understood that the question contradicted with their political line. At the end of that same story, I had a stand-up<sup>75</sup> but they aired the report without it. That used to happen quite often.... Later, I began to understand that some of my stand-ups put the story in a context they don’t like.... So, I learned over time and understood the limits... I learned to balance between the real facts—the accurate news that I want to present in an ideal situation—and the policy of the institution which I cannot cross (Interview # 7c & 8c, June-July, 2006).

To be sure, all reporters mentioned that over time the learning incidents from the work routine become minimal since they internalized the political line. This also occurred among news managers. The following newscast producer explained how this interaction process was intense at the beginning, but over time, became minimal:

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<sup>75</sup> A “stand-up” is usually a brief conclusion made by the reporter or correspondent at the end of a news story. It also called a “tag” or a “sign-out.” Stand-ups could sometimes give a conclusion or add some commentary or analysis to a story.

I used to get a lot of instructions from the news director... Over time, I memorized them. I've been here for a long time, so by now I understand how they think and what our political line means. So, I try to work within that line and rarely get any instructions anymore (Interview # 4b & 5b, June-July, 2006).

***Learning Tools: Interacting With Coworkers***

Third, journalists do not only interact with their superiors in the context of the daily work routine. They are, in fact, constantly interacting with coworkers around them, even if it was for a small period of time during lunch or at the water cooler. Those were important moments where the average employee shared stories about their peers and superiors. Several reporters mentioned that they learned what to do and what not to do from these stories, especially if the story talked about someone who got fired or promoted:

On many occasions, I sit with the news director or have lunch with a producer or reporter, and I hear stories about someone who had an incident or a problem, and that helps me understand the atmosphere.... Bit by bit, unconsciously you find yourself as part of the whole atmosphere of the station (Interview # 5a, June-July, 2006).

***Learning Tools: Interacting With Owners and Political Patrons***

Next, in some stations newsroom employees not only interacted with their superiors and coworkers but they also interacted with the station's political patrons and owners. One reporter commented about regular meetings organized by her station's owner:

[The former owner and political patron of the station] used to have a meeting with all the reporters and editors almost every three months. He used to brief us on what is happening and answer our questions. He would have those meetings every time we feel there is a political change occurring. [The current owner and political patron] has only had one meeting with us so far, probably because of the political situation (Interview # 15c & 17c, June-July, 2006).

Another reporter noted that journalists don't have to wait for the station's owner to set up a meeting. "Whenever I feel I have any important questions, I ask for an appointment with him." The reporter said she once had questions about a specific political issue that emerged. "I asked him, what should we do about that story? Reduce the dose on it or highlight it? He said we should keep it low profile and calm the public down" (Interview # 15c & 17c, June-July, 2006). Although these examples show that the instructions given by the owners and political patrons are not questioned, some participants said they do bring up controversial issues but were aware of the futility of that effort. One reporter said she never hesitates to ask about things the owner might not agree with, but laughingly added "if he has taken a political stance on something, he wouldn't care about my opinion. If he has already made up his mind, my opinion will not make any difference" (Interview # 15c & 17c, June-July, 2006). This, incidentally, confirms the top-down flow of orders and instructions in the TV institution.

### ***Learning Tools: Reading News Releases and Listening to Political Speeches***

Finally, reading news releases and listening to political speeches delivered by the station's owners and their allies seemed to act as an early warning mechanism whenever

a change in the political line occurs or when a political decision needs to be clarified or framed. According to one news anchor:

I learn about any major changes in the political line from the speeches and stances made by [the owner of this station] and the news releases written by [his] parliamentary group and allies... So, usually [the owner] comes up with a political stance, and his advisors and representatives relay the picture to us and to others (Interview # 15c & 17c, June-July, 2006).

In addition, there are many other details a journalist can learn, especially from the environment they work and live in. For examples, if they missed the signs in the newscasts or speeches or chats with their colleagues, they can will sure not miss the photos of politicians, religious icons and political slogans hung on the walls in almost every station. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, most employees were aware of the broad political line before coming to the station, and many of them said they understand the whole political situation in the country and how different political groups are aligned. One producer explained:

You are living in this place and it is very simple to understand the policy of the institution even from the outside world. The institution is from this political group, and therefore it is clear and common sense to put stories for that group and not to put stories for the other group. It's straightforward: We are with these people, and we are not with those people (Interview # 2d, June-July, 2006).

All in all, the process of learning the institution's political line works at the detail and mundane level and is almost automatic and invisible. The broadcast journalist

internalizes the political line through his daily interaction with instruments, people and messages in the workplace.

### ***Ambitions and Aspirations and the Institution's Political Line***

Aside from learning the institution's political line, it is important to learn how a journalist's ambitions and aspirations in life interact with the dictates of the political line. Does the political line impede or propel one's ambitions? Does it work in tandem with the ambitions of the journalist or does it work against it? And how might the institution's political line influence and shape those ambitions and aspirations?

Despite the overwhelming frustration, pessimism and dissatisfaction relayed in chapter five regarding the journalists' feelings towards how the news media operate in Lebanon, participants were surprisingly ambitious and hopeful of future advances in their positions. Almost all of them saw themselves working in the same field in the next five to 10 years. In general, participants with entry level technical positions, like tape editors, saw their positions as "temporary jobs" or stepping stones to better jobs in the field. They aspired to become technical/creative directors or producers of political or entertainment TV shows (Interview # 7a, June-July, 2006). On the editorial side, most reporters looked forward to becoming hosts of their own shows. Most of them wanted to host political talk shows, which bring great prestige and name recognition. But several mentioned their interest in shows, "that cover social and domestic issues, not political problems" (Interview # 6a, June-July, 2006). As for reporters and anchors who already host their own shows, many of them mentioned their interest in producing documentaries. One anchor said, "I would like to work on big historic or humanistic documentaries at an

international level, not just locally—something on the scale of shows produced by the Discovery Channel or National Geographic” (Interview # 9a, June-July, 2006).

In addition, most of the reporters seemed passionate about working in news and loved their jobs, despite the low pay, dangerous working environment and demanding schedule. One reporter noted, “I always thought I will end up going back to sports reporting—my first job here, but I like political news more now.” He added, “There’s something about it that attracts me. I don’t know what it is. It pushes me to read the newspapers every day and follow the stories and know the secrets and analyses... It’s just addictive” (Interview # 6b, June-July, 2006). It is this “addictive” notion of working in news that seems to keep the Lebanese broadcast journalist going and aspiring for a better position.

The lines of aspiration, however, seem to flow in certain directions to the exclusion of others, and seem to taper-off the higher we go in the hierarchy of positions. In fact, the closer we got to top management positions, the less ambitious the participants were. That may be because those participants consider they have already achieved their dream jobs or goals in life. But there was an interesting trend; most of the average newsroom workers did not aspire to become TV or newsroom managers. These positions seemed to be out of the equation and something not reasonable to target. This was not because they were competitive or required extremely rare or advanced skills. Even positions that were highly competitive, like creative directors and show hosts, were not beyond reach or aspiration for the most junior employee. One technical director who aspires to become a director of political documentaries and entertainment shows was not discouraged at all by the difficulty of achieving her dream job in a highly competitive

field. “In Lebanon,” she noted, “it is extremely hard to become a director, and there are limited opportunities for those who work in entertainment and artistic work. There’s also a lot of competition, and companies try to tighten things for you” (Interview # 8a, June-July, 2006). Despite that, she predicted it would take her three to five years to achieve her dreams.

Not one participant on the editorial side, however, echoed such ambition to become a newsroom manager. That was strange, given that most current managers—news directors, producers—started as regular reporters. So, it was not competition that was discouraging newsroom employees from aspiring to become managers. There was much more than skills, experience and competition putting those positions off the ambition radar. And it is not simply a matter of not wanting to become a manager. In fact, when participants were directly asked if they aspire to become news directors, most of them did not see that as a reasonable goal. One reporter responded, “Frankly, these positions are reserved for certain people who have strong connections” (Interview # 5a, June-July, 2006). In other words, those positions are not based on merit and skills, but on loyalty and cronyism. Several reporters confirmed that notion by noting that those positions were “political appointments.” This notion is corroborated by the fact that higher positions in the corporate hierarchy tend to be staffed by people loyal to the top officers and owners. Those officers also tend to share the same political ideology of the owners, and, in many cases, the same religion and even familial ties (See Chapter 5 for details). That was not true when it came to many of the newsroom employees, who tend to come from a wide variety of cultural and social backgrounds and maintain different



beliefs and ideologies—in some cases contradictory to the ideologies of their institutions as we shall see in the next section of this chapter.

That is why this study considered the majority of TV newsroom employees as foot soldiers (see chapter seven). The foot soldier takes orders from the officers, who in turn take orders from officers above them all the way up to the civilian leadership of the government. There is no risk for the foot soldier to have deviant beliefs as long as his actions are consistent with the orders of his superiors. If his actions contradicted these orders, they can be quickly remedied and contained, and he can be easily punished or dismissed and replaced by one of the thousands of foot soldiers waiting in line for a job.

The officer, however, has to be loyal to the upper brass. The higher in the hierarchy, the more loyalty is required. Any deviance could cause considerable damage. Although the officer is by no means irreplaceable, her dismissal could cause serious interruption in the production process and unwanted changes in the culture of the newsroom. Under special circumstances, mutiny of the upper brass could lead to shift in control of considerable parts of the institution, as in the case of LBCI (See Chapter 5 for details on ownership). The higher the officer, the more consequential her deviance could be, and therefore, the more loyal she should be to the top leadership.

### ***Political Affiliations and Beliefs and the Institution's political Line***

The earlier section dealt with the interaction between the institution's political line and the broadcast journalist's ambitions and aspirations. In this section, we delve into the political affiliations and beliefs of those individual journalists. Instead of describing the ideologies and political commitments, participants were asked to compare their

beliefs to that of the station's political line. Based on those opinions, three groups emerge: the apolitical, the politically consistent and the politically inconsistent.

### ***Politically Consistent***

First, about one quarter of interviewed journalists declared that their political beliefs were either slightly or fully consistent with that of the institution. The higher the position of the participant, the more likely they belonged to this group. In fact, almost all station and newsroom managers, including news directors, assistant news directors and producers, not only shared the political views of the station, but had also been active members of political parties that backed these stations. Only a few of them, however, admitted they were still active politically. In addition, most of the top station and newsroom managers in Lebanon are very well known politically, and most people can easily tell you about their histories and backgrounds. For instance, one news director at a major station is well known for wearing the political party's military fatigues before and during the time he used to work at that party's radio station during the civil war. Other managers are well known "advisors" to the political owners of the station, a term often used to signify extreme loyalty to a certain political leader. For instance, one news director used to be the head of public relations of a major business establishment that was owned and symbolized the wealth and power of the station's owner. But even based on interviews with those managers, there was enough evidence to support the idea that journalists who occupy higher positions in the TV institution's structure tend to be "politically consistent."

Members of this group also tended to choose their place of work depending on the political line of the station. One newscast producer said:

I chose to work at [this station] because it's close to my beliefs, and I used to know the people who work in management positions when I first applied. I knew them because they were in the [political party that owned this station], and I was then an active member of the party (Interview # 7b, June-July, 2006).

### *Apolitical*

Second, the majority of participants considered themselves apolitical or not having any strong political convictions or beliefs. Some of those participants may have preferred not to divulge their true beliefs, but what is interesting about them was they tend to be either entry level employees or mid level journalists and technical and creative personnel. Very few of them occupied management positions. One member of this group noted the following:

I had no problem working at [this station] since I came straight out of college, didn't have any strong political convictions and wasn't working in a different station before. So, figuratively speaking, the station raised me. It was not like I came from a different belief system or had to change beliefs (Interview # 6a, June-July, 2006).

In addition, most participants in this group tended to flock to the stations that had a highly diverse body of employees, especially New TV. One reporter who said she came from a "religiously mixed" background explained:

I was never active politically. I've only worked with the Red Cross.... Unlike other stations, New TV doesn't have a religious identity, and it has reporters from all kinds of religious and political backgrounds. That is why I never pursued any other station. I'm afraid of that matter. I can't imagine myself in an atmosphere

that lacks diversity and flexibility. Even here, there are people who sometimes are upset when I criticize a politician they might support, but to me, it doesn't matter since I've always been neutral and non-aligned (Interview # 8b, June-July, 2006).

But even the stations that are arguably less diverse and have a specific sectarian identity had enough margin of freedom for employees who have no specific political ideology but don't necessarily agree with the station's political line or religious affiliation. One participant from Future TV had the following to say:

I am [not Sunni], and my family is very secular. In the nineties, there was a lot of sectarianism in Lebanon, but when I came to Future TV, I found a lot of religious diversity. This comforted me because this environment goes with my beliefs. I don't know the religion of my colleagues, and that's how I was raised.... Concerning political alliances, I am not committed to anyone, but I wasn't a supporter of Hariri's economic policies either. And I had no problem criticizing them but not on air, only in discussions between employees (Interview # 18c, June-July, 2006).

### ***Politically Inconsistent***

Finally, there were the journalists who said they had political beliefs contradictory to those of the institution's political line. Surprisingly, those made up about a quarter of the participants. They were either entry level employees or senior—but not top—news managers. None of the latter, however, were working in local political news; they were either responsible for the 'Arabic and International News' departments or for social and

cultural news segments. In addition, participants in this group tended to have many years of experience and were considered excellent at their craft by their peers. In fact, their excellent skills seemed to be the only reason they survived for so long in the institution—given their contradictory beliefs. The former subgroup (entry level employees) seemed to be seeking whatever experience they can get, regardless of where they get it. One reporter expressed his frustration with the institution’s policy and revealed his intention of move to another station he felt was more consistent with his beliefs—once he got enough experience. In fact, just a few months after this study was conducted, two participants in this subgroup happened to move to stations more consistent with their beliefs. One of them even became a show host at the new station—a huge promotion for a reporter with little experience.

Employees who belonged to the third group also shared another characteristic. They believed that they did not have other options and found some solace in the material return of their job. At least one of them faced serious problems at the psychological level and was only able to adapt to the work environment after a long time and many sacrifices. One reporter even revealed being diagnosed with serious levels of depression during the first three years of work. (See next section for details). Invariably, this group was the most interesting because, as we shall see soon, their work and output didn’t differ from the most loyal employees, despite their contradictory beliefs.

### ***Dealing with Conflicts between Personal Beliefs and the Institution’s Political Line***

As mentioned earlier, there are circumstances where the journalist’s personal political beliefs were in slight or full conflict with the institution’s political line. This section discusses how the participants from two groups above dealt with those conflicts:

The Politically Consistent and the Politically Inconsistent. It is important to note that even participants who were generally loyal to the institutions political line had some contradictions and only few participants claimed that their beliefs were 100 percent consistent with the institution. To be sure, there were two kinds of relationships when it came to the Politically Consistent group: Those that had some differences with the institution's policy at the detail level but not at the general level, and those that had no conflict whatsoever with the institution's policy. What follows is a discussion of how those two groups, in addition to the Politically Inconsistent group, deals with any contradictions between their beliefs and the orders and instructions they receive from the institution.

***No Conflict at the General Level, Some Conflict at the Detail Level***

First, most of those in the politically consistent group said their personal ideologies were consistent with the institution's political line at the general level, but there may be some contradictions at the detail level. One anchor and political show host summarized the opinions of this group:

There is no such thing as an institution's policy that you agree with 100 percent or that you have to follow 100 percent down to the minor details. Of course, there will be some differences with some details, but the most important thing is to agree on the broad and general principles. That's my situation here. There are certain details I don't agree with, but in the end when you decide to be a part of an institution, you can't run your own policy or act as if you own the station.... You try to discuss matters and present your own point of view. They might take it into

consideration and they might not. I might convince them or they might convince me... The only other option is to simply quit (Interview # 9a, June-July, 2006).

To this senior journalist, the choices are clear. He agrees with the institution's policy on the broad level. When there is a conflict on the detail level, he tries to challenge it and "convince" the institution of his opinion, or be "convinced" of theirs. Alternatively, he can quit, but since the conflict is minor, it is doubtful that he will throw his senior position away.

Not all journalists, however, said they try to convince their superiors of their own opinions. Some tried to work within the narrow margins of freedom they have. For instance, one anchor said she tries to avoid going into details about certain stories. "I also try to avoid putting negative or positive spins on them, even though I might not be convinced the story should run in the first place" (Interview # 18c, June-July, 2006), but even that is not an option sometimes, as she explained:

When we get orders from the news director to run a certain story in full—say a major business project related to [the owner of the station] or even his travel plans, I would have no choice but to run it as it is.... I don't have a problem running those stories, in principle, but there are certain details I normally cut out.

In these situations, I have to run them anyway (Interview # 18c, June-July, 2006).

Several other participants from this group expressed content and comfort about their job because "most of what I write is consistent with the station's policy..." and "that makes things easier. I rarely felt that I want to write something they didn't like" (Interview # 6b, June-July, 2006; Interview # 6a, June-July, 2006). This sounds like a

healthy relationship between the institution and the journalist, except it might not work if the conflict was at the general ideological level, as in the third case below.

Regardless the situation, it was clear for the first group, that when personal and institutional beliefs are in contradiction, the latter always takes precedent. As one anchor confirmed:

My personal beliefs are consistent with this station. If there was a story that contradicts my own beliefs, I still do it. And it has happened to me several times, and here they do take your feeling—a tiny bit—into consideration. You try as much as you can, but you cannot go all the way and reject doing it (Interview # 10c, June-July, 2006).

Another participant in this group gave an example of such a situation. She was writing a story about a controversy between the chairman of a major government (public) institution and a government minister allied to the owner of her station. “Based on what I read and the background information I have on the chairman, he was right, and I couldn’t write that the minister was right and the chairman was wrong. So, I wrote it the way I understood it.” Later, one of the minister’s advisors called to inquire and talked to the reporter and her superiors. “He told me that I didn’t understand the story, and that I got the whole thing wrong. So, I rewrote the story and toned it down” (Interview # 10c, June-July, 2006).

### ***No Conflict Whatsoever***

While the first group had little conflict on the detail level, the second group found no conflict whatsoever with the institution’s political line, whether on the general or detail level. Those expressed emotional and ideological belonging to the institution,



which they saw as part of a bigger cause. One participant even claimed “I don’t care about position and money. Even if I was to work as a concierge for no salary, I would still feel more comfortable working here” (Interview # 14c, June-July, 2006). Not all participants in this group were willing to become concierges or to work for free, however. One anchor complained that her loyalty is taken for granted by the institution, and that “those who belong to the same political side and [religious sect of the station’s owner] have it worse than those who are opposed to him.” She added “there are people in the institution who were opposed to [the owner] and even criticized him, but are still working here and even doing better than those who have always been loyal supporters” (Interview # 10c, June-July, 2006).

When pressed to remember if there were any conflicts at all, some participants in this group did mention minor disputes with management about scheduling or pay raises “but that never develops into major problems because the institution protects you. In the end, I believe that I am not more important than [the owner of the station], one participants said. “We belong to the institution; it is our identity,” he added (Interview # 14c, June-July, 2006). This statement reflects a deep commitment to the owner of the institution that typifies many Lebanese citizens who are loyal to one “Za’im” or another.<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, when asked about their news writing and how to deal with hypothetical conflicts, one participant responded:

Sometimes I am on the ground, and I see events happening in a certain way, but when you go back to the editors, they have background information that I don’t have, and they put the story in context for me. For instance, when I was covering a story about the environment and garbage disposing, they told me that certain

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<sup>76</sup> See Chapter 4, Part A, for meaning of za’im.

political sides were pushing people to put the story on the agenda to harm [a government official allied to the station's owner]. So, often the editors have more information than the reporters.... It's not a matter of conflict. It's a matter of information that you don't have, and they give it to you or put your story in context (Interview # 9c, June-July, 2006).

This is a fascinating response that reveals the astonishing sense of blind loyalty to superiors. This reporter was willing to fully reject what his own eyes told him and accept the "context" of the story the editors give him. To him, there is no conflict. It is only a failure from his side because he doesn't have the relevant information that only editors have.<sup>77</sup>

### ***Full Inconsistency***

Finally, in clear contrast with the second group, a handful of participants expressed full inconsistency between their own beliefs and the institution's policy, both at the general and detail levels. Again, those were the most interesting because they revealed the overwhelming power of the institution to mold and shape the work of just about anyone inside it—or simply eject those who don't submit. The situations of members of this group were sometimes unbearable, yet they often reached relatively high positions in the institution—although certainly not top positions. One of the most fascinating quotes came from a participant whose ideological beliefs were in extreme contrast with the institution. This participant even used to engage in political activity opposed to that of the station's owner. "When I started working here, I stopped being

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<sup>77</sup> Another participant in this group talked about strong personal ties with the owner of the station and still claimed "I wouldn't write anything I am not convinced about." This participant's notion of what she is or is not "convinced about" is highly questionable, especially when she adds that the owner of the station "personally requested that I work here" (Interview # 13c, June-July, 2006).

active politically. And someone inside the station tried to use my background to get me fired, but because I was not active politically, they didn't do anything (Interview # 2d, June-July, 2006). This participant explained how she unconsciously internalized the institution's political line in her work, but remained loyal to her personal ideology, but not in actions. "Believe me, you get used to it. There are things that I am fully opposed to, and at some point you start writing the story almost unconsciously exactly the way they want it to be written." She added, "Then you wake up and say that's it; I can't do this anymore. But you go back and remind yourself that you work for an institution, and it's your job." The frustration clearly revealed in this quote echoes a much more serious situation for another participant:

About three years ago, I came to the point where I couldn't hear about anything that has to do with [a major political group allied to the station's owner]. I just got sick of it. Everything I wrote had to do with [that group]. I felt I was suffocating and went into depression. I stopped feeling I was a journalist. But I had no alternative, and had no other job at the point. It is not easy to get a job like this in Lebanon or even abroad (Interview # 2d, June-July, 2006).

Clearly, the internal conflict revealed by these participants is slightly allayed by the need for a job—or good job. But material incentives are not enough to allay these severe frustrations. To most participants, distraction was the solution. One reporter, reiterating the "unconscious" work process said "when we are working on a newscast, we barely have time to scratch our heads. All our concern is to deliver the newscast on time. Deadline pressure helps me forget about my personal beliefs and just focus on the work" (Interview # 7a, June-July, 2006).

To be sure, the frustration emanating from the conflict was not limited to the news these participants produce. Even their daily interactions with co-workers were limited, and they were very cautious about what they said, whether it was a casual conversation or voicing an opinion in a meeting. “There isn’t a lot of space for my personal beliefs to appear in work, but they may appear in personal conversations with others, although I do try to avoid discussing sensitive subjects because it might negatively affect me later,” one producer noted. “Even in news meetings, I try to present ideas in a careful way. I put them in a professional context and not in a political context, so it doesn’t create a backlash,” she added (Interview # 3d, June-July, 2006).

There were other solutions for these contradictions. Several participants said they try to avoid stories that are “totally inconsistent” with their beliefs. On participants explained:

Most often, I pass it on to one of my colleagues, and ask that they try as much as possible to write it in a professional way, but I am always clear with them that someone has requested that story to be done, and we’ll have to do it. But if that does not work, I cannot simply say I won’t do the story (Interview # 3d, June-July, 2006).

Another participant chose another route to solve the contradiction. He tried to work mostly on nonpolitical news, which in many ways is limiting in Lebanon because almost all the newscast content is political (See Chapter 10 for details on news content). This reporter saw there was little or no contradiction with any Lebanese station at the cultural or social level because all those stations share the same cultural and social norms. He added:

My background, whether cultural or social, doesn't contradict at all with my news story. But my political affiliation may clash with that of the station because newscasts in Lebanon are primarily political. So, if you are working on a cultural story, you have a lot of margin to play around and you may work on the story in a way that goes with your own cultural or social background, of course with certain limits. But that is not true when it comes to political stories (Interview # 1c, June-July, 2006).

Interestingly, several participants in this group tended to work more often on non-political stories, but not always by their own choice. So, the politics-heavy nature of Lebanese newscasts marginalized members of this group and pushed them into working with non-political news genres. But there was yet another window of relief for those who wanted to stay in politics: working with regional and international political news. Non-local news seemed to provide a wider margin of freedom compared to local news. In fact, one reporter in this group said, "I've always considered myself lucky because I don't deal a lot with local news." The difference between local, regional and international news will be revisited later.

#### **D. Conclusion of Chapter 5**

In this chapter we used the term institutionalization rather than socialization because the process does not necessarily change the beliefs of the person, but only his actions and output. His work, his activity and effort all become synchronized with the larger institutional machine, regardless of his own beliefs. We saw how broadcast journalists learn the institution's political line and how to follow it in their work in a

complex process of daily interaction with their surroundings. That includes watching the newscast every day, learning from the small comments and corrections they get from superiors during their work routines, interacting with their superiors outside the work context, interacting with the owners and patrons of the station, and interacting with their physical environment. Most stations in Lebanon have no printed material or formal process for introducing the journalists to the institution's political line. The apparently random and unintentional process, however, seems to really be a systematic intentional mechanism perfected over time and assured by the nature of the corporate establishment. Most journalists learned the institution's political line through a slow accumulative process that worked unconsciously at the detail level. Over time, the broadcast journalist "memorized" or internalized the policy and worked exactly the way the institution wanted.

It is important to remember that all participants in this study are current employees. So, their opinions do not cover journalists who may have rejected the institution's policy and resisted assimilation. Those, of course, are journalists who ended up leaving their institutions and, ironically, their stories are exchanged among employees and serve as reminders of what awaits those who attempt to resist.

Despite the resounding frustration with the state of broadcast news in their country, Lebanese broadcast journalists are enthusiastic and excited about their jobs. They like working in news and aspire to reach higher positions, regardless the numerous dangers, difficulties and frustrations. The journalists' aspirations, however, went in certain directions to the exclusion of others. Almost all editorial staff aimed to climb the editorial ladder but did not show any interest in pursuing management positions, whether

in the newsroom or the whole station. That was mainly because management positions were perceived as political appointment set aside to loyal cronies of the stations' owners and are not based on merit or skills. This is directly related to the culture imposed by the institution and its policy, which demands unflinching loyalty of its top brass.

When it comes to broadcast journalists' personal political beliefs and affiliations, they can be divided into three groups: the apolitical, the politically consistent and the politically inconsistent. The first group makes up the majority of the journalists who have little or no trouble assimilating with the station's political line. The second group is made up of journalists loyal to the station's political line and feels comfortable working in an institution that reflects their own beliefs. The last and smallest group covers those who have beliefs and political affiliations conflicting with those of their station. This group was made up of highly skilled journalists who either occupied relatively high positions in non-local news posts or were seriously thinking of moving to stations that reflected their personal beliefs—and some of them did so during the period of this study.

Regardless the professional, cultural, religious and political beliefs and affiliations of the journalists, most of them categorically admitted that their work, production and output were perfectly consistent with the station's political line. The mechanisms that produce this consistency will be extensively analyzed in chapter eight. In addition, when it came to work, they all understood that the "institution's political line" came in first and could never be crossed or undermined. Although, there were some who said they try to bend the policy using whatever margins of freedom they have, no one claimed to challenge or betray it—at least no one who still works there.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> In fact, there were two incidents some participants told me about where reporters were fired because they did not follow the institution's policy. In both cases, the stories were about Saudi Arabia.

Moreover, most if not all journalists subscribe to some political beliefs, but there is a clear line between believing and practicing, whether inside or outside the station. The vast majority of participants categorically denied having any political activity or actively belonging to a political group at present. The few who did admit they engage in some minor political activity had beliefs consistent with the station. In addition, their activities tended to have a “humanitarian” scope, especially regarding political prisoners’ rights. One reporter who was a former prisoner in Israeli occupation jails said the only obstacles to his political and social activity outside the station was the little time he had left due to the demand of a reporter’s job.

Furthermore, news directors did not seem to mind their employees engaging in political activity. “They are free to do whatever they want outside, but in here all they are requested to do is be objective and professional,” one news director said. They also seemed to be aware of the contradictions in some political beliefs. Another news manager claimed that “even if someone said they just can’t write a story in a certain way because it contradicts their political beliefs, I don’t make them write it. I just give it to someone else” (Interview # 4a, June-July, 2006).

### ***Institutionalized Journalists: Foot Soldiers, Diverse Backgrounds, Unswerving Performance***

The first and most important conclusion in this whole section is that regardless which group the participants belonged to, regardless how much they accepted or rejected the institution’s policy, and regardless their professional values, they all agreed that their work will follow the institution’s political line. This will be confirmed again in the chapters below. Bennett (2003) confirmed this process in news departments:



Novice journalists experience constant pressures (subtle and otherwise) from editors about how to cover stories. These pressures are effective because editors hold sway over what becomes news and which reporters advance in the organization. Over time, reporters tend to adjust their styles to fit harmoniously with the expectations of their organizations” (p. 171).

Bennett’s (2003) comment highlights the importance of corporate hierarchy and the incentive to maintain one’s source of livelihood and advance in the work field. This point will be more pronounced in chapter seven, where we analyze the fears and pressures journalists face.

Another interesting outcome in this section that can be generalized to all participants is the acceptance of the owner as the logical policy setter. Although the idea of leaving the strategic decision to top superiors is a common notion in almost all businesses and corporations around the world, it is slightly different when it comes to media institutions. A common perception in U.S. media is that business and commercial interests are separate from newsroom chain of command. That may or may not be true in practice and will be further discussed in chapter eight, but at least you will find many journalists that argue and defend the “wall” that separates business from news in the U.S.A. In Lebanon’s case, not one participant viewed that there was a separation between the owners and those who run the news department. This is even more than saying there is no separation between the corporate chain of command or business interest and the editorial team. The participants linked the political line, which dictates the limits and frames of news production, directly to the owner—whether that owner held a position in the institution or simply had his advisors run it.

## Chapter 6: External Fears, Pressures and Obstacles

We have so far described professional values and aspirations that drive broadcast journalists and the institutional frameworks that direct their actions. Before going into further details about the daily work process of those journalists, we still need to understand the external fears, pressures and obstacles that face them in their line of work.

External political pressure and violence against journalists are part of job in Lebanon. They are mostly expected and have become more common during the past few years after a lull following the end of the civil war in 1990. In fact, since 2005, several journalists have survived gruesome assassination attempts, but some were not so lucky. Ghassan Tuani, a prominent newspaper editor and publisher whose son—also a journalist and parliament deputy—was recently assassinated, commented that Lebanon needs to take the “martyr-project” out of the journalism profession. Violence against journalists became so common that Lebanon now commemorates the “Lebanese Press Martyr’s day” every May 8<sup>th</sup> (Armtown, 2007, ¶ 1).

But political pressure doesn’t always come in the form of physical violence. Politicians try often to court and even bribe journalist, who in turn see their relationships with politicians as vital to their success in work, especially in securing sources of information.

This section discusses three topics. First, journalists are asked about their relationships with and perceptions of politicians, the nature of these relationships, and whether they thought the relationships influenced their work. The second section focuses on political pressures practiced on journalists and discussed their forms. Finally, the last

section covers the “red lines,” or what journalists perceive as dangerous topics and political taboos that need to be avoided.

### **A. Relationships With and Perception of Politicians**

It is important to understand how journalists in Lebanon perceive politicians and understand the nature of their relationships with them, and whether they are aware of their tactics and actions to influence the news agenda and get favorable coverage. In this domain, Lebanese broadcast journalists are not naïve and don’t lack the needed level of skepticism to protect them from conniving politicians. On the contrary, they seem to be frustrated with most politicians’ ignorance of the nature of their work.

It is important to first note that political management of news and media is not as professional and systematic as it is in the U.S. and the West, but it is certainly approaching that level. Still, only the most prominent and affluent politicians can afford to have media offices and public relations teams. In most cases, those offices are run by former journalists. According to a senior TV executive, “Some current journalists are even top political consultants to major politicians, but they are still not terribly professional in their [PR] work” (Interview # 6b, June-July, 2006). This will certainly change as more public relations college majors and companies become common in Lebanon and as more prominent politicians show the advantage of having media teams in their political arsenals. In fact, several events in the past few years show an increasing amount of awareness and spending by politicians on media campaigns. The massive demonstrations that took place in 2005 stand witness to the new media strategies some prominent politicians are resorting to. In several demonstrations, top executives working

for the international advertising giant Saatchi and Saatchi were key organizers and advisors for the events (Shadid, 2006; Wilson and Williams, 2005).

Another important point is that unlike in print journalism, relationships between politicians and the average broadcast journalist seemed mostly superficial for TV journalists because politicians prefer to go directly to top newsroom executives.

According to several participants, broadcast news executives are the ones who usually get contacted by politicians. One reporter confirmed that “aside from when we interview them, politicians don’t usually contact us directly. They go straight to the news director. They constantly call to complain why we didn’t run their story or why the story was short, and the news director relays the message.”

As reflected in this comment, in Lebanon, unlike the U.S., many politicians seem to personally contact the TV stations instead of having their personnel do the talking. This not only confirms the lack of professional PR managers and press officers for most politicians, but also reflects the somewhat crude manner in which politicians try to handle journalists. They seem to lack any understanding of how broadcast news works. In fact, several reporters expressed frustration with their unreasonable expectations. “Some politicians think if we run a favorable story for them once, then we will become their supporters. They then become angry when we later don’t run their story or run something negative about them” (Interview # 6b, June-July, 2006). This sense of frustration is especially annoying to journalists when it came to the lack of understanding of time constraints, as one show host noted:

Almost every politician I interview asks me to give them more time, and I explain to them that I can’t because I have to give everyone else equal time. I explain to

them that there is limited time, but there's always this obsession with more time, and they want you to treat them as if you're their official spokesperson (Interview # 9a, June-July, 2006).

One reporter said many politicians not only want more time on air, but also cannot understand why it takes a lot of time for the reporter to interview them.

I usually interview a politician for 30 minutes, but they see that their story ran only three minutes in the newscast. So, they call and complain saying 'if I knew that you'll only run three minutes, I would've given you a three minute interview.' They just don't understand the severe time constraints we have (Interview # 6b, June-July, 2006).

It is hard for an American broadcast journalist to understand why a politician would complain when he was given three whole minutes of a newscast. That would certainly be an enormous media success for almost any politician in the U.S.—but not in Lebanon. In fact, the majority of journalists mentioned this point and even said “many politicians would often reject giving us an interview saying the last time we interviewed them for 20 minutes and only aired two minutes” (Interview # 1c, June-July, 2006). The fact is that broadcast news stories in Lebanon, on average, are much longer than those in U.S. newscasts (See Chapter 10 for details on news content).

In addition to complaints about time, “perception of the journalist” was another factor that participants thought affected their relationship with politicians, especially when it came to getting interviews. One reporter noted “politicians tend to give interviews depending on how they perceive you. If they believe you won't be lenient with them or if the station's policy is opposing to their policy, they won't give you an

interview” (Interview # 6b, June-July, 2006). In addition, many participants felt that the first impression is the most important:

Usually the first interview is a test. They track how many of their statements you ran in full and how many you changed or paraphrased. They also track if you broadcast any statement they made off-record. So, the more you win them over, the more they are likely to give you future interviews (Interview # 6b, June-July, 2006).

This statement hits the heart of the symbiotic relationship between the news media and the political establishment. Reporters seek to “win them over,” to advance their own careers and survive in the workplace. If a reporter was “perceived” to be hostile by all politicians, she will not get interviews. This will negatively affect her job. Whether this perception factor is real or something journalists imagine is irrelevant. It is a perception they work within, and it always pushes them to seek to win politicians over. Furthermore, given the content of Lebanese newscasts, which are almost fully made up of politicians’ statement and news, most reporters had no illusion of who controls their raw material and how to get it from them.<sup>79</sup> One senior reporter said, “Most successful journalists establish strong connections with politicians.... We get all kinds of invitations from local and foreign politicians, and that gives us the opportunity to connect with them.... Later, those long-term relationships become sources of valuable information” (Interview # 1c, June-July, 2006). This quote echoes the opinions of most participants, who openly mentioned that they have established relationships with politicians and didn’t think that those relationships influence their work negatively. In fact, most participants perceived these relationships as benign and not in any way influencing their work. Most

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<sup>79</sup> See Chapter 10 for details on news content

even rejected the idea that their relationships with politicians will compromise their professionalism. One reporter explained how small the impact is:

If someone attacks a certain politician in an interview, you can contact that politician and give him a chance to respond in the same news segment, or you can wait and they will eventually respond after they've seen the attack on TV. So, if you had a relationship with a politician, you tend to do the former and that's the extent of it (Interview # 6b, June-July, 2006).

On the other hand, a handful of participants disagreed and questioned the morality of those kinds of relationships. According to one reporter, "most journalists I know have personal relationships with politicians and even mutual interest, and that's wrong."

Another reporter said, "I get many invitations from politicians for social events, but I don't accept them. Most of my colleagues do... I believe there is a conflict of interest there (Interview # 7c & 8c, June-July, 2006). The same journalist interestingly added "some reporters don't need to establish political relationships because they have enough contacts in their own families." The assumption here was that "family" contacts are not political, although the reporter did reveal that some of them occupy top positions in government and the army.

This raises a new point about who is perceived as a politician and who is not. Several participants noted that certain sides try to shame them into doing them favors based on prior familial, religious or political relationships. One reporter complained of the constant calls she gets from a political party with which she was active before she became a journalist.

People from my political background expect me to promote their cause and give them more prominence and time. The media manager for [a major political group] once approached me at a funeral of an assassinated politician and asked me, out of friendship, to highlight that their party was present at the funeral.... I said OK, but I really didn't. I wrote that most of the parties were present.... The same group approached me again complaining that we gave an opposing politician three minutes and gave them only two. The reason was that the former said something more important, but they don't see it that way. Their expectations are sometimes ridiculous. They expect me to cover their leaders every time they sneeze (Interview # 6a, June-July, 2006).

The same reporter confided that she always says OK when they ask her, but later writes what she thinks is right. "You have to be diplomatic with them. You can't just be blunt and say no; they will start saying now she's a famous reporter and doesn't care about us anymore (Interview # 6a, June-July, 2006). This reveals the pressure a journalist can receive from former associates or even family members who are not necessarily perceived as politicians. Despite that she disregarded their requests, the constant connection between the two is more likely than not to influence her work, especially that it is important, as she noted, not be seen as a sell-out.

This last idea is corroborated by a series of observed phone calls between a newscast producer and a media manager from the same political group.<sup>80</sup> At first, the producer was formal and somewhat cold with the caller who was asking about a reporter's phone number. The producer first said, I don't think I can give you his personal number," and asked, "who needs to know?" When the caller said he is from the press

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<sup>80</sup> The phone was on speaker and the producer gave the researcher permission to listen.



office of a political group the producer was sympathetic to, the producer's tone warmed up, and she said "in that case, of course, I will give you the number," and did exactly so. The caller then mentioned a political activity organized by his party and hoped that the station can cover it. He also complained about an event that was not covered by a reporter who "seemed to oppose his political party." The producer told the caller that she will personally make sure that a correspondent is dispatched and that she will deal with the other reporter. The caller then expressed doubts about the correspondent's covering the event, so the producer explained that sometimes reporters get caught up in several events and they have to drop one of them, but she confirmed that she will stress the importance of the event and make sure he covers it. Later, the producer asked the secretary to call the correspondent and give him the information about the political event. She didn't stress the importance of the event or relay any complaints as she had promised to the other reporter.

This event reveals two things. First, that sympathy to a political side opens the channels of communication between the politicians and the journalists and may have a slight influence on whether that politician is covered or not. However, that political relationship does not override the institutional and professional commitments of the journalist to her station and job. The producer in the example above was warm and open to the caller and promised to do what he asked, but later ignored most of his requests, except for dispatching a correspondent to his political event. It could be argued that this, in fact, was all that media manager actually wanted and that the other requests were only part of the negotiation tactics used to assure that the station will in fact send someone to

cover their event, or at least to shame the journalist into making sure she is not perceived as a sell out, as in the former example.

### **B. External Pressures, Threats and Appeasements**

Among the various factors that influence broadcast journalists and their work are external pressures. Those pressures come in the form of threats, violent attacks, appeasement tactics and simply perceived threats. The sources of those pressures are almost always political sides. While several participants did share their experiences in this domain, the majority of them admitted that they had either never faced such pressures or that the pressures were mostly minor incidents. As one veteran anchor and show host said “only once have I faced direct pressure from the outside and it was not a big deal. Someone sent me threats over the phone through a messenger, but nothing really happened” (Interview # 9a, June-July, 2006). In addition, as in the case of political contacts above, the majority of participants said those kinds of pressures usually target the news director and the CEO.

Still some participants gave revealing accounts of situations they faced. The most interesting among those stories highlighted the role of the U.S. Embassy in Beirut in putting pressure on journalists. The Embassy seemed to use a “good cop, bad cop” approach, as one participant put it.

On one hand, some U.S. embassy personnel were aggressive and even abusive with some journalists. According to one participant who called the U.S. embassy to inquire about the accuracy of an anonymous story related to U.S.-Lebanese relations, “I was shocked from their reaction.” The participant added:

[The Embassy official] started getting mad and yelling and screaming and telling me that I was unprofessional if I run the story. She told me the anonymous source is here in the Embassy and he talked to journalists off the record.... She told me I'm a bad journalist... and threatened to break all links with [my station] if I run the story... She was insulting and out of control (Interview # 6d & 1e, June-July, 2006).

The Embassy official did not want the participant to run the story because it hinted that the U.S. is interfering in Lebanon's internal affairs and suggested that the Bush administration has ulterior motives beyond the "democratization" rhetoric—a common accusation against U.S. policies in the Middle East. In the end, the participant discussed the matter with the news director, "who told me to forget about it, and that it's not worth it. So, I just dropped it" (Interview # 6d & 1e, June-July, 2006).

On the other hand, the U.S. Embassy often organized events where top international journalists and politicians were invited. The U.S. embassy also spent time on informal interactions with journalists, where they invite them for coffee or casual meetings. And they were certainly clear about their intentions and didn't seem to mind outright bribery to reach their goals. One participant who got invited to have coffee with an embassy official shared parts of the conversation:

[The U.S. Embassy official] was telling me that this work is a two way street. I help you. You help me. Then she told me, if you want to get your Masters degree one day, we can help. Later, they kept on sending me stories and reports they produce about their activities. After a few months, they invited me again to a gathering where top journalists and politicians will attend, and there will be

someone from the U.S. defense department. I went... and from there on, she would often email me for social events... and I know if I was not on good terms with them, they wouldn't invite me to these big events.

The participant refused to accept the Embassy's help in getting a scholarship for the Master's degree, but another journalist accepted a similar offer. Several reporters noted that a couple of journalists received grants to travel abroad and finish their graduate studies. According to one participant, the grants were not directly from the Embassy, but embassy officials played a big role in getting them. This tactic seemed to pay off. One participant noted about her colleague who received the grant: "I think he got too close to the American Embassy. He would make special reports about what the Embassy is doing, but I don't think his writing was affected" (Interview # 6d & 1e, June-July, 2006). The same participant confided that the Embassy events did help in establishing contacts with top officials and journalists. "A few months later, I got to interview [a top U.S. official] live, and that's all due to the contacts I established through those events, which had all kinds of top journalists from CNN and Al-Jazeera and many other stations."

Several other participants corroborated these stories, but noted the stringent restrictions U.S. Embassy officials put on what the reporter is allowed to ask. One correspondent who was invited to interview a top U.S. official visiting Lebanon sarcastically said, the Embassy official "wouldn't allow me to ask political questions. I could only ask about USAID and how great America is." The correspondent agreed to the terms rationalizing that the interview will help establish a stronger connection with the official. In a later interview, "I was able to ask him all the questions I wanted, and I did get that" (Interview # 6d & 1e, June-July, 2006).

The U.S. embassy tactics are diverse and go beyond dealing with junior journalists. One news director noted that the Embassy officials “contact us often, not every day but maybe once or twice a month.” She added:

Sometimes they also visit us, and we talk to them and discuss politics.... We criticize their policies, and they tell us what they don’t like about our coverage and try to convince us to change some stories. They also invite us to local events and to free training sessions for reporters abroad. That’s their style. But we know who to send and we know they have a reason to be nice to us (Interview # 4a, June-July, 2006).

Another typical pressure journalists face from politicians is their ostracism or denial of access to certain venues or figures. One correspondent who wrote an unflattering story about a certain minister faced that tactic:

When I went the next time to the Ministry’s building, his press secretary told me not to come here any more because some people are angry of what I reported. I told him I didn’t do anything wrong; the minister was opening congratulations cards while the political situation in the country was upside down. After a while it was OK, and they let me in again (Interview # 9c, June-July, 2006).

Several journalists also mentioned they were attacked by regular people or government security personnel while working on sensitive stories that may embarrass some politicians. In all cases, those incidents had a happy ending, and no one was hurt. In addition, the journalists anticipated the reactions and were prepared to deal with the situation. One reporter explained:

We were once covering how a factory was dumping chemicals into the sea and were arrested by the army. Before arresting us, the army fired warning shots. I quickly switched the tapes in the camera and hid the video that had the shooting and the chemical dumping. When they got to us, they tried to search me, but I challenged them using the President's own words (Interview # 13c, June-July, 2006).

Lebanese President Emil Lahoud had announced a few weeks earlier that no one will be allowed to harass the press and promised to protect freedom of the press and freedom of speech in the country. The correspondent's challenge worked and the army ended up not searching the crew but they did arrest them for a short period. "We got out at 7:45pm and I was in the station at 8:10 and the tape went on air right away. We got calls from everywhere, from top officials. The story caused a lot of noise in the country (Interview # 13c, June-July, 2006).<sup>81</sup>

Furthermore, several anchors and talk show hosts complained that some politicians insisted on receiving the questions they will be asked on-air before agreeing to appear, but others didn't seem to care. Surprisingly, American politicians seemed to be notorious for that and not the local Lebanese politicians. According to one participant, a U.S. spokesperson from the State Department who commonly appears on Arabic stations once kept on asking about the questions, "but I didn't show him anything." So, she sent someone from the Embassy to inquire, "and I told her I don't have them with me now and was able to brush her off until the show was over." But the second time a State

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<sup>81</sup> This story sounds fascinating, but it does seem to be a bit exaggerated. I asked the correspondent about the tapes and if I can watch them. She first told me, they are not available at the station and that she has them at home. Then she told me her parents packed the tapes because she had to move to a different home. Finally, she told me not to ask her about them anymore, and that she can't get to them.

Department representative was on my show, “she basically had the list of questions for me and insisted that I ask them” (Interview # 6d & 1e, June-July, 2006).

Finally, a handful of participants conveyed their fear of field coverage in areas or among populations that may be hostile to their station’s politics. Some of the fears seemed a bit exaggerated and influenced by colleagues and the whole political situation. For instance, one participant was convinced that Syrian border personnel have the names of all journalists working at the station, and that they will arrest any of them if they enter Syria. But several other incidents did substantiate that fear, including one I personally experienced.

In one instant, a Future TV crew driving in a company car to reach a huge anti-government demonstration was attacked by a mob, and their car was ransacked, but no one was injured.<sup>82</sup> I was covering that same demonstration, and at one point a demonstrator approached me and threatened to break the camera if I don’t stop recording. I was taking a long shot of the encampments near downtown Beirut, and the demonstrator thought I wanted to take shots where only few people stood and later claim that the demonstration didn’t bring many people. Hezbollah’s ubiquitous security personnel stepped in and protected me, and the incident was quickly defused. There was a moment, however, when the demonstrator was clearly determined to attack. I later understood that Future TV itself was accused of spreading misguided information about the Hezbollah-led demonstrations. One sore point for Hezbollah supporters was when Future TV claimed that the Shiite Hezbollah supporters were “wearing orange” and posing as

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<sup>82</sup> Future TV also had other violent incidents, even before the assassination of its owner Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. In one incident, someone attacked the station with two B-7 grenade launchers but no one was injured. In addition, when I was interviewing Future TV journalists a bomb hidden in the garbage was found outside the station, but fortunately it did not detonate.

supporters of Christian leader Michel Aoun in order to exaggerate the Christian presence among the opposition movement (see chapter 10, section B, for details on this story). Regardless how accurate or false the claim was, the incident created a chain reaction among the public which instantly produced media-vigilantes frequently challenging journalists in the field and watching their moves. After that, journalists working for stations from one side of the divide didn't feel safe covering events organized by the opposite side.<sup>83</sup>

### C. "Red Lines"

The term "red lines" in Lebanon signifies a taboo or an issue that cannot be crossed, unless the person violating it is ready to deal with dire repercussions. In addition to the institution's political line, there are two red lines every Lebanese journalist learns about almost as soon as they start work: Syria and Saudi Arabia. As one assistant news director put it "we all know that we need to be careful when dealing with stories from Syria and Saudi Arabia... I and always check with the news director to be on the safe side. I tell him about the story, and he decides. That way, I give him the burden of responsibility" (Interview # 3d, June-July, 2006).

While Syria has become less of a red line after its troops withdrew from Lebanon in 2005, stories critical of Saudi Arabia remain a potent taboo today. This is not limited to Lebanon. There are many references in the literature about Saudi Arabia's influence on the Arabic media due to its investment in most private media groups in that region (e.g. Alterman, 1998; Boyd, 2001; Rugh, 2004).

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<sup>83</sup> Another incident was when Future TV constantly replayed the video of a Hezbollah supporter climbing a pole and replacing the Lebanese flag with a Hezbollah flag.



### ***Red line: Syria***

Syrian influence has been known, especially since the end of the civil war in 1990, but Syrian influence even at its peak had been constantly challenged and subverted by many Lebanese journalists, especially in print media. The Syrian intelligence apparatus dedicated a lot of resources to keeping the Lebanese media in control, including a team of observers in Ramleh el-Baydah area responsible for monitoring all media in Lebanon (Interview # 3a, May-June, 2006). They succeeded to a large extent, but despite their strong presence and tight political control, “Syrians were never able to fully control Lebanese media,” according to one senior media manager (Interview # 3a, May-June, 2006). Syrian officials have always complained about that matter, to the point that the suicide of Ghazi Kanaan—the Syrian Interior Minister and virtual ruler of Lebanon at the time—was blamed on the “pressure” the Lebanese news media put on him<sup>84</sup> (Biedermann, 2005; Ibrahim, 2005; Whitaker, 2005). Regardless the truthfulness of this claim, it highlights the pain and trouble Lebanese news media were to the Syrian government during that period.

But despite being constantly challenged, criticizing Syria between 1990 and 2005 was likely to get any journalist or media institution in trouble. Several participants did testify to that, but as mentioned before, Lebanese broadcast journalists tend to be more protected by their institutions than print journalists—only because they are seen as less autonomous than their peers in print. So, the backlash almost always hit the political patrons of the TV station and not the broadcast journalists themselves. From there, the journalists responsible for the problem were dealt with from inside the institution. One

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<sup>84</sup> In reference to the anti-Syria campaign launched by the Lebanese news media after the assassination of Rafik Hariri, Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Sharaa blamed the Lebanese media and said they pushed Kanaan to commit suicide.

reporter noted “we never got any calls directly from the Syrians but we hear that they used to call the [owner], who in turn dealt with us.” Another participant said the station’s owners “never put us in the front line, and they often didn’t even tell us that the Syrians called. They just give us directions” (Interview # 10c, June-July, 2006).

The one exception seems to be political show hosts who have more autonomy than the average broadcast journalist. The case of LBCI anchor and show host May Chidiac is one example. Her assassination attempt was blamed on Syrian intelligence but there has been no proof or official investigation outcome so far, and Syrian officials categorically deny the accusation.

After 2005, as the country was split into two camps, the media institutions followed suit. The Syrian “red line” almost disappeared, and those who used to constantly praise Syrian officials were now their staunchest critics. At some points, the negative rhetoric disseminated by anti-Syrian media reached alarming levels of racism and bigotry. The mudslinging even breached all traditional standards of decency, with politicians calling the Syrian president the most offensive names and slurs (See Chapter 11 for details on news content). Overall, stories critical of Syria became common place. One newscast producer described how stories related to Syria were treated before and after 2005.

Before the assassination of Rafik Hariri, if we had a story about Syria, we always go to the news director and inquire if we can run it. But there were things we avoided even asking about because we knew they created political controversy. For instance, the Syrians once imprisoned a Syrian opposition leader. In the past, we never wrote about that, but today we enthusiastically air it. Early in 2005, I

made sure to still ask if I should air these stories, and they always said yes. Later, it became automatic. Now, we no longer ask. We even assign those stories to reporters before going to the editorial meeting (Interview # 3d, June-July, 2006).

Another anchor and newscast producer echoed this idea and highlighted the narrow margin journalists had when it came to stories critical of Syria and its local allies. “Before, they withdrew from Lebanon, you couldn’t outright insult Hezbollah or the Syrians, but you could still get away with minor criticism...” (Interview # 6d & 1e, June-July, 2006). Today, this has changed and neither Syria nor its allies are immune. Even Hassan Nasrallah, the widely revered leader of Hezbollah, at one point was attacked by political opponents over the air and even mocked by an LBCI comedy show. The latter created a major stir among Hezbollah supporters, reminiscent of the controversy over the Danish cartoons of Prophet Mohammed, but on a local scale (Lebanese Press Highlights, 2006).

Several participants from a station opposed to Syria (today) mentioned a story about a colleague who got fired simply because she used archived video footage about a current story dealing with a car crash, which apparently was not allowed to be shown. When asked why, one participant simply said, “we were not supposed to use archived videos for stories from Syria—that would lead to catastrophes!” Another participant said, “I’m not sure. Maybe there were certain pictures or information that would threaten Syrian security. We were just not supposed to use it.” This reveals the power of the “red line,” which is not even to be questioned or understood, but simply avoided. The red line even had a systematic and clear guideline to deal with. The latter participant noted that “for any news story about Syria, we used to wait for SANA [Syrian Arab News Agency]

to publish something before we can write about it.” This kept the journalists and his institution on the safe side, since SANA is an official Syrian organization and any problems could be blamed on that organization.

If the earlier example caused the firing of a journalist, this one led to the imprisonment of a station’s CEO and major owner. A senior manager from New TV talked about a backlash by both the Lebanese government and Syrian intelligence officials running the country.

When the Syrians were here, New TV was the only station that used to criticize them. For example, we once ran an investigative report about the Bank al-Madina scandal.<sup>85</sup> Right after it broke out, we acquired internal documents about Lebanese and Syrian security officials who received bribes, and we ran the story. The transactions included Rustom Ghazali, head of Syrian intelligence in Lebanon.

Rustom Ghazali was a powerful figure in Lebanese politics, especially during the last few years preceding Syria’s withdrawal from Lebanon. The incident landed New TV’s CEO Tahseen Khayyat in jail. “He was accused of being an Israeli collaborator, which is unconscionable,” the senior manager said. “Just 24 hours later, it was clear that the accusation was a fabrication. They were hoping to break him, but it backfired because he became stronger and more critical.” The incident didn’t stop at imprisoning the CEO, however. According to several participants, Lebanese and Syrian security officials broke into the CEO’s house and confiscated the documents related to the Bank transactions. They also took his domestic servant, questioned her and shaved her hair. The CEO’s

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<sup>85</sup> For details the scandal, see (Administrator named for Lebanese bank accused of money laundering, 2003).

daughter also later found out that her passport was frozen, and the employment permit of a Sudanese anchor working at the station was revoked. The anchor had to leave the country but later returned when the problem was solved.

Apparently, New TV was the only TV station that seriously challenged Syrian hegemony during their tenure in Lebanon. Several similar incidents dealing with critical reports about Syrian officials had led to the closure of the station earlier. One senior New TV manager jokingly said “Rustom Ghazali was so distressed from New TV that he once came to the station with a huge convoy and said jokingly: ‘I am going to kill Tahseen Khayyat and then kill myself.’”

Surprisingly, New TV today is considered leaning towards the “pro-Syria” side in the country. But even the staunchest opponents of Syria today had never dared venture into such controversial topics, partly because they were Syria’s staunchest allies before 2005. In fact, most of their stations actively promoted the Syrian political line. This caused some confusion and among the newsroom personnel during the transition period. One producer noted “before 2005, we used to run all the good stories about Syria and its allies. They even used to tell us if Rustom Ghazali was at an event we covered, to make sure we include his picture in the story.... Now, we have to attack him and be critical of his allies.”

### ***Red Line: Saudi Arabia***

Apart from Syria, there is Saudi Arabia, which unlike the former, remains a current and unchallenged red line. Even hinting at criticizing Saudi Arabia could immediately cause someone to lose his job or even a station to be closed. Most participants, in fact, believed that dealing with Saudi Arabia was more sensitive than

dealing with Syria, even before 2005. There seemed to be no margin of freedom or any tolerance at all in this case, and there was no attempt to challenge this red line. In fact, several participants commented that problems regarding stories about Saudi Arabia were rare and they almost “never caused major damage because the lines were very clear in my head when it comes to that country” (Interview # 3d, June-July, 2006). This clarity is even more fascinating once we look into the systematic process journalists use to deal with stories about Saudi Arabia. One assistant news director summarized the process:

In the case of Saudi Arabia, we always prefer to get the news from its official source, like the King’s Counsel, or the foreign minister, or the interior minister, or the Saudi news agency.... If a story about Saudi comes in the wires and its source is a witness or another foreign newspaper, we prefer to get the story from Saudi officials, or at least get their opinion on it, and whether they can confirm it or not. Sometimes if it was an economic story about a big project in Saudi Arabia that doesn’t affect the image of that country negatively, we don’t need to look for official Saudi sources. There’s no problem in running it (Interview # 3d, June-July, 2006).

Another producer explained the systematic process at the more detailed level of running pictures related to Saudi. “If we receive videos about Saudi Arabia, we need to be very careful about them, except if they are from Arabia TV. Since that station is owned by Saudi Arabia, we will be on the safe side if we use it.” If the pictures don’t come from Saudi TV, however, the producer noted, “We wait for the Saudi interior ministry, or Saudi News Agency, or AFP stories that are attributed to official Saudi sources.” The producer made sure to add, “We don’t get into things that would create

problems with Saudi Arabia, especially if it was a security story” (Interview # 18c, June-July, 2006).

Not all stations were so systematic in dealing with stories about Saudi Arabia, but all of them learned one way or another about the consequences they will have to deal with in case they crossed this red line. For instance, one incident related to a political talk show episode about Saudi Arabia led to the closure of a whole station. A senior manager at New TV explained that the political show “Bila Rakeeb” (Without a Censor) once started airing a live episode about Saudi Arabia.

Suddenly, the Lebanese army broke into the station, occupied our offices and ordered us to stop the program. We refused to submit and asked for an explanation. They cited a passage in the law and said the program will damage relationships with a ‘brotherly’ state. We told them that they haven’t even seen the episode, and they are judging us based on intention not evidence (Interview # 10a, May-June, 2006).

New TV tried to go ahead with the live program, “but the army occupied every entrance and exit inside the building and forbade anyone from moving around. It was impossible to go on.” The station then negotiated with the army. “They asked us to sign an agreement that we will never run any program in the future about Saudi Arabia, but we rejected that proposal and agreed to the lesser deal that we cancel this specific episode for today only and retain the right to run it in the future.” In return, the army left the building and the station was allowed to continue with its business as usual, but only briefly. According to the same senior manager:

Later, the Prime Minister himself took a decision to cut our satellite transmission and only left the local transmission running, fearing that we may run the program again. It was an illegal decision, because he didn't discuss it with the Assembly of Ministers or the courts... and it didn't follow the legal protocols. We filed a petition with the Minister of Information and Telecommunications. Two days later, they allowed the Satellite transmission again (Interview # 10a, May-June, 2006).

This incident reflects the seriousness of meddling with Saudi Arabia. The same station that faced some trouble and annoyances after it ran a story critical of Syria was instantly shut down even before airing anything regarding Saudi Arabia. This comparison reveals the potency of Saudi's power.

To most participants, this whole ordeal was unacceptable and frustrating because there was no margin of freedom when it came to Saudi Arabia, and it was simply a taboo they had to live with. Other participants rationalized the situation and even accepted it. One political talk show producer noted, "We know that Saudi is going through a slow process of liberalization and democratization, and we are very careful when it comes to this issue (Interview # 81a, June-July, 2006). To others, the lines were not only rationalized but even internalized and common sense:

When we estimate that there is something that would make Saudi officials uncomfortable—for instance, if there was a story about human rights abuse in Saudi Arabia, we intuitively know that the institution can't deal with it, and we naturally avoid it (Interview # 3d, June-July, 2006).



Above all this caution, there is one thorny topic that no one dares to cross when it comes to Saudi: the ruling family. One political talk show producer from a station sympathetic to Saudi Arabia told a revealing story. “We once brought the liberals and the Islamists in Saudi to discuss local Saudi politics.” During the program, a member of the Saudi ruling family called and wanted to be on the show and they allowed him. The caller turned out to be critical of the ruling family, and “apparently that was a super red line—someone from within the ruling family revealing the dirty laundry.” Later the Saudis arrested a group of liberals, several of whom were on the show, and put pressure on the station to stop the program and fire the show host. The station’s CEO had to intervene. He convinced them that the program doesn’t have to be cancelled, and that the show host was only an anchor and was not responsible. He noted that there was a producer behind the show who is responsible for all the show. They requested the producer be fired, and he agreed. The CEO then “asked me to take my name off the program and lay low for a few months, and that’s how it was solved” (Interview # 81a, June-July, 2006).

The sensitivity of this topic is not restricted to Saudi Arabia’s political allies and business partners in Lebanon. In fact, even the Sunni Muslim kingdom’s staunchest political and ideological opponents seem to avoid criticizing it. Hezbollah’s multi-media apparatus rarely publishes news critical of Saudi. Even during the summer 2006 war between the Shiite Muslim group and Israel, when Saudi seemed to side with Israel and criticize Hezbollah’s “recklessness” and “adventurism,” the political party responded politely and diplomatically (see details in chapter 10).

On the side, in addition to avoiding critical stories about Saudi Arabia, Lebanese media—and to a large extent Arabic media—seem to never have a shortage of stories

coming from that kingdom. Oftentimes, these are banal reports about routine activities of a Saudi royal family figure or ambassador. In addition, many participants in this study listed Saudi Arabia as third on their non-local news priority list, followed by Palestine and Iraq (See Chapter 9, Part A, for details on newsworthiness). Sometimes, the stories were economic or business reports from the kingdom that have nothing to do with the Lebanese stations' audiences. One newscast producer gave an example:

There was once a launching of a big project in Saudi Arabia that we did not run. We considered it an economic story, and we usually only run economic stories that affect Lebanese politics and society. Immediately after the show, the news director contacted us and told us we need to look for that story and run it in the next newscast (Interview # 3d, June-July, 2006).

This seems to highlight the effect of Saudi spending on Arabic media and Saudi's huge and lucrative advertising market—the lifeline of broadcast journalism. In addition, it provides strong evidence about the effect of business alliances and partnerships between Saudi interests and Lebanese Media. Surprisingly, LBCI, the rightwing Christian channel seems to be excelling at striking alliances with the Saudis. In fact, a senior executive said 80 percent of the revenues for the Satellite news operation (LBC SAT) comes from the Saudi advertising market. In addition, one of LBCI's current projects is to expand their Satellite newscast operations to include newscast and talk shows that focus exclusively on local Saudi news. In fact, some Saudi nationals are already training at the station to host those shows in near the future.

***Red Line: Other***

Aside from Syria and Saudi Arabia, it is important to quickly visit the issue of red lines when it comes to local Lebanese politicians: There are none. The only prohibitions are related to religious figures, but that is a legal matter and is often violated with little or no repercussions. To be sure, each media institution has its own protected politicians who are not to be criticized. It starts with the owners of the station and extends to the allies and cronies—who sometimes fall from grace or shift sides.

Finally, it is important to note that all the examples given above that related to challenging or violating “red lines” have two characteristics: they were either done by mistake, as in the case of the Saudi royal family member, or they were intentionally implemented by the TV institution and not the individual broadcast journalist. The latter is more important since it reveals that any challenge not supported by the institution would probably have caused the expulsion of the individual journalist. Unfortunately, those fired journalists—if they exist at all—were not included in the study and, therefore, their stories were untold.

#### **D. Conclusion to Chapter 6**

##### ***Relationships***

Three matters were revealed when journalists were asked about their perception of the nature of their relationships with politicians. First, most broadcast journalists were not naïve about the nature of that relationship but thought politicians cannot influence their work negatively. Most participants actually believed that the relationship is vital for their careers and professional success. A handful of participants rejected the morality of the relationships with politicians and noted that they create a conflict of interest. Some of

those, however, had other powerful familial relationships which they did not perceive as “political.” Second, most journalists conveyed frustration with politicians’ lack of understanding of their line of work. Most complained that politicians do not appreciate the time constraints and have no idea about the process of their craft. This sentiment reflected the rather crude manner in which politicians deal with journalists. Finally, conversations with participants revealed that relationship with politicians, in fact, have a slight influence on their work, but that influence does not override the institutional pressures on the journalist.

### ***Pressures***

When it came to external pressures, threats and appeasement tactics politicians and non-politicians employ against journalists, the most important finding was that broadcast journalists, especially those not in senior positions, are less exposed to political pressure and violence than their peers in other news media. Pressures in TV news are mostly applied to the top of the hierarchy and to senior personnel, who then relay the messages to junior journalists. This is not true in print journalism in Lebanon where the individual journalist seems to have more autonomy from the institution. Nevertheless, several participants did discuss certain tactics politicians used. Those included appeasements that in some cases amounted to bribes, threats to boycott or ostracize from certain venues, and outright attacks by their followers. In most cases, those tactics seemed to work on the handful of journalist who faced them, but in the big picture, the TV institution protected the majority of its personnel and handled the brunt of those pressures.

### ***Red Lines***

Journalists in Lebanon were very aware of the “red lines” they cannot cross, and were even more aware of the repercussions they will have to face if they attempt to challenge them. Before 2005, Syria used to be a strong red line, but it lost its power after the Syrians withdrew, although that red line was almost constantly challenged by some media institutions in Lebanon even before 2005. Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, remained a potent red line that has always been more powerful than the Syrian red line. The most important conclusion from this section is that journalists challenge those red lines only when their institutions’ political line demands so.

## **Chapter 7: The News Department**

Among all news media operations, television news certainly requires the biggest team effort, the most complex machinery and organizational processes, and the fastest and most efficient application. Unlike newspapers and radio, for instance, TV has to deal with text, picture and sound simultaneously. It requires professionals dedicated to each of these three basic elements of the final product. But that only touches the surface, and doesn't address the complex and expensive machinery, the severe deadline pressures and the enormous amount of uncertainty in the production process of broadcast news.

This section is dividing into two sections. The first analyzes the roles of news department employees, including division of labor, employee tasks, work routines and the production process. The second focuses on the instruments, tools and equipment that make their work possible, especially in regards to controlling the message.

### **A. The News Department Hierarchy: Generals, Lieutenants and Foot Soldiers**

To understand how TV institutions shape and mold news stories, it is important to delve into the details of the newscast production process, more specifically the roles and tasks of each person working on the newscast. The goal of this chapter is not to reproduce the many handbooks about the roles of broadcast journalists, but to pinpoint the main human and organizational influences on the final product. This chapter is a continuation of chapters six and seven, which respectively focused on the institutional and external pressures that shape the Lebanese TV journalist's behavior and output.

Most news departments in mid to large U.S. markets are divided into two sections, the technical and the editorial. The technical team in general is responsible for the creative production of the newscast, including running cameras, lighting, sound, tape editing, mixing up the final product and airing it. The editorial section, on the other hand, deals with the gathering, editing and sorting of content and includes, the reporters, anchors, producers, and senior and executive producers. The news director heads both divisions, which make up the news department.<sup>86</sup>

In Lebanon, the roles of news department employees are slightly different, but generally follow the same functionality. One interesting difference is in the titles. Most TV news department personnel in Lebanon use the same titles used in print journalism. This reflects how most broadcast journalists in Lebanon were educated and trained in print journalism or used to work for newspapers.

Another difference is the micromanagement of news by the news director. In the U.S., news directors take on more management roles and usually don't interfere with the details of content and news editing, but focus on management decisions and strategic planning.<sup>87</sup> In Lebanon, as we shall see, the news director constantly interferes with and supervises news content. This point highlights the importance of this position and merits that we start with it.<sup>88</sup>

### ***The Generals: The News Directors***

The news director (ND) is the focal point of the news operation in Lebanon and is commonly known as the “political director” or “political supervisor” of the newscast. In

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<sup>86</sup> In smaller stations, the division of labor is not so pronounced. For instance, a reporter could also take on the role of photographer and tape editor, which blurs the line between technical and editorial.

<sup>87</sup> See (Adams and Marjorie, 1987).

<sup>88</sup> In one case the assistant news director whose title is usually editor-in-chief (Ra'ees Tahreer).

this section we discuss in detail the main tasks of the Lebanese news directors, their relationships with both their superiors and subordinates, and the variations in their management styles.

We start with the general questions: What is the role of the Lebanese ND? One news director from a major station simply answered: “Everything.” He added:

We contextualize the newscast. We choose the stories and even pick the sound bites. We allocate reporters to stories, check and approve their work, and even sometimes anchor the newscast.... In Lebanon, the news director’s role is different from America and Europe. Here we have to be in touch with all the details because of many issues: the politics of the country, the lack of professional journalists and the reliance on foreign professionals, values and standards (Interview # 80a, June-July, 2006).

The same news director expanded on the last three points, saying, first, “every news story in this country is politicized, no matter how apolitical the issue.” By politicized, the news director meant each story had some underlying connotations about religious, sectarian, regional, familial or tribal ties. “Even if you write about garbage dumpsters, someone will protest: Why was the story in a Christian region, or a Muslim region? Or why are you attacking this Za’im or that politician?” He added, “If you write a report about two political rivals—Michel Aoun and Samir Geagea, for instance—and give one figure a longer sound bite, someone will protest.” He explained that this makes the news content highly “explosive” if it wasn’t handled carefully.

Second, the ND complained that news operations are hardly pressed to find qualified journalists with a high sensitivity and the ability to balance the issues and take



into consideration all the risks. He explained that the situation before the Syrians left was actually easier, since “there was only one Rustum Ghazali and there were some people not allowed to go on air. Today the situation is more complex with a dozen Rustum Ghazalis in control.”<sup>89</sup> The news director also complained that universities in Lebanon are not doing the best job in educating journalists. “They are spitting out journalists who belong to this political and cultural landscape but are not sensitive to these complex issues.”

Finally, he said Lebanese broadcast institutions rely on foreign consultants to train their journalists, “but those consultants come from different norms that don’t work in this culture. Television news is not an indigenous Arabic profession. It is a Western product that is trying to find an appropriate shape for itself in the Arabic world.” So, in order to secure a news product that fits the Lebanese “norms,” the ND concluded that micromanagement of the newsroom was the only solution.

The same news director even saw himself engaging in the technical side of news production. He attributed that to the nature of Television news:

In TV news, editorial and technical aspects are not separated. The pictures, the sounds and the words make up the message, and it is my job to be able to produce the right message by directing and supervising the detailed process of creating this complex product (Interview # 80a, June-July, 2006).

While not all news directors agreed with this explanation, all of them actually did micromanage but with slightly varying degrees. In one case, an Assistant News Director or the Editor in Chief, as he is commonly referred to, took on the editorial tasks and left the news director to worry about the management tasks. This was true in only one station

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<sup>89</sup> Rustum Ghazali was head of Syrian intelligence in Lebanon between 2002 and 2005.

in Lebanon where the news director was still newly hired. Participants from that station who were contacted later noted that the news director was taking on more editorial tasks. In this chapter, the news director and the editor in chief are both referred to as the ND.

The difference between one ND and another in management style is not merely a matter of personal preference but is directly related to the institutional structure and the quality of the technology available (this will become clearer in the next section).

Regardless the variations in tasks and management styles, however, there is one thing clear: the news director has his fingerprints engraved on every bit of the newscast.

### ***The News Director and His Superiors:***

Only one person can supersede the ND in Lebanon: the CEO himself.<sup>90</sup> But the CEO does not have time to interfere with the details of the newscast production. There is no doubt, however, that the ND is in constant touch with the CEO. In fact, several news directors confirmed that constant connection and noted they coordinate and discuss big and small issues with the CEO on a daily basis. One news director's comments reveal how much the CEO interferes in the newscast:

We are always in contact by phone. He usually calls me regarding Arabic and international issues. For instance, he called me today and suggested we run a story about Jewish fundamentalism. We only hear about Muslim fundamentalism, but fundamentalism is not unique to one religion.... Yesterday, he suggested we run a story about the Islamic Courts in Somalia. Every day, for the past two weeks, Al-Jazeera has been starting its newscasts with the Islamic courts in Somalia and no

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<sup>90</sup> This applies to all stations except TL, which is directly linked to the Ministry of Information, and therefore, the CEO here is the Minister instead of the TL's general manager.

one explains who those people are and how they came to be. So, he suggested we run an in-depth report on the issue (Interview # 14a, June-July, 2006).

The same news director noted that the board of trustees does not interfere with the daily work of the newsroom, but “the CEO does supervise us politically.” This fact has already been established in chapter four—where most members of the board of directors were there only to back the decisions of Chairman, who is almost always the same person as the CEO and sometimes even the majority stake owner. In addition, all the news directors interviewed said the CEO does not write anything in the newscast. One ND added, “the CEO watches the newscast and gives us feedback, sometimes about a report that was too long, or if we were too heavy on local news...”

Several news directors also confided that they don’t always see eye to eye with the CEO, but only on technical and not on political issues. “I sometimes disagree with him about the order of stories,” one ND noted. “I think that local news should go first. He thinks that local and international news should be mixed” (Interview # 14a, June-July, 2006). In addition, some news directors also noted that they engage in putting the political line of the station along with the CEO. These two points suggest that the news director is not simply an employee who runs the production machine, but rather a partner and political crony. This conclusion is corroborated by the fact that every news director interviewed had strong present and past political ties with the station’s establishment.

The relationship between a news organizations management and editorial personnel has not been widely studied, and we often take for granted the mythical “wall” that separates business and top management from news department staff.

Even inquiries into the influence of owners on the news have been rare, mostly because it is extremely difficult to trace that influence. According to Daniel Chomsky (2006), “Owners usually deny that they intervene in news decisions. Editors and reporters insist that they act autonomously.” (p. 2). But his study of memos between Arthur Hays Sulzberger, a former owner and publisher of the New York Times, and its news editor Turner Catledge showed that “the publisher frequently intervened in news decisions, and the editor usually tried to satisfy the owner’s demands” (p. 1). The owners even exerted influence that remained invisible to reporters and other newsroom personnel (Chomsky, 2006). In addition, the well known stories of Rupert Murdoch’s interference in editorial decisions—the most popular was his intervention to stop publication of a book critical of Chinese leaders—makes one suspect that these kinds of interferences are common and routine rather than anomalous (BBC News, 1998; Wallen, 1998).

In this study, we are satisfied with what has been discussed so far to confirm the strong relationship between the CEO and the News Director, and more importantly, the constant interference of the CEO in the ND’s work. But this only covers one side of the story. The more interesting link in the hierarchy is that between the ND and his subordinates.

### ***The News Director and His Subordinates:***

To begin, there are several tasks linked to the news director’s daily work routine. It first starts with planning the news agenda and allocating resources for future coverage. News directors are responsible for allocating future tasks based on planned events that are usually faxed to them in advance. While producers sometimes handle these tasks, the final word to which events will be covered and how much resources are allocated to them

go back to the news director. The ND could decide to ignore an event or simply run a copy story for it based on the fax they received. Alternatively, he can send a cameraperson or a full camera crew with a star reporter and live coverage capabilities.

Second, the news director heads and directs the editorial meeting. Although those meetings are designed to bring in all the staff and have them discuss the latest issues and suggest stories, there is no doubt about who has the final word here. Several editorial meetings observed confirm that no real debate takes place there. Reporters and producers “suggest” stories and some might even have the courage to bring up controversial issues, but in the end the ND sets the agenda, opens the discussion to certain matters and limits others. Most importantly, the ND has the final word in how to deal with each topic. In one incident, for example, a reporter raised the issue of a politician who comes into the news room and chooses his own sound bites and dictates them to the staff. The news director, obviously uneasy about the topic, said that he is surprised to hear about it, and then told the reporter “I wish you had told me about this before the meeting,” in a clear signal that the subject should not have been raised in front of an outsider (the researcher) or in front of all the staff. The news director then promised that this practice will stop. Several other participants noted that they try to raise some controversial issues in the news meeting, but they make sure to present them diplomatically to avoid any backlash. One participant said “I sometimes suggest stories in the news meeting, but I know they will not take them into consideration.” On example she gave was unemployment in Lebanon. “That is a huge issue, but it will land on deaf ears in this station because it is allied to the government, which is consequently responsible for the unemployment

problem. So, running this story will embarrass them.” These points remove any doubt on who sets the meeting agenda and who controls it.

Third, while the reporter is the main person handling the nuts and bolts of a story from inception to air, she does not start working on a story from scratch—figuratively and literally. One of the most powerful influences on how a reporter’s story comes out is the news director’s framing of that story before it is even covered. We will use the term “pre-framing” in this study to differentiate it from the well know concept of “framing” in media studies.<sup>91</sup> When asked about the first steps he takes to cover a story, one reporter explained while drawing a square frame with his hands: “First, the news director gives you the framework of the story before you start covering it.” He then gave an example to illustrate the pre-framing process.

A while ago, [a prominent politician] protested the government’s move to eliminate the Constitution Council, which was appointed when Syria ruled Lebanon. Three years ago that same politician was against that same Constitutional Council and delivered several speeches criticizing it. So, the news director saw that we need to dig up some stories to shed a light on that historic fact. They appointed me to the story and gave me the broad framework. So, I searched for his past speeches and found some statements contradicting his present stance. I also conducted interviews with people related to the story, most important of which is a former ally of that same politician who had lost the election based on the decision of the Constitutional Council....

Had the reporter not been given the “broad framework,” he would have written it in a very different way that would not have suggested hypocrisy on behalf of that

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<sup>91</sup> For details on the concept of framing see Entman (1993) and Goffman (1974).

politician, according to the participant. This pre-framing of stories by the news director was reiterated by almost all reporters. Some were skeptical about it, seeing the news director's actions intentional editorializing and biasing of the news. Others viewed it as an essential step in producing a well informed report, since the news director by default is the most informed and knowledgeable person, even when this meant contradicting what a reporter saw in the field (See Chapter 6 for specific examples).

Next, one of the news directors tasks is the checking and approving of stories after they are written by reporters. This important task is revisited several times below and call post-checking. The practice of pre-framing and post-checking create a potent and efficient tool for effective control of the message, as we will below.

Finally, the news director is responsible for writing a unique and important element of Lebanese newscast: the newscast introduction. This is an editorial introduction to the newscast that is extensively analyzed in Chapter 11.

### ***Variations in Management Styles***

While these five main tasks are constant across all stations, there are some variations in different news directors' management styles. Each news director seems to set the mood and culture of the newsroom with their style of management, starting with their accessibility to newsroom employees, their willingness to negotiate with them, their tolerance of opposing ideas and their level of interaction with them.

On one side of the spectrum, there is the news director of TL, who is mostly invisible and highly inaccessible to most newsroom employees. His office is isolated

from the rest of the newsroom and his door is always closed. Anyone seeking access has to knock and wait at the door and often turn away after no one had answered, that includes senior managers in the newsroom. A handful of employees, however, had constant access to him and entered his office without even knocking. Those few employees virtually rule the newsroom in his name. But the members of his closed circle are not necessarily top editors or producers. In fact, one of the most influential people in TL's newsroom is the news director's secretary, who seems to meddle in everything and anything. His job seems more like an enforcer of the ND's will than an executer of his directions. TL's news director is surrounded by an aura of fear and reverence, and no one dared dispute his orders openly, though many criticized him privately. This invisible-dictator style has created a tense culture in the newsroom, where people close to the news director use his name to achieve what they want. This is partly due to the narrow and limited editorial meetings, where most reporters and even some senior editors and producers are not invited. One senior editor frustratingly commented "they avoid us in the meeting and don't invite reporters. Only the newscast producer is invited." He added, "That way the news director deals only with the producer, and the producer has more leverage in dealing with the reporters since they were not in the meeting and don't know what was said" (Interview # 7c & 8c, June-July, 2006).

A case in point here is a quarrel that broke out between a producer and a reporter. The reporter was yelling "why is it that only my story is always monitored closely?" The producer responded that the ND told her not to put the sound bite she had chosen where a local politician called the Lebanese president "a president of the Shiites." This style of management seemed to be partly imposed by the highly diverse and politically



heterogeneous body of employees that would have been ideologically allied to the news director in other stations. It is also affected by the lack of advanced technology at TL that would have allowed the news director to more effectively monitor his employees' work, as we will see in the next section. So, the ND resorts to a reign of fear with little tolerance for mistakes and very narrow margins of freedom, which keep most newsroom employees in line. To be sure, the manner in which the news director treats his subordinates reflects the way he is treated by his superiors, chiefly the Minister of Information. According to one participant, "the newsroom receives angry calls from the minister of information's office very often. I think that's why the ND and the editors are very cautious and don't let anything that might cause them trouble fall through the cracks."

In the middle of that spectrum lies LBCI and Future TV's news directors who are more accessible to their employees but at the same time maintain that aura of reverence and semi-invisibility. The latter is due to the highly advanced technology they use in their newsroom, which precludes the need to interact with any employees on a minute by minute basis. Newsroom employees know that everything they write or produce is instantly accessible and potentially monitored by the news director—and even the CEO in some cases (See next section for details on newsroom technology). At these stations, the ND's offices are close to the newsroom and their doors are often open and reporters can go in and out at any time. In addition, there is some tolerance and openness practiced by those news directors, as witnessed in their editorial meetings where reporters openly discuss different opinions, albeit with a lot of caution, and suggest stories that may not be fully in line with the station's policy. Most reporters, however, know that in the end the

news director will get his way in running the stories he wants. Most of them even admit that they are very diplomatic in presenting stories they deem problematic, to avoid any backlash against them. Nevertheless, the mere existence of an opportunity to voice opinion and bring new ideas to the table widens the margin of tolerance and freedom in those newsrooms. One thing to add here is that relative tolerance and openness may be due to the highly homogenous body of employees, especially at LBCI, who tend to subscribe to the same political line as the station. That is not to say there is no diversity in those newsrooms, especially for Future TV.

The difference between those two stations and TL is that the latter's news director is politically appointed by the government, while the former are appointed by the owners and political patrons of the station. For TL, this means the institution's political line, and consequently the news director's politics, change depending on changes in government, while the staff remain the same. In Future TV and LBCI, both the news director and the staff remain constant, but external political pressures may change, especially in the case of LBCI after the Syrian withdrawal. For TL, that means whenever a change in political line occurs, the newsroom hierarchy is reshuffled and those closer to the dominant political line become the inner circle of the news director, while those opposing the political line lose power and become marginalized. This fact was reiterated by several TL employees, and one senior reported elaborated:

The job title is not always a good indicator of the real role and the power of a person. For example, there is a person in the newsroom whose title has nothing to do with journalism, and he doesn't even have a college degree. The news director, however, gives him a much bigger role and more privileges than what his title

gives him. Although he's not a journalist, he interferes with putting the newscast together and often tries to allocate favorable stories and work schedules to certain people (Interview # 7c & 8c, June-July, 2006).

While TL's management style generates a somewhat tightly controlled newsroom, it negatively affects the output due to a culture that generates cautious and fearful journalists either seeking to please their superiors or trying to avoid their wrath. The result is a newscast unmistakably identified with the government and full of dry official reports with little diversity. The reporters and producers have no incentive to be creative or excel at their work and that is certainly reflected in TL's newscast. Of course, the lack of resources plays a big role in the failure of that newscast to attract a loyal audience.

A more effective tight control of the newsroom is achieved by the management styles of LBCI and Future TV's news directors. However, the newscast is more vibrant and has a higher degree of diversity. But that diversity and openness is often only a veil and reflects a smart way of presenting oneself as objective and open, while the bulk of the newscast strictly serves a specific political line, as we shall see in Chapter 11.

On the other side of the spectrum falls New TV's news director, who seems to spend most of her time in the producer's office or roaming around the newsroom interacting with reporters constantly. She rarely uses her office and is extremely tolerant of different opinions to the point that reporters often negotiate their stories and often spend time arguing over them. In one instance, the reporter was arguing for the inclusion of a "juicy story" related to how hospitals are handled. The news director disagreed and decided not to run it, but there was a lot of give and take before that decision was reached. First, the news director told the reporter the story had run too many times, and it

seemed to serve a certain politician. She then questioned the use of an anonymous source asking, “who is that ‘political leader’ you mention?” The reporter confided he did not know the identity of the anonymous source but added that the politician behind the story promised him a scoop. The news director replied “do you really think Michel Murr is going to give you the story? Last time, he preferred to go with a press conference. She added, “You keep on telling me you have a juicy story, and we give you the time, but this story has been given more exposure than it deserves.” The reporter then told her that there is a government investigation into these practices. She replied “every week there is an investigation into this. It’s a beaten up story...” A few minutes after the reporter left, the news director went up to him and handed him a different story saying “here’s the juiciest story of the day. Do you want to do it?” The reporter nodded in satisfaction.

This is probably one of the most open and democratic newsrooms in the region, with enormous amounts of tolerance and dialogue between reporters and editors. While the news director here also has the final say, her opinions are sometimes openly contested and challenged. According to the news director herself, this policy minimizes mistakes and allows for various unnoticed ideas to be communicated.

I don’t claim to be always right. So, I follow a “consultative council”<sup>92</sup> approach and take as many opinions as possible from reporters and producers. Sometimes, there are some political matters I am convinced about, and I stick to them regardless, but sometimes a reporter convinces me otherwise (Interview # 14a, June-July, 2006).

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<sup>92</sup> The Majlis al-Shura, or Consultative Council, is a traditional Muslim concept reflecting the accessible leader who consults with his citizens.

Furthermore, this style of management trickles down the chain of command and sets a highly tolerant and flexible newsroom culture. This is evident in the flexibility news crews have in independently taking initiative in the field, rather than waiting for a command from the top, as in the other stations. One excellent example is the coverage of a chain of political assassinations which started with the killing of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri February 14, 2005. Although New TV is among the smallest, poorest, most ill-equipped news operations in Lebanon, it managed to offer arguably the best coverage of those events. For sure, New TV was first at the scene of several assassinations. The station's news director shared the compelling story:

When Hariri was assassinated, one of our cameramen was covering a parliamentary event... when suddenly the building shook and an explosion was heard... Immediately, the cameraman unbuckled the camera off the tripod and ran outside, jumped behind a motorcyclist that happened to be passing by and told him to follow the smoke plumes. He kept the tape running all the way and was at the sight of the explosion just four minutes after it happened. He was the only camera on the ground and we got the first videos. Every station in Lebanon and the Arabic world took the video from us.... Our rejection of strict laws and constraints is what gives our teams that flexibility and initiative to cover what they think is the most important event of the day. Other crews have to wait for orders to be sent from their superiors, or they have to call first and get permission to stop what they are doing and move to the next story, but by the time they get the OK, the most critical moments are lost. And that's exactly what happened with the other TV crews the day Hariri was assassinated. Some of them sat there

as usual doing nothing because that was their assignment and they have a specific and strict culture of fulfilling their assignment (Interview # 14a, June-July, 2006).

Of course, there was a down side to this flexibility. As the news director confided, “sometimes there could be a disagreement between the reporter and photographer, and sometimes the crew misjudges.” This brand of openness and tolerance also comes at a cost: inefficiency in the news operation, which is further exacerbated by the lack of advanced newsroom tools and equipment, as we shall see in the next section.

Nevertheless, it produces the richest and most diverse newscast that truly covers various views and criticizes various sides, without being openly a propaganda machine for one political side, as will become apparent in chapter 10. Of course, this diversity, balance and openness are relative to other stations in Lebanon and do not exclude an intentional political line and direction. But, as mentioned earlier, this openness is partly due to the fact that the former patron of the station, the communist party, only nominally exists in Lebanon and the actual owners don’t have political positions in government. So, the station can afford to criticize every political side, since they are not committed to any.

### ***The Institutional instrument of Pre-framing and Post-checking the News Story***

In sum, the news director is the ruler of the news department. He is the political supervisor and only the CEO or the owners of the station supercede him. The news director is in direct and constant contact with his superiors and closely manages every aspect of the newscast, regardless of management style. This is why we compared the News Directors to Generals in the army. Two of the news director’s most important daily tasks are *pre-framing* and *post-checking* news stories created by reporters. The potency of these tools will become more apparent in the next few sections.

### ***The Lieutenants: Newscast Producers***

The second most influential person in the news department (aside from the assistant news director) is the newscast producer. Some newsrooms have senior and executive producers to differentiate them from the regular producers, but in general their tasks are the same in the Lebanese newsroom. They are mainly responsible for absorbing the enormous amount of information coming from the outside—through the wires, correspondents, other newscast, etc. The producer then is responsible for prioritizing and categorizing those stories before presenting them to the news director, who ultimately decides the final order and therefore importance of each story, and whether it will be covered or not. While in some cases the producer writes some stories, she is mainly responsible for managing the newscast and making sure everyone is doing the work on time, starting with the correspondents in the field and ending with the tape editors and technical team in the studio.<sup>93</sup>

Producers in Lebanon can be divided into two kinds, depending on their tasks and privileges. On one hand, there are producers whose role is mostly technical and managerial. Their responsibility is basically to execute the news director's decisions when it comes to putting together the newscast rundown, allocating stories and following up with reporters and technical teams until the newscast is completed. Their editorial work is limited to assembling and prioritizing the daily news and calendars and presenting them to the news director. On the other hand, there are the producers who overlook both the technical and content/editorial parts of the newscast. In addition to the

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<sup>93</sup> In large operations an assignment desk editor helps the producer in this task.

technical tasks mentioned above, they also have privileges to edit content, write scripts and even approve stories written by reporters.

Regardless the type, however, almost every producer interviewed described the details of the daily work in a similar way. It starts with assembling news and ends with monitoring the newscast execution. Since the work of the first type of producer (technical) is covered by the second type (technical/editorial), the following analysis will deal with the latter. We will start by detailing the daily tasks of the producer and focus on his relationship with her superior (the news director) and her subordinates.

First, after taking over from the prior shift, the newscast producer spends time updating herself with the latest and most important news of the day by reading newspapers, faxes, wires, watching the last three newscast, and getting debriefed from the producer of the prior shift.<sup>94</sup> She then assembles a rough rundown for the newscast according to the newsworthiness of the story (See chapter 10 for details on newsworthiness).

Second, the producer meets with the news director, usually in a separate editorial meeting not open to all newsroom staff. In the meeting, the producer presents the important stories of the day from the rough rundown she had prepared. Based on the news director's instructions, she then reorders the newscast rundown, specifies the format for each story<sup>95</sup> and allocates the stories to reporters.

In some cases, the producer allocates stories to the reporters without much interference from the news director. When asked about the criteria they follow to allocate stories to reporters, producers had roughly three kinds of responses. The majority of

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<sup>94</sup> See Chapter 10 for details on news sources.

<sup>95</sup> See chapter 10 for different formats of TV news stories, which include voice over, sound byte, package, etc.



producers allocate stories according to the reporter's expertise with a certain subject. On producer explained, "I try to fit each reporter with the appropriate story depending on their skills and knowledge of the subject." She added, "Some reporters can deal with certain images and social matters and can project them in a much better way. Others have a better understanding of complex political issues. So my job is to match each reporter with the stories they do best" (Interview # 2c, June-July, 2006). Some producers allocated stories according to their importance and to the reporter's experience. "The more important the story, the more likely it will go to an experienced reporter, especially if there's a tight deadline or the story is politically sensitive." The assumption, of course, is the more experienced the reporter, the more they understand the station's political line. A handful of producers said they allocate the stories either randomly or according to the preference of the reporter. "Each reporter has his own preference, and I know who prefers what kind of story," one producer said. Furthermore, in at least one station, a handful of reporters complained that producers allocated stories based on religion and political allegiance. A senior reporter complained:

When a producer is assigned to put together a rundown for the newscast, if that person was Christian, for example, she would appoint Christian reporters to the most important stories. The rest are given to Muslim reporters, and many reporters even do nothing or very little work that day. I sometimes only work two out of my nine-hour shift because of this mentality (Interview # 7c & 8c, June-July, 2006).

Regardless the criteria used to allocate stories, the privilege of making that decision creates for the producer substantial resources of power that influence the overall

actions of the reporters since they tend to seek the “big” or “juicy” story. In other words, a reporter who wants to advance in her work and cover big stories that will make her more famous and prominent is dependent on the producer’s decisions to allocate stories. This creates a superior-subordinate relationship between the producer and the reporter. Of course, not all reporters have the same stature and this relationship is altered sometimes; the more experienced and prominent the reporter, the less influence he has from the producer.

In addition to allocating stories to reporters, some producers get to decide what type of news report the story will be—of course, after consultation with the news director about the important stories, which almost always tend to be full packages.<sup>96</sup> This adds to the power of the producer by being able to upgrade or downgrade the importance of certain stories. This could occur before or after the reporter works on a story. In other words, a reporter could be punished by a producer by simply having his hard work on a news package downgraded to a voice over, something that several reporters complained about. This applies to stories that the producer initiated or decided to add in the rundown, but not all stories are initiated by the producer and certainly not all story formats are clear from the start. Sometimes the content and value of a story is not clear, and the story format cannot be designated beforehand. This occurs mostly with when the sequence of events reach the reporter before they reach the producer, like breaking news, stories initiated by reporters, and scheduled events covered by reporters in the field and relayed later to producers. The producer here has to work with the reporter who is covering the story as it unfolds to decide on the matter. So, for instance, the reporter contacts the

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<sup>96</sup> See chapter 10 for different formats of TV news stories, which include voice over, sound byte, package, etc.

producer from the field to explain the facts of the story, and the producer decides, based on that information. Although the sequence of events here works in the favor of the reporter, producers tend to put extra effort in dealing with these stories. They even tend to control what video and sound bites are included in the report. To illustrate a specific case, some interviews or press conferences are usually allocated to reporters beforehand. In those cases, according to one producer, the following happens:

The reporter transcribes the tape and tells us what the speech was about. We then decide together what sound bites we want to include from that speech. Then, the reporter writes the story and brings the script to us for approval. Then the reporter works with the tape editor to record her voice and add video segments (Interview # 7b, June-July, 2006).

Several reporters complained about this policy which often leaves them transcribing long speeches and news conferences for hours only so that the producer or the news director can quickly go through the transcript and pick a sound bite or two. This systematic process, no doubt, keeps the reporter in-check and prevents him from independently framing the story by taking advantage of his exclusive knowledge of the events.

Third, after allocating stories to reporters and finalizing the rundown, the producer is responsible for checking and correcting (post-checking) the less important story scripts, which were written by the reporters. The important stories are usually left to the news director, unless it is one of the less important newscasts, for example, the morning or noon newscast. In that case, the producer corrects and checks every story. To be sure, the reporter has to show his story script to a superior and get the green light

before proceeding to the next step of transferring the written script into a TV news report. This step will be discussed in the section that follows.

Fourth, whether they were responsible for checking the script or not, some producers have to also view and check the reporter's edited and finalized video report before it goes on air. One producer noted, however, that over time this step became unnecessary, especially with experienced journalists. One producer noted:

When I started working here, I used to watch every single tape before it was sent to the studio, but over time—as reporters became more competent, I no longer had to watch them. All of the reporters are professionals now, and they know their tasks. They rarely make any mistakes (Interview # 1d, June-July, 2006).

As in the case of the monitors in the programming department (discussed in chapter six), new reporters were not trusted with the final product even though their stories were pre-framed and post-checked. Their final product was checked for a third time to insure no error or deviance. As the producer becomes more confident about their work and understanding of the institutions political line, she eliminates the third check-point. After a while, most experienced reporters send their tapes straight to the operations department, which only checks them for picture and sound quality, and readies them for airing.

Fifth, there are several small but important tasks for the producer after allocation of stories. Some producers write the introductions to news packages, others only check it after the reporter writes it. A few producers even write the introduction to the less important newscasts, but never for the main evening newscast. That is strictly left to the news director. But even when producers write the newscast introduction, they don't write

it the same way as the news director. For one, they do not include any political commentary, only a brief summary of the top stories. In the rare instances where they had to add some political commentary, the producers confirmed that they called the news director at home and read the introduction word for word before allowing it to go on air.

Furthermore, other tasks producers are responsible for include following up on reports and making sure they are finished on time. They also follow the development of important stories and keep an eye out for breaking news. If there was a major change in news that merited a change in the newscast rundown, some producers are responsible for that. However, those changes are only made technically, especially if it was the main evening newscast. One producer commented, “I practically can make the changes from my computer, but I have to get permission from the news director first. I don’t make any changes without getting back to him” (Interview # 1d, June-July, 2006).

The latter two tasks point to the frequent communication between the producer and the news director. In fact, at any point during their shift, producers are almost constantly in touch with the news director. They ask them about anything political or anything that might cause a political problem, no matter how slight. As one producer put it, “Nothing goes on air without the supervision and approval of the news director” (Interview # 1d, June-July, 2006).

Finally, right before the newscast, the producer makes sure that all the elements of the newscasts are in place, especially the script and the rundown. Then some producers sit in the control room while the newscast airs, but others stay in the newsroom and watch it on a TV screen, while they monitor other stations and prepare for the next newscast. In the control room, the technical director, whose tasks are discussed below, is responsible

for execution and for the technical side of the newscast. The producer is responsible for making sure everything is ready and in place, including scripts and tapes. At the same time, the producer is responsible for the timing of the newscast. It is her job to make sure stories are dropped if the newscast is too long, of course, after getting back to the news director. According to one producer, “usually I suggest the story to be killed. In some cases, he (ND) agrees, in others, he does not, but in any case the final word is his” (Interview # 1d, June-July, 2006).

It was striking how disciplined and loyal the interviewed producers were, especially when they had so much power to influence the newscast. To be sure, all of them were trusted by the news directors, had been working at their stations for a long time, and most had personal and political beliefs consistent with that of the station. Even when asked about how much authority they had over the political direction of the newscast, all producers unequivocally responded that the news director in that matter reigns supreme. A veteran producer confirmed:

I have no responsibility or authority over the political content of the newscast.

The news director is the only person responsible for that. He knows the political line of the station, and he knows how to direct the newscast accordingly.

Sometimes I suggest things, but in the end the news director has full and final authority over the newscast (Interview # 1d, June-July, 2006).

It is important to note that although some producers are almost fully responsible for the less important newscast, such as the morning and the noon shows, the system in which they work assures that the newscast is fully supervised by the news director—even when he is not physically in the newsroom. For example, both the morning and the noon

newscasts are usually a rehash of last night's evening newscast with minor additions of today's news. But most major political activities occur around noon or later, which means little news needs to be added in the first place. In addition, unlike the main newscast, the less important shows don't have the same editorial introductions. So, the producer doesn't have to worry about any political commentary. And in case a major event did occur in the morning or political commentary was needed, the news director is a phone call away. As one news director noted about a senior producer she strongly trusted with the morning newscast: "He is always in touch with me by phone. I sometimes call him every hour, and he calls me if he has any political questions, no matter what time it is" (Interview # 14a, June-July, 2006). The same news director confided that if the news event was big enough, "like the assassination of Prime Minister Hariri," she will come to work regardless.

In addition to the main producer tasks described above, several Lebanese stations have smaller or sub-news operations linked to the main newscast. Those sub-operations include short non-Arabic newscasts in English, French, or Armenian. They also include sections of the newscast that are allocated to a specific department, for instance the common Arabic and International news departments.

While these sub-operations belonged to the same newsroom hierarchy, they tended to have their own producers who enjoyed more independence and less severe monitoring than that imposed in local news. Nevertheless, the systematic monitoring was replaced by other tools.

First, these sub-operations deal mostly with regional and international news. Local news is either a small part of their operations, as in the Arabic and International

news departments, or it is covered very briefly and superficially, as in the non-Arabic newscasts. Whatever local news the latter covers is almost taken verbatim from the main local newscast. The only difference is that it is much shorter and, of course, translated.

Second, while producers of non-Arabic newscasts also start their work by absorbing the daily news from newspapers, the internet and the wires, their main source for local news is the actual local newscast that aired last. In addition, those operations usually have two to three people working in them and barely have time to process news stories that reach their hands, and certainly don't have the time or resources to send crews to the field. They attend the editorial meetings sometimes and stay in touch with the News Director in case of certain questions.

In addition to these sub-operations, there are producers of political talk shows who probably have the most independence from the news directors. In some cases, the show host is the producer, but in others the host may have one or more producers. In the latter case, the producer's job is mainly to book the guests, but sometimes engages in generating the talking points and putting the questions. In some stations, the show producers are linked to the news directors. In other stations, they are directly linked to the CEO. Here is an account from one political talk show producer who showed how the news director supervises the sensitive elements of the program:

In principle I pick the guests, but I always check with the news director to see if there is a person they don't want to show at the moment or if there is a political veto on him. We invite all sides and all politicians appear, but of course, we might have more people from one side or the other, depending on the present politics. I also put the questions and show them to the news director. He usually



adds some questions and takes out some and maybe revise others (Interview # 16c, June-July, 2006).

In other stations, the political talk show producer and host have more autonomy and are entrusted with the topic, guests and questions. One of those producers/hosts said they only sometimes contact the news director or the CEO, especially with topics related to local Lebanese politics or red lines, like Saudi Arabia.<sup>97</sup>

We often call if the topic is related to Lebanon, because in the end, we are a Lebanese company and can be prosecuted by Lebanese laws and affected by Lebanese politics. We also often inquire when the issue is about Saudi Arabia (Interview #82a, June-July, 2006).

Talk show producers tended to be experienced journalists who had been working at the station for a long time and therefore intimately understand and are committed to the political line of the station. While the news director technically is their superior, they have enough clout to bypass the news director and directly contact the CEO. One producer had to do that when the news director rejected his proposal for a show about the Danish cartoons lampooning Prophet Muhammad. The CEO told the producer to figure out a compromise with the news director, and they ended up agreeing on taping the show instead of going live. The producer note, “In case anything unwanted was spoken, we can cut it out and save ourselves any problems.”

From the analysis above, it is clear that the power and influence of a producer varies from one station to another and from one news genre to another. Overall, however, the producer is the equivalent of a Lieutenant in the army. He is the eyes and ears of the general in the field and monitors and commands the troops with the utmost effectiveness

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<sup>97</sup> See Chapter 9, Part C, for details on “red lines.”

and loyalty. And like junior officers, their status and power differs depending on their relationship with their superiors and depending on the experience and clout of the soldiers subordinate to them.

### ***The Sergeants: The Anchors and Show Hosts***

There are many variations to the role of the newscast anchor in Lebanon, and most of them overlap with the other newsroom positions, to the point that a separate section discussing their daily tasks is not terribly necessary. The tasks of the news anchor in one station could be limited to simply reading the news, while in another station the anchor could simultaneously be the newscast producer or even the news director. So, the various roles of the anchor have mostly already been covered in prior sections and need not be revisited here. Nevertheless, it is important to at least highlight some of the main variations of those roles and how they may impact the production process of the newscast. It is also important to understand the relationship between the anchor and other main newsroom players.

Most anchors had one task: to read the newscast. In those stations, the anchor engages in little if any writing of news stories. One anchor said, “Our role is in presenting the newscast, except when there is a need in writing when there is pressure, but that is very rare and limited.” He added:

When the script is starting to be typed, we print out the stories and practice reading them. If there was a problem with a word or sentence, we review it with the producer and get it corrected. I don’t change anything in the political context, but I do change the tone and style of the script according to what fits my style of

reading. I sometimes switch a word with something that sounds better or flows better, and that's it (Interview # 9a, June-July, 2006).

A few anchors were also newscast producers. That was probably the most difficult and hectic job in Lebanese news. In fact, the anchor/producer in those cases had enormous duties to fulfill in very limited time. In many cases, the anchors had little time to prepare themselves cosmetically before appearing on air. One anchor/producer observed was constantly stressed and frantically working to meet the deadline. In addition to all the editorial tasks she had to deal with, she was solving a technical problem about a missing video tape right before she went on air. Another anchor/producer observed had to even edit a voiceover because the tape editor was overwhelmed with work. The frantic environment the anchor/producer had to deal with in this station was mostly due to the disorganization, bad management of tasks and lack of equipment at that station. The combination of anchor and producer roles certainly exacerbated the situation.

The most interesting job for an anchor was to also be the news director. That was the case of only one anchor interviewed. Although the dual position sounded impossible to handle simultaneously, the anchor/news director observed seemed to easily manage his tasks. That may be due to the anchor's exceptional skills, but it was also made possible by the well-oiled machine, excellent management, and superior machinery at his station. In fact, when it came to equipment, management and organization, the anchor/news director's station falls on one extreme of the spectrum, while the anchor/producer's station falls on the other extreme.

In all three cases, there was little difference in the way news content was controlled. In all cases, the news director fully controlled the editorial and political content of the newscast and delegated the rest of the control to producers. The only difference between the three types of anchors was in the efficiency and productivity of the station. The anchor/producer combination seemed to be the worst, where the anchor is overworked and burnt out. The anchor/news director model was working efficiently but cannot be generalized to all stations, since it is rare to find the skills of a news director and an anchor in one person. In addition, the anchor/news director model needs a superior news room when it comes to organization, management and equipment. The anchor who only read scripts seemed to be the most common and most transferable model.

None of the stations studied had anchors who doubled as reporters, but most had reporters who doubled as political show hosts. In those political programs, the host's relationship was directly with the news director and did not go through the producers. According to one host "we are supposed to consult with the news director, tell him about the topic and get some feedback and directions." As mentioned earlier, political show hosts or their producers either communicate directly with the CEO or the news director and have substantial power over content, but are also regarded as the most trusted and most experienced among the staff and, therefore, are not expected to cross the political line of the station.

All in all, the newscast anchors have little or no power over the content of the newscast, except in the case of doubling as producers or news directors.

### ***The Foot Soldiers: The Reporters***

Below the producers in the hierarchy are the correspondents, *reporters* and writers. These are the foot soldiers of the newsroom who shoulder most of the hard work, from going out to the field and getting the story, to rewriting wire stories and searching for video to go along. Most importantly, their job is to write the final version of the story the way the news director wants it to be written. As mentioned earlier, the reporter has little autonomy and even less margin of freedom to play around with. Still, he can use simple tactics to get away with minor matters, like adding words or highlighting a minor politician or slipping in a statement. Some of these tactics are discussed below. More specifically, however, this section will focus on the nuances of the relationship between the reporter and her direct superiors—the news director and producers, and revisit the system that monitors the reporter’s work for quality and content, especially the concepts of pre-framing and post-checking.

The beginning of a typical reporter’s day was similar to that of a producer. Most reporters interviewed said they start tuning-in to whatever news is available the moment they wake up. Most rely on newspapers and increasingly online news, but many also watch the morning newscasts on TV and listen to the radio newscasts on their way to work. Only few reporters mentioned reading wire stories as their daily routine, which is something producers do more often. One reason for that may be the limited access to news wires in some stations, especially for those who still print the stories outside the newsroom and distribute them to producers instead of getting online access for all newsroom employees. This daily habit is important because it points out that most reporters rely on news already processed by the dominant news media outlets in their countries. This creates a self-sustaining cycle of news and culture among the reporters

and makes it hard for them to see outside this dominant news prism. This becomes more important when we add the fact that most reporters focused mostly on newscasts produced by their own station and only checked the other sources when they have enough time. This becomes part of the institutionalization process mentioned earlier and submerges the reporter into a paradigm of news reality mostly controlled by her institution. In other words, the reporter not only changes raw news into news stories in accordance with what the institution intends, but even the bulk of that raw news is already processed by the institution.

After updating themselves with the latest news, most reporters waited for the producers to distribute their assignments. Some, who already knew what their assignments were from the prescheduled calendar, went straight to the field to cover their stories. In any case, the most important part of distributing stories, as mentioned earlier, was when the news director, and sometimes the producer, designated the angle and frame of the story before the reporter even started working on it. They then checked the work of the reporter and edited it before it went into the final phase of production. This process of pre-framing and post-checking was very systematic and detailed, as one reporter indicated:

After assigning stories, the news director talks to each reporter and tells them he wants this or that angle and supervises them on how to write the story. For example, he explains which part goes at the beginning of the story and which part goes at the end.... Then the reporter writes the story and comes back to get the OK (Interview # 1d, June-July, 2006).

But not all stories were so rigorously pre-framed and post-checked. It depended on the importance of the story. In this regard, there were three kinds of stories. First, some reporters stayed in the newsroom and wrote scripts based on wire stories and maybe some phone interviews and archived material and studies. Those were often considered the least important stories and were handled by inexperienced reporters under the supervision of the producers. These stories often included brief international or regional reports that were already half-processed by the wires or newspapers. So, little pre-framing and post-checking were required from the news director or producer. In addition, the reporter here was usually assigned several stories at a time because they required less work than the more important stories.

Second, some stories required the reporter to stay in the newsroom but send a photographer out to gather some original footage or cover less important events or speeches. Those stories tended to vary in importance since that was designated after the photographer delivered the tapes and the reporter transcribes them. Here, little pre-framing by the news director was needed since the content was often unknown beforehand. Post-checking by the producer, however, was heavy and detailed. As mentioned in the producers' section above, these kinds of stories required the reporter to transcribe the tapes and show the transcript to the producer and sometimes the news director, so they can choose the sound bites and even point out which video shots to use. The more important the story turned out to be, the more rigorous was the post-checking process. In one instance where a junior politician delivered a scathing speech attacking his opponents, the news director was not satisfied with picking sound bites from a transcript, but went into the editing booth to check them. When asked why, he said that

he wanted to make sure the sound bites “sounded” the same way they were on the transcript.

The most important stories were those where the reporter went out to the field accompanied by a production crew. These included major protests, big politicians, important press conference or investigative reports. These types of stories are important for both the news director and for the reporter’s career, or as one reporter indicated, “This is where you can differentiate yourself from other journalists and be creative” (Interview # 5a, June-July, 2006). Those are stories where the reporter was fully invested and interested in producing and owning. Subsequently, those stories demanded the most effort by the reporter and the most amount of pre-framing and post-checking by the news director. In addition, mostly experienced reporters covered these stories, unless they were apolitical like social events or festivities.

The importance of these types of stories merits further discussion about their different sub-types. The so-called beat stories fall under this latter type, and are allocated to experienced reporters who understand the political line of the institution. In Lebanon, beat stories are slightly different from the U.S. because most reporters are considered general assignment reporters, and usually two or three reporters alternate in covering those beats. More details on each beat are covered in chapter nine.

Another kind of story under this category is the foreign correspondent report, which is usually sent from Palestine, Iraq or the U.S. They either send a fully produced package via a satellite link, or they only send in their voice recorded via telephone and have a local reporter and tape editor assemble the rest. The only difference here is that the foreign correspondent often communicates by phone with the news director to get the



pre-framing before he starts covering the story. But due to distance and the non-local nature of these stories, the correspondents seem to have more freedom to contextualize their reports.

Also similar to the foreign correspondent's stories are those initiated by the reporter and not the news director or producer. "Sometimes we suggest stories we want, especially for investigative and special reports," one correspondent noted. But, to be sure, those are rare and "most of the stories are assigned by the news director and producer" (Interview # 6b, June-July, 2006). In addition, a story suggested by a reporter has to go through the same if not more stringent monitoring system before making it to air. First, the reporter has to sell the idea. "I usually submit it to the news director and then explain it in detail and try hard to get the approval," a reporter noted. As the account of the reporter who wanted a "juicy" story showed, many pitched ideas never make it.<sup>98</sup> When they do get approved, they still have to go through the filtering process like any other story.

In fact, regardless the type of story, every reporter and correspondent had to come back to the news director or producer to check the story before it airs. As one experienced reporters confirmed, "no matter what," the story had to pass through the filtering system. "After I write my story it has to pass by the news director or producer and be checked. They check if something political or non-political shouldn't pass through," he said (Interview # 6b, June-July, 2006). The reporter added, "Sometimes producers don't catch it until after it airs, but most often they do." Another experienced reporter explained that after the news director or producer review his story, "they rarely change it, but sometimes they do." There are two kinds of changes, those related to language and style and those

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<sup>98</sup> See the section on news directors in this chapter.

related to the political content. Most reporters agree “the former is rarely touched, but the latter is changed more often.”

For example, when I write a story in a neutral way, they might not want it to pass so innocently but want to give it direction and send an underlying political message or hint—like criticizing the government or a politician. So, they add sentences and rewrite others. But even that doesn’t happen frequently with me because after working here for a while, you come to understand the station’s policy and what they want. Besides, the news director would have already given you directions before you write the story. But even when they don’t, you write it the way they want because you’re an insider and understand the mentality (Interview # 5a, June-July, 2006).

This quote reveals the intricacies of how the media institution works and highlights the power of the pre-framing/post-checking system. It points to the power of the institution in shaping the behaviors of its workers and ultimately the final product, whether through the intentional and visible daily monitoring process, or through the institutionalization effect of that process that instills and internalizes a discipline that leads the reporter to almost unconsciously follow the institution’s direction even when the system is not perfect—when the producer might not catch the problem “until after it airs.” In other words, even when the filtering system seems to fail—whether the news director did not pre-frame the story, or he did not post-check it effectively, or the producer didn’t catch the problem—the institutionalization process guaranteed that the final product would nevertheless come out the way the institution intended. The internalization of the discipline acts as a redundancy for the visible pre-framing/post-

checking system, in case it fails. This system works despite the fact that some reporters despise it and even actively try to challenge it, but many others gleefully embrace it and use it to advance their own careers. As one participant noted, “Some reporters overdo it to impress their superiors when they did not even ask for that kind of writing, and some reporters balance what the station wants and what they see as an objective account of the story.” He added, “That is what differentiates the good reporter from the mediocre, but, of course, there is a limit to that too” (Interview # 5a, June-July, 2006). The participant here meant that even the “good reporter” could only challenge the institution’s pre-framing/post-checking process to a limited extent because they can easily get in trouble, as many fired reporters before them bore witness.

How does that limited challenge occur practically? Several reporters who mentioned that they despise this system noted that there are some tactics or “tricks” that can help them bypass it and in some rare cases undermine it without getting themselves in trouble. The main tactics are: manipulating deadline pressure, using quotes and sound bites extensively, telling the story with pictures, working within the designated frame, and claiming objectivity and balance.

First, manipulating deadline pressures was the most common tactic used by reporters to assure that news directors and producers do not significantly change their reports. This tactic basically meant waiting close to the deadline before seeking approval for the story. The tactic didn’t always work, however, especially if the story was not at the top of the newscast. In addition, at some stations where the technology was highly advanced, this tactic had been rendered obsolete, as will be discussed in the next section.

Second, manipulating quotes and sound bites included using the words of the newsmaker to advance what the reporter wants to say. This tactic was only possible in the rare cases where the reporter was asked to choose sound bites instead of the news director or producer. One reporter advised that “a smart journalist who wants to challenge the institution’s political line understands that they can only push the limit so far....”

For instance, they can pick and choose among an array of sound bites that a politician provides in their speech. But instead of choosing a sound bite scathingly critical of a politician the station does not want to upset, they can often get away with choosing a sound bite that is still critical of that politician but more moderately so. That’s a game we play in this business (Interview # 7c & 8c, June-July, 2006).

Third, as will be highlighted in the next section, TV news is not only text, but pictures often tell a much more powerful story than words. So, since the news director monitors mostly the text and sound bites, the reporter can tell the story directing the tape editor to use certain pictures. As in the case of manipulating deadline pressures, however, new technologies have made this tactic obsolete too.

Next, even after the news director pre-framed the story, the reporter still had some margin to play around with inside that frame. Most reporters noted that they had many choices to make inside the designated frame, but most also agreed that those choices often preclude writing anything that crosses the institution’s political line. Even in the rare case that they do, there is still the post-checking filter to go through.

Finally, when all tactics failed, there was one more to resort to: claiming objectivity and balance. This was more often used to justify a certain choice or protect

one's job rather than a tactic to challenge the institution's policy. Here reporters explained their choice by saying that they were trying to be objective and balanced. This put the news director on the defensive and forced him to come up with an explanation of why they needed to change the story. One reporter commented, "If the violation was minor and the story was not important, the news director will usually let it pass and accept the objectivity and balance argument, but if the story is important, none of this matters. The news director will change it, regardless."

Certainly, the effects of the tactics mentioned so far should not be exaggerated. In the first place, those are used by a minority of reporters who, first, disagree with the stations' political line, and, second, have the will and courage to challenge it and risk their jobs. In addition, as mentioned above, many of these tactics are becoming obsolete with the advance of newsroom technology, as we will see in the following section. In any case, those tactics posed—at best—minor if not negligible challenges to the institution's political line and the newscasts grand narrative. Additionally, the institution's top level officers had tremendous power to instantly eliminate those challenges. This confirms the weak status of the reporter in the newsroom, hence the comparison to the foot soldier.

### ***Combat Support: Technical Personnel***

The foot soldiers mentioned above are backed by an army of *technical personnel* who vary in level of authority and influence over the newscast but generally have less authority and power than the reporters, with few exceptions. The most important and most influential among them is the technical director who is responsible for technically executing the newscast and managing the production team during air time. The TD usually ran the main video mixer but in larger operations she had an assistant pushing the

mixer's buttons. The latter—usually called the switcher—took orders directly from the TD.

The TD's work, however, started before the newscast aired. She had to first review the rundown and "mark" it for camera shots and types of segments.<sup>99</sup> In addition, she readied the production crew and machines before the newscast aired and made sure everyone and everything was in place. During the newscast, the TD controlled all the production personnel and machines and called the shots according to what was listed on the rundown. Any decisions regarding changes in content, however, were made by the producer or news director. As one TD put it, "The producer sits next to me and is responsible for the content of the newscast. He or the news director has the final word in adding or dropping stories" (Interview # 8a, June-July, 2006). Nevertheless, any changes in content had to be communicated to the TD in advance, and the TD sometimes did overrule the producer if the change was technically not possible because of the time crunch, or if the quality of the added material was not up to technical standard. In those rare situations, minor conflicts may occur between the TD and the producer, especially when the line of separation is blurred between what is technical and what is content. Still, the TD potentially could influence the final iteration of the newscast, but because of the tremendous time pressure and multi-tasking needed, she had little time or attention for that. According to another TD:

The work needs a lot of concentration because it has major responsibility. There's always time pressure and uncertainties like dealing with technical difficulties of routing phone calls and live shots or inserting breaking news. The pressure and

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<sup>99</sup> See Part B, section2, of this chapter for details on rundowns.

time constraints could often be overwhelming, and I can barely deal with them (Interview # 8a, June-July, 2006).

That meant the TD relied on the producer to help life some of the pressure and rarely got into a conflicts with him. Nevertheless, every TD interviewed was well aware of the power they have in influencing the newscast's content. One TD gave specific examples:

If I have a live shot or video scene playing, I am deciding which shots to take. I can take a graphic shot or decide to take the milder shot. I can forward a video tape a little and take something in the middle instead of the top.... I can also pick and choose between photos stored in graphics machine. I can pick an angry picture of a politicians or a pleasant one (Interview # 8a, June-July, 2006).

The TD had such power because video is hard to monitor by the ND and producer. As we shall see in the next section, advanced technology minimized this potential to pick and choose but did not eliminate it.

In addition to the TD, the photographers and tape editors, while often considered technical personnel, actually were important agents in gathering and editing content. Because Television is a visual medium, the picture and sound often overwhelm the written message. This gave both the photographer and the tape editor power over video content, and therefore, over the final iteration of the message.

The photographer in the field has numerous options to select from when shooting video. One example of the influence of the photographer could be summarized in following incident. On one occasion, a reporter and a photographer were observed while covering a minor protest next to the Lebanese Prime Minister's headquarters in Beirut.

There were about 50 people with pictures and banners. Surrounding them and protecting the Prime Minister's building were twice as many soldiers and police officers armed to the teeth. Only two stations dispatched camera crews to the scene to cover the protestors, who yelled slogans calling on "foreign countries" to help release their sons from Syrian prisons.

After about 45 minutes of shouting slogans, the protestors moved forward to close the road passing next to the prime ministry—although only little traffic passed there anyway. They lay down on the street and said they would not move unless an official talked to them. Fifteen minutes later, they tried to move towards the prime ministry's entrance but their futile attempt was easily blocked by security personnel. Suddenly, a minor scuffle broke out between two women and the officer facing them. Some minor pushing also occurred, but it was not clear who pushed who or who started it. The altercation lasted about two minutes. The camera men during that time, however, actively tried to catch the best angles of the disturbance. Matters quickly went back to calm and about an hour after it all started, the protest was over.

When asked about how he will write this story, a reporter said "I will try to be as neutral as possible." He said:

I can say that the police provoked the scuffle or vice versa but will instead stick to the facts. I will start with when and where the protest took place and talk about what the protestors wanted. Then I will briefly mention how the protestors tried to enter the building and how they were stopped.

Later that night the reporter did what he said, but the 45 second story had mostly video of the scuffle and the pictures were much more prominent than the reporter's



words. The story looked like a major fight between protestors and the police. The shots were mostly close ups and did not reflect the size of the protest. Although the scuffle was only about two minutes out of an hour worth of protesting, these few minutes dominated the story.

In this example, although the reporter truly tried to be as neutral as possible and reported the facts, it was the photographer and the tape editor who had the upper hand in telling the story. Anyone who works in television knows that pictures can be more powerful than words. Photographers and tape editors, especially, know that action shots make the story more dynamic and active, and therefore, actively pursue those shots. In our example above, although the action moments in this story were more of a footnote to the whole protest, playing 45 seconds of the scuffle made the whole story about exactly that: the scuffle.

The same applies to the tape editor, who can potentially have some influence over the images that run in the story. That was why reporters in Lebanon often oversee the tape editors' work, but overtime experienced editors were trusted to work alone with the story, and they were given minor directions or a script to follow. One fairly new tape editor described her work process:

First, I record the reporter's voice. Then I put the pictures over that voice track. Some reporters stay and tell me which scenes to choose. Others give me the tape and leave. Every now and then, we have discussions about which picture is better. Most of those discussions relate to technical problems. But, in general, when I am in doubt, I ask the reporter to double check the tape.

When it comes to sound bites, however, “that’s all up to the reporter. It’s not my responsibility. Reporters choose the sound bites, how long and how many, and tell me where to insert them.” Of course, as we had seen in earlier sections, the main person who chose those sound bites was the news director or the producer. Here, the reporter was playing the role of supervisor for the tape editor, by relaying the information needed for the sound bites and making sure the pictures chosen were accurate and acceptable, technically and politically.

Similarly, photographers covering important stories were often accompanied by reporters who somewhat direct their work. This limited their power over content, especially when the story was not driven by events occurring in front of the camera, but by the reporter’s outline or plan. When photographers were working alone, usually the story was less important. In general the more important the story, the more likely the producer or even the news director will personally step in to supervise the production of the video. In fact, several news directors and producers, as mentioned above, were observed stepping into the editor’s booth to watch the raw tape shot by the photographer and sometimes stayed to give directions to both the reporter and the tape editor for crafting the story. In other words, even the video and sound elements of important stories were closely monitored by the news department heads. This kept the photographer and tape editor’s powers in-check.

The least amount of influence on the newscast content came from the studio production crew, who often numbered between 15 and 20, but in smaller operations were a handful of people. Those included studio camera operators, sound mixer operators and sound personnel, graphics and text generators, tape deck players, prompter operators,

lighting personnel, props personnel, floor managers or directors, and several technical personnel and engineers working in the station's master control room. This whole team took orders from the TD and the head of Master Control, and was only working on the newscast while it was being aired. Their influence over content was negligible.

***Other Troops: Language Editors, Typists and Oratory Advisors***

In addition to the aforementioned personnel, there were other jobs unique to the Lebanese, and possibly Arabic, newsrooms. Given the complexity of the Arabic language, almost every newsroom in Lebanon had what was commonly called the “Arabic Teacher” or *language editor*. The language editor was responsible for making sure the written text was grammatically flawless.

In addition to the language editor, most newsrooms had a *typist* responsible for typing all the stories written by the reporter and inserting them into a computer application. This task is most likely to disappear as more newsrooms require their reporters to type their story instead of handwrite them—as most of them still do today.

Both the language editor and the typist had little or no influence over content, except at a strictly technical and stylistic level. Several newscast scripts were reviewed before and after the language editor reviewed them, and barely any content was changed—aside from the occasional grammar mistakes. One language editor confirmed he never changes any content, and even major grammatical corrections in sentence structure were reviewed with the reporter or producer. The main element the language editor added was what is called in Arabic “al-Tashkeel.” Those are small markings over and under words that help the reader pronounce the words correctly and sometimes give

additional instructions, like emphasizing or deemphasizing certain letters (Submission, 2007).

Finally, some newsrooms in Lebanon had a person who monitored the oratory abilities of the anchors and reporters and trained the new employees to deliver their stories eloquently. The *oratory advisor* made sure anchors and reporters delivered Modern Standard Arabic in an effective and proper way. One oratory advisor explained, “My job is to train new reporters and anchors, monitor and follow up with them as they advance. I also work with the more experienced journalists, but to a much lesser extent...” And, as he noted, the oratory advisor faced tremendous difficulties in that matter:

The problem is we speak one language and write an almost different language. The colloquial language we use on a daily basis is very different from the formal standardized Arabic we read in the books or use in formal speeches and in newscasts. Arabic speakers automatically acquire their colloquial language at an early age, but it is hard for them to master the standardized Arabic. Here the mind is dealing with almost a new language. Whether it was writing or orally delivering the formal Arabic, we have a problem because schools don’t concentrate on it a lot.

And as the advisor explained, training reporters and anchors on modern standard Arabic demanded a lot of work on the detail level:

We divide the story into smaller voice segments and train them on how to properly pronounce the prefixes and suffixes and how to breathe correctly. We make sure the beginning of a story is given more vigor and enthusiasm. We also

teach them how to transition from one sentence to another; how to end a sentence and where to put emphasis and stress; how to add tone to the story if it was sad, happy or angry; and how to deliver the story in the simplest, smoothest and most appropriate way.

Although this oratory advisor discounted his role in influencing news content, he admitted that it was hard to fully separate content from its delivery. In fact, the oratory advisor was one of the most influential people in setting the general tone of news in Lebanon, and probably the Arabic world. As we shall see in the next chapter, the news in Lebanon is delivered in a serious tone and the anchor's voice type is always low and projecting authority. This is not a coincidence. As one oratory advisor confirmed, "The newscast anchor and reporter cannot get out of the formal tone and voice. Anchors in Lebanon, unlike show hosts, don't joke or laugh and barely even smile." This is a fixture in all Lebanese and most Arabic news (McKenzie, 2006, p. 297). Oratory advisors reproduced that tradition by making sure their trainees reached and maintain that level of formality and authority, which in many ways differentiated news from non-news. It gave news an aura of credibility which was certainly tied to the awe and respect Modern Standard Arabic imposes. This awe is partly linked to the difficulty of the language but also to the relation between the Arabic language and the Quran.

In addition, oratory advisors not only set the standard tone for delivery, but defined the national norms of the language. The oratory advisor interviewed explained that one of his roles was to "work hard to eliminate the various accents Lebanese reporters brought with them," and added that it was harder to work with non-Lebanese accents and dialects, especially from the Arabian Gulf region or North Africa. In fact, he

considered “the Arabic dialect we use in Lebanon as the purest, most proper and most refined.” He added, “In Lebanon, we took the Arabic language in its simplest form. The letters we use are in their purest form and have no defects as in other dialects...”<sup>100</sup> It would be interesting to see what oratory advisors from other countries think of the “purity” of their dialects. Nevertheless, this opinion reflected a view of what was the “normal” and “proper” language that was reproduced in Lebanese news both through oratory advisors and their trainees. Aside from influencing the tone and mode of delivery, however, oratory advisors had no influence over the political content of the news.

### ***Conclusion***

Observing the details of the newscast production process and the role of each news department employee confirmed that the top of the news department hierarchy, which was strongly tied to the station’s owners and political patrons, tightly controlled the output of the department, especially when it came to the political content of the newscast. The two most important mechanisms in this process were the news director’s pre-framing and post-checking of individual news stories. This arrangement, where the news director contextualized stories for reporters before they covered them and then checked and edited those stories after they wrote them, guaranteed that all news stories followed the station’s political line. This was both a filtering and monitoring mechanism.

The main day to day tasks of the news director, which included selection, pre-framing of the stories, writing the newscast introduction, and post-checking and editing

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<sup>100</sup> When pressed to explain the criteria and logic in reaching this conclusion, the oratory advisor was only able to say “all the letters in our dialect are pronounced properly.” He added: “Even the Lebanese colloquial accent is much closer to the formal Arabic than in any other country in the Arab world. If you go to some Arabic countries, you can’t understand a word they say, but the Lebanese accent is widely understood. Of course, the Egyptian accent is more widely understood than the Lebanese and that’s because their media industry is more advanced and more wide spread than ours, especially their music, soap operas.” I believe oratory advisors from other Arabic states will say the same thing about the purity of their accent.

stories processed by reporters, kept him in control of most of the newscast's political content.

But because the work of news department was highly complex and demanding, the news director delegated some of his authority to the newscast producers. The producers pre-framed and post-checked the less important stories. In addition, most producers allocated news stories to reporters, an arrangement that altered the power relationship between the reporter and the producer in favor of the latter. The reporter, whose success depended on receiving and covering “big” and “juicy” stories, depended on the producer's allocation privileges. Although most producers were usually loyal veterans of the station, the news director still supervised their work and stayed in touch with them constantly, even when he was outside the newsroom. In addition, the news director only delegated his authority to them for the less important newscasts or stories. In less important newscasts—the morning and noon shows—some producers even wrote the newscast introduction, but most of them avoided political commentary and got the news director's approval over the phone whenever in doubt.

The rest of the news department personnel were virtually foot soldiers with little or no influence over content. The most powerful among those foot soldiers were the reporters who handled the biggest chunk of the work when it came to gathering and crafting news stories. The reporters had some margin of freedom to work within depending on the type of story they were crafting, but in most cases they stayed within the framework and context dictated by the news director and producers. A few reporters occasionally used tactics to undermine the supervision and filtering system, but those tactics were becoming obsolete and had little influence over the political content of the

newscast. Furthermore, most reporters did not even attempt to challenge the political line and the stories of colleagues fired from their work acted as a powerful deterrent to those who had any deviant ideas. The rest of the news department personnel had insignificant influence over news content, especially in regards to the political line of the station.

All-in-all, the arrangement of work in the news department gave the Lebanese news director ultimate power over every single detail of the newscast. The only person who superseded the news director was the owner or political patron of the station, but even that latter didn't engage in the daily work of running the news department. The owner or political patron of the station simply delegated his authority to the news director the same way a political head delegates his authority to the army general who runs the battle in the field.

The importance of the news director is confirmed over and over in this chapter, where we saw how the circulation of information was initiated outside the newsroom; then organized by the producers loyal to the news director; then filtered, framed and allocated by the news director; then processed by the reporters; then approved and edited by the news director; before it finally airs. This routine assures that the majority of the news that reached the air carried the frames, connotations and ideas intended by the news director, and subsequently the political patrons and owners of the station. This confirms and explains the consistency in output phenomenon discussed in chapter six, where most reporters categorically admitted that their work, production and output were perfectly consistent with the station's political line, regardless their professional, cultural, religious and political beliefs and affiliations and regardless their view of the institution's political line.



In the next chapter, we see how advanced newsroom technology, such as video storage and computer software, and other instruments and routines, such as the newscast rundowns and scripts, further increase the power of the news director and his lieutenants—the newscast producers—over all the activities and outputs of the foot soldiers and the rest of the news department personnel.

### **B. Instruments and Technologies: The News Department's Weapons**

Most studies and views on new media technologies, especially the latest innovations in information and communication technologies (ICTs), tout their liberating and positive effects (Liu, 2006), including the added efficiency and productivity in the workplace. While this is certainly true, another aspect of new technology that is not commonly analyzed is its capacity to intensify the control and monitoring of employees and their output. Liu (2006) sheds a light on the grave impact caused by the rapid development of ICTs on labor–employer relations among Taiwanese print journalists. He argues that reporters had “experienced a decrease in their autonomy and an increase in surveillance by management (p. 705),” among other negative effects. This section describes the main technologies engaged in the production of the Lebanese TV newscast and traces their evolution and impact on the newsroom operation and output.

This section is not a summary of technologies and instruments used in TV news operations, but an analysis of a handful of tools that evolved over time and were reorganized and redistributed in a manner that allowed for maximum efficiency and control over content and quality. While Liu (2006) focused in his study on the impact of ICTs such as cell phones, beepers and email technology, this chapter will first deal with

the following tools: the news story format, the newscast rundown, the newscast script, and video storage formats and editing machines. Then it will focus on the impact of a technology that synergizes and streamlines all the mentioned tools and instruments: The networked computers. While there are many more tools and instruments engaged in the TV news operation, this section will only focus on these four.

Before covering each instrument, however, it is worthwhile describing how those instruments were used in the least advanced stations. TLN, which was discussed in chapter four, is used as an example. At TLN, the news operation was rather simple. The majority of the newscast operation was handled by a half dozen people. The raw news came mainly from three sources: four radio newscasts, a handful of in-house photographers and correspondents and three newspapers. Most often, one person came in a few hours before the newscast was recorded and started reviewing what news was available from these sources. That person, then, handwrote the stories, each on an individual piece of paper, and stacked them up in order. The anchor then took the papers and read them to the camera, which was connected to a VCR. The little amount of video available was inserted later after the anchor's voice and picture were recorded. In this archaic news operation, control over content was mostly in the hands of the one or two people who wrote the newscast. Those, as mentioned earlier, were committed members to the political party that controlled the station, even though their link to the top was not constant and sometimes did not even exist. The SSNP's leadership never had the capability effectively monitor the newscast and relied on the staff they entrusted with that task.

In this case, there was no need for any rundown for the newscast, which in modern operations in a highly complex outline of the newscast. At TLN, the rundown was practically the act of stacking stories in order. While this task was certainly not reliable, there was no need to enhance it since the newscast was recorded, and the anchors had plenty of time to search for stories in the stack and throw them out or change their order. One major disadvantage of this technique was the uncertainty of the length of the newscast and the difficulty to calculate it. But that was not an issue for TLN since newscast time was flexible. There were no pressures from the programming department and no allocated time.

Also in this case, there was no tape editor, and one person was needed to execute the job of the whole production crew of a modern studio. Since there was no mixing of multiple cameras and no need to run tapes or graphics while the anchor was reading, the “camera man” was basically the technical director and everyone else. All he needed to do is run a sound test, switch the light projectors on, hit record and signal the anchor to start reading. Occasionally, he needed to insert video in the newscast and record the commercials on the same tape.

Despite the apparent simplicity of this crude operation, the production of TLN’s newscast was a tedious ordeal and took tremendous time and effort. And as mentioned earlier, securing control over content could have only been achieved through a staff dedicated to the ideology of the political owners of the station. Although in modern stations, this fact remained true, it was limited to the upper brass of the institution. Political loyalty of the majority of employees was replaced by an intricate system of monitoring and institutionalizing of workers and their work routines, as we saw in

previous chapters. In the following sections, we will see how modern newsroom technologies and instruments made the monitoring, filtering and over all control of news content by the news director and producers much more efficient.

### ***The News Story Format***

In today's TV newscasts there are roughly five basic formats of news stories from a production point of view: the news package or full report, the sound bite, the voiceover, the on-camera shot, the graphic, and any combination of the above.

The package (PKG)<sup>101</sup> is a fully finished report that includes video, reporter narration, sound bites and sometimes music and graphics. It is basically a mini-documentary or small newscast and usually includes an introduction and sometimes a tag, both read by the anchor. The PKG in most U.S. newscasts runs around ninety seconds. In Lebanon, most PKGs are usually between two to four minutes, but can often be longer. Due to their importance, PKGs are usually run at the beginning of the newscast and are perceived as important stories. They also demand the most time and effort from the reporter, photographer and tape editor.

The sound bite (SOT) is a piece of video and sound taken out of a speech or statement, usually made by an official or newsmaker. The SOT's video and audio run in full, and the audience can see and hear the person's statement. SOTs are usually statements of important news makers. The more important the newsmaker is perceived and the more important his statement, the longer the SOT. Hallin (1991) noted that the length of the average sound bite in presidential campaigns shrank from more than 40 seconds in 1968 to less than 10 seconds in 1988. Today, in U.S. news, the average SOT is

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<sup>101</sup> Different stations use different symbols for these types. For instance PKG is usually called VT in Lebanon.

probably even shorter. In Lebanese newscasts, however, SOTs are much longer and a series of SOTS edited back to back often run over two minutes, especially if they come from politicians and not the general public. SOTs are time consuming since the journalist has to watch the whole video tape or read the transcription of a speech before selecting the sound bites. That does not include getting approval from the news director. In many cases, participants complained that they had to spend hours transcribing the speech and submit it to the news director, who will then choose the sound bites for them.

Nevertheless, SOTs demand less effort and time than PKGs but more than voiceovers.

The voiceover (VO) is a group of edited video shots taken from the news agencies or in-house photographers and includes a low track of natural sound that plays in the background while the anchor reads the story over it live. While VOs are less time consuming for the reporter, they still demand substantial effort since the reporter has to write the story according to the pictures. The reporter has to then sit with the tape editor or write her instructions on which pictures to include, especially for stories shot in-house. Most international stories come partly edited by the news services and require little time by the tape editor. VOs are in general short stories that run an average of 45 to 60 seconds and are considered less important less.

On-camera shots (ONCAM) are usually the least important stories, but sometimes can be breaking news that arrives before any video can be accessed. ONCAMs are basically reports read by the anchor on camera without any videos. Most producers know that ONCAMs should be very short and even preferably avoided because they bore audiences and slow the newscast down. So, many stations in the U.S. today use still pictures, graphics and maps (GF) for these stories to keep them dynamic.

In addition to these basic types, there are several combinations, for instance VOSOT, which means voice over followed by a sound bite. There are also other types of shots like live shots taken from a satellite feed (SAT) of a live camera in the field (LV).

The designation on the rundown of what kind of story is coming next is very important for everyone working on the newscast, from the news director to the tape runner. PKGs for example are considered the most important and longest and demand the most amount of resources. The news director might decide to “downgrade” a PKG to a VO or even an ONCAM, if he wants to make the story less important or vice-versa. At the same time, the reporter working on the story needs to know how much time and effort to allocate to each story, given its type. A PKG will take a lot of time to write, research, search for pictures and offer instructions to the tape editor. During newscast airing everyone on the production team knows what to do with a PKG. An anchor reads the introduction then stops. The tape runner runs the tape containing the PKG. The sound person brings the volume of both sound tracks up, that of the natural sound and of the reporter’s narrative—this is not the case for VOs. The switcher or technical director channels the tape’s video signal from the appropriate source to the air. Before the PKG ends, the floor manager relays the countdown to the anchor and the camerawomen make sure their next shot is ready, and so on.

At TLN, none of the types of news stories mattered, since the whole newscast was more or less an ONCAM and the video instructions were not needed since the crew was limited in one person.

### ***The Newscast Rundown***

The rundown or “conducteur” is basically the outline of the newscast.<sup>102</sup> As mentioned earlier, TLN did not need a rundown, aside from stacking the stories in a certain linear manner. This technique only works if the newscast is prerecorded and not airing live. In addition, once the papers are stacked in order, it is time consuming to change their order or find a specific story to drop. Furthermore, once the stack of stories leaves the hands of the news director, he has little or no control over them. In the modern Lebanese TV stations, however, explicit rundowns are important tools to keep the whole newscast crew on the same page, whether before or during the newscast airing. Technologically speaking, rundowns are employed at two levels in Lebanon: the highly advanced and the moderately advanced. Moderately advanced stations include TL and New TV, while highly advanced rundowns include LBCI, al-Manar TV and Future TV.

Elements of the Newscast Rundown
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Story number or order in the newscast
Name of the story
Kind of story (PKG, VO, SOT...)
Name of anchor or reporter reading it
Total duration
Start time
End time
Tape number or ID
Characters or the text that should appear in the story
Cue or last few words in the story
Other instructions for the story

**Table 17**

Regardless the group of stations, elements of the rundown are mostly the same. Table 17 summarizes those elements. Although advanced stations often employ all the elements in the table, most rundowns reviewed only had the order, name of story, kind of story, duration and name of anchor.

<sup>102</sup> The French term “conducteur” is often used in Lebanon to describe the rundown.

In moderately advanced stations, the rundown was prepared in a computer database application and then printed on paper. As mentioned earlier, while the main decisions regarding story order and what to include or exclude ultimately went to the news director, the producers practically crafted the rundown. The producer “threw in” all the stories that could potentially air, but later consulted with the news director and put the stories in order according to his directions. After all stories were inserted and any changes made, the producer then printed the rundown and distributed it to everyone engaged in airing the newscast.

While the main purpose of this grid was to keep everyone on the same page and assure that the complex operation flowed smoothly, it also served as a guiding map for the news director. It helped him control every aspect of the newscast, by calling the producer or TD at any moment and requesting a change in the order or an elimination of a story. More importantly, the rundown represented the newscast before it aired. That meant the news director could review this representation before or during execution and make sure there were no problems. He could make changes any time. In moderately advanced stations that printed out rundowns, changing the rundown was often a tedious process, especially when not enough time was given to the producer and TD, since they needed to inform everyone on the team about the changes. Another disadvantage of having rundowns on paper was the constant calculation of time needed to assure that the newscast didn’t exceed its allotted time—a task usually left for the newscast producer. In addition, any changes in the rundown not only exacerbated the calculation process but also left the rundown chaotically marked with instructions that can confuse the crew. Some changes could spell disaster if the information was not accurately conveyed. Even



worse, major reshuffling of news stories during the newscast airing was almost impossible and very risky. All those limitation and problems were solved in the most advanced stations, where the rundown existed digitally on a computer network. In this case, everyone working on the rundown could get instant access to it by simply looking at the computer monitor in front of them. In addition, the news director did not need to waste time calling the producer or TD and worrying about conveying accurate information. He could do it himself simply and quickly, and any changes on his computer were instantly reflected on everyone else's screens. This of course, is dangerous if everyone can make changes, so the rundown software had different levels of access and permissions. The News director and the producers had full access to add, delete and change stories. The TD and reporters could mark and change individual stories, but they could not delete them or change their orders or formats. Everyone else had a read-only permission level.

In addition, the digital rundown software automatically calculated the time left and estimated how much time was left in the newscast. It also signaled the producer if the newscast was "heavy" or "light" on time. This option allowed the producer to focus on other aspects of her job.

Furthermore, the digital rundown had time and name signatures, registering who was the last person to change a story and at what time. This allowed for accountability and full tracking of who was doing what at what time.

This highly advanced instrument, on one hand, freed the newscast crew from the time and space constraints of a printed rundown and made their work much more efficient. With all the extra time, the newscast crew directed its focus to other matters. On

the other hand, the advanced rundown simultaneously allowed for more efficient control over content by newsroom managers and more effective monitoring of employees' work. The News Director now had a dynamic representation of the newscast and could instantly and seamlessly change and mold it even while the newscast is airing.

### ***The Newscast Script***

The newscast script is a document parallel to the rundown that contains all the text of the stories that will appear in the newscast. Most importantly, it includes the text the anchor will read on air. In the case of TLN, the script was simply handwritten on paper with a title for each story at the top. In the moderately advanced stations, the script had more control information included. For instance, each story included the title, the name of the person who wrote it, and several notations designating when a VO or PKG would start and what the anchor should do. A typical script for a VO is presented in figure 8.2.

[Story ID]
[VO/Palestine/Written by...]
[Duration: 50 sec]
Israeli occupation forces besiege Gaza in preparation for a wide offensive.
----- VO -----
In the meantime, Egypt is contacting both sides in an attempt to convince Palestinian factions to free the kidnapped Israeli soldier and to stop Israel's impending attack...

**Table 18**

In moderately advanced stations, the script was printed out and given to the anchor and the TD. If a producer or the news director wanted to substantially change this story, she had to physically locate it, retype it, reprint it and physically carry it to the

anchor and TD, which wasted a lot of valuable time. As mentioned in the prior section, the news director's control over the individual story was in pre-framing and post-checking. But once the story was printed, the news director's intervention to change it took a lot of effort and time and was disruptive to the live newscast's execution. Again, this problem was solved in the highly advanced operations, where the script was also on the computer network connected to the rundown.

Like the rundown in the highly advanced newsrooms, the script was accessed and changed instantly at any moment and the change was reflected instantly on the screens of all the workers. This not only saved time but made the change smooth and effortless. It also allowed for any last minute corrections or even updates in the constantly changing news stories. Most importantly, in the advanced computer applications used at LBC and Al-Manar, the software allowed the news director to monitor any change and any story from the comfort of his desk. The tactics some reporters used to sneak in some words or sentences the last minute became obsolete.<sup>103</sup> First, the news director had much more time to work on each story. The deadline was no longer the newscast deadline—when the newscast needed to be printed right before the newscast aired, but became the story deadline, right before the individual story aired. In other words, the news director could change the story at any moment before it airs, regardless when the newscast begins airing.

Second, the reporter was not physically interacting with the ND anymore, which made the latter invisible and subsequently his reactions unknown. From a reporter's perspective, the news director could be monitoring him at any moment. Several reporters who worked both with the printed and the networked script noted they are “constantly

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<sup>103</sup> See section A of this chapter for details on reporters' tactics.

worried that someone will catch a mistake or problem. So, I make sure that everything is perfectly correct and the way they want it to be written.” The participants also mentioned that they prefer the old technique where they can get instant reactions from the news director when they physically interact with him. “With the new system, I always feel an invisible eye is watching me, and I sometimes get paranoid over things that turn out to be nothing. It can drive you insane.” This feeling of a constantly watching eye parallel’s Foucault’s panopticon figuratively and in effect.

### ***Video Storage***

Video storage is discussed here because video used to be the most difficult element of TV news to control by the news director. Capturing and editing picture and sound demands much more time and effort and complex and expensive technology compared to the written text. That was probably why TLN had little or no video in its newscasts.

In addition, a news director insisting on watching all videos before airing is stretching herself too thin in an already overstretched time crunch. So, in moderately advanced stations, the news director had to make due with representations of the video written in the script, but those short descriptions barely touched the surface and were often not written by the reporters due to lack of time. So, it was not out of the ordinary for a news director or even a producer to see the video for the first time while it aired. In those circumstances a lot of faith was put in the reporter and tape editor’s intentions and skills, and therefore they were given more power to influence the newscast.

Moreover, a news director could not change video sequences with the same ease she did with text. A tape had to physically be carried from the control room to the editing

booth. Then it had to be re-edited and brought back to the control room. The operation took at least take 15 minutes, especially with the traditional linear editing machines, where the editor was constrained with the sequence of video segments as they were recorded on the tape. Any change in sequence required the recreation of all or substantial parts of the whole video on a different tape. With the advance of digital technology, the task became easier. The video sequences were all “digitized” or copied to a computer’s hard drive. On the computer, the editor could easily rearrange different video segments and edit them. Then the video on the computer was re-dubbed onto the tape. But even with this digital advancement, there was valuable time wasted on transferring the video from one medium to another and back (tape-to-computer and then computer-to-tape).

In the highly advanced stations, the tape that stores the video was replaced with a video server, which was also linked to a network that carried the rundowns and the scripts. This made a tremendous difference by freeing the crews from the constraints of physically moving the tape from one place to another. In addition, it allowed virtually everyone to watch the raw and the edited videos on their desktops and feed the editor instructions on what to change. Moreover, some advanced applications allowed the news director or producer to edit the video herself. Because this technology was far more advanced than the skills of any current news director in Lebanon, it was not utilized yet. Nevertheless, this meant that the news director could potentially change the video as easily as she changed text. In a worst case scenario of a quick change in video while the newscast was running, the news director only needed to look at her computer, click on the video, take a few moments to cut out a video segment or shorten a sound bite and

save the file. The new video gets instantly changed in the server, and the TD can run it with a click of a button.

### ***Conclusion: The Multi-Tool***

There is one more thing to add to this awesome assortment of tools and technologies: a computer application that unifies them all in one space. Today's advancement in software and hardware for news operations allow journalists to simply open one application and get access to almost every single tool they need. That includes access to a wide range of wire stories, pictures, videos, the newscast rundown and script and contact information, just to name a few. At LBC and Al-Manar TV, these applications were almost in full use.

As commented earlier, while these tools allowed for a more efficient and reliable workflow, they also allow for more control and monitoring. In other words, these tools allowed for a concentration in power and control in the hand of the news director. Foucault (1995) would never have dreamt of such an effective panopticon, where the guard did not even need to man his post and the prisoner was not only fearful of violating the laws but in effect produced work almost perfectly consistent with the wishes of the guard.

In sum, the modern tools of the newsroom not only allowed for excellent control of the production process and monitoring of the producers but also for constant, direct and instantaneous control of the product (news content) from the highest posts in the hierarchy.

Adding these tools to the aforementioned mix of departmental divisions, institutional norms and practices and the process of institutionalization of employees, the

end result is tremendous amount of power concentrated in one or few hands. Everyone else in the hierarchy becomes a foot soldier following the orders of that invisible hand and maintaining and bolstering its power—a vicious cycle that reproduces itself while generating tremendous resources of power.

In the next section, we will see how these tools and the earlier mentioned organizational arrangements and structures reveal themselves in the final product: the newscast content.

## **PART IV: NEWS CONTENT**

If part III covered the people, institutions and technologies behind broadcast news in Lebanon, part IV deals with their output, namely the newscast (Chapter 10), and the raw materials they use, or the news sources, and the newsworthiness values that filter these raw materials (Chapter nine). This part, however, is not a typical “content analysis” of newscasts but rather an analysis that tracks how the news story reveals the political interests and agendas and the institutional forces that influence its shape and construction. We are mostly concerned here with tracking the “traces” of power in the script.

The first section in chapter nine reviews the main news sources Lebanese broadcast journalists use and how those sources and the routines used in harvesting them play a big role in shaping the overall content of TV news. The second section of that chapter deals with the elements of newsworthiness used by Lebanese broadcast journalists to filter the raw news and prioritize the stories in the newscast.

Chapter 10 discusses in-depth how that raw material is transformed and packaged into the final products that are disseminated to the publics. It starts by analyzing a traditional institution in Lebanese news called the newscast introduction, and then compares the rundowns and scripts of different stations. Finally, it analyzes individual rundowns and draws conclusions.

The main reason we will avoid conducting a traditional content analysis is the availability of several studies that have already done so. Dajani (2006) analyzed the content of TV news in Lebanon and concluded that “political figures, who are the main sponsors of television stations, also are the main actors in a relatively high percentage of the local news item. ‘Sects’ are the main actors of another small but significant group of



local news items” (p. 136). McKenzie (2006) confirmed this notion and added “news is known for being compliant insofar as it avoids questioning and criticizing sectarian and religious authorities, as well as power groups that subsidize these authorities” (p. 297). When it came to the difference between newscasts, McKenzie explains that most stations present the major events of the day, but there is a variation in the order of the stories (p. 300). This order, of course, serves the political patron and owners of the stations, as we shall see below. This trend has dire consequences. As Dajani (2006) noted, current political events in Lebanon are covered in a way that supports the views of each television station with no respect for professional codes and ethics. He cited a United Nations report that complained about the tendency of Lebanese stations to spread rumors and non-credible information and present them as facts. According to the report, the widespread practice following the assassination of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri created distress and anxiety among the Lebanese public.

All this confirms what will be discussed next. However, the next chapters will go beyond that and attempt to tie the final news product to the institutional and political pressures and the norms and practices discussed in earlier chapter. In the New Institutional approach, the goal is to tie the macro-level forces—state and institutional pressures—to the micro-level forces—construction of newscasts and news stories (Entman, 2006; Lawrence, 2006; Ryfe, 2006).

## **Chapter 8: News Sources and Newsworthiness**

Information is the vital fuel that runs through the veins of news operations. Without raw news coming into the system, nothing comes out. That is why news operations are dependent on the sources of raw news (Bennett, 2003, p. 165). Those sources may include government officials and powerful political and economic interests, along with other news media, like wire services, newspapers and the World Wide Web.

But not all raw news material makes it into the newscast. In fact, the vast majority of stories don't, and most of them are filtered out. This filtering process is often attributed to the concept of newsworthiness. Students in most journalism schools learn about the general elements of newsworthiness, like timeliness, currency, relevance, etc. But different cultures interpret elements of newsworthiness differently. The second part of this chapter tackles this issue and attempts to understand the main elements of newsworthiness for Lebanese broadcast journalists, especially for the producers and news directors who ultimately decide what is included and what is excluded from the newscast.

### **A. News Sources**

Since news sources are often interested in framing stories and affecting the news agenda or have commercial, political and/or cultural interests, they are not simply neutral conveyors of information. To be sure, the skills and experiences of people and institutions behind news sources determine to what extent they are able to shape the news agenda. Nevertheless, the volatile nature of information and the inherent uncertainties and complexities of political events make absolute control of the news by one side or another almost impossible.

Still, more and more raw news today comes from institutionalized, organized and systematized news processors (Bennett, 2003). Many politicians and government officials have their own media staff and press secretaries. A big chunk of newscast stories are material pulled from Satellite feeds and wire services or even the internet—with little editing. Lately, Public Relations agencies have become major suppliers of business and commercial news that often airs without identification of the source and with little or no change in content (Bachman, 2006; Chepesiuk, 2006).

The following chapter is based on interviews with journalists who specified their main sources of news and their daily routines in acquiring that raw commodity. Eight dominant news sources are discussed: the Lebanese National News Agency, politicians and government officials, local newspapers, in-house news gathering operations, regional and international news agencies and the Web, other radio and TV newscasts, pooling and sharing practices, and the security correspondent.

### ***The National News Agency***

The most important source of raw news in Lebanon was the recently modernized Lebanese National News Agency (NNA), commonly known as “al-Wikaala al-Wataniyya.” It is important, therefore, to briefly discuss the history and structure of this dominant institution.

Although the NNA has been around since the early 1960s, its operation had been inefficient until late 2003 when it started using the internet to distribute information. In the past, NNA used to print all reports into one publication and send it out twice a day, one in the morning and another in the evening. Recently, NNA cancelled the evening publication, and very soon it will cancel the morning issue, according to a veteran

executive at the agency. Today, anyone can get free access to NNA's website which includes the latest news releases and an archive that goes back to August 2003—when it started publishing online.

From the moment NNA went online, private news operations, especially newspapers, severely cut back their correspondents and bureaus and started relying on NNA for most of their local news. According to an NNA manager and former newspaper reporter, newspapers have become so reliant on NNA that “if we are late in posting a story, they frantically start calling us.” The same manager said the newspapers' move not only freed their staff to cover other stories but also protected them from legal and political backlashes. “If there was a mistake in a story, they can simply say they took it from the NNA and shift the blame on us.”

This convenience and cost effective news source, however, has come at a premium. Lebanese news media now depend on a news operation fully controlled by the government. In fact, NNA is one of several departments which belong to the ministry of information. Presiding over the NNA and its sister departments is a general manager who is appointed by the council of ministers (government) after consultation with the minister of information. Below the GM are the directors of each department, whom are directly appointed by the minister of information. A news director heads the NNA department and directs several senior and junior editors and managers. Those editors and managers are also appointed by the ministry of information. At the time of this study, however, the senior editors were practically acting as news directors due to some political problems with the news director that included pending resignations.

But even before that, and with the presence of the news director, the senior editors had substantial power due to the introduction of email technology to the NNA. While officially all news stories from the outside should first go through the news director's desk before reaching the senior editors, more and more information was coming in via email, which went directly to the senior editor and bypassed the news director. One participant suggested that the news director didn't have the required knowledge or the time to check emails and shifted the task to the senior editor.

Just like news directors in TV newsrooms, the senior editor at NNA was the gatekeeper and everything posted had to pass by her first. The similarities include all the details of planning daily agendas for correspondents, pre-framing and post-checking stories before posting them. One interesting task for the senior editor was "categorizing news." The senior editor said there are five kinds of news stories: political, economic, educational, sports and varieties. Most stories were categorized as political stories, and when a story fell under both political and another category, it was always posted as a political story. This notion confirms the idea that any news in Lebanon is political news, as mentioned earlier. It also hints at the reasons why newscasts are heavy on political news, especially statements by politicians. In fact, most participants considered statements from political figures as the most important among political news. This matter will be more pronounced in the next chapter.

In addition to the senior and junior editors and managers, the NNA has an army of correspondents dispersed around the country. According to several NNA managers, every single city and principality in Lebanon had at least one correspondent and 26 principalities even had offices with several correspondents. The central office in Beirut

had the largest number of correspondents. Those were distributed among the government offices and centers.

All those journalists and workers from top to bottom were officially either permanent or contracted government employees. This meant suggests political appointments and partisanship in hiring practices. To make things worse, the ministry of information often hired and appointed journalists from the same region they covered. This meant most often they reflected the political, religious and cultural aspects of that region.

It is important to emphasize the link between NNA employees and the government. Although government employees in Lebanon were not easily fired (or hired) given the sectarian sensitivities of the country and the links those employees had to politicians, ministers and top officials still had substantial influence over them. Officials could easily marginalize or promote employees or even given them more authority than their titles suggest. This is certainly similar to the culture of TL, the government owned TV station covered earlier. Several participants from NNA confirmed that matter and one senior manager even noted “when the Minister of Information changes, most directors and managers also change.” He explained:

Correspondents, however, are not fired or hired, but their positions usually change. For instance, a minister promotes those close to him and demotes those who are not, or simply puts them aside by taking away their privileges. But they can’t mess around with religion. If the post is from a certain sect, it has to be replaced with someone from the same sect. I might be demoted to a regular

correspondent if a new minister of information comes, just like I was promoted to this position a few years ago.

The same manager added that correspondents get fixed salaries with no commission, and “legally people who work for the NNA are not supposed to work anywhere else but most of them work for newspapers.” Indeed, most of the employees interviewed confirmed the latter. This meant that employees didn’t have much leverage against their superiors. They try to avoid trouble in the hopes that they can keep their illegal second jobs.

To further understand how this influential organization works, it is critical to delve into the details of its news operation. To be sure, after interviewing several managers and journalists and observing their work, it was easy to reach the same conclusions reached in earlier chapters. In fact, NNA was similar to any newsroom in hierarchy and operation. The news director or his representative (senior editor) acted as framer and filterer of the news. The senior editor sent assignments to correspondents, who reported back with the news they gathered. The senior editor remained the most powerful person to influence news content. In addition, the relationship between the senior editor and his superiors was clear. One senior editor described the NNA’s general manager as the political supervisor and added:

If there is a political stance by a politician that I don’t feel comfortable taking responsibility for, I call him and get his advice. For instance, if there was a fiery stance by Suleiman Frangieh [a Christian opposition leader], I get his advice and see if I should tone the statement down or cut out of it or if I should not post it at all.

The only difference between the NNA and the other private TV stations was that news directors at NNA changed following any change in government—which was similar to TL’s culture. Therefore, there was no one constant policy, and in many cases there were contradicting political lines that took over the institution. This meant most of the people who worked at NNA had to adapt to the political changes.

Most of the participants from NNA described their jobs as relaying information from various Lebanese sources to the main media institutions in the country. There were two main sources of information: those sent by NNA’s correspondents and those sent by just about anyone else from around the country. Stories from the former source were organized by an assignment manager and sent to the senior editor (officially the news director) who posted them online after editing. The latter were handled by a large staff of editors and writers working in the central office in Beirut. Those stories first arrived at the senior editor’s desk (or in her email inbox).<sup>104</sup> Then, they were sorted and filtered and distributed among editors and writers to prepare them for publication. One of those editors described her job as follows:

We get the news either as wires or faxes or emails. We edit the stories by taking out the jargon, correcting grammatical and factual errors and making the story tighter. We also rewrite each story according to the NNA’s style.... When we rewrite a sentence, we make sure not to change its meaning but simply put it in a grammatically and stylistically correct manner, especially the beginning of the articles.

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<sup>104</sup> The senior editor is taking place of the news director because the latter resigned, but usually all stories go to the news director.



Sometimes, however, the NNA editors went beyond grammatical and stylistic editing and eliminated some content, but only following the senior editor or the news director's instructions. One senior editor explained, "If someone calls a politician a crook or uses other obscenities, we usually take those out." She added, "If there was any information that generates sectarian hatred, it does not go through. Moreover, the same senior editor also noted that she edited or simply threw out content intended for self promotion and advertising. In one instance, a school sent a fax directly to one of the editors hoping to have it posted. The senior editor told him she can't let it go through; "The fax is from a school congratulating its students for receiving great results in government tests. This is a virtual advertisement for the school and won't pass," she said.

To be sure, not all who sent information to NNA were equal. The position and stature of the person sending the information dictated everything from the length of the article to how much information was edited out. According to a senior editor:

If it was from a current ministers or current parliamentarians, they usually get every word posted, whatever they say, even if they were very critical of the current government. If it was from a former minister or parliamentarian, we tend to take out more stuff, summarize and post less material. It depends on the importance of the person. If it was a regular person or a business owner, we might post a short one or two-sentence story.

When several editors were asked about directions, influences or interferences from the Ministry of Information, they all responded: "it depends who the minister was." One editor noted, "Some ministers are open and give us the freedom and don't interfere. Others don't let us post a lot of material for opposition politicians, especially if it is

critical of them.” Another editor said, “The current prime minister doesn’t interfere much. Whoever sends news, we post it. Now, sometimes the minister sends his advisors, and they talk to us and indirectly give us some directions.” A third editor explained how NNA operated before 2005, when the Syrian army dominated the country:

Back then, no story would be critical of the Syrians. All news stories critical of them won’t pass, and there was a lot of careful monitoring of stories related to the Syrians—down to the comma and period. Also, nothing from opposition groups like the Aoun movement or the Lebanese Forces passed back then. They used to send stuff but none of it reached our hands. It would stop at the senior editor’s desk.

When asked how they learned about changes in policy, one editor responded, “you get a word or comment from a superior and you know immediately that you don’t write something like that.” And similar to the responses from TV stations, the editors noted that “Syrian officers never called us directly. They only called our superiors.”

Furthermore, NNA editors and correspondents rely heavily on official accounts to confirm stories sent to them by the general public. A senior editor explained, “To protect ourselves, we call several official sources, especially for security-related stories.” She added, “We call the army and other national security offices and make sure the news is factual and accurate... That way the responsibility lies on the security or official source, not on us.”

So, the private news media, as mentioned earlier, shift the responsibility of the news they broadcast to NNA, while the latter shifts it to government officials. Following this logic, the private news media rely both directly and indirectly on government

officials for the biggest chunk of their broadcasted news. This is further confirmed in the next section.<sup>105</sup>

### ***Politicians and Government Officials***

While sifting through the many faxes at one of the newsrooms, it was hard not to notice that the majority of those faxes were press releases directly sent from politicians. Although it was impossible to air all the statements—and most of them, in fact, never made it into the newscast or even outside the fax room, many producers noted that politicians or their press secretaries haunted them all day asking why their statements were not aired. “Even when we aired their stories,” one producer complained, “some politicians still called to complain why the story was too short or why we excluded a sentence or even a word.” Of course, those politicians who called didn’t include the politicians who own the station. Those got full coverage no matter what. Still some politicians who were close allies to the owners of some stations interfered even with the details of their stories. In one instance discussed later, a politician came to the newsroom and instructed the reporter on which sound bites to pick for his story.

Due to their routines and norms, broadcast journalists always kept an eye out for activities of prominent politicians. One news director complained that her sister, who works with Reuters, happened to be in same room when she got paged that Hassan Nassrallah is having a press conference. “She knew before I knew, although she worked with an international organization,” she said. “I called the station and asked them how

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<sup>105</sup> Correspondents who work at NNA only send back written stories. The NNA does not have any photographers or videographers. For photos, however, the ministry of information has a contract with a photography office Dalati and Nehra. The government pays that company an annual fee in return for sending the photos to all newspapers in the country. They also get paid from the newspapers who publish their photos. They mostly cover the presidential and prime minister’s office. There is no one, however, like Dalati and Nehra for video material. Each station depends on its own crew and on pooling resources with other TV stations.

could Reuters know before me?” This reflects the constant attention and importance journalists give to politicians’ activities.

On the other hand, politicians too made sure the news media were aware of any important events they had. As mentioned earlier, most of them send numerous faxes about their activities. Some politicians even send videos of their speeches or events when stations don’t dispatch their own photographers to cover them. Several producers welcomed and encouraged that process. “We prefer they send videos because there’s a lot of pressure on our camera crews to cover everything,” one producer said.

As mentioned earlier, compared to the U.S. public relations and political communication is still a developing field in Lebanon, but it has been advancing rapidly, especially in the past decade. This means broadcast newsrooms are destined to be increasingly submerged with those political statements and news releases, even more than they already are.

### ***Local Newspapers***

One of the important finding in this section is that almost every single journalist interviewed said they get a substantial amount of their local news from reading the morning newspaper. We often assume that broadcast news is faster and more current than print news. This leads to the assumption that print journalists are more likely to get their news from broadcast rather than vice versa. In Lebanon, broadcast journalists have traditionally relied heavily on newspapers as their first and foremost news source, especially during the war. This habit is starting to change, however, with the spread of online news and, more importantly, the development of the free and easily accessible national news wire services (NNA), which was covered earlier.

As mentioned earlier, almost every participant said their daily routine starts with reading the newspaper, but that process is not simply for updating oneself with the latest news but also serves as a source for broadcast news. Most reporters mentioned they put many stories they read aside to bring them up in the editorial meeting. In addition, many stories in the newscast are often based purely on newspaper articles, especially if they were exclusive interviews with prominent politicians or analysis pieces by prominent print journalists—who in general are considered more knowledgeable and prestigious than broadcast journalists. Several reporters mentioned that they review newspapers specifically “for reading analysis and different points of views and not simply for news and information,” which is not always timely enough. Furthermore, one reporter commented, “in newspapers, I focus on local political news and to a much lesser extent on international news,” reflecting several other reporters’ practices of getting international news from alternative sources.

The three main publications cited by most participants were an-Nahar and as-Safir newspapers, followed by al-Diyar, al-Balad and al-Mustaqbal. Many participants also included L’Orient le Jour, a Lebanese newspapers published in French, but only two participants mentioned its English counterpart, The Daily Star. A few participants also mentioned the pan Arab Saudi-owned newspapers Al-Hayat and Al-Sharq al-Awsat, which are commonly available in Lebanon. In addition, a handful of participants included the Kuwaiti al-Qabas, the Egyptian al-Ahram and the Palestinian-owned and London based al-Quds al-Arabi newspapers.

Interestingly, participants from different stations tended to choose newspapers that were close to their station’s political line. For instance only participants from Future

TV mentioned the Hariri-owned al-Mustaqbal newspaper—which literally means “The Future Newspapers.” On the other hand, most participants from New TV mentioned as-Safir, which is considered a leftist or left-of-center newspaper (McKenzie, 2006, p. 295). Although reading the newspaper was certainly a personal preference and not something imposed by the institution, it is important to note that each station decided which newspapers to subscribe to and not the individual journalists. Since, as discussed earlier, most journalists working at a certain station already subscribed to the political line of that station, reading newspapers that also follow that political line only confirmed their views and paradigms—especially that they were mostly reading analysis pieces.

### ***In-house Newsgathering Operations***

On a daily basis, each station daily dispatched news crews to cover major stories and many of those crews covered one of the “four main news centers” in Lebanon: parliament, the presidential palace, the prime minister’s “Saray” or headquarters, and the council of ministries’ headquarters. Although those centers were frequently covered, they didn’t have a permanent crew—like the press corps at the White House. Still, when glancing at the daily calendar of several stations, it was clear that most crews and reporters were sent to cover politicians or activities by politicians. And even the social, cultural or economic events scheduled were sometimes indirectly related to a political agenda or tied to the sectarian identity of the station.

Aside from the newsroom’s daily calendar, another document seemed to reveal the systematic focus on politicians and their activities. Several stations had maps of “news gathering centers,” which pointed out the positions of correspondents around the country and the locations of microwave links and transportation routes. These were

mainly used to quickly figure out how to link a live shot or send a video from a local correspondent to the station. One station, for instance, had all of its eight fixed ENG microwave transmitters located inside Greater Beirut. Four of those were located in the council of ministries headquarters, the council of deputies' headquarters (parliament), the presidential palace and the prime minister's headquarter. The other spots on the map that were distributed outside of Greater Beirut were linked to one of those ENG's through a taxi route. This meant a story from a correspondent in south Lebanon, for instance, was driven up to one of the closest ENG locations near Beirut and then transmitted to the station. That, of course, ruled out live shots from south Lebanon, unless a mobile ENG was sent, which was not an easy task and cost a lot of money and effort—let alone the technological difficulties of connecting an ENG link in a mountainous country like Lebanon. This map reveals that stations cast their nets mostly inside metropolitan Beirut and more specifically onto the political centers of the country.

Moreover, along with the calendars and maps that point crews to their routines, most stations were also filled with bulletins and charts that had important information (telephone numbers, addresses, maps, etc.) of political figures. In one station, which was superbly organized, those charts also included photos and current snippets of information about those figures. This reveals the supreme importance of politicians for newsroom crews.

### ***The Security Correspondent***

One of the most curious sources of news in Lebanon is called the security correspondent. As one news director explained “those are people who have contacts with the security apparatus in Lebanon, from intelligence to police to the army.... Some of

them also have scanners and listen to the internal communication between police and other security groups.” Some security correspondents had strong relationships with security officials and spooks and often delivered inside scoops to the news industry. In practice, news directors rely on security correspondents to confirm any rumors of a security breach or an assassination. In one coincidence, a news director immediately contacted a security correspondent after several reporters said they heard a loud explosion. It turned out to be something else. But security correspondents also initiated contact with news directors too. One producer noted that “some security correspondents know about things before government officials. So, they contact us and tell us what’s happening.” None of the participants commented on whether those correspondents were on the station’s payroll or if there was a possibility that they were government agents themselves trying to sneak stories or rumors into the newscast. Most producers and news directors said they often but not always confirm the stories they received from security correspondents with government officials before they air them.

### ***Monitoring Other Radio and TV Newscasts***

Monitoring radio newscasts seemed to be a tradition that survived from the civil war. Almost every station studied had a person or even a staff who monitor radio newscasts for any breaking news. In addition, most stations monitored other newscasts, but not as systematically as they monitored radio. In most cases, the newscast producer monitored the other newscasts to make sure she didn’t miss a story. Along with the local Lebanese newscasts, several producers monitored Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabia TV. Some also monitored the Syrian newscasts. Those were not major sources of news, but more like early warning systems of breaking news.



### ***Pooling and Sharing***

The practice of sharing content is an old tradition in Lebanon. When one station doesn't cover an event that later they deem newsworthy, they quickly contact the other stations to get the video from them. Many producers even complained that they spend too much time helping other stations get the videos they need:

Sometimes we spend the whole newscast copying video tapes from and for other stations because we don't have enough camera crews to send out, so we tell our correspondents to drop some stories, but we later find out that one of the stories we dropped had an important statement in it. So, we scramble to get it from another station, and they do the same thing with us (Interview # 4b & 5b, June-July, 2006).

Pooling—a traditional American practice where several stations “pool” their efforts to cover major events—was not widely practiced in Lebanon but it seemed to be gaining favor, especially that it saved stations a lot of money and freed their crews.

### ***Regional and International News Agencies and the Web***

All the stations studied had access to some regional and international news wires and video feeds, but not all used them effectively. At one side of the spectrum there is TL, which had little or no systematic monitoring of wires and barely two or three video feeds available. To make things even more inefficient, TL employees printed out wire stories and distribute them to producers instead of giving all newsroom staff access the stories online. For videos, they had to wait for the editor to copy the feed on tape. In many cases the tape was not labeled or outlined. So, the producer or reporter had to spend valuable time searching through the tape for the appropriate video. Even when it came to

the internet, connection was slow and unreliable and discouraged the reporters from accessing the numerous sources of information. Even at New TV, which was slightly more advanced in its technology than TL, an employee from outside the news department monitored international and regional newsfeeds. He was responsible for recording the video feeds, printing out the wire stories, translating the headlines for all English stories, and printing and sending them to the news department. At the other side of the spectrum was LBCI's newsroom, where networked desktops connected to high-speed internet were ubiquitous. Any person instantly accessed a wide array of wires, video feeds or online news outlets without leaving their desks.

The top three international wire services used in Lebanon were Reuters, AFP (Agence France-Presse) and AP (Associated Press). One participant confirmed that "90% of international news scripts come from Reuters, AFP and AP. The rest come from Arabic Sat channels like Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabia."

Regionally, each Arabic country had its own wire service and stations had free access to most of them. On the top of the list was Saudi Arabia's wire service followed by Syria's SANA.

As for video feeds, the following were commonly found in TV stations: Reuters, CNN News source, APTN (Associated Press Television News) for international news and ArabSat/ASBU (Arab States Broadcasting Union) for regional news.

In addition, many reports noted that they daily access information from the World Wide Web. The top two web sites accessed were Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabia, regionally, and BBC, CNN, The Washington Post and the New York Times, internationally. One producer had, in addition to the above, the following web sites bookmarked: Ha'aretz,

Jerusalem Post, ynetnews.com, Khaleej Times, Lefigaro.fr, usembassy.gov.lb, whitehouse.gov, syria-news.com, elaph.com, lemonade.fr, telegraph.co.uk and ahram.org.

As we will discuss in the next chapter, international and regional news took a back seat to local news. Therefore, these new sources were not as important as the preceding ones—except, of course, those coming from Syria and Saudi Arabia.

### ***Conclusion***

From the above, it is clear that the most reliable “nets” Lebanese stations cast are those that capture stories about local politicians and government officials in the greater Beirut area. The main four sources of information for broadcast news are: Politicians and government officials, who try hard to push their own agendas and political rhetoric utilizing the skills of publicists and public relations experts; the National News Agency, an organization fully controlled by government and heavily influenced and systematically biased towards government officials and political news; the newspapers, private media institutions that heavily rely on the NNA and government officials; and in-house news gathering teams, who are systematically positioned in the main centers of political power in Beirut. The other news sources only account for a small chunk of all the raw news stations receive.

The dominant news sources will later reveal how and why most newscasts in Lebanon are mostly made up of political news, especially politicians’ activities and statements. Before moving on to analyze newscast content, however, one more piece of the puzzle needs to be explicated: perception of newsworthiness by the Lebanese broadcast journalist.

## **B. Newsworthiness and the Rundown: Political Figures, Not Political Positions**

Almost every news organization has a criterion for filtering and organizing stories, regardless the news medium. These criteria are often referred to as newsworthiness and encompass principles and traditions that guide journalists in their task to include, exclude, highlight or bury certain news stories (Bennett, 2003). Journalists and editors in most countries present news stories according to their newsworthiness or perceived importance. The most important story is often displayed prominently at the top of the newscast and given substantial time, effort and resources. While “newsworthiness” or “importance” may be a universal, rational and acceptable criterion for organizing and presenting news, it carries within it the cultures that dominate the news media circles and to a large extent is generalized to the larger society (Mellor, 2005). Most importantly, the theory of newsworthiness is a powerful predictor of news coverage in developing countries (Schwarz, 2006).

The conceptualization of newsworthiness certainly differs from one country to another and even from one medium or news organization to another. In Lebanon, the term “importance” (a’hamiyyat) is most often used to describe newsworthiness. One producer summarized this concept:

The newscast is divided into Local, Arabic and International News. The position of the story in the newscast and its length depends on the importance of the news story, whether it was local or international. We start with the most important. If a story is important we have a package for it. If it’s not, we either drop it, or if it has video we run a voice over and put it late in the newscast (Interview # 4b & 5b, June-July, 2006)

The importance of the story clearly dictates the prominence of its position in the newscast along with other factors, such as its length, its format and amount of time given to newsmakers. For example, a very important story could span a 10-minute package (PKG) and include several long sound bites for a newsmaker. It could also be presented early in the newscast. On the other hand, a less important story could be a 45-second voiceover (VO) with paraphrases of the news maker's words read by the anchor. Therefore, the less important a story is perceived, the short and the later it comes in the newscast.

But there is more to the position and format of the story than the term 'importance' or 'newsworthy' reveals. In the following paragraphs we visit that concept and try to decipher its meaning or how it is perceived by Lebanese broadcast journalists and managers.

### ***The Station's Political Line and Newsworthiness: The Dominant Criterion***

The first and most important element defining newsworthiness in Lebanon is directly tied to the political line of the station. The golden rule is news that promotes and is compatible with the station's political line gets high priority. In some station, this rule can bluntly be stated "news that serves the political goals of the station's owners gets high priority." This is not speculation but something several participants communicated openly and clearly. One producer noted, "We don't include all stories in the newscast. We choose what is most important, what is most current and what corresponds to the station's political line, and we present that before any other news." She added, "That's the criterion for building the newscast, of course, along with the standards of objectivity, neutrality and balance" (Interview # 4b & 5b, June-July, 2006). So, although

newsworthiness is influenced by professional standards, it remains strongly tied to the “station’s political line.” As one reporter explained, the station’s political line is tied to the political interests of the owners. “The question becomes which story will serve the owner’s political interests.” Another reporter confirmed that notion saying “give me any story now, and I can tell you if this will help [the owner] or not politically.” She added, “Based on that, I can tell you if the news director will run the story or not, and where he will position it in the newscast.”

Another participant, a producer, explained “priority is based on how you deal with the newscast politically, and how you make that newscast serve you politically through the way you present the story.” This adds the dimension of how the story is presented and not only where it is positioned. In addition, this criterion seemed to apply to all stories, whether they were political, social or economic, and seemed to influence the minutest elements of the story. One participant elaborated with this example:

Even a picture and the way you present it can serve you politically. For example, in the context of reconstruction of Lebanon, you can show pictures of the bridges [a certain politician] built or about the reconstruction of [Beirut] or the towers built by [that politician’s construction company] and how that company’s stocks are going up. If every day you run a short report like that, it will be present in people’s minds, and they will talk about how much [that politician] is serving the country economically.... This will serve the country—people from abroad will be encouraged to invest here, but at the same time you are marketing [that politician’s] project indirectly because, in the end, it is his project. So, you are

promoting what he wants indirectly, whether through an economic or a social story (Interview # 15c & 17c, June-July, 2006).

This elaboration reveals how strong the political line criterion influenced the understanding and implementation of newsworthiness. Although this criterion can be generalized to all stations, its degree of influence may vary from one station to another. It is weaker at stations that are not owned or controlled by current and prominent politicians, like New TV. On the other hand, it is very strong at stations owned by patrons who have major political projects in the country, like Future TV and al-Manar TV. In any case, this criterion was common to all stations. Even New TV had a political line that influenced newsworthiness.

One of the outcomes of this criterion, as we shall see later, is the quota of stories allocated daily to certain politicians. Each station had a quota for its own politicians and their allies. Future TV constantly covered the Hariri family and their parliamentary allies in the Future Movement, regardless how insignificant or trivial their statements or activities were. Al-Manar and NBN had a quota for politicians from Hezbollah and the Amal Movement, respectively. LBCI had a quota for the politicians associated with the Lebanese Forces and other political allies. TL, given its relationship with the minister of information, and consequently the prime minister, also had a quota for the Hariri family, the prime minister and the information minister. New TV was slightly different since its owners were not political figures, and the communist party, which it used to be associated with, had barely any political power or goals. Still, as we shall see, the station allocated time to communist officials, when no other station did that.

Furthermore, an interesting phenomenon was that almost all stations have standard quotas for stories related to Saudi Arabia. No matter how mundane or un-newsworthy the story, you can almost always rely on hearing something about Saudi Arabia in Lebanese newscasts, especially on LBC and Future TV, both of which have financial and political ties to the gulf state.

***Newsmakers and Newsworthiness: The Political Figure or Za'im***

The second most important factor influencing the newsworthiness of a story was the political figure behind it. It is important to emphasize that by political figure we mean the person of the politician and not his political position or title. Almost every producer and news director explained there were some political figures that cannot be ignored, whether they were allied or opposed to the station's political line. Several producers even named the "important seven:" Hassan Nasrallah, Nabih Berri, Walid Jumblat, Michel Aoun, Samir Geagea, Fouad Seniora and Saad Hariri.<sup>106</sup> One producer noted that although Nasrallah and Jumblat were the top two in the list, "all the rest are at the same level of importance but it also depends on what they say." The same reporter added "take Walid Jumblat, for example. I cannot possibly give him a short, say one minute, story. You just cannot do it. It's simply illogical." She explained, "Jumblat is an influential Lebanese leader; his allies and opponents listen to what he has to say because he is Walid Jumblat." This circular logic is stunning but more importantly reveals the inherent importance of certain political figures. The importance of Walid Jumblat does not stem from his position as a member of parliament or even as the head of a major political alliance. Jumblat is important because he is Jumblat, because in Lebanese culture, a

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<sup>106</sup> Rafik Hariri before he was assassinated.



Za'im inherits and is inherently important. In fact, the Za'im gives importance to the political position he occupies and not the vice versa.<sup>107</sup>

Most interesting about the list of “Za'ims” above was not the name of people included but those who were excluded. Not one participant named Lebanese President Emil Lahoud among the top seven. When asked about the president, one producer answered “the president? God help the president. Who is listening to him these days?” Another producer was asked if Walid Jumblat and the President both delivered speeches of equal importance, who would they consider more newsworthy? The reporter unequivocally responded “definitely Jumblat. He would get a full package at the top of the newscast. As for the president, I would run a regular story, probably a voiceover, but not put him in the lead, unless if he delivers an extraordinarily explosive speech.” This answer reveals that notion that the president seemed to be finding great difficulties in getting media exposure lately. The pro-government media had shunned Lahoud after the Syrians withdrew in 2005—since he was considered pro-Syrian and later in the opposition camp. This changed when the Hezbollah-Israel war of summer 2006 broke out. During the war, the President did get significantly more media coverage, first internationally and then locally. A member of parliament interviewed for this study noted that during the war the president told him, “Just two weeks ago, no one wanted to talk to me. Now every journalist from around the world is asking for an interview.”

Another example that confirms this notion is Saad Hariri, the young member of Parliament and son of slain Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. His prominent media status certainly does not come from his government position—he is only a deputy in

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<sup>107</sup> See chapter three for the more information on the concept of “Za'im.”

parliament—but because he is one of the leaders of the March 14 movement, and more importantly the inheritor of his father’s political power, wealth and popularity.

In addition, Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah, has no official position in government, but is arguably the most prominent media personality in Lebanon, if not the Arabic world—certainly during and after the Hezbollah-Israel war of summer 2006.

Nasrallah’s prominence comes partly from his position as the Chairman of Hezbollah but more likely from the successes that party had achieved under his leadership and his popularity among the Lebanese public, especially among the Shia Muslims in Lebanon—the largest religious community in the country. Nasrallah’s appearances, although infrequent, command enormous attention by the news media and its audience. It was common during and after the summer 2006 war to walk into any crowded restaurant in Beirut only to find people silently and attentively watching his long speeches on big plasma screens. In one observed incident, a foreign reporter covering the war was stunned by what she saw in an upper scale restaurant on Hamra Street. Even the person preparing coffee stopped his work to watch.

All this confirms that the political figure and not necessarily the political position add to the newsworthiness of a story. To be sure, however, the content of a politician’s speech or the activity he is engaged in influenced his newsworthiness. Nevertheless, almost any activity or speech delivered by the “important seven” was most likely to be covered somewhere in the newscast. One producer elaborated about a story that covered the prime minister welcoming Miss Lebanon: “I might run it as a voiceover in the middle of the newscast, but if the prime minister delivers a speech saying he will go to Syria tomorrow, then it becomes the top story.”

It is important to note that the “news maker” criterion is the most dominant on slow news days, where there are no extraordinary events—like explosions, assassinations or national security issues. While tracking how producers and news directors approached the enormous amount of news daily, it became clear that their thinking process rotated around the activities of politicians. A producer explained how she prioritized news the day she was interviewed:

An event is defined by the political personality... Today, [Prime Minister] Seniora’s visit to Bkerki [headquarter of the Christian Maronite Patriarch] is the most important story and will likely run first in the newscast. Seniora and Patriarch Sfeir will talk about the spying network that was caught in Lebanon and other important news. Then, after that, I look for who has any activities or statements, like Michel Aoun’s response to another politician.... Then a Hezbollah official’s response to Jumblat.... Then I see if any other politicians had some activities or statements.... Still, Seniora’s story is the most important because many political sides are requesting that he resign, and because Sfeir is the head of the Maronite Christian sect. Of course, the position of Seniora is also very prominent. Now, if Aoun today meets with the president, he will be the first story, because they have never met yet (Interview # 7b, June-July, 2006).

Three important matters are revealed in the thinking process of this producer. First, the producer’s daily routine is a conscious search for activities and statements made by politicians, starting with the most prominent to the least. Second, the importance of two politicians equals the sum of their individual importance. In other words, if there were three politicians of equal importance and two of them engage in the same news

event while the third has an independent news event, the story of the former two will be considered more newsworthy—unless the criterion of the institution’s political line affects this equation. Third, the political context of a politician’s activity or speech, regardless his importance as a person, also affects the newsworthiness of his news event. This is confirmed by another producer who noted that although Nasrallah is one of the most important political figures, “he sometimes says something social or religious and not political,” which makes the story less newsworthy. This is related to the third element of newsworthiness: type of story.

***Type of Story and Newsworthiness: The (National) Security Story***

Although in Lebanese news almost all stories had a political dimension, as noted in earlier sections, producers and news directors do consciously categorized different news genres. This categorization allocated important elements of newsworthiness to the stories. As mentioned earlier, the National News Agency categorized stories into five kinds: political, economic, educational, sports and varieties. Most producers interviewed had a much simpler categorization that seemed to divide the political from the non-political stories, where the former are invariably more important.

When asked about the most important kind of story, all producers unequivocally answered “security stories” or “al-khabar al-amni.”<sup>108</sup> These included any explosions or battles or assassinations and almost always landed the top story in Lebanon. This is probably a universal matter, but given the size of Lebanon, even minor breaches in security, where there were even no casualties, may easily top the priority list. One news director put the importance of security stories in context:

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<sup>108</sup> “Security” and “national security” almost have the same meaning here.

Lately the Israeli spying network caught in Lebanon was the most important story. Security stories like that tended to be extremely important, even more so than political statements. Rafik Hariri's assassination, of course, was extremely important because Hariri was a prominent politician (Interview # 7b, June-July, 2006).

Security stories included regional and international news. One producer noted that "last year, an explosion occurred in Tel-Aviv, just 15 minutes before the newscast aired. We immediately changed the top story and ran a breaking news banner." To many producers, security stories were the kind of stories that "imposed themselves." As one producer explained, "certain events impose themselves without me having to put any effort in figuring it out." She added, "If there was a security event, no one needs to point it to me, and I don't need to philosophize in justifying why it's the top story." In other words, security stories blast through the filtering process of the news organization and producers seemed confident to give them the highest salience without even going back to the news director, especially in tight situations like the Tel-Aviv bombing example.

When asked if two or more national security events occurred simultaneously, the same producer said "other factors intervene here; it could be a small detail like a missing factual element about an explosion; was it a bomb or a missile?" The producer continued, "It could also be the size of the security breach, its location, but most importantly, how many casualties and who were the casualties. If a prominent politician was assassinated, there is no question where this story will be positioned." Obviously, the last sentence suggests that the sum of "security event" and "prominent politician" yield the highest level of newsworthiness.

After national security stories came stories about political leaders, which were mostly activities of politicians. These types of stories were covered in the second criterion, and were almost always early in the newscast, especially when no security events had occurred. One producer suggested that even when there were very few political activities occurring taking place, it didn't automatically mean that the amount of political news became less. She added, "Sometimes we don't have many major political events, so we run investigative reports, usually about corruption in government, or we have interviews with some politicians." This quote not only highlights the importance of political news in Lebanon, but suggests that journalists actively seek and create political news when it doesn't occur.

The degree of importance for stories falls precipitously after this kind of story. In fact, when asked what came after stories about security and political leaders, one producer said "after that comes regular news, which we usually run in a summarized way along with its video." He added:

It is important to keep the newscast diverse. We might put a car crash; it is emotional and sticks in the audiences' minds. But our priorities sometimes include social and cultural events. We also try to include some soft news, varieties from around the world and sports news. These kinds of stories help the audience relax at the end of the newscast (Interview # 70a, June-July, 2006).

The producer's use of the term "regular news" to describe all other stories not political or related to security events is revealing. First, it suggests that those stories are given very little attention and importance and are all lumped together in one category. Second, the main purpose of airing "regular news" is to "keep the newscast diverse" and

not because regular news is newsworthy. Another producer confirmed this by saying “lately, people have grown sick of politics, because politicians spend all day mudslinging each other. It has become a political bazaar. So, we try to include social and health reports.” The producer added “we try to focus on the people, their problems, economic situation, health, etc.” In other words, the stories that concerned people were not included because they were newsworthy but because people had grown sick of politics.

This is a problem in Lebanese broadcast news. Several studies noted that Lebanese newscasts are extremely heavy on political content and highly ignore matters affecting people’s lives (e.g. Dajani, 2006). Even when those matters were presented, they had a political context, where some politician was explicitly or implicitly blamed or praised. Dajani (2006) noted that Lebanese Television news focuses mostly on domestic politics and pays little attention to public service. “[A]ny television coverage of ‘social distress’ is perceived to be negative, in the sense that the presentation of information about hardships is intended to expose ‘the other group,’ and not oriented toward public service” (p. 135-136). This creates a dilemma for news stations; if they cover social issues, they will most likely be politicized, and if they don’t, the whole newscast will be political statements. For example, one reporter noted “we almost never cover stories about the bad conditions of roads in some areas because some government officials responsible for fixing those problems are allied to the [station’s owners].” The same reporter added, during a short period when another politician took over government and the station’s owner became in the opposition camp, “We spent all day covering pot holes.”

Another reason for the low priority given to “regular news,” especially social issue is the effort and time it took to locate and produce these stories. One news director noted that although less than 25% of the newscast is usually dedicated to social issues and 75% to political stories, the latter “only take up about 25% of my time and effort, while 75% goes to social issues.” The news director added, “Social issues are much harder to deal with because you need to double-check if the person complaining is not exaggerating or taking advantage of us to get some personal gain, or if he is really a victim of injustice.” Double-checking if a regular person is taking advantage of a news organization, while taking for granted that politicians don’t do that, seems to be a universal practice. To be fair, the news director did note that they also check “if the issue affects a lot of people or reflects their concerns and rights.” In that case, “We don’t hesitate to air them if they do.” Still, it is worth noting that stories by regular people were subjected to more scrutiny than those from politicians, although the latter are more adept at manipulating the news media and certainly have much more resources to do so.

After security events, political figures and regular news came the least important stories that regularly stacked the end of the newscast. Those included sports news, caricatures, varieties from around the world and the weathercast. Consistently with the U.S., sports news fall in the least important category for news. Weathercasts in Lebanon, however, are also not newsworthy. Actually, weathercasts were a new phenomenon and had never been a constant staple of the newscast until recently. That may be due to the predictable four-season Mediterranean climate. Caricatures had long been a common feature of Lebanese news, and, not surprisingly, they tend to be exclusively political satire.



### ***Proximity and Newsworthiness: Geographical and Sectarian Proximity***

Proximity is one of the standard universal elements of newsworthiness and usually means the closer the news story is to the news organization's audience, the more newsworthy it is, whether that closeness is geographical or cultural (Greer, 2003, p. 47; Sparks, 1992). Geographical proximity is simple and straight forward. In Lebanese newscasts, local stories are more important than regional stories, which are more important than international stories. This doesn't mean, however, that international news items never make it as the top stories. On the contrary, international items sometimes are considered among the most important, but that is often related to elements of those stories that affected local or regional politics. For example, a UN security meeting on a Lebanese or Arabic matter would certainly be considered important. Local news stories, however, dominated Lebanese newscasts and were considered more important than regional and international news, especially after the assassination of Prime Minister Hariri and the upheavals that followed. This perception had clearly been communicated since 2005 by the management apparatus of stations. Several producers noted that management had scaled back their international operations and in some cases merged the satellite newscast with the local newscast, which before 2005 were two separate and almost independent operations. One news director also noted that the station's CEO was constantly pushing for more emphasis on local news.

In addition, when it came to regional and international news, not all were treated equally. Starting with regional news, which often means Arabic or Middle Eastern news, there were four countries that topped the list, according to most producers and news directors: Palestine, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Syria. In one of the stations that had a

separate Arabic and International news subdivision, a producer explained her department's work process and how she organizes and prioritizes news stories:

We have a folder for each of the important countries, and each folder has stories sorted according to the importance of the story and its currency. Security stories are the most important followed by political stories.... Of course, today there are certain countries that take priority, for instance Iraq and Palestine (Interview # 5d, June-July, 2006).

When asked which is more important Iraq or Palestine, the producer said "it depends on what is happening in the field. For instance, today was the first time the Israelis reentered Gaza and nothing major was happening in Iraq, so Palestine took precedent." The producer noted that not all countries have folders, and that having a folder does not mean that other countries will not be covered if something newsworthy happens. "We could have a plane crash in another country, or an earthquake or the death of a senior politician. We are not simply driven geographically, but some stories impose themselves, and those coming out of Iraq and Palestine almost always do." In other words, regional and international stories that have folders are high on the monitors list, but that doesn't guarantee they are high in the newscast. The producer continued "today we have a story about Kuwaiti elections coming in third because this was the first time women vote there." The same producer also noted that although stories from Iran also had a folder, that day they only had a short voice over for Iran because UN Secretary General "Kofi Annan and the Iranian Foreign Minister had a meeting, but we often have Iran as the first story, especially when there is a proposal for negotiation over nuclear weapons or things seem to be going towards a clash."

Given that many stories can come out of the same country, participants were asked how they chose from among those stories. One producer said he first chooses the latest news, but “also stronger pictures and visuals give higher priority to the story, especially destruction or killed and wounded and security and military issues that affect a large part of society.” The point about “stronger pictures” is discussed below, and the other elements were discussed earlier.

As mentioned in earlier sections, International news was given the lowest priority, unless a major event occurred or the news affected local politics. Several producers and news director noted that this trend of ignoring international news started after the Hariri assassination and seemed to be directly affected by local political and security events. Some also confirmed that station managers had clear instructions for them to focus on local news. We will confirm this notion in the next chapter when we look at the Lebanese newscasts content.

But geographical proximity also affected the prioritizing process of local news stories, and not only regional and international news. As one producer noted, “I start putting the rundown by including local stories, starting with events happening in the capital, going to stories from our correspondents outside of Beirut, then moving on to regional and international stories.” This had led to a lot of focus on events taking place in the capital and ignoring the rest of Lebanon, to a large extent. This also corroborates what was mentioned earlier in this chapter about the ENGs and fixed wireless transmission stations that are concentrated in the capital.

But boundaries of “the capital” are not necessarily geographic and vary from one station to another. During the civil war, for instance, the capital was divided into Eastern

and Western Beirut. Today, although the capital has long been unified, journalists had different notions of what made up “Beirut,” and that mostly depended on the journalist’s sect and political allegiance. Several Christian journalists, for instance, confided that they don’t feel comfortable venturing into some areas of “Western Beirut,” and considered the downtown area some kind of a border. Others felt that Beirut started at the Nahr el-Kalb tunnel and extended all the way down to the southern suburbs, where both al-Manar TV and NBN have their headquarters. This brings us to the non-geographic conception of proximity.

As mentioned earlier, proximity can be psychological or cultural. Given the sectarian and communal divisions in Lebanon, a predominantly Christian area is perceived closer to a Christian than to a Muslim, although geographically it might be much closer to the latter. This notion was not explicitly communicated by participants, most of whom felt uncomfortable discussing religion and sectarianism in Lebanon. Still, a handful of journalists did give their opinion openly. A reporter who had earlier noted that producers tended to distribute important stories to reporters from their own sect, also said she often tries to highlight stories about her own community. The reporter, however, did note that this practice is “very carefully hidden because after the civil war, sectarianism was considered something very dirty, but everyone still practices it.” This sectarian proximity will be especially highlighted in the next chapter where we see how a Christian station was the only one to cover two Christian towns in South Lebanon, while a Shiite station was the only one to focus on an area predominantly Shiite and strongly supportive of the political party that owns the station.

Since most Lebanese stations were associated with a “sectarian identity,” this meant sectarian-proximity was one of the hidden criteria of newsworthiness. But sectarian-proximity did not only apply to local news. As mentioned early in this study, sectarian communities in Lebanon have strong political and cultural links with foreign countries (See Chapters three and four). This meant, if the Shiite Muslim sect had cultural and political links with Iran, Al-Manar TV, Hezbollah’s station, was not only more likely to cover matters affecting the Shiite Muslim community or events occurring in predominantly Shiite areas, and engaging Shiite religious or political figures, but was also more likely to cover issues pertaining to Iran, especially if they were positive. The same applied to the other stations. So, locally, LBCI, a station associated with the Christian Maronite identity, was more likely to highlight events in demographically Christian Maronite areas and give more prominence to the Maronite Patriarch. Internationally, LBCI was more likely to give salience to stories coming from countries perceived as allies to the Maronites in Lebanon. In the past, that country was France, but today it also includes the U.S.A.

As for Future TV, it was most likely to cover matters related to Saudi Arabia, although this country, along with Syria, seemed to be covered constantly by every station due to political and financial reasons. Saudi Arabia has a lot of political influence in the region, and as mentioned earlier is the biggest advertising market in the Arabic world. Furthermore, many of its ruling family members have substantial stakes in almost every private Arabic media company, including Lebanese media (Alterman, 1998; Boyd, 2001; Rugh, 2004, p. 238).

A side effect to sectarian-proximity, of course, was the avoidance of stories that highlight the sectarian mentality and hatred, except when it seemed to serve the goals of certain political sides. This meant that stories showing different religions coming together, whether through regular people or religious figures, were often highlighted.

### ***Video and Newsworthiness***

The availability of video and pictures is not usually included among the elements of newsworthiness in most textbooks. However, anyone who works in television quickly learns that the availability of video strongly impacts the value of a story's newsworthiness. One interviewed news director simply said, "A story without picture is not a story in TV." (Mariam El-Bassam NTV). This matter was also clear to producers in Lebanon, especially when it came to non-local news. One producer noted, "International stories that have video are more important than those without video because we work in Television not in radio or print. We rely a lot on video, and we write our news according to the pictures." The availability of video also impacts local news, even if it was from a prominent politician. One producer gave an example:

Last week, there was a statement by Jumblat but without video. It ran as a voiceover in the sixth spot. Now, if the statement in itself was really important, it might still make it to the top even without video, but that rarely occurs. Plus, I'll have to create a graphic or map or add a picture from the archives. It's also much better to have someone deliver the statement in their own voice rather than us paraphrasing it.

Another producer noted that the availability of the video might be a guarantee to have the story run, but not necessarily as a top story. The producer added, the video

content might make it more or less important; “if the speaker was animated and emotional—banging his hand on the table, that’s always better than having someone quiet or stiff or boring” (Interview # 2c, June-July, 2006). Another producer noted that security stories almost always have “good” pictures. For example, “video footage of an explosion and the carnage it leaves behind is always considered good video.” She added, “of course, there’s nothing ‘good’ or nice about explosions and destruction, but those are the words we use in the profession.”

### ***Conclusion***

The almost universal elements of newsworthiness (timeliness, proximity, prominence, significance, currency, etc.) were followed by Lebanese journalists, but those elements were framed and influenced by several others that related to the political and cultural climate in their country and station.

First, the most dominant element influencing and framing newsworthiness was the station’s political line and subsequently the political goals of the station’s owners and political patrons. The political figure or newsmaker came in second. It is important to emphasize that the political figure was the main element of newsworthiness and not the political position. In other words, political (government) positions may but do not necessarily bring prominence to the politician in the news media, but the opposite is almost always true. Type of news story came in third, and was divided into three types, in general. The most important type was the security event, followed by the political event, which was often a political statement or activity. Less important was the non-political story or what was often called “regular news.” These stories were often included just to break the monotony of the political-heavy newscast and were often ignored

because they took a lot of time and effort to produce. More importantly, they were avoided because they frequently caused political controversy since they almost always had a negative political dimension. Finally, the least important news included sports news, caricatures and weathercasts. After type of news story, came proximity, which included both geographical-proximity and sectarian (cultural) proximity. The former made local news coming out of the capital more important than that coming from outside Beirut, while at the same time making local news more important than regional news, and regional news more important than international news. The latter made stories associated with certain sects and religions more important for stations associated with those sects. It also influenced regional and international stories by making news coming out of countries perceived as allies or supporters of certain sects more important to stations identified with those sects. Finally, the availability of video and its content influenced newsworthiness. The more graphic the pictures were and the more animated the people in them, the more newsworthy the story became.

These elements of newsworthiness add to other factors in making the Lebanese newscast more political and leaving social, cultural and other stories that highlight the suffering or interests of the general public out or buried at the end of the newscast. Although the concept of newsworthiness or “importance” was constant across all stations and journalists, unlike the U.S.—where the constant meaning of newsworthiness yielded a homogeneous output,<sup>109</sup> in Lebanon it seemed to yield the opposite outcome. The main reason for this disparity may be because in the former newsworthiness is primarily influenced by business and commercial interests, while in the latter it is primarily influenced by political interests. Contrary to competing political interests, which are

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<sup>109</sup> See (Ryfe, 2006).



divided by competing political groups, ideologies and interests, commercial interests tend to unify competing media entities since their only ideology is profit.

In the next chapter, we see how elements of newsworthiness and other factors discussed earlier—including news sources, institutionalization and technology—  
influence and shape the newscast content of each station.

## **Chapter 9: The Newscast Content: long boring official news**

In one of the interviews, a seasoned producer described his frustration with the content of Lebanese newscasts:

I regret that Lebanese newscasts are filled with official statements. Most of the news start with such and such said this and such and such visited that. That is poor journalism and repels our audience. I believe the news should be about matters that concern and affect the public not just stories about what the politicians said and who they visited and who they welcomed.... Another problem is the length of the news stories. Most stories are boringly long. A story that deserves 25-30 seconds often runs over two minutes... (Interview # 5a, June-July, 2006).

This account accurately describes the content of newscasts in Lebanon and confirms what was discussed in the preceding chapters. It also reflects the frustration of many journalists who participated in this study, and is corroborated by numerous studies on Lebanese media. Dajani (2001), for instance, concluded in one of his studies on broadcasting in Lebanon that the “news programs focus mainly on news of politicians, with little reflective coverage of issues that concern the general public” (p. 138). The following pages delve further into this topic by taking the Lebanese newscast apart, analyzing each part and comparing its elements across stations, and reaching conclusions about how and why the content takes this form.

We first study a Lebanese broadcast tradition and institution called the *newscast introduction*, which tops and colors every Lebanese newscast. We define what an introduction is and what its purpose is in the perception of producers and news directors

and then we analyze and compare introductions across stations. Then, we analyze and compare rundowns, or newscast outlines, and end with analyzing and comparing individual news stories.

### **A. The Newscast Introduction**

Every viewer of Lebanese TV news first encounters the *newscast introduction*—a long, monotonous, editorial analysis of several stories conflated into one context and delivered by an on-camera anchor in a serious, and almost ominous, tone. In the U.S.A., the newscast introduction is usually a quick and flashy tease of the top two or three stories that will be covered in the newscast. It usually includes the top story and a few others in the middle of the newscast that the producer wants to entice the audience with—so they don't switch the channel. In Lebanon, the introduction is more of a gestalt of the many stories that will be covered in the newscast. This gestalt is, of course, carefully framed to fit the station's political line and includes substantial subjective analysis.

As mentioned in earlier chapters, the newscast introduction was almost always written by the news director or under his strict supervision. Sometimes, the producer wrote the introduction of less important newscasts (morning or noon shows) but never for the main evening newscast. In addition, when the producer did write the newscast introduction, she usually excluded any commentary or editorial analysis and made sure to consult the news director before airing. That meant calling the news director at home and reading the introduction to him over the phone.

In a sense, introductions written by producers were similar to those produced in the U.S.A. One producer described her introductions as “a summary of the most salient stories in the newscast” and compared it to “the display you see when you stand in front

of a clothing shop; from the display you get an idea about what's inside the shop, and similarly, the introduction shows you what's in the newscast."

Our concern here, however, is more about introductions that were written by the news directors and carried editorial commentary. We first start by briefly discussing how those newscast introductions are perceived by the journalists who create them.

### ***Perception of Newscast Introductions***

One of the most interesting findings related to the newscast introduction was that the vast majority of participants regarded it as an outdated practice and a bad part of the newscast that should be eliminated. Even most news directors and producers criticized its use—just moments before they wrote an introduction for their own newscast. One news director said the phenomenon of the newscast introduction started during the civil war by a station that wanted to specify that there was a certain political line that existed in this country and wanted to target a certain audience. "The trend, unfortunately, caught on and still exists today," he added. In this sense, the newscast introduction was a trademark that confirmed the existence and power of the political line that ran the station.<sup>110</sup> Another news director said "I personally prefer not to have an editorial introduction in the newscast because it's something outdated.... Today you can make those statements through your political programs or an investigative report or even through your priorities in the newscast." The same news director, however, admitted that the prominence of the newscast introduction still made it the most powerful and efficient tool to deliver political statements.

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<sup>110</sup> Although several news directors and producers noted that this kind of newscast introductions is a unique Lebanese phenomenon, confirming that point is beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, reviewing several available Arabic newscasts does confirm that uniqueness to a limited extent.

When reporters and producers were asked about newscast introductions, almost all of them were vehemently opposed to that tradition and hoped that it will disappear. One producer even called newscast introductions “virtual brain washing segments.” Another reporter considered them offensive to the audiences since “the assumption is that audiences can’t think, so we explain and spoon-feed them the news instead of having them reach their own conclusions.” A third participant noted, “In Lebanon, if you hear the newscast introduction, you immediately know the political line of the station. People don’t even need to hear the whole newscast to know what their leaders want them to think.” In other words, the introductions were virtual marching orders for the followers of each political group and its corresponding station.

One of the few participants who supported keeping the newscast introduction gave this justification:

Some people watch our newscast just to see what we will say in the introduction.... You simply can’t let any major event pass without giving the station’s opinion on it. The station has a clear political line and stance on all political occurrences, whether it is about Iraq or Palestine or a local story.... If you have a message to send to the audience, you put it in the introduction (Interview # 4b & 5b, June-July, 2006).

When asked why you still have the introduction in place, most news directors and producers said they couldn’t eliminate it until other stations do, and gave other vague explanations relating to traditions that are hard to leave behind.

### ***Comparing Newscast Introductions***

Aside from the opinions of newsroom managers, let us compare several introductions broadcast in the main evening newscast on August 15, 2006. That date was chosen because it was the second day after the UN ceasefire was implemented following the Hezbollah-Israel war (July 12-August 15, 2006). This was a time where the news media in most countries tend to rally around the flag and cover the destruction, deaths and refugees returning home. As we shall see from the following analysis—and in subsequent sections, some “rallying” did exist, but it was around different “flags” rather than one national “flag.”

To begin, each of the five newscasts analyzed (Future TV, New TV, al-Manar TV, LBCI and TL) had their typical introductions—some also had a quick look at headlines preceding them (Future TV and New TV). The longest introduction came from New TV and was three minutes and 20 seconds long, followed by LBCI and TL, each of which was two minutes and thirty seconds long. Al-Manar TV’s introduction was two minutes and 20 seconds long, while Future TV had the shortest introduction at one minute and 50 seconds.

Each newscast that day had between 24 and 38 stories, and most of the introductions highlighted the same three stories—in addition to several other stories uniquely highlighted. Interestingly, stations belonging to the same side of the political divide tended to highlight the same stories in their introduction.

#### ***Future TV, LBCI and TL***

On one side of the divide, Future TV, LBCI and TL all focused immensely on Syrian President Bashar al-Assad’s speech that was delivered that same day. Each station, however, approached it in a slightly different manner.

### ***Future TV***

Going into further details, Future TV's introduction was almost fully dedicated to scorning Syrian President al-Assad, if it wasn't for a fleeting sentence at the end mentioning the planned deployment of the Lebanese Army in South Lebanon—which was also included in LBCI's and New TV's introductions. Future TV's introduction had an overtly mocking and highly derisive tone, attempting to paint al-Assad's speech in a hypocritical light by, first, highlighting that he was silent throughout the war and then mocking his use of the term "resistance" by adding the statement: "meaning, of course, the Lebanese resistance alone." By that, the anchor hinted several times that al-Assad praised and took advantage of the armed resistance in Lebanon while not allowing any armed resistance to operate from Syria—an accusation anti-Syrian groups in Lebanon often cite. The anchor also accused al-Assad of trying "to drown the international investigation of the assassination of the prime minister (Rafik Hariri) into the chaos of the latest Israeli war crimes." The Hariri assassination is a staple of Future TV's news and is omnipresent on that channel and often included somewhere in the introduction.

In sum, Future TV's newscast introduction was a scathing personal attack on the Syrian president, which was later continued in a whopping 10-minute news package about his speech. It is important to remember that Future TV is owned by the Hariri family, which accuses the Syrian government of assassinating former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in 2005.<sup>111</sup>

### ***LBCI***

Similarly, LBCI's introduction focused on al-Assad's speech but also included a speech by Iranian president Mahmoud AhmadiNejad and noted the flood of diplomats

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<sup>111</sup> See chapter four for details on ownership.

coming to Lebanon. While LBCI's introduction was less scornful and did not engage in much of the personal attacks on al-Assad as Future TV, it was nevertheless equally critical and disparaging of al-Assad's speech. Interestingly, al-Assad's speech was tied to AhmadiNejad's speech by likening both to "a cooperated Syrian-Iranian counter attack." The anchor even brought in the U.S. to the equation by describing the two presidents' stances "as if they were a first round in a series of battles that could end up in a regional war or a counter-coup aimed at attacking what was initiated by America in Iraq in 2003 and in Lebanon in 2004." LBCI's words were carefully and smartly picked, and its criticism was slightly toned down by, first, using similes ("appeared like" and "as if they were"), and by using al-Assad's own words in their analytical tone. For instance, while Future TV mocked al-Assad by explicitly interpreting and framing his quotes, LBCI, avoided overt interpretation and used al-Assad's quotes to highlight what he said (See the three parallel examples below). After highlighting what they saw as the main points of al-Assad and AhmadiNejad's speeches, LBCI's anchor introduced a complex series of rhetorical questions, each answered by another rhetorical question, in what was clearly intended to be covert commentary rather than analytical inquiry. For example, the anchor asked, "and why did Bashar al-Assad break with Saudi and Egypt, both of whom were his only connection with the West ever since [UN] resolution 1559 came out? Has he chosen the Iranian axis permanently? And why does the Iranian foreign minister visit the Islamic governments that are candidates for sending troops to Lebanon...?" Before introducing these rhetorical questions and in an effort to tie them together and make them relevant, the anchor started with "today's developments produce many questions and little answers." This intricate technique gave the impression of a comprehensive and



coherent summary of the important matters of the day, while simultaneously disarming the audience by bombarding them with several complex ideas and not giving them a chance to think about the rationale that ties them together. This technique is considered a propaganda tactic and sometimes referred to as “pacing and distraction” (Rhoads, 2004, p. 19)

In sum, LBCI’s introduction employed smart rhetorical tools in its commentary to frame al-Assad’s speech and presented a seemingly more complex and comprehensive account. The end result was a more professional sounding but equally critical analysis of the major events of the day—as LBCI saw them.

### *TL*

If comprehensiveness meant a larger amount of topics in the introduction, then TL receives the first prize, followed by New TV. In fact, TL’s introduction covered over nine topics in a frantic and disorienting manner, which reflects the work habits and environment in that station’s newsroom (see chapter eight). The biggest chunk of the introduction, however, was dedicated to al-Assad’s speech. At first, the introduction was not critical of al-Assad—certainly much less critical than Future TV and LBCI, but then the anchor introduced a badly constructed paraphrase attributed to an American official and vaguely aimed at criticizing al-Assad. The anchor said, “While the German foreign minister cancelled his visit to Damascus after al-Assad’s speech, U.S. Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs David Welch said there are some who are standing over the ruins and destruction in Lebanon to announce their stances.” Aside from that criticism, there was only one clumsy attempt to “bridge” al-Assad’s speech to the UN investigation of Iran’s nuclear weapons by calling the speech “a bridge between two phases: the phase

of the end of the Israeli aggression against Lebanon, and the phase of seriously opening the Iranian nuclear file.” TL didn’t seem ready to be very critical of al-Assad’s speech although it was on the same side of the political divide with LBCI and Future TV and was controlled by a press minister vehemently allied with the March 14 movement. After covering al-Assad’s speech, the anchor introduced eight other stories, barely giving each story one sentence. The anchor, not surprisingly, ended the introduction with the announcement of “a grant from Saad Hariri to build bridges in Akkar.” By singling out Hariri’s grant and ignoring the many other grants, contributions and proposals to help rebuild Lebanon—especially those made by Hezbollah and Iran, TL naively confirmed its historic bias in favor of the officials in government who directly control it.

In sum, TL’s introduction was a poor attempt to covertly criticize al-Assad’s speech and a dizzying presentation of many stories in a short time. Although TL’s introduction was not as critical of al-Assad as Future TV and LBCI, its selection of stories to highlight in the introduction clearly pointed to its historic bias in favor of the Prime Ministry and the Ministry of Information.

Here are three parallel examples of how Future TV, LBCI and TL noted that al-Assad criticized Arab countries in his speech:

***Future TV:***

... and in another [message] declaring adversity to the Arabic countries that took a stance on what they called the adventurism of the resistance, and accusing them of replacing the peace strategy with what [al-Assad] called the cheap peace, claiming his commitment to the resistance choice, and citing historic Syrian resistance fighters, starting with Sultan Basha el-Atrash and ending with their

latest Joul Jamal, who fell in a martyr attack during the Suez war in 1956, without including any other martyrs after that date....

***LBCI:***

... but what stood out [in the speech] was al-Assad's criticism of Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Egypt, who had described Hezbollah's actions as adventurism....

***TL:***

... President al-Assad entered the depth of Lebanese affairs, attacking the March 14 forces, and entered the depth of Arabic affairs, criticizing Saudi Arabia and Egypt, without naming them, by alluding to officials in those countries when they said adventurers rather than resisters....

***Al-Manar TV and New TV***

On the other side of the political divide were Al-Manar and New TV—although the latter considers itself somewhere in the middle leaning slightly towards the opposition which includes Hezbollah and other powers. Interestingly both stations did not even mention al-Assad's speech in their introduction. Al-Manar dedicated its introduction to highlighting the internal political fallout inside Israel as a result of what it called “the humiliation from the utter defeat of the enemy's army and intelligence apparatus... and after the enemy's military and strategic goals had failed...” New TV, on the other hand, chose to lead its introduction with a somewhat poetic denunciation of Israel's use of “depleted uranium, phosphorous and the poisonous cluster bombs, and maybe material we are yet to hear about its dangers.”

***Al-Manar TV***

To elaborate further, al-Manar's introduction focused on "the resistance's brilliant victory" and Israel's "utter defeat" and the political aftermath of this military outcome. The words victory and defeat, or their synonyms, reoccurred eight times in this relatively short introduction. And if the audience missed the message, the anchor made sure to state half-way through:

The victorious, then, are the peoples of the region, and their vivacious forces, and their resistance movements. And the defeated are the enemy and America and their allies, and their aim towards our total submission, which was dubbed the New Middle East.

The introduction tied Israel's military defeat to a larger strategic political failure in "implementing (UN) resolution 1559 and disarming the resistance and effecting an internal coup in Lebanon aimed at altering the balance of powers in the region to serve the interests of the American-Israeli project." It also hinted at the failure of some Lebanese political sides that "wanted the barbaric aggression to be a chance to settle internal scores... and had been prepared for this and awaited it calmly but not briefly." The introduction also touted the beginning of the reconstruction process, "which was announced by Hezbollah's secretary General last night, to confirm the powerful organization and good administration, and wise planning, and honest love between the resistance and its people." It is important to note that this was the only time the word "Hezbollah" was used in the introduction. Everywhere else, al-Manar TV used the term "resistance" instead. Finally, the overwhelming tone of the introduction was elated, especially at the end where the anchor said "the weddings (celebrations) of victory

continued for the second day, overwhelming every house in Lebanon and the Arabic world with joy.” This is mainly where New TV differed with al-Manar.

### *New TV*

New TV’s introduction was akin to a long, depressing and highly emotional eulogy, rich with tragic images, messages of reproach, and a touch of defiance. The introduction began by describing how the southern suburb of Beirut, which used to be a bustling trade and business center, became a “disputed palace” and a shrine for people and politicians to visit and an area polluted by the thousands of Israeli bombs that targeted it. The introduction then hinted at the hypocrisy of the West in dealing with Iran’s attempt to acquire nuclear technology while ignoring Israel’s nuclear weapons arsenal. The introduction sarcastically called on Muhammad al-Baradei, the director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, to come and test the weapons used by Israel “because the smell and color and the scale of destruction, all became a weapon of mass destruction we now own in the southern suburb of Beirut.” Then the sarcastic tone turned defiant and announced that “these weapons, with all their power, were not able to erase the resistance off the Lebanese map.” New TV then lashed out at the Lebanese sides and Arabic countries that claimed to be concerned about the increasing Iranian influence in Lebanon without noticing the Arabic countries’ “retreat and collaboration with the U.S. and Israel, and their abandonment of Lebanon when it was being devoured by the aggression.” The criticism became even harsher and more graphic

when New TV's anchor told Arabic countries to instead send a salute to the resistance "because it upheld heads that were buried in the sand." The anchor continued with a graphic statement telling Arabic countries to call on "an investigation into Israel's American bombs, which froze the bodies of babies and targeted their sleep and their dreams and their toys, because that is how they can make up for the Arab abandonment, and that is how the babies can rest in their eternal sleep." New TV's introduction even praised Iran—something al-Manar TV didn't do—by saying that at least Iran filled the Arab gap by supporting the resistance and promising to help in reconstruction. The rest of the introduction talked about the bodies that had been pulled out of the debris and the children meeting their parent for the first time, "including those who were cold corpses buried under the rubble." The introduction then noted the news about the Lebanese Army's deployment in the south and ended by promoting a tape released by Hezbollah that showed "the burning of the most powerful Israeli tanks and the fleeing of Israeli soldiers." This latter was also not promoted in al-Manar TV's introduction.

To sum up, on one hand, al-Manar and New TV both dedicated their introductions to promoting the resistance's victory and Israel's defeat while simultaneously criticizing the abandonment of Arabic countries and some Lebanese sides, and their collaboration with Israel and America. The former had a joyful tone touting the celebrations of victory, while the second reflected a depressingly tragic picture left by the destructive war. Neither station mentioned the speeches of the Syrian and Iranian presidents, although New TV mentioned Iran as a supporter during the war. Interestingly, al-Manar TV's introduction didn't at all mention Iran—Hezbollah's main ally and benefactor—and only used the term "Hezbollah" once, preferring to use "resistance" instead. In addition, al-

Manar TV's introduction avoided political analysis and references to the various political sides, and opted instead to frame the outcome of the war as a victory for the resistance and Lebanon and a defeat for Israel, America and any Lebanese or Arab sides allied to them. New TV added to this framing the depressing images of killed children and corpses pulled out of the rubble. Unlike the other stations which focused on complex geopolitical analysis, these images uniquely communicated with the regular individual on a simple and plain level.

On the other hand, Future TV, LBCI and TL mostly focused on the Syrian president's speech, criticizing it and hinting that al-Assad was trying to reap the fruits of victory while the Lebanese people pay the price. Future TV and LBCI were much more critical than TL. Future TV's introduction was highly sarcastic and mostly a personal attack on al-Assad's character, trying to paint him as a hypocrite. LBCI's introduction was more cunning, and it used complex rhetorical techniques to reach the same goal. In addition, LBCI tied al-Assad's speech to that of the Iranian president making it seem like a collaborated and calculated counter-attack on their local and international political opponents. TL's introduction, while mostly dedicated to the same subject ended up with a more diverse range of stories chaotically thrown together.

### ***Conclusion for Section A***

Three conclusions can be made about how Lebanese broadcast journalists and their institutions view the newscast introduction. First, the main assumption behind the editorial introduction was that audiences wanted to hear it, and that it was a powerful tool to control the understanding and perceptions of those audiences. Second, the introduction was some kind of political—rather than commercial—brand that identified the station

with a certain political line and constantly reminded the audience about it. In other words, the station did not want to hide its political bias but, on the contrary, it wanted to make it salient. Third, stations didn't see that framing each news story is enough and didn't miss an opportunity to tell people what events to think about and how to think about them. Whether they were achieving their goal is a different matter, but this reveals that stations and their owners were always fearful of losing "their grip" over their constituents, as one participant put it. Finally, since most participants, including some news directors, were opposed to the tradition of the newscast introduction, this leads to the conclusion that someone beyond the news director wanted to maintain that tradition. It means the owner and political patron of the station may strongly believe in the power of the newscast introduction to control their constituents. This may be true for people who rely exclusively on one newscast for their daily news, but, as mentioned earlier, most Lebanese audiences watch several newscasts every day.

When it comes to analyzing the content of those introductions, the overall results back the findings of the interviews above and highlight the link between the political line of the station and its content. The introduction not only directed the attention of the audience to what the political patrons of the station want to make prominent, but also carefully framed the highlighted events. Future TV, LBCI and TL made the speech of the Syrian President the focus of their newscast introduction. It is not a coincidence that the three stations belonged to the political side that considers itself anti-Syrian and vehemently opposes the Syrian regime. The Hariri family's Future Movement which controls Future TV, the Lebanese Forces Party which influences LBCI and the current Minister of Information who oversees TL, all belong to what is called the March 14



group. This political coalition is credited for pushing Syrian forces out of Lebanon after the assassination of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. They are also considered to be allied with the U.S.A., and two of their main political goals are the disarmament of Hezbollah and the establishment of an international tribunal to try those responsible for the Hariri assassination. Opposed to the March 14<sup>th</sup> group is another large coalition which includes Hezbollah, the owner of al-Manar TV and other forces. Hezbollah's interests, of course, include promoting their victory over Israel in the war and highlighting their successes while simultaneously burying any failures or disasters. That may explain their celebratory tone and the avoidance of any topic related to the killed, wounded and destruction. In addition, Hezbollah's leaders from the start described the war as an effort linked to real internal Lebanese interest and, unlike the other side, did not want to highlight any connections to foreign powers—lest they be seen as a puppet organization acting on behalf of Iran and Syria in their proxy war with the U.S. and its puppet Israel. While New TV's historic association with the communist party is not likely to substantially influence its stance—since the latter is much weaker than the TV institution itself, the station does identify itself as a middle player slightly tilting towards the opposition movement. But the history of New TV's opposition to the Hariri dominated governments over the past 15 years clearly influences its hostility to that political side. Also, their declared commitment to Arab Nationalism, anti-Western Imperialism and Leftist ideology was reflected in the dim tone of their introduction. Nevertheless, New TV's introduction, true to its commitment to the regular folk, was the most closely allied to the concerns of the general public who were horrified by the destruction and death.

## B. Comparing the Rundowns

In the preceding section, we found that the newscast introduction resonated with the priorities of the political patrons and owners of a station. But a newscast is much more than an introduction. In this section, we analyze the rundowns of each station on that same day (August 15, 2006) to confirm the findings above.

A quick look at the stations' rundowns easily confirms that they reflect the priorities of the newscast introductions. Both LBCI and TL, for example, started with al-Assad's speech as a top story. The former gave the story a six-minute news package,<sup>112</sup> then followed it by a one minute voice over of the German foreign minister, who cancelled his trip to Damascus, in reaction to al-Assad's speech. Then LBCI's third story was a two-and-a-half-minute package on the Iranian president's speech, which was tied to al-Assad's speech, as mentioned earlier. The coverage of al-Assad's speech is more extensively analyzed

in the next section,

which is dedicated to

looking into the

elements of the

individual story. In

Aftermath of war	Salience (starting position)	Time (Approx. in min.)
<b>-- High to Medium Prominence --</b>		
<b>Future TV</b>	High (1 <sup>st</sup> )	High - 48% (41min)
<b>New TV</b>	High (2 <sup>nd</sup> )	High - 46% (45min)
<b>TL</b>	Mid (8 <sup>th</sup> )	High - 49% (22min)
<b>-- Medium to Low Prominence --</b>		
<b>Al-Manar TV</b>	Mid (6 <sup>th</sup> )	Mid - 39% (31min)
<b>LBCI</b>	Low (16 <sup>th</sup> )	Mid - 35% (28min)

**Table 19**

Prominence of the aftermath of the war stories

this section, we more closely analyze the rundowns of each newscast, by first describing the emphasis given to al-Assad's speech, and then focusing on the more important stories of the day: those related to the aftermath of the war.

<sup>112</sup> The six minutes include the anchors introduction and conclusion or what is often called a sig-out in broadcast news. So, the package (or VO or VOSOT) alone is shorter than six minutes. Still the amount of time given to the whole story reflects its importance in the news director's view.

August 15, 2006, was a day when the guns of war fell silent and hundreds of thousands of refugees filled the streets and headed south to check on their homes, towns and relatives—or what was left of them. So, aside from al-Assad’s speech, the aftermath of the war was the obvious “big story” of the day for the Lebanese public. This topic included the destruction in south Lebanon and the southern suburb of Beirut; the plight of the refugees returning home; the cleaning and reconstruction efforts; the digging up of bodies; etc. Every station covered some of these stories, but with varying emphasis and salience.

Table 19 above reveals the amount of salience each station gave to these stories by tracking the position of the first aftermath story and calculating the proportion of all aftermath stories combined to the total newscast time. Future TV, New TV and TL ranked among those who allocated high to medium prominence to these stories, while al-Manar TV and LBCI ranked among those who gave medium to low prominence.

But gauging the location and time allocated to a group of stories does not tell much. So, the following analysis also includes description of the content of the first four adjacent “aftermath” stories appearing in each newscast. Table 20 below summarizes the “aftermath” topics covered and the overall tone in which they were covered. The “main topics” were the angles that were given substantial emphasis and time, while the “minor topics” were those given less emphasis and time. These will be discussed further below.

	Main Topics	Minor Topics	Overall Tone
<b>Future TV</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Overwhelming destruction &amp; devastation</li> <li>Few/some refugees returning home</li> <li>The dangers of returning to the south</li> <li>Some people stayed behind</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pulling bodies out of rubble</li> <li>Israeli tanks withdrawing</li> <li>Cleaning roads, removing rubble</li> <li>No electricity, water, phone...</li> <li>Unexploded ordinance, cluster bombs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Destruction and devastation</li> <li>Misery, shock, danger, sorrow, helplessness, pessimism</li> </ul>
<b>TL</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Historic” return of refugees</li> <li>Traffic congestion due to refugees’ return</li> <li>Overwhelming destruction &amp; devastation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pulling bodies out of rubble</li> <li>Israeli tanks withdrawing</li> <li>Cleaning roads, removing rubble</li> <li>No electricity, water, phone...</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Destruction and devastation</li> <li>Sorrow, pessimism</li> <li>Some defiance &amp; hope</li> </ul>
<b>LBCI</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Overwhelming destruction &amp; devastation</li> <li>Return of refugees</li> <li>Traffic congestion due to refugees’ return</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pulling bodies out of rubble</li> <li>Israeli tanks withdrawing</li> <li>Unexploded ordinance, cluster bombs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Destruction and devastation</li> <li>Sorrow, helplessness, pessimism</li> </ul>
<b>Al-Manar TV</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Victory of resistance, defeat of Israel</li> <li>Heroic stories of fighters resisting</li> <li>Reconstruction plans &amp; efforts</li> <li>What retreating Israelis left behind</li> <li>People defiant, celebrating victory</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Defeated Israeli tanks withdrawing</li> <li>Pulling bodies out of rubble</li> <li>Refugees returning</li> <li>Cleaning roads, removing rubble</li> <li>(Barely any destruction shown/covered)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Celebrating victory</li> <li>Heroism, defiance, resisting, honor</li> <li>Upbeat, optimistic</li> <li>Rebuilding and starting over</li> </ul>
<b>New TV</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Defeated Israeli tanks withdrawing</li> <li>What retreating Israelis left behind</li> <li>Heroic stories of fighters resisting</li> <li>Victory of resistance, defeat of Israel</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some refugees returning</li> <li>Some destruction</li> <li>Cleaning roads, removing rubble</li> <li>Reconstruction plans &amp; efforts</li> <li>Unexploded ordinance, cluster bombs</li> <li>Traffic congestion due to refugees’ return</li> <li>Funerals of martyrs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Destruction as evidence of resistance and heroism</li> <li>Heroism, defiance, victory</li> <li>Upbeat, optimistic</li> <li>Humiliation and defeat of the enemy</li> </ul>

**Table 20**

### ***Future TV’s Rundown***

Although Future TV highlighted al-Assad’s speech in the newscast introduction, it chose to lead with seven stories all covering the aftermath of the Israel-Hezbollah war. While al-Assad’s speech came in eighth in the rundown, the whopping 10-minute package made up for the prominence it lost by not being positioned at the top. Following al-Assad’s story was a 20-second response to al-Assad’s speech by the Israeli defense minister, which was followed by the same German foreign minister’s story covered by LBCI. Interestingly, the Iranian president’s speech was positioned 23<sup>rd</sup> in the rundown and only given a 40-second voice over. Unlike LBCI and to a lesser extent TL, Future TV did not tie al-Assad’s speech to AhmadiNejad’s. In addition, Future TV did not stop with

the first group of “aftermath” stories, but ran several more that were scattered later in the newscast. Most of the latter stories focused on donations and announcements about reconstruction—especially from the Hariri family and their allies. Still Future TV allocated to the “aftermath” stories about 40 minutes of its 86-minute-long newscast, or 48 percent—only second to TL.

Future TV’s major emphasis was on the destruction and devastation of south Lebanon. Dozens of long shots of destroyed towns and leveled neighborhoods were shown with the reporter reminding of the overwhelming destruction over and over. Curiously, and unlike the other stations that highlighted the massive flood of refugees returning home, Future TV emphasized that only few refugees had returned, and several times reminded its audience of the dangers of returning to the south—due to unexploded ordinance, cluster bombs, lack of electricity and water, etc. In addition, Future TV was unique in emphasizing that some people stayed behind and showed sound bites of old and weak people living in miserable conditions and describing the agony they went through. That may be intentionally highlighted to emphasize their miserable conditions. Future TV also gave some emphasis to stories related to pulling bodies out of the rubble, Israeli tanks withdrawing, and the beginning of the cleaning effort. The overall tone of Future TV’s coverage reflected the overwhelming destruction and devastation of the south; the misery, sorrow and shock of the few people returning and those who stayed behind; and a feeling of danger, helplessness and pessimism.

This clearly reflected Future TV’s priorities of giving extensive exposure to the destruction and carnage of the war. The Hariri current and its allies made sure from the start of the war to criticize Hezbollah and accused it of unilaterally plunging Lebanon

into a war that will destroy the country and its economy (KUNA, 2006; Lebanese Kataeb, 2006). The Future current's main Arab sponsors and backers—especially Saudi Arabia, also echoed this rhetoric during the war by describing Hezbollah's actions as “adventurism.”

### ***TL's Rundown***

TL positioned al-Assad's story at the top and gave it a three-minute news package. The story was followed directly by a 20-second voice over of the Iranian president's speech. After that came five relatively short stories covering official announcements, two of which were by top Israeli officials. Then came four packages with live shots related to the aftermath of the war, starting at position eight and ending at position 11. Another series of similar stories ran at position 19, 20 and 21. The total amount of time allocated to the aftermath of the war was about 18 minutes or 49 percent of this relatively short newscast—the highest proportion among all stations.

Like Future TV, TL highlighted the overwhelming destruction and devastation of the areas hit by Israeli aggression, but slightly higher on the emphasis scale was the focus on the massive and “historic” return of the refugees. In fact, TL ran three redundant stories that mostly focused on the traffic congestion caused by the hundreds of thousands returning home. Other angles of the “aftermath” stories included pulling bodies out of the rubble; the withdrawal of Israeli tanks; the beginning of the cleaning effort; and the lack of electricity, water or phones. While the overall tone of the coverage also reflected the destruction, devastation, sorrow and pessimism, unlike Future TV, TL's tone had a touch of defiance and hope reflected through the refugees' sound bites.

The similarities between Future TV and TL clearly reflect the political alliance of those who control both stations. The slight differences, especially in tone, can be attributed to the diversity of TL's body of reporters and the lack of advanced technology and the weakness of institutional mechanisms at TL, which would make the job of controlling the message much harder. Nevertheless, the overall message of TL's newscast was almost identical to that of Future TV's and reflected the same political priorities and interests.

### ***LBCI's Rundown***

Curiously, LBCI did not get to the aftermath stories until about 25 minutes into the newscast. In fact, the first story dealing with Lebanese refugees coming back home was a four-minute PKG that ran in the 16<sup>th</sup> spot. That story was then followed by two similar packages, each around three minutes long and positioned right before the first break. More interesting were the stories located at positions 13, 14 and 15 in the rundown. Those dealt with the Israeli army's withdrawal from the south; life in Northern Israel going back to normal; Israeli estimates of the war cost on its economy; internal Israeli political debate; and even stories unrelated to the war about the spread of corruption among top Israeli politicians—which was prime news in Israel at the time. Apparently, LBCI's news director felt that stories about Israel in the aftermath of the war were more important than parallel stories about Lebanon, namely the refugees going back home in south Lebanon.

In addition to the first three “aftermath” stories, LBCI allocated a series of similar packages starting at position 29 and ending at position 34. The total amount of time allocated to aftermath stories throughout the newscast summed up to about 28 minutes or

35 percent of the newscast. Compared to other stations, LBCI allocated the least amount of time in proportion to its 86-minute-long newscast and assigned the least prominence to aftermath stories.

Table 19 above shows LBCI ranking last on the prominence scale—but certainly first in giving prominence to aftermath stories from an Israeli perspective. Could this be because of the old historic alliance between Israel and LBCI’s patron—the Lebanese forces? Or could it be because of the station’s sectarian-Christian identity, hence its little concern about the mostly non-Christian areas and populations bombarded during the war? We can only speculate about the former question, but the latter is backed by other evidence and could more assertively explain LBCI’s editorial decision to give the least amount of prominence to aftermath stories. In fact, it is well known that most of the destruction and carnage occurred in Shiite Muslim areas, which were supposedly supporters of the Shiite Hezbollah, and therefore not a main concern for LBCI’s core news audience. In addition, LBCI was the only station to cover the destruction in two Christian southern towns. In one story, it ran a long pessimistic sound bite from the town’s priest who said the people of his area were no longer ready to deal with any more disappointments, helplessness and destruction—a far cry from the defiance and victorious tone heard in al-Manar TV and New TV’s sound bites (see below). Similarly, a Christian Bishop spoke in the second Christian town where he described how Christians helped their Muslim brothers who came from a devastated nearby town.

Like TL and Future TV, LBCI decided to focus on the overwhelming destruction and devastation in the aftermath of the war. It also followed TL’s approach of highlighting the massive return of refugees and the traffic congestion they caused while



returning home. Similarly, LBCI gave some emphasis to stories about pulling bodies out of rubble; Israeli tanks withdrawing; and the unexploded ordinance and cluster bombs. Except for the slight sense of defiance in TL's newscast, the overall tone of LBCI's newscast was also almost identical to that of TL's—a sense of overwhelming destruction, devastation, sorrow, helpless and pessimism.

Again, LBCI's approach to covering the aftermath of the war pointed to the political alliances and interests of those who control Future TV, TL and LBCI, with one major difference that can easily be attributed to LBCI's Christian sectarian identity. That was seen through the lack of prominence given to the aftermath stories overall, and the highlighting of Christian towns and figures when the stories were finally covered late in the newscast. This in no way is a condemnation of LBCI's journalistic standards, but it is evidence that the sectarian identity has a deep impact on its work process and output. LBCI is not unique in this matter. In fact, this could be generalized to most other stations in Lebanon—as we note below—and has both positive and negative implications. On the up side, the diverse sectarian identities of the TV stations in Lebanon guarantee that the major sects and their associated towns and symbols will be covered. On the down side, this diversity reinforces the divisions among the Lebanese publics by focusing the attention of each group on what is important or newsworthy to that group and not what is important to the whole country. It furthermore guarantees that minor sects and political parties will barely be covered.

### ***Al-Manar TV's Rundown***

Both Al-Manar TV and New TV did not lead with al-Assad's speech and deemphasized that story, although the former gave it more prominence than the latter. Al-

Manar TV positioned al-Assad's story in the seventh spot and about 23 minutes into the newscast, while New TV ran it in the 31<sup>st</sup> spot along with other Arabic and International news stories. Although Future TV ran the story 8<sup>th</sup> and about 30 minutes into the newscast, it gave it a 10-minute package, while al-Manar TV only gave it a three-minute voice over and sound bite (VOSOT). Al-Manar then followed al-Assad's speech with a 35-second story about the Sudanese president praising Hezbollah on its victory, which was then followed by a one minute graphic without video covering the Iranian president's speech. Consistently with its introduction, al-Manar chose to lead with the story about the fall-out inside Israel and the "settling of scores" between Israeli leaders. That, of course, added to the notion of victory from Hezbollah's side. This was not similar to LBCI's series of aftermath stories, however. Al-Manar TV's stories about Israel focused solely on the devastation and utter defeat of Israeli political and military leaders.

Al-Manar TV's aftermath stories covered 31 minutes or 39 percent of its 79-minute-long newscast. The positioning of the stories certainly shows that al-Manar wanted to deemphasize them. In fact, most of the aftermath stories came in the middle and end of the newscast, with the exception of the first, which was a long eight-minute story positioned sixth in the rundown. The rest came in 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and then 17<sup>th</sup> through 21<sup>st</sup>. We already discussed the impact of LBCI's sectarian identity on the low emphasis given to an area and population that least interests its Christian audience, but why would the Shiite Hezbollah station also deemphasize the aftermath stories? On its face it looks counterintuitive, but looking further into the content of al-Manar TV's aftermath stories and what they decided to focus on reveals a logical connection that is consistent with Hezbollah's strategy throughout the war.

Unlike the three stations above that emphasized the vast destruction and devastation of the south, al-Manar TV barely touched on the destruction angle. In fact, barely 20 seconds of video footage showed destruction, and even those were a far cry from the devastation shown by other stations. For example, in one shot al-Manar TV's camera moved away from the live correspondent to show some buildings in the background that were barely touched. Even those shots were dark and almost out of focus, as if al-Manar TV was intentionally avoiding the coverage of any destruction.

Conversely, the main focus of the aftermath stories was the victory of the resistance and the defeat of Israel. The reports were filled with sound bites of people celebrating the victory, describing the heroic actions of the resistance fighters and showing what the defeated Israeli army left behind—from burnt tanks and abandoned weapons, to blood stained military fatigues and ID cards.

The other stories that were somewhat emphasized included the defeated Israeli tanks withdrawing; the pulling of bodies out of rubble; the refugees returning; and the cleaning up of roads and removal of debris by the citizens. The overall tone was unmistakably jubilant, celebrating the resistance's victory over Israel. The stories carried high doses of patriotic pride, heroism and defiance, and were mostly upbeat and optimistic, with a strong sense of moving into the rebuilding phase.

Furthermore, if Future TV's reconstruction plans and announcements focused on the Hariri family and their allies, al-Manar TV's announcements focused on Hezbollah and their allies. Al-Manar TV's stories highlighted the reconstruction plans and efforts, especially those led by Hezbollah's leadership. In one story a top Hezbollah leader spoke

for several minutes about the instructions Hassan Nasrallah gave to his men for starting the damage evaluation and reconstruction effort immediately.

And if LBCI was the only station to cover the aftermath of the war from two Christian towns, al-Manar TV was the only station to focus on the destruction and carnage in the Bekaa region, especially Baalbek—an area predominantly Shiite and highly supportive of Hezbollah. In addition, two stories focused on refugees coming back from Syria, which promoted the effort of Hezbollah’s main ally in helping Lebanese refugees.

All this pointed to three important matters: First, the focus was on areas which were associated with the sectarian identity of the station and were underrepresented in other stations—like the city of Baalbek. Second, the coverage of refugees coming from Syria highlighted Hezbollah’s political alliance with that country and promoted the good deeds of the Syrian government in helping the Lebanese people during the war. Third, and most importantly, the under-exposure of the refugees’ plight reflected Hezbollah’s need to downplay the enormous amount of destruction and death, lest it overshadows the victory aspect of that war. The last two points certainly resonated with Hezbollah’s political interests and its strategy throughout the war, while the first point played on the sectarian identity of the station.

### ***New TV’s Rundown***

New TV gave al-Assad’s speech the least amount of prominence—by far. While all stations positioned this story in the first bloc (i.e. before the first break), New TV ran it in the last bloc—right after the third break. Al-Assad’s speech came in spot 31 and was given a five-minute package. The story was followed by a one-minute voice over about

the Egyptian president and then a one-minute VO about the Iranian president. It is obvious that New TV positioned al-Assad's speech in the place it usually runs the regional and international news that has a "foreign news" or "in other news" context. Therefore, New TV did not give al-Assad's story the "local" angle given by all other stations.

Interestingly, New TV's top story was a one-minute voice over showing the tape Hezbollah released, where they destroyed several Israeli tanks. Al-Manar TV ran that story second in its newscast but gave it almost six minutes. After the Hezbollah video, New TV ran 10 news packages and live shot stories related to the aftermath of the war. They had an additional five related stories in the middle of the newscast, bringing the total time allocated to aftermath stories to 45 minutes or 46 percent of its 98-minute-long newscast.

Consistently with al-Manar TV, New TV highlighted stories of the victory of the resistance but gave even more emphasis to the Israeli defeat aspect. In one long news package, the correspondent only talked about the Israeli withdrawal and spent substantial time showing signs of their defeat and what they left behind, from weapons and hardware to blood stained fatigues and ID cards. New TV also emphasized heroic stories of the fighters who resisted the Israeli attack and even described the retreating Israeli soldiers as in a state of "anxiety and exhaustion."

New TV also covered other angles of the aftermath stories with less emphasis. Those stories included short segments about refugees returning; some destruction; cleaning up of roads and removing of the rubble; plans and effort for reconstruction; unexploded ordinance and cluster bombs; the traffic congestion caused by the returning

refugees; and the funerals of martyrs. The diversity of these angles point to New TV's declared goals of trying to reach all citizens.

The overall tone of the coverage, while not as jubilant as al-Manar TV, was nevertheless defiant, upbeat and optimistic. It carried strong doses of patriotism, heroism and boldness. In addition, while the station did cover to some extent the destruction and devastation—although nowhere near as much as LBCI, Future TV and TL—New TV put an interesting spin on that coverage. In several incidents, correspondents referred to the destruction as “evidence” of the strong resistance and heroism of the fighters. That cast the destruction in a positive light consistent with its overall tone. In addition to this overall sense of victory, the coverage gave a strong sense of “humiliation and utter defeat of the Israeli enemy.”

In addition, like al-Manar TV, New TV covered the refugees coming from Syria but added to them the refugees coming from Akkar—an historically impoverished and under covered area. New TV's vast number of aftermath stories meant that they covered almost every major area in Lebanon with no apparent focus on one area to the exclusion of another. One point noticeable about this coverage was the dominance of interviews with the general public. All other stations, on the contrary, allocated more time to sound bites delivered by political and religious figures and local junior officials. This reflected New TV's commitment to cover public issues rather than politicians. It also highlighted the stations' non-commitment to certain political sides or interests and its influence by communist ideology, which usually focuses on the regular person and the poor worker. In other words, the sectarian identity was replaced with the party's ideology in New TV's case. In fact, New TV was the only station to cover a small meeting in south Lebanon

that included the communist party. The two-minute package was dominated by sound bites of communist officials. In addition, the diverse areas covered reflect New TV's secular identity and its ability and intention to reach a wide audience regardless of religion and sect.

### ***Conclusion of Section B***

The analysis above revealed that stations from the same political sides do not necessarily give the same amount of prominence to similar stories. Only in the case of al-Assad's speech, were the stations grouped along the same political lines (See Table 11.3 below). LBCI, Future TV and TL highlighted the story and gave it substantial time, while both New TV and al-Manar TV practically buried the story. In the case of the aftermath stories, however, both LBCI and al-Manar TV—two politically opposing stations—deemphasized the coverage, while Future TV, TL and New TV gave them prime positioning and time (See Table 11.2 above). When looking at the news angles and overall tone, allied stations covered the aftermath stories with high levels of consistency. Both al-Manar TV and New TV, for instance, highlighted the victory aspect of the stories and covered them in an upbeat, defiant and positive tone. On the other side of the political divide, Future TV, TL and LBCI decided to focus on the destruction and devastation and their tone of coverage was dim, pessimistic and negative.

Of course, there were some differences among stations of the same political grouping and some similarities among stations of opposing political groupings. The analysis attributes that mostly to the sectarian or ideological identity of each station. For example, while both LBCI and al-Manar TV gave little prominence to the aftermath stories, the former did that most probably because its core Christian audience was less

concerned about destruction and devastation that affected mostly Shiite Muslim areas and populations. The slight difference between allied stations could also be attributed to the state of technology and the strength of the institutional structure in each station, which, as discussed in the preceding chapter, are not only tools for maintaining high quality in output, but are simultaneously instruments for effectively and efficiently controlling the message. For instance, while Future TV, LBCI and TL's overall tones were mostly pessimistic and negative, the latter had a touch of defiance and hope. It comes to no surprise that TL has the least advanced technology and the weakest institutional structure to control the message, while the opposite applies to the former two stations. In addition, TL has the most diverse body of employees among all stations mostly because it is a public station owned by the government. Consequently, its hiring practices were influenced by the sectarian and clientalist mentality in the country, which dictates a balance between religions and sects across all government positions.

So far, we have established that the political priorities of a station were reflected in the newscast's introduction and sometimes, but not always, in the priorities of the rundown—or the prominence given to certain stories in the rundown in terms of positioning and timing. When the priorities were not reflected in the rundown, however, they certainly emerged in the coverage, framing and overall tone of each story. In addition, their positioning and prominence was explained by other reasons, especially the sectarian or ideological identity of each station.

The analysis of the aftermath stories in this section, however, is not sufficient to support the latter conclusion simply because it was not deep enough and it only focused on stories that were given different emphasis by stations from the same political



grouping. More in-depth analysis is needed to understand how the framing of individual stories and the priorities of the rundown reflect the political line and goals of the stations and correlate with the elements of newsworthiness (Discussed in the preceding chapter). So, the shortcomings of this section are remedied in the next section by focusing in-depth on one story: al-Assad's speech.

### **C. Comparing the News Story: Al-Assad's Speech**

This section focuses on the basic building blocks of the newscast: the news story. The preceding section showed how the stations' decisions to highlight or downgrade al-Assad's speech correlated with their political alliances. On one side of the political divide, LBCI, Future TV and TL gave substantial prominence to al-Assad's speech. On the other side, al-Manar TV and New TV buried the story. One might ask: why did Syria's supposed allies bury the story, while its opponents promoted it? To answer this question and better understand the editorial decisions behind this story, we need to further investigate each story in-depth to see how it was covered by the five stations.

In several earlier sections we noted that stories are first "pre-framed" by the news director, then constructed by the reporter—who usually knows what the news director wants even before asking him, and then the story is "post-checked" or reviewed and edited by the news director or producer before it airs. It is important therefore to analyze some individual stories in-depth to track the institutional instruments of "pre-framing" and "post-checking" and tie them to the top of the institutional hierarchy and hence to the political interests of each station's owners and patrons.

The criteria of analysis will focus on three elements of the TV news story. First, we focus on sound bites used in the story—their number, length, proportion to the

newscast, and content. Sound bites are mostly short excerpts selected from speeches and interviews. If framing is essentially selecting some aspects of an event and making it salient (Entman, 1993), sound bite selection contributes immensely to the framing of news. As mentioned earlier, most news directors or producers select the sound bites themselves, especially for important stories.

Second, we analyze the context in which each sound bite ran. This includes the anchor's introduction and the reporter's introduction and sound track. As one interviewed reporter commented, "you can start the story as *verb-subject-object* or you can give it an introduction. Most of our producers like the former direct style, and that's how news is supposed to be." The reporter's assumption here is that stories with introductions have more subjective material than those that don't have introductions. Therefore, we will give special attention to the beginning of the story and check whether it had an introduction or if it was written in a "direct style."

In broadcast news, most top stories are introduced by an anchor and "tossed" to a reporter. The anchor's introduction or "toss," as mentioned earlier, is mostly written by the news director, while the rest of the package is written by the reporter—under the former's supervision. Since introducing the story could carry vast amounts of framing, we will take into consideration the anchor's introduction.

In addition to the anchor's introduction and the sound bites, the reporter's sound track glues all parts of the story together, providing a coherent structure and smooth transitions between sound bites and other elements. The reporters track also provides context to those elements, especially the sound bites. So, we will focus immensely on the reporter's sound track. If the reporter's track is highly compatible with the overall

message of the newscast—especially the newscast introduction, that means it is consistent with the overall political line of the institution, which testifies to the power of the institutional instruments of “pre-framing” and “post-checking,” among others.

Finally, since this story does not have much video footage to analyze—the whole story was mostly wide shots and close ups of President al-Assad speaking, the video shots or graphics will not be the focus of this analysis.

Al-Assad’s speech	Salience - position	Time – min & %	Salience - type of story	SOT #	SOT min	SOT %	Framing Level
<b>LBCI</b>	High (1 <sup>st</sup> )	Mid – 8% (6min)	High – PKG	5	4:40	78%	Mid
<b>TL</b>	High (1 <sup>st</sup> )	Mid – 7% (3min)	High – PKG	4	2:05	66%	High
<b>Future TV</b>	Mid (8 <sup>th</sup> )	High – 12% (10min)	High – PKG	10	6:30	65%	High
<b>Al-Manar TV</b>	Mid (7 <sup>th</sup> )	Low – 4% (3min)	Mid – VOSOT	1	1:40	56%	High
<b>New TV</b>	Low (31 <sup>st</sup> )	Low – 5% (5min)	Mid (SOT)	3	5:10	94%	Low

**Table 21**

Prominence of the al-Assad speech story

Table 21 above shows the prominence given to the al-Assad speech in each newscast by measuring each story’s position in the newscast (Salience - position), length and proportion to the whole newscast (Time – min & %), format (Salience – type of story), number of sound bites (SOT #), length of all sound bites combined (SOT min), the percentage of the story that was made up of sound bites (SOT %), and the level of framing, paraphrasing and reconstruction in the story (Framing Level).

### ***Prominence of Sound Bites***

Table 10.4 shows that LBCI gave al-Assad’s speech the most prominence. It ran it as the top story and gave it a six-minute-package or eight percent of the newscast with five sound bites that consumed 78 percent of the story. This latter percentage is important since the more time dedicated to direct quotes or sound bites, the less a journalist can

manipulate and frame a story. In this sense, LBCI had considerable amounts of framing and paraphrasing.

TL ranked second but was very close to Future TV. Although TL only dedicated about three minutes to the story, the package consumed seven percent of its relatively short newscast. In its news package, TL ran four sound bites that amounted to 66 percent of the story, also an indication of substantial amounts of framing and paraphrasing.

Although Future TV positioned the speech eighth in line, it came in third before al-Manar TV—which positioned it at seventh spot—because of the whopping 10 minutes package allocated to this story. The package consumed 12 percent of the newscast—the highest proportion among all stations. In addition, Future TV gave the story the largest number of sound bites among all stations. The ten sound bites took up six minutes and thirty seconds, which amounted to 65 percent of the story. Only al-Manar TV allocated a smaller proportion to sound bites. This indicates a high level of framing, which is further analyzed below.

Al-Manar TV only ran a voice over followed by one sound bite (VOSOT). The sound bite consumed only 56 percent of the 3-minute story, also an indication of high levels of framing and paraphrasing. The whole story, however, took up only four percent of the newscast.

Although New TV practically buried the story at position 31 and ran only a three sound-bite-only story, it actually gave the sound bites the highest percentage of the story. In fact, only 20 seconds of the story were narrated by the anchor, while 94 percent of it was direct sound bites from al-Assad. This indicates very little amounts of framing and commentary.

### *Selection and Content of Sound Bites*

When it came to the selection and content of the sound bites, a trend consistent with the newscasts' introductions quickly appeared, although there were some common sound bites carried by almost all stations. The one common sound bite selected by all stations except al-Manar TV was probably the most newsworthy part of the speech to Lebanese audiences. It covered the core of al-Assad's accusation of some Lebanese and Arab sides of collaborating with Israel and even held them responsible for the war. Al-Assad in this excerpt drew a parallel between an imposed peace treaty following the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and the current war. Back in May 17, 1983, some Lebanese groups with Arab backing tried to sign a peace agreement with Israel that was unfavorable to Lebanese and Syrian national interests. Syria and opposing Lebanese groups rejected the agreement and succeeded in killing it. Ever since, anything and anyone associated with that agreement was shunned and labeled a May 17<sup>th</sup> supporter or even collaborator (Denton, 1983; Walsh, 1984). In this sound bite, al-Assad labels the March 14 forces—a term referring to the anti-Syria groups in Lebanon—as the “May 17th groups”:

... Lebanese groups fail in achieving their pro-Israeli scheme; so they incite Israel to come militarily in order to save them from their predicament and hit the resistance, consequently having Lebanon join the Israeli camp. In both incidents there was an Arab cover. That is why I stress the 17th of May incident. And I always call those groups the May 17th groups. It doesn't matter what labels they use. Sometimes they say February and sometimes March (SANA, 2006, ¶ 17).<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> See Appendix A for the whole speech, along with marking of each sound byte.

Another similar sound bite was carried by all stations except al-Manar TV and TL. The excerpt held the same political groups “responsible for the destruction, massacres and the war from A to Z,” and declared their failure to disarm the resistance.

It is not surprising that al-Manar TV chose not to carry these two sound bites, but instead chose a much less critical quote which vaguely and timidly criticized all Arabs and invited them to look for common grounds. Throughout the war coverage, al-Manar TV tried hard not to alienate any Lebanese or Arab side. On numerous occasions, al-Manar TV’s talk show host stopped critical callers from lashing out at some Lebanese and Arab leaders, telling them this is a time to unify and stand with the resistance and not a time to settle scores. The talk show host did, however, occasionally allow some timid calls of grief directed at Arab leaders who didn’t support the resistance. Arguably, this strategy greatly contributed to Hezbollah’s success in gaining public sympathy and support and avoiding a fall-out among the Lebanese publics. When Israel counted on the Lebanese people to fragment and turn against Hezbollah, the opposite happened (Gordon, 2006). It is also noteworthy that the quote al-Manar TV chose included the name of Hezbollah’s leader Hassan Nasrallah. In addition, the sound bite was full of praise to the resistance and gave it credit for all the success and achievements:

The battles have also proved that the Arabs’ words have no weight or importance in international forums.... Indeed, it was the situation on the ground and the steadfastness of the Lebanese people and the resistance and not the Arab political performance which modified the previous draft resolution into the current formula.... In all these matters we have come to the conclusion that relying on the international situation doesn’t yield fruitful results. As Arabs, if we do not search

for points of strength, then we have no weight or political performance.... In my belief, the real battle has just started but not in military terms.... But we all listened to the speech of Hezbollah's Secretary General, Mr. Hassan Nassrallah, who answered them... (SANA, 2006, ¶ 27).

Again, this sound bite which focused on the resistance's victory was consistent with al-Manar TV's overall strategy which we saw in the earlier section. Although al-Manar TV, in general, avoided attacking Arab countries that criticized it throughout the war, this sound bite shows an apparent departure from this strategy. However, compared to other sound bites which were scathingly critical of some Arab leaders, this one can almost be considered praise. In fact, the criticism here is vague and general and not pointed in a certain direction, but addresses the general weakness of Arab words "in international forums." In addition, the sound bite carried a conciliatory tone and an invitation for Arabs to "search for points of strength." This is a far cry from the "half-men" that LBCI carried (see below) or the "Arabic cover" for Israel that all other stations carried.

Both Future TV and TL used parts of this sound bite. TL skipped the sentence that criticized Arab leaders and focused on the praise to the "steadfastness of the Lebanese people and the resistance." TL also included the last few sentences but stopped before Nasrallah's name was mentioned. Future TV only used the sentence that announced "the real battle has just started" and skipped all the rest. The 10-second sound bite was used out of context, as discussed below.

TL's four sound bites focused mostly on al-Assad's criticism of the Lebanese and Arab sides that didn't support the resistance, although TL did not use the quote where al-

Assad held Lebanese sides responsible for the war “from A to Z.” In addition, TL was the only station to carry the more conciliatory quote where al-Assad said “we want from our Arab brothers to stand with us, and we welcome anyone who wants to do so but only through our vision and evaluation of our interests.” In that way, TL differed from the other stations by slightly toning down al-Assad’s criticism of Arab sides.

LBCI’s quotes almost exclusively emphasized al-Assad’s criticism of Lebanese and Arab sides. It also included the derogatory comment by al-Assad when he indirectly called some Arab politicians “those with half stances... or those who are half men” (SANA, 2006, ¶ 20). LBCI was also the only station to include al-Assad’s criticism of the UN Security Council, “which the U.S.A. has transformed from a council to preserve security into one that destroys it by issuing a resolution that responds to the demands of Israel and saves it from its predicament at the expense of Lebanon...” (¶ 21).

New TV’s four sound bites focused mostly on al-Assad’s criticism of France, Arab states and Lebanese sides who didn’t support Hezbollah during the war. Each of the sound bites carried accusations of collaboration with Israel, or in the case of France accusations of double standards and hypocrisy in dealing with Arabs. It is noteworthy that only New TV included the last part of the quote where al-Assad attacked France for its enthusiasm to push for an international tribunal for the assassination of Hariri, but didn’t seem to care about an investigation into the Israeli war crimes:

Is the reason here that in the first case the suspect was Syria, and this is sufficient motive and justification, and in the second the suspect is Israel, and nothing should be done. Or is it that the children of Qana and other poor people do not deserve this official’s attention? (¶ 13).



Although Future TV did carry the earlier part of this quote, it stopped right after the mention of France’s calling for an “investigation into the assassination of Prime Minister Hariri.” This, in fact, was one of two easily defined focuses of Future TV’s coverage of the speech when it came to selecting sound bites—namely anything related to Hariri’s assassination. The other focus was al-Assad’s criticism of Lebanese, Arab and French sides. Aside from that, Future TV’s sound bites were short, fragmented and seemingly incoherent when taken alone without analyzing the reporter’s track, as we do below.

<b>Al-Assad’s speech</b>	<b>Main Focus of Sound Bites (SOT – Focus)</b>
<b>LBCI</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Al-Assad attacked Lebanese sides</li> <li>• Al-Assad attacked some Arab leaders and states</li> <li>• Al-Assad criticized the U.S.A and the UN security council</li> <li>• Al-Assad called Arab leaders “those with half stances... or those who are half men.”</li> </ul>
<b>Future TV</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Al-Assad attacked Lebanese sides</li> <li>• Al-Assad attacked some Arab leaders and states</li> <li>• Al-Assad Labeled the “March 14<sup>th</sup> forces” as the “May 17<sup>th</sup> groups.”</li> <li>• Al-Assad said “The real battle has just started...” (out of context)</li> <li>• Al-Assad criticized the investigation into the assassination of Prime Minister Hariri.</li> </ul>
<b>New TV</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Al-Assad attacked Lebanese sides</li> <li>• Al-Assad attacked some Arab leaders and states</li> <li>• Al-Assad criticized France</li> </ul>
<b>TL</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Al-Assad attacked Lebanese sides</li> <li>• Al-Assad attacked some Arab leaders and states (a toned down sound bite used)</li> <li>• Al-Assad praised the resistance and steadfastness of the Lebanese people</li> <li>• Al-Assad said “we want from our Arab brothers to stand with us...”</li> </ul>
<b>Al-Manar TV</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Al-Assad attacked some Arab leaders and states (a toned down sound bite used)</li> <li>• Al-Assad praised the resistance and steadfastness of the Lebanese people</li> <li>• Al-Assad praised Hezbollah and its leader Hassan Nasrallah.</li> </ul>

**Table 22**  
Main Focus of selected Sound Bites from al-Assad’s Speech.

Table 22 above summarizes by station the main focuses of all sound bites in al-Assad’s story. It shows that all stations ran sound bites of al-Assad attacking some Arab leaders and states and all except al-Manar TV ran sound bites that mentioned al-Assad’s attack against some Lebanese sides. Only al-Manar TV and TL ran sound bites praising the resistance and the steadfastness of the Lebanese people, and their sound bites criticizing Arab leaders were substantially less critical than those of the other stations.

Only New TV ran a sound bite that criticized France, and only TL ran a conciliatory sound bite where al-Assad invited Arab states “to stand with us.” In addition, only LBCI ran the sound bite that criticized the U.S.A. and the UN Security Council, along with a scathingly critical sound bite where al-Assad calls some Arab leaders “half-men.” Future TV was unique in running a sound bite that labeled the “March 14th forces” as the “May 17th groups,” along with short sound bites that criticized the investigation into the assassination of Prime Minister Hariri and that said “the real battle has just started.”<sup>114</sup>

***Context of Sound Bites: The Anchor’s Introduction and the Reporter’s Track***

So far we’ve seen some traces of the station’s political interests reflected in the selection of sound bites, with all stations rotating around a common core but also uniquely using excerpts from the speech that focused on separate points each station wanted to highlight. Although the common core of sound bites could be viewed as the most newsworthy part of the speech for a Lebanese audience—namely the quotes where al-Assad attacked Lebanese sides and Arab sides, it is important to understand the context in which those sound bites appeared. In fact, analyzing the selection and content of sound bites separately from the whole story doesn’t really tell much. Audiences do not watch sound bites in isolation. They view whole or parts of stories that contextualize sound bites through an anchor’s introduction and a reporter’s track, along other elements of the story. In other words, although several stations used identical sound bites, the context of those sound bites sends different messages. What follows is an analysis of the whole content of each story with special focus on the anchor’s introduction and the reporter’s sound track and how both contextualized the sound bites in the story.

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<sup>114</sup> See Appendix A for the position of each sound byte in the speech’s text.

### *New TV*

Since New TV had an on-camera anchor shot followed by a sound bite, and the anchor read the whole story, we treat the anchor's introduction as a reporter's track. New TV's anchor track introduced the sound bite with the following:

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad considered that the forces that wanted to disarm the resistance have failed, and that their fall is looming, and that [UN] resolution 1701 became an international political crane for these forces. Al-Assad's speech was delivered at the opening session of the fourth conference of Arab journalists in Damascus.

In addition to the last sentence which simply stated the place and occasion, the introduction barely highlighted two points in the speech without much commentary about them. In addition, the first sentence was almost taken verbatim out of the speech. Unlike the other stations, New TV did not mention who are "the forces" al-Assad referred to. It left the sound bites tell the story. This approach points to the little paraphrasing and reconstruction in New TV's story, as compared to other stations.

### *Al-Manar TV*

Unlike New TV, Al-Manar TV's introduction framed and pointed the speech in a specific direction. Al-Manar TV's anchor chose a totally different focus that highlighted the victory over Israel—a strategy consistent with the coverage of the aftermath stories, as mentioned earlier. He introduced the voice over as follows:

Among the standpoints taken today, President Bashar al-Assad sent the most honorable salutes to the resistance fighters in Lebanon who defeated Israel and its

allies and bosses, and considered that the real battle has just begun, and that we have to transform the military victory into a political victory.

Aside from the allusion to the defeat of Israel's "allies," this focus excluded any attack or criticism of any Lebanese or Arab leader, which was highlighted in all other newscasts but to varying degrees. Both the promotion of the resistance's victory and Israel's defeat were a clear theme that ran throughout al-Manar TV's newscast. More importantly, this rhetoric along with avoiding any direct and explicit criticism directed at Hezbollah's Lebanese or Arab opponents reflected Hezbollah's strategy throughout the war, as discussed below.

Instead of running several sound bites, like New TV, al-Manar TV<sup>115</sup> chose to paraphrase al-Assad's words briefly over video (voice over). The story only visited three points of the speech, all of which were consistent with the anchor's introduction and al-Manar TV's strategy during the war. The anchor reiterated al-Assad's points that "the resistance choice has become the Arab choice, emphasizing that the strategy of peace does not mean giving up the resistance." Then he pointed out that "al-Assad criticized the Arab stances," but didn't add much more to that message. Finally, al-Manar TV highlighted al-Assad's conception of the "New Middle East." Again, al-Manar TV followed its strategy during the war of not criticizing any Lebanese or Arab sides and did not mention al-Assad's criticism and accusation of the March 14 forces for collaborating with Israel—a point visited several times in his speech and made prominent by other stations.

What was also noticeable in al-Manar TV's story was the use of al-Assad's words without any additions or commentary. Unlike some stations, however, al-Manar TV

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<sup>115</sup> Since al-Manar had a voice over, the anchor's track is used instead of the reporter's track.

avoided most of the harsh words al-Assad used, especially those criticizing Arab states. This again was consistent with their overall strategy and may reflect the calculation of Hezbollah's leadership—that they were coming out of a war victorious and wanted to open any diplomatic channels of communication with the Arab states that criticized them earlier.

### ***TL***

TL had a short introduction to its news packages with barely any commentary. TL's anchorwoman simply said, "Now we start with the details of President al-Assad's speech." The station, however, had the story at the top of the newscast. This meant the newscast introduction acted as the story introduction. Therefore, whatever framing and commentary was made in the newscast introduction already colored the speech (see "newscast Introduction" above).

TL's news package was basically four sound bites, each preceded by a reporter's introduction—a traditional way of constructing a sound bite. The reporter started with a brief rehash of some points in the speech. She covered the point about the resistance being "the only way to get back rights," and moved quickly to point out that al-Assad said "the American administration adopts the preemptive war principle." This was a brief point al-Assad was trying to make to point out that the U.S. does not want peace by saying that preemptive war "is absolutely contradictory to the principle of peace." The reporter, however, didn't use the latter part of his sentence, but moved on quickly to another point in al-Assad's speech saying "the Israeli aggression is not related to the imprisonment of the two soldiers... and that Israel was defeated militarily." Then the reporter noted "that resolution 1701 is positive in appearance but negative in content and that Israel along

with the March 14 group were responsible for the aggression, according to al-Assad, who tied between resolution 1701 and the assassination of Hariri.” It is interesting how the reporter made sure to insert a redundant attribution to al-Assad in the middle of the last sentence to make sure the audience understands who is making the claim.

The reporter’s first introduction was followed by the sound bites other stations used in which al-Assad accused Arab and Lebanese sides of creating a cover for Israel’s aggression. The reporter then narrated al-Assad’s point that UN “resolution 1701 revealed that the Arab word is ignored and that Arabs have failed in the peace process because they haven’t understood the meaning of the strategic choice for peace, and he [al-Assad] asked them to be aligned with the resistance.” This narration was followed by a short and redundant sound bite of al-Assad saying “we want our Arab brethren to stand with us....”

Finally, the reporter narrated an introduction to the last two sound bites—which were cut back to back—saying “al-Assad renewed his support for the resistance, and considered that the new Middle East they are talking about has become an illusion, and called on a popular renaissance.” The next two sound bites were about al-Assad’s note that “resistance and peace have one axis and not two...” and that “relying on the international situation is worthless.... If we didn’t search for the resources of power as Arabs, then we are worthless...” TL, however, did not mention al-Assad’s new vision of the Middle East.

There was not much commentary in the TL reporter’s narration. It was mostly basic and sometimes vague paraphrasing, followed by redundant sound bites. The framing of this story rested mostly in the selection of points to highlight from the speech.

Overall, the story seemed almost incoherent and disorienting. Although it was consistent with the newscast introduction, the level of consistency was not high. Again, this may be the result of the chaotic operation TL runs, the highly diverse body of reporters and producers, and the poor state of its technology. The fact that the institutional instruments of “pre-framing” and “post-checking” don’t guarantee control of the message when the institution itself is in a weak state, as we saw in the case of TL in chapter four. Despite that institutional weakness, the message did not contradict the station’s political line but was probably not as consistent as its patrons hoped, and certainly not as consistent as the stories produced by the other two allied stations.

### ***LBCI***

Like TL, LBCI had a short anchor’s introduction with barely any commentary. LBCI’s anchorman pitched the story to the reporter saying, “First, what was in Bashar al-Assad’s speech?” Also like TL, LBCI had the story at the top of the newscast, so the same applied to the role of the newscast introduction here (See “Newscast Introduction” above).

While the reporter’s narration in TL and al-Manar TV’s stories were limited to introducing the sound bites and mostly basic paraphrasing, LBCI’s reporter followed a different style by using several adjectives that colored al-Assad’s speech and by adding a tag at the end of the package—which is often a subjective commentary by the reporter.

LBCI’s reporter started his narration with an introduction that paralleled the newscast and the anchor’s introduction: “In a speech intended to be about the latest developments, the Syrian president launched an attack, at the fourth conference for Arab journalists... an attack on the March 14<sup>th</sup> powers, and accused them of collaborating and

cooperating with Israel....” The use of the term “attack” twice in the sentence tied this narration to the whole newscast. As mentioned earlier, LBCI’s newscast introduction used the term “attack” five times, along with other similar terms, like “first round” and “battles,” to clearly give the impression that al-Assad’s speech is one round in a bigger fight. In that sense, the reporter’s narration was fully consistent with the overall tone of the newscast introduction—evidence that the news director himself may have rewritten the story or at least instructed the reporter to write it accordingly through the pre-framing practice.

After the first two sound bites presented al-Assad’s criticism of some Lebanese sides, the anchor introduced the next sound bite emphasizing that “al-Assad compared between the latest war and that of the Israeli invasion in 1982, and considered that the Arab cover for Israeli operations was always there.” The third sound bite redundantly mirrored the reporter’s narration and was then followed by a short comment introducing a fourth sound bite where al-Assad used the derogatory term “half-men” to allude to some Arab statesmen. That sound bite was then followed by another similar quote telling Arab leaders that he who “never had experience in war is not entitled to assume the role of a guide or instructor in peace.”

Then LBCI’s reporter summarized al-Assad’s positions on UN Security Council Resolutions 1559 and 1701, and made sure to point out that al-Assad said the former “has nothing to do with the extension for President Lahoud.” Looking back at the speech, this comment was clearly taken out of context. Al-Assad was trying to make a point that today it was difficult to convince people that “the war has nothing to do with the capture of the two soldiers,” the same way it was difficult “two years ago” to convince them “that



resolution 1559 has nothing to do with the extension of President Lahoud's term of office." Lebanese President Emil Lahoud is seen by the March 14 forces as a Syrian puppet. Mentioning this point struck a chord with Lebanese Christians, who have historically considered the presidential position as their own turf and guarantee to remain in power and not be overwhelmed by other religions in that tiny country.

The reporter, then, followed the comment with al-Assad's "tying between the international resolutions that came out regarding Lebanon, and the role of some Arab and Lebanese sides in it"—a point already made at the top of the story. Then the reporter ended this part of the narration with "al-Assad considered UN Security Council resolution 1701 was intended to save Israel," and followed it with a short sound bite where al-Assad criticized the UN security council "which the US has transformed from a council to preserve security into one that destroys it by issuing a resolution that responds to the demands of Israel..." Finally, the reporter ended the story with the following tag:

Al-Assad pointed out that the outcome of the war came in Hezbollah's advantage, and said that the real war has just started, calling on the conversion of the military achievement to a political achievement. And he didn't forget to remind that the return of talking about the Arab rights owes itself to Hezbollah, considering that now it is his role to influence the Arab World.

Consistently with the newscast and anchor introduction, LBCI's reporter never used the word "resistance," which appeared 63 times in al-Assad's speech, but preferred to use "Hezbollah," which only appeared once in the speech. LBCI was clearly trying to make a point that Hezbollah—a local Shiite political group in conflict with other local groups like the Christian Lebanese Forces—stood to gain from this war, and not Lebanon

or some conception of “Lebanese resistance.” The station also clearly wanted to highlight the link between Hezbollah’s victory and al-Assad’s newfound political capital and “role to influence the Arabic world,” as if indirectly saying that this whole war was to Syria’s advantage and its Shiite ally in Lebanon, and to the detriment of the local Lebanese powers opposing Syria and Hezbollah. This is a critical point to LBCI’s right wing Christian audiences, especially to supporters of the Lebanese Forces party, who historically have been terrified from an imagined Muslim takeover of the country and from the return of Syrian hegemony over Lebanon, that latter of which had destroyed their military might at the end of the civil war and kept them in check throughout the 1990s.

LBCI’s construction of the story is a model example of the power of the institutional instruments of “pre-framing” and “post-checking” and testifies to the strength of LBCI’s institution, its highly homogenous body of employees, and the extremely advanced state of its technology. This whole story might as well been written and produced by one person—the political patron of the station.

It is important to note that the commentary and framing in LBCI’s story was extremely subtle and much more complex than other stations. This cannot be said of Future TV’s blunt and somewhat crude construction of the same story.

### ***Future TV***

Like al-Manar TV, Future TV’s introductions clearly pointed the speech in a specific direction. Future TV’s anchor simply introduced the story with, “we return now to the speech of al-Assad who attacked the forces of March 14<sup>th</sup> and considered that the time is now a time of the resistance.” The emphasis on al-Assad’s attack on the March

14<sup>th</sup> groups was highlighted in the newscast introduction too and remained the focal point of the whole story. This again was consistent with the rhetoric of Future TV's political patrons, who since 2005 hadn't missed an opportunity to emphasize al-Assad's enmity to them. This also reflects comments from several senior executives from Future TV who openly considered the station "a representative and spearhead of the March 14<sup>th</sup> movement" (Interview # 4d, June-July 2006).

Unlike all the other stations, Future TV's reporter took a totally different approach to the construction of this news package. First, the reporter frequently used very short sound bites excerpted from various parts of the speech and often used out of context to specifically poke holes in al-Assad's credibility. Second, while all other reporters followed the traditional form of introducing a sound bite and then run it, Future TV reversed that process by first running a sound bite and then commenting on it. Even the few sound bites the reporter did introduce were followed by an interpretive tag that was sometimes not related to the story but clearly meant to score a point against al-Assad or attack his personality and credibility.

Almost fully reflecting the newscast introduction, Future TV's reporter introduced the story with the following statement:

Throughout the war on Lebanon, there was a Syrian silence never breached by any official.... Twenty-four hours after the implementation of the ceasefire, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad came out himself trying by all methods to take advantage of the war on Lebanon for the benefit of Syria, and pushing the internal situation to renewal of fighting by accusing some sides of being allied with the Hebrew state and, with emphasis, describing those sides as the May 17<sup>th</sup> group.

Future TV's reporter did not put any effort to hide the contempt to al-Assad or to even give the impression that the story was covered objectively. From the first few words, doubt was shed on Syria's intentions because of silence throughout the war—which was actually not accurate.<sup>116</sup> Clearly, the reporter's introduction was full of interpretation and commentary, from saying that al-Assad was “trying by all methods to take advantage of the war” or concluding that his criticism of some Lebanese sides was “pushing the internal situation to renewal of fighting.” This introduction was followed by three sound bites cut back-to-back. The first was a long sound bite used by most other stations, where al-Assad accused some Lebanese sides of collaborating with Israel. The other two sound bites also reiterated the same topic.<sup>117</sup>

After the first three sound bites, the reporter introduced another point in the speech by saying, “Bashar al-Assad tried to take another route by suggesting that Hezbollah's resistance was under Syrian direction and was aimed at restarting the peace talks between Syria and Israel, and spoke about a new Middle East....” Although the next few sentences of narration from the reporter were taken almost verbatim out of the speech, the introduction to this point was all based on analysis and was not even supported in the speech, especially the part dealing with the resistance being under “Syrian direction.” Most interesting, however, was what came next in the narration: “We want to point out that Syria gave intelligence information to Washington in what the latter calls the war on terrorism following the infamous September 11 attacks.” This unrelated commentary clearly was an attempt to discredit al-Assad's accusation of some Lebanese sides of collaborating with Israel and the U.S. by saying that al-Assad himself

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<sup>116</sup> Top Syrian officials often delivered speeches and made stances during the war.

<sup>117</sup> See Appendix A for the position of each sound bite in the speech's text.

collaborated with the U.S. Ironically, the political side that controls Future TV is well known to be a U.S. ally, but it seems they want to distance themselves from America by using terms like “in what the latter (American) calls the war on terrorism....”

From here on, the process of introducing the sound bite and then running it was reversed. In fact, after the fourth sound bite—which only Future TV ran, and which dealt with “wisdom, courage and fear,” and clearly had nothing to do with the story except for finding contradictions in al-Assad’s words—the reporter slapped al-Assad with another unrelated historic reminder that suggested he was a coward for not responding to Israel’s actions against Syria:

It is noteworthy that the separation of forces in the Golan Heights has not been violated since 1973, even when the Israeli jets bombed the region of Ain el-Sahir, which is near the border with Lebanon, and when the Syrian airspace was violated right over the Presidential palace in Latakia city during the war on Lebanon. And Damascus at the time announced that al-Assad was not in the palace.

The reporter repeated this tactic again after the sixth sound bite, which dealt with the outcome of the battles that “came as a nationalistic response to the defeatist plans that were promoted in our region, especially after the invasion of Iraq.” The reporter followed this sound bite with a “noteworthy” comment that the Syrian “support to the Lebanese resistance did not exceed the slogans and banners...” and that “Damascus tried to catch up during the final days of the war and called upon its army to be prepared.” The reporter then introduced the seventh sound bite by falsely claiming that “Syrian president discounted armed resistance as a basis for resistance from his country.” Although Syria truly does forbid armed resistance from its land—a point used often against al-Assad to

show that he has double standards when supporting armed resistance from Lebanon—al-Assad actually never said so in his speech. The reporter ran the following sound bite, but out of the middle of al-Assad’s closing sentence and out of context to suggest that Syria’s resistance will only be non-military: “That there is no place in this world but for the strong. Strength starts by the power of the mind, will and faith and this is the basis of resistance and the only way to achieve victory.” Al-Assad’s closing comment was meant to say that a bright future for Syria can only be guaranteed by strength, but the reporter’s commentary changed its meaning, especially to those who did not listen to the speech or watch it on other stations.

These tactics were used throughout the news story and covered the various issues of criticizing Arab states and France. The overall tone of the reporter’s narration was fully consistent with that of the newscast and anchor introduction, which again supports the concept of pre-framing and post-checking by the news director. Like LBCI, this testifies to the strength of Future TV’s institution, its relatively homogenous or loyal employees and the relatively advanced state of its technology. It may also point out to the fact that the station’s owners are both well financed and major players in the Lebanese government. This meant that their political priorities superceded their financial sustenance needs—unlike LBCI, which balances its political goals with its financial goals.<sup>118</sup> Future TV’s patrons are major players in government, and more importantly they are well financed, therefore they can afford to utilize the station’s power as a propaganda instrument and disregard its financial loss caused by the alienation of some audiences.

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<sup>118</sup> LBCI tries to target a broader audience beyond its core Christians constituents to guarantee enough advertising revenues.

## Conclusion

In this section we saw how the three elements of the Lebanese broadcast news story—the anchor’s introduction, the selection of sound bites and the reporters track—all point in one direction, and that direction is consistent with the newscast’s overall direction, the station’s political direction and consequently the political interests of the station’s patrons and owners. That level of that consistency, however, varied from one station to another. To be sure, the general direction of those three story elements never contradicted the general political line of the station, but the variation mattered in how closely they served the political interest of the station and how closely they were associated with the general political line of the institution. This variation can be linked to three characteristics of each TV institution: The state of technology, the homogeneity of its body of employees or their loyalty to the station’s ideology and politics, and the strength of each institution’s management and processes. These three characteristics were discussed in the preceding chapter.

Station	Institutional characteristics			Consistency of Story Elements with		
	Advancement of Technology	Homogeneity or loyalty of employees	Strength of Institutional practices	Overall Newscast Elements	Stations Political Direction	Political interests of patrons
<b>LBCI</b>	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH
<b>Manar TV</b>	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH
<b>Future TV</b>	MID-HIGH	MID-HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH
<b>New TV</b>	LOW-MID	LOW	MID	MID	MID	MID
<b>TL</b>	LOW	LOW	LOW	MID	LOW	LOW

**Table 23 Relation between institutional characteristics and consistency in story elements**

Table 23 above summarizes the levels for each of the three institutional characteristics and compares them to the levels of consistency between the three story elements, on one hand, and the overall newscast elements, the station’s political direction and the political interests of the station’s patrons and owners, on the other hand. The table

shows that both LBCI and al-Manar TV have high levels in all three institutional characteristics and that is associated with high levels in consistency between their newscast stories and the three levels of political interest. It also shows the same high levels of consistency for Future TV, although this station ranked in the mid-high for advancement of technology and for homogeneity and loyalty of its newsroom employees. In addition, the two stations (New TV and TL) that ranked mid to low on institutional characteristics also ranked mid to low on consistency.

It is important to note that despite the low ranking for TL's and New TV's institutional characteristics, that didn't translate into a contradiction or inconsistency with each station's political interests and direction. It only meant that the consistency was weaker and that the newscast could have more effectively served the station's or its patron's political interests. In other words, regardless how weak the technology, how heterogeneous the employees and how weak the management style, the overall consistency of the news story will still serve the station's political patrons to some extent.

Finally, it seems that the strength of institutional practices, most important of which are instruments like pre-framing, post-checking and institutionalization of employees, are the most powerful among all three institutional elements. This testifies to the power of the corporation or the institution in shaping and molding the behaviors and outputs of its employees, or the "stickiness" element of institutions, a point that was visited earlier.



## D. Analyzing Individual Rundowns

In this section we analyze in-depth individual rundowns for each station. The goal here is to capture the overall trends for all stations. We will start by analyzing the kind of stories in each rundown and then by weighing the balance of the rundown by counting how many stories were dedicated to each side of the political divide—government loyalists vs. opposition leaders. Finally, we will measure the proportion of local news in the newscast compared to regional and international news.

We start with Future TV’s newscast that aired on Monday, June 26, 2006. Table 24 summarizes the actual rundown used for that newscast. It is no surprise that even here the top story was about a speech by Syrian President al-Assad, and as described

in the earlier section, the anchors here also lashed out at the Syrian president criticizing him and his allies in Lebanon. But the most striking characteristic of all stories in this rundown was that the vast majority of them not only fall under political news but are even labeled after politicians. Virtually, all the stories highlighted in gray were either announcements or activities of politicians during that day. After reviewing the script of this newscast, it become clear that even stories not labeled after politicians in the rundown were, nevertheless, stories about politicians’ announcement or activities. For

Story	Kind
Headlines and Introduction	
1. Al-Assad	PKG
2. Hamadeh	Graphic
3. Al-Aridi	PKG
4. Constitutional Council	PKG
5. The Phalanges (party)	VOSOT
6. Aoun’s (parliament) bloc	PKG
7. Seniora (Prime Minister)	PKG
- Break 1 -	
8. Kabalan	Graphic
9. Hagob	Graphic
10. Al-Khazen	Graphic
11. Ain el-Tinit (Berri)	PKG
12. Bkerki	VO
13. Lahoud (President)	VO
14. Ta’elbaya	PKG
15. Minister of Justice	VOSOT
16. The detained	PKG
17. Ta’awouniyat	PKG
18. Damac	PKG
19. Lecture	VO
- Break 2 -	
20. Palestine	PKG
21. Iraq	VO
22. Iran	VO
23. Korea	VO
24. Afghanistan	VO
25. Mauritania	VO
26. Music	VO
27. Weathercast	PKG
28. Caricature	PKG

**Table 24**  
**Future TV’s rundown June 26, 2006**

example, story number five was titled “The Phalanges,” referring to the Phalanges political party. The script, however, showed that the whole story was an announcement by Amin Gemayel, the party’s supreme leader. Similarly, stories number 11 and 12 were the names of the headquarters of the head of Parliament Nabih Berri and the Christian Maronite Patriarch, respectively. Both stories covered the announcements and activities of the two men. Story 14 referred to a Lebanese town in the Bekaa Valley where the 500th-day commemoration of the assassination of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri took place. Story 16 covered the commemoration of “End Torture Day” at the press association’s headquarters and included speeches by several politicians and journalists. Story 17 reported an announcement by the shareholders of a company that fired the General Manager and the board of directors. Story 18 was the first economic story in the newscast and covered the announcement of the founding of the Damac Properties Real-estate project in Beirut. Damac is a major Dubai-based real-estate developer with other international ventures (Damac, 2007). Following that story was an economic lecture delivered by an international scholar.

The first seven stories after the second break mostly covered international political and security news, including an update on the stand-off between Palestinians and Israelis, the announcement of a possible visit by the Iranian president to Iraq, a rap up of the situation in Iraq, America’s reaction to Korea’s long-range missile test, a suicide bombing in Afghanistan, and elections results in Mauritania.

Story 26 covered a music festival sponsored by deputy Bahia Hariri, the sister of Rafik Hariri, which was followed by the weathercast and a political caricature.

Overall, 21 out of the 28 stories (75 percent) in the newscast were purely political or security stories. Out of those 21, at least 15 stories (or 54 percent of the whole newscast) covered announcements or activities of politicians. When it came to political sides, the newscast had seven stories dedicated to politicians from the pro-government side or the March 14<sup>th</sup> movement (Marwan Hamadeh, Ghazi al-Aridi, Amin Gemayel, Fouad Seniora, Hagob Kasarjian, Simon al-Khazen) while only three stories were about Lebanese politicians from the opposition side (Michel Aoun, Nabih Berri and Emil Lahoud). While the newscast did include stories for the three top government positions in Lebanon (President, Prime Minister and Head of Parliament), President Lahoud only received a VO, while both Prime Minister Seniora and Speaker of Parliament Berri got full packages.<sup>119</sup>

All this confirms what most participants said about trying to include every politician in the newscast, but giving more time, prominence and emphasis to politicians who were on the same side of the station's patrons. Furthermore, the rundown confirms the heavy focus on political news and little if any the disregard to non-political news, a symptom of the routines of gathering news, the news sources, and the institutional practices of newsworthiness.<sup>120</sup> Even the few non-political stories in the rundown indirectly were related to political and economic interests of the station's owners. Story 14, for example, highlighted the commemoration of the slain former owner of the station. Story 18 covered the reconstruction effort and foreign investments coming to Beirut, a project that symbolized Rafik Hariri's success and was often touted in his station, as

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<sup>119</sup> It is worth noting that although Berri is considered in the opposition side, he often acts as moderator between the two and is treated as a moderate.

<sup>120</sup> See preceding chapter.

several participants from that station confirmed. Even the music kicker at the end (story 26) was related to a Hariri family member.

Future TV had four regional news stories, including from Syria, Iraq, Palestine and Iran, and three international stories, from Korea, Afghanistan and Mauritania. Except for the story from Syria, which was at the top of the newscast, all regional and international news stories were located at the end of the newscast. This confirms the focus on local news and the little prominence given to regional and international news, especially the latter. It also points to the conception of proximity in regional news, where most of the focus is on Arab and Middle Eastern countries.

The rundowns of the other stations were analyzed the same way. The results were almost identical, with a few exceptions. The following is a summary for each station.

In TL's newscast on June 21, 2006, only four out 23 stories were non-political, and those included a sports segment, a story about an historic site in Jordan and the weathercast. That brought political stories up to 83 percent of the newscast. In addition, only two of the political stories were not about activities or announcements made by politicians or religious figures. So, 74 percent of the newscast covered official statements and activities. As for the balance of political figures, eight political politicians were government loyalists, while five were from the opposition. Most of the former were stacked at the top of the newscast, while the latter were in the middle and end. There were only three regional stories—from Palestine Iraq and Jordan, but no international news. All three regional stories were at the end of the newscast.

LBCI's newscast on July 7, 2006, had 19 out of 26 political stories (73 percent) and 10 stories or 38 percent of the newscast was dedicated to activities and

announcements of political and religious figures. There were five non-political stories, which included a sports segment, a crime story, a business story, a package of varieties from around the world, and the weathercast. Five of the local politicians were from the March 14 side, while three were from the opposition side. LBCI had five regional stories—one from each of Sudan, Palestine and Iran, and two from Iraq. It also had a package that included several brief international stories. Both regional and international stories were at the end of the newscast.

New TV's newscast on June 16, 2006, had 22 out of 29 stories (76 percent) related to political or security news. Fourteen out of those 22 stories (or 48 percent of the whole newscast) were mostly announcements or activities of local Lebanese politicians and religious figures. New TV's rundown was unique in its balance between the politicians. Although New TV is considered tilting toward the opposition, it had five stories for opposition politicians and six for government loyalists. This reflects a balance between the two sides—with a tilt towards the latter, if anything. New TV had two regional stories, from Iraq and Palestine, and three international stories, including one from the U.S. and another from Somalia.

No rundowns or scripts of al-Manar TV newscasts were available from before the Hezbollah-Israel war that began on July 12, 2006, so the station's main evening newscast on September 27, 2007 was analyzed instead. The results showed that 23 out of its 25 stories, or 92 percent, were political. The only two non-political stories were the weathercast and a public protest in Saida against new laws that threaten free elementary education in Lebanon. In addition, out of the 23 political stories only two were not direct announcements by politicians or stories about their activities. Those two were: a story

written by a newspaper and a report published in an Israeli newspaper. So, al-Manar TV had the highest percentage (84 percent) of stories that were strictly announcements or activities of local Lebanese politicians and religious figures. When it came to balance, the station had 10 stories for opposition politicians and six for pro-government politicians. This was in contrast to all other stations, including its supposed ally News TV, and it clearly signified the station's political allegiance and priorities. Finally, al-Manar had only one regional story and no international stories, which was also consistent with all other stations when it comes to the lack of focus on international and regional news.

No rundown was analyzed for NBN, but a casual observation of its newscast points to a correlation between its rundown and that of al-Manar TV. This is predictable since al-Manar TV and NBN are political allies at the moment, and both are in the opposition camp.

### ***Conclusion for Section D***

Table 25 below sums up the preceding analysis and reveals a trend that confirms earlier sections in this study.

	% political stories	% political figures	# March 14 figures	# Opposition figures	# Regional news	# Int'l news
<b>LBCI</b>	73%	38%	5	3	5	1
<b>TL</b>	83%	74%	8	5	3	0
<b>Future TV</b>	75%	54%	7	3	4	3
<b>Al-Manar TV</b>	92%	84%	6	10	1	0
<b>New TV</b>	76%	48%	6	5	2	3
<b>Mean</b>	80%	60%	6	5	3	1
<b>S</b>	0.08	0.19	1.14	2.86	1.58	1.52

**Table 25**

Prominence of the al-Assad speech story across stations

It is clear from the table that all stations were extremely heavy on political news and even dedicated substantial amounts of their stories to the announcements and

activities of political and religious figures. All stations focused mostly on local news and gave little attention to regional and international news, which was mostly buried at the end of the newscast—with the exception of a story about Syria in Future TV’s newscast. Most stations seemed to cover all of the prominent local politicians on both sides of the political divide, with a pronounced tilt towards politicians aligned with the station’s political line. The only exception was New TV which actually had a slight tilt in favor of the institution’s political opponents. The one story difference is evidence that New TV had the most balanced newscast when it came to stories about politicians.

It is important to reconfirm that most news directors said they cover all the major politicians. That meant they sometimes ignored the minor politicians, especially those who are opposed to their station’s political line, but ignoring the major politicians didn’t seem to be an option. To quote one reporter, “They can’t ignore Hezbollah the same way they ignore Frangieh because Hezbollah has bigger weight politically. And even Frangieh can’t be ignored all the time—given his medium political weight.” The reporter added, “The other political sides, like the Baath party and the SSNP, for instance, are totally ignored. Their news releases don’t even make it outside the fax room.”

A final note here is to caution any direct generalizations from this section, since the sample of newscasts was very small and not statistically generalizable to other stations. But other studies and evidence from other sections of this study suggest a logical generalization that should be confirmed in the future with a larger sample.

### **E. Conclusion for Chapter 9**

This chapter analyzed and compared the content of newscasts, rundowns and stories in an attempt to support the claims discussed in earlier chapters, namely the power

of the institution and its instruments in shaping the behavior of journalists and their output. More specifically, the chapter provided strong evidence that supports this hypothesis and confirms that power of institutional practices like the pre-framing and post-checking of news, practices of gathering news from their sources, institutional norms of newsworthiness and the overall process of institutionalization of journalists. While all these practices seem to influence the output of TV newsrooms, it seems that the institutionalization of journalists and the pre-framing and post-checking were the most dominant.



## **PART V: CONCLUSION**

### **Ch. 10: Television News and the State in Lebanon**

It was the morning of Father's Day when the researcher spent his first day at one of the Lebanese TV stations. This was not a widely celebrated occasion in Lebanon, but it had become more popular in the past few years. It was a Sunday, a day politicians usually set aside to deliver speeches and visit with other politicians, and quite a few of them had activities that day. In the evening, the main television stations in the country were anything but similar in their newscast rundowns. TL, the only public station in Lebanon, and a station known for its pro-government and official stance, started its evening newscast with Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Seniora's tearful "letter" to his late patron former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri—who was assassinated a year and a half earlier. The second story was an even more emotional letter from Hariri's daughter to her slain father. The long sound bite was read in her own voice over sentimental music. That was followed by a story about the renaming of a hospital after the assassinated prime minister and some sound bites from the current Information Minister—the person who had direct official jurisdiction over TL. Buried in the middle (4<sup>th</sup> story after the first break) was a two minute report about Christian opposition leader Michel Aoun. The report had basically two long sound bites and a little commentary from the reporter. The reporter who wrote this report noted that he purposefully kept the commentary to a minimum to protect himself and shift any responsibility to the person who delivered the sound bites.

The same evening, NBN, a station controlled by Nabih Berri—a prominent Shiite opposition politician and Speaker of the House of Parliament, lead with a 10-minute report on the same story TL had buried: Michel Aoun's statement. A short segment of

Prime Minister Seniora's tearful letter came in second, followed by the hospital renaming story. Al-Manar TV, Hezbollah's TV station and the spearhead of the opposition movement and the official representative of the armed Lebanese resistance against Israeli occupation, also lead with Aoun's press conference. Needless to say, both al-Manar TV and NBN were on the same political side—at the time. LBCI, a rightwing Christian pro-government station, topped its newscast with U.S. President George Bush's speech and his visit to Iraq—a story barely mentioned and mostly buried in the international news section at the end of the other newscasts. Bush's story was followed by a report about the Paris visit of Saad Hariri—Rafik Hariri's son and heir to his political might and financial empire. Then, a story covered a press release about the March 14<sup>th</sup> committee—the main political body that spearheaded the pro-government effort against the opposition movement. Michel Aoun's activity came after that in a slightly over two-minute report.

That day, apparently, the Future movement—Hariri's political party, decided to turn Father's day into a media event promoting the slain prime minister in a fatherly image. Events linking the slain prime minister to father's day were clearly timed and crafted to generate a media publicity splash—at least among allied stations. The lineup of stories at Hariri's TV station was too predictable to comment review here.

Scholars of mainstream U.S. television news have often characterized it as homogeneous and filled with infotainment. Many have attributed this phenomenon to standardized routines and business practices and pressures (Ryfe, 2006; Anderson, 2004; Wittebols, 2003). Many scholars in the New Institutionalism tradition have even taken this homogeneity as fact rather than theory (Ryfe, 2006; Cook, 2006). These two dominant characteristics of U.S. television news, however, were far from what regular

broadcast news audiences saw in Lebanon, where news was primarily about political leaders, their activities, speeches and visits to other politicians, and where stations framed stories, prioritized reports, constructed tones, and added commentary in accordance with their political allegiances and loyalties. Although most Lebanese newscasts were fairly inclusive of all the prominent politicians, the prime locations in the newscasts were almost always given to the political patrons of the stations or their prominent allies. Of course, there was a big disparity in the time allocated to each story. In the example above, one station gave opposition leader Michel Aoun a 10-minute package and positioned him at the top of the newscast, while another station barely gave him two minutes and buried his story in the middle. It was not a coincidence that the former belonged to the opposition camp while the latter belonged to the pro-government camp. To be sure, Aoun would not even have received that two-minute reporter in an opposition station had he not been considered a prominent politician. A less prominent politician, former minister and former parliamentarian Suleiman Frangieh, for instance, was excluded altogether from two non-allied newscasts that same day. But even when less prominent politicians were allowed to appear in a non-allied station, there was a political reason behind that appearance. A parliament member interviewed for this study explained, "Some stations allow opposition politicians to appear because they get something in return." For example, Nabih Berri's NBN often ran stories for Boutros Harb—a Christian leader in the pro-government camp. "That's because Harb often made statements in parliament that served Berri and showed that the pro-government camp was not unified—for instance, statements regarding the presidential elections and the two-thirds law."<sup>121</sup> He added, "of course, voicing those statements were the result of deals

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<sup>121</sup> The two-thirds rule is a law that says two thirds of parliament should be present before a president could

made under the table, and so were the decisions to let him frequently appear on television.”

This picture was slightly different two years ago, when the government and the country’s political elite were unified under Syrian hegemony, and opposition groups were totally excluded from the news—with few exceptions. Then, the news could have been described as homogenous, but only for fleeting periods when the political elites of the country were not divided and bickering with each other over the scarce resources of this tiny country—which often occurred even under Syrian hegemony.

This turns on its head Entman’s (2006) concept of “punctuated homogeneity,” or the phenomenon of broad homogeneity across national media with occasional important episodes of deviation from a single, standard line” (p. 216). If there was any such homogeneity in Lebanese television news, it appeared in three matters: the fact that almost the whole newscast covered stories about the dominant local politicians and *za’ims*; the fact that the overall tone of the news anchors and reporters was almost always formal and authoritative; and the fact that almost all the main newscasts opened with a editorial introduction fraught with commentary and analysis that supported the political rhetoric of its owners and political patrons. But that is not what New Institutionalists mean by homogeneity of news. They focus more on the stories and how they are framed, and not on the overall structure of the newscast—although that arguably is the result of the same institutional practices and routines.

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be elected. That gives leverage to the opposition side since they don’t control the majority in parliament, and therefore they can simply not show up, and the election of a president would be stalled. On the other hand, the pro-government camp has been pushing for a 50 percent presence rule to elect the president. So, when a pro-government politician like Boutros Harb announces in parliament that he supports the two-thirds law, he is serving Nabih Berri’s political interests and the opposition, in general.

Entman (2006) cited Dahl (1989, 1999) when arguing that homogenous news works against democracy, while “where news is more diverse, the potential for democratic influence over government officials and decisions increases” (p. 215). Dajani (2001) would most probably disagree with this link between heterogeneity of news and democracy. Dajani noted that the main problem with Lebanese television lies in the lack of adequate media professionals and structures and government laws and practices “that would provide the opportunity for this medium to contribute to its society's unity and cohesion as well as to address issues that are relevant to the every day life of the average citizen” (p. 138). This is a key matter that many “Western” scholars and politicians miss when discussing issues related to advancing democracy. Many forget that democracy is a means to serving society and the “average citizen,” and not simply an end in itself. In other words, Lebanon’s highly heterogeneous news may or may not serve this idealized notion of “democracy,” but will it serve the real needs of the Lebanese society when it pushes its population toward further fragmentation and into yet another civil war?

Nevertheless, the highly heterogeneous political content or what Dajani (2001, 2006) calls diverse content of Lebanese newscasts was nevertheless the product of highly standardized and routinized practices. As evidence in this study revealed, stations and journalists did not differ at the micro or mezzo levels—in their work processes, their values or their institutional structures. The main divergence came at the macro level. The main difference was in the top of the hierarchies, or the structure of the political/economic elite who controlled the news media institutions and were the product of a deep historic political/cultural divide in the country. Bennett (1990) and many other media scholars have consistently confirmed that the news was often both homogenous

and consistent with the government line except at times when the political elite were divided or engaged in a competition—as often happens during elections, for instance (also see, Donohue, Tichenor and Olien, 1995; Entman, 2004 and 2006; Mermin, 1999). But what if this division of a country’s elite was the norm? That is the case of the Lebanese society, which this study described in chapter two as a mosaic of cultures in flux. The use of the mosaic metaphor was intentional. It was borrowed from Sa’adeh’s (1947) description of this fragmented population as a mosaic of sects and tribes, of which its pieces might come close together but could never fully dissolve or unite. **This fragmented culture, generated a similarly fragmented and deeply divided political/economic elite, which used its resources and access to the news media to solidify its status, and by doing so, recreated and confirmed the politico-sectarian divide of this country. In this vicious cycle, the institutionalized and instrumentalized news media played the role of mediator between the elites and their fragmented constituents, and simultaneously bolstered the political and economic power of the former while keeping the latter tightly held in their “grip”—a term used by one journalist to describe the purpose of news in Lebanon. As for the individual journalist, her values, struggles and hard work, all that was systematically channeled through the powerful institutional mechanisms and was redistributed and rearranged to serve the top of the hierarchy—regardless the journalist’s background and beliefs and regardless of whether those beliefs coincided or contradicted with the “institution’s political line.”** It did not seem to matter whether the individual journalist strived to become a neutral objective professional or whether he willingly acted as a partisan biased propagandist. In fact, the former’s

“objective” mentality and training may have actually guaranteed that the final news product had an “authority-disorder bias,” to borrow a term from Bennett. Bennett (1990) was mostly correct in concluding “that the everyday work routines inside news organizations bias the news without necessarily intending to do so” (p. 162). When it comes to Lebanon, however, Bennett would be dead wrong to assume that those routines and their outcomes were unintended.

As evidenced in chapters five and seven, the routine institutional practices were conscious, intentional and had a clear purpose: to control the message and the messenger. Three main institutional instruments played the dominant role in this control mechanism: the systematic and intentional process of institutionalization of the journalist inside the hierarchized and corporatized structure of the modern news company; the methodical and ominous process of monitoring and self-monitoring of the producer and her product; and the newsroom heads’ routine practice of pre-framing and post-checking the reporters’ stories. These institutional mechanisms were constant across stations. Although they were extensively analyzed in the study, a few more examples not covered earlier would clarify how intentional and systematic they really were.

The first example comes from a station where the researcher entered as an intern and was writing actual news stories for air. The first story was a short voice over about the assassination of Saddam Hussein’s lawyer. The researcher intentionally used the term “American Occupation” when it was against the channel’s policy. Predictably, the editor’s eye quickly caught it and eliminated the word “occupation.” When asked why he took out that word, the editor—surprised by the questioning, did not say it was the news director’s policy but gave a rational explanation based on the principles of objective





what served its political line, excelled in framing a story beyond what his news director had requested. In the story, he covered a demonstration and pointed out that one political group was trying to back another political group by having their constituents pose as members of the other group through wearing their shirts and carrying their banners and colors. According to the reporter, this “deception” benefited both political groups. For the first, it gave the impression that the protest was inclusive of many segments of society. For the second, it showed that their numbers were larger than they actually were. So, the reporter focused the whole story around that point and made sure to “expose” their schemes and discredit their attempts. The reporter later received a memo of congratulations that praised his superior work.

These three examples and others throughout the study show how the instruments of intentionalization of the journalists inside the hierarchized newsroom; the methodical process of monitoring and self-monitoring; and the routine practices of pre-framing and post-checking by the newsroom heads, insured a systematic filter that excluded anything fully incompatible, reconstructed anything slightly off-line and encourage everything consistent with the institution’s political line. But these instruments were not purely institutional and were aided by numerous complex technologies. Nevertheless, these modern newsroom technologies that were virtually inseparable from those institutional routines and control mechanisms only made the filtering and control process more efficient.

Many recent technological inventions, such as the internet, are often touted as instruments of liberation that can positively serve democracy by allowing more people world-wide to voice their opinions and by bringing more voices into the marketplace of

ideas. These same new technologies put in an institutional context, however, can have a totally different outcome. Carey (1992) noted that the invention of the telegraph led to two important developments in the history of communication. “It permitted for the first time the effective separation of communication from transportation... [and] allowed communication to control physical processes actively,” and from a distance, thereby exponentially increasing the effectiveness and the purposes of communication. He added, “This separation of communication from transportation has been exploited in most subsequent developments in communication down to the computer control system” (p. 203). Carey later explained that this invention had many important impacts on journalism and the newsroom culture. Most importantly, “news judgment had to be routinized and the organization of the newsroom made factory-like. The reporter who produced the new prose moved into prominence in journalism by displacing the editor as the archetype of the journalist.” That forced news to become a “commodity: something that could be transported, measured, reduced, and timed” (p. 211). In other words, the invention of the telegraph made news something that can be efficiently controlled for commercial as well as political purposes, and the newsroom environment was restructured into a “factory-like” hierarchy—a matter that blurred the lines between institutional and technological effects on news.

Innovations in newsroom technologies have come a far way since the invention of the telegraph. As we saw in chapter seven, the latest developments in networked computer software that effectively controlled news content in a hierarchized newsroom environment also effectively controlled the behavior of journalists, especially the reporters, who, in Carey’s words “produced the prose.” Reporters who used to physically

bring the news story to the news director to post-check it were now inserting their stories into a computer software that was instantly and constantly accessible to newsroom managers, and potentially the station's top managers. Those reporters were conscious and fearful of this constant and invisible monitoring system. This technology made the "pre-framing" process only needed for new-comers who have not yet been institutionalized, and rendered obsolete the tactics seasoned reporters used to take advantage of to sneak in their own ideas—for instance, waiting till right before the deadline to post-check a story with the news director. More importantly, and especially for experienced reporters, the fear of the constant and invisible monitoring along with the institutionalization process made the "pre-framing" instrument an almost "unconscious" process, as one reporter put it. The deep understanding of the station's political line was internalized, and in many cases—as the example above suggests, led some reporters to go beyond what the news director would normally request through pre-framing.

This advance in technology and the parallel institutional routines had other impacts, most important of which are the concentration of power efficiently into a few hands while improving the invisibility of these hands, both to the audiences and to the reporters. If, according to Carey (1992), the telegraph brought the reporter into prominence by displacing the editor (or the news director in this case) and overwhelmed the editor with the vast amount of information that became readily available, the latest developments in broadcast news technologies made the news director's work more efficient and manageable and his power in controlling the newsroom factory almost absolute. Those new technologies, however, did not make the reporter less prominent. On the contrary, the reporter became more visible—her image broadcast to millions of

people gave her instant fame in the eyes of the audience who did not see the mundane processes of daily newscast production. This exponentially added to the invisibility of the news director and his link to the power elite, thereby making the whole structure more powerful. Arguably, this invisibility is much stronger in more advanced media systems in the West, where giant corporations and complex integrations in news operations make it even more difficult to link the stations to one owner or political/economic group. Lebanon's size and its new and less complex media industry still make the whole system relatively visible and transparent compared to U.S. news media.

So, on one hand, those modern television technologies brought together in one instrument the effective control and constant monitoring of news and those who produced it. In other words, the networked computer software unified the control of product and producer. On the other hand, this instrumentalized control of news and journalists could have only occurred in the context of institutional control, and the corporatized structure of the modern television news department. This was a necessary context for the systemized production of news in the first place. This institutional context today acts as an initiator for the new reporter, who is trained to behave in a certain way and to be consciously and later unconsciously aware of red lines, institutional political lines, and constantly monitoring eyes. His behavior is altered "bit-by-bit" through mundane processes that work slowly at the detail level and are internalized and generalized over time, only to emerge as one coherent object at the generalized macro level, which created its possibilities in the first place. In other words, the arrangement of institutional practices, its hierarchized structures of power and its technological instruments were initiated and constantly controlled by a political and economic elite that emerged from

the cultural landscape of the Lebanese society. Over time, this arrangement of bodies, machines and values at the detailed level generated power assets that simultaneously enhanced the power of the controlling elite and maintained and reinforced the cultural status quo that created them.

This interaction between the inseparable institutional and technological instruments of control produced a system similar in its efficiency and power to Foucault's (1977) prison panopticon system, which "arranges spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately." It is a system that reversed three old functions of the dungeon: to enclose, to deprive of light and to hide. The new system maintained "only the first and eliminate[d] the other two. Full lighting and the eye of a supervisor capture better than darkness, which ultimately protected. Visibility is a trap" (p. 200). Foucault (1977) analyzed how the modern jail system and its justification evolved out of the old system of torture, punishment and public execution. Foucault paralleled this evolution with the similar process that produced the systems of power in modern societies. He located that system—the disciplinary society—in a number of broad historical processes—economic, juridico-political, and scientific. Foucault generalized the disciplinary (corrective, objectifying, normalizing) techniques used in prisons and said these techniques pervaded all modern societies. Power was dispersed through society in micro-centers (schools, hospitals, the military), which, like prisons, operated as paternal correction centers armed with scientific truths that made deviations from the norm punishable, containable and isolatable. Foucault argued the object of modern technologies of power, as was during pre-modern times, remained the body—the docile bodies of the population. In another study, he called the modern phenomenon of those

technologies of power “governmentality,” which had its main target the population (Foucault, 1991). When applied to the news media, these concepts offered a checklist for understanding mechanisms of control, in this case not in the prison, but in the newsroom.

What is meant by compact centers of powers, the modern hierarchal societies, and the population? What constitutes population and what constitutes the compact centers of power and how can we locate both in our modern hierarchal societies? These questions are better answered using, as metaphor, an excerpt from Mitchell (2002), where he discussed the major interacting events that occurred during the first half of the past century in Egypt. These events both resulted in disaster and represented some of the defining transformations of the past century. One of the main three events that intersected and wreaked havoc in that country was the damming of the Nile and the schemes of blocking the flow of large rivers, in general. Mitchell noted that the importance of dams was in their ability to alter the “distribution of resources across space and time, among entire communities and ecosystems” (p. 21). For centuries, inhabitants living near the Nile basin awaited the flood season that submerged vast areas of agricultural land, soaked it with water and enrich it with alluvial silt and other nutrients. It then subsided, leaving farmers with vast areas of rich fertile land. This natural process created an agricultural rhythm, where farmers knew when to plow, when to seed and when to cultivate. Later in history, Egyptians developed and redeveloped schemes that manipulated this “natural” process to better utilize its resources. The developed system of “channeling floodwaters in sequence into hundreds of interconnected field basins, holding them for a certain period, and releasing them in sequence again into the river,” however, was later destroyed by the new large dam schemes (p. 35).

As new technology in the media world brought numerous promises, damming the river too promised agricultural development and technical progress, at the time. It also symbolized the strength of the modern post-colonial state. The new scheme had more than a technological aspect, however. Its social, cultural, political, scientific and economical aspects and results were equally pronounced. The interwar period accompanying the rebuilding of the dam witnessed a struggle among the large business groups who tried to dominate the economic resources of the country (and happened to be dominant political groups who were allied with colonial powers, the same way those who brought television to Lebanon were allied with the French colonizers). “[A]t the center of these struggles from the 1920s to the 1950s was an effort to command... the flow of the waters of the Nile. The Aswan Dam offered the opportunity to reorganize and concentrate into fewer hands” an array of economic resources circulating in Egypt (Mitchell, 2002, p. 33). The process altered the ecological, social, scientific, political and economic landscape simultaneously:

Just as alluvial silt had once been carried and deposited by the floodwaters of the Nile, synthetic chemicals would in the future be transported in sacks from the nitrate plant at Aswan and deposited across the country’s fields to restore a little of the lost fertility of the soil. The complex flows of the Nile flood, channeled into storage basins, held for several weeks to allow silt and nutrients to settle, and released again into the river, were to be reorganized and transformed into the narrower flows of waters through turbine wheels, high voltages along transmission cables, electrical energy into nitrates, fertilizer sacks across the countryside, and ammonia from the

soil into the proteins of cane and cotton plants. The political struggle to control [economic profits] was a battle to build and control these interconnected circuits (Mitchell, 2002, p. 33).

This complex operation and the struggles that ensued from it reflect the complexities of the broadcast news industry and the history of television in Lebanon and its struggles. And even the unfortunate outcome of the damming of the Nile somewhat resembles the overall state of television news today.

The new scheme of manipulating the Nile brought riches and power, not to the population at large, but to a few groups. In fact, it brought disasters, famine and disease and weakened the social fiber of numerous local communities. The reservoir behind the dam, moreover, inundated numerous ancient sites, wiped out towns and villages. The numerous political problems in the countryside led to increasing poverty, indebtedness, loss of land, hunger, mass migration, death, and the spread of malaria and other diseases among the peasants. Even worse, the enormous amount of evaporation and seepage was “so great that instead of increasing the water available, the mean annual discharge of water below the dam was almost one-fourth less in the fifty years following the dam’s construction than in the thirty years before it was built” (Mitchell, 2002, p. 37). Some accounts even deemed the enormous singular barrage and reservoir system inferior to the old more complex irrigation mechanism it replaced.

Similarly, the advance in broadcast media technology, the new broadcast laws that were introduced (see chapters two and three) and overall political and economic landscape, led to a similar redistribution of the broadcast news media industry. It pushed most small operators out of the market—though legal and economic force, and



concentrated the industry in the few hands of the dominant political elite. This, consequently, led to the much lower quality in news content that focused on official statements and activities, and ignored the basic and critical needs of the general public and the pressing issues of society overall. In addition, this instrumentalization and concentration of power in a few hands led to the effective use of the news media as a promotional tool to stir the public and direct their emotions and actions to serve the political patrons of the stations—for example, television was key in promoting and framing certain political events that successfully persuaded hundreds of thousands of Lebanese to join giant demonstrations that in the end served those political patrons and not the demonstrating public. Fueled by this consistent barrage of political propaganda, the Lebanese public has been steadily inching toward yet another civil war.

Going back to Mitchell's (2002) case, his story brings forth the concept of reorganization of space and time, and the concentration of knowledge or power. Schemes to control and manipulate resources of the Nile into a few hands were achieved by the reorganization and concentration of knowledge—of the river control mechanisms—in one site; of hydraulic power, technology, science and engineering in another site; of capital, accounting, calculation, description and expertise, in a third.... This reorganization and concentration mechanism was simultaneously a social, cultural, technological, scientific, political and economical process.

Foucault (1977) explained that bodies are made docile through a set of techniques that evolved historically: the art of distribution, the control of activity, the organization of genesis, the composition of forces, the instrumentalities of disciplinary power, which include hierarchal observation or surveillance, normalizing judgment, and the techniques

of examination. The result of implementing these techniques is the effectively isolated individual unit, who is subjected to compact hierarchical networks (centers of powers) that oppose horizontal social intercourse between the units thereby ensuring the maximum “docility-utility” of each individual unit. It is specifically these techniques, which are consistent at the detail level with Mitchell’s mundane processes, resulted in the reorganization and concentration of communication.

Applying Mitchell (2002), Foucault (1977), and Carey’s (1992) concepts to what has been discussed about the evolution of television news in Lebanon and the innovations in technological and institutional control mechanisms, it would be informative to consider the television news media as a result of the reorganization and concentration of knowledge, or more specifically the concentration and reorganization of communication. Putting it all together, the **television news media can be considered as the result of the redistribution, reorganization, recomposition, and instrumentalization of communication that have evolved over time and resulted both from and in the creation of a modern hierarchal society dominated by compact centers of power that have the population as their main object.**

This concept brings to center-stage the importance of the broadcast news media—and the media in general, whether in political, economic, cultural matters. To quote a senior Lebanese media executive and politicians:

In the past, they used to say a businessman should pursue power (sultat) and money. Today, we say he should pursue power and media. Today, if you don’t have a media instrument, you can’t advance your projects—economic or political projects. Today, the media are the most potent weapons whether in hands of

government, politicians or businessmen. And although [this station's] managers are primarily businessmen, you cannot really separate their political concerns and goals from their business pursuits (Interview # 13a, June-July, 2006).

## APPENDIX A

List of a Interviews used in the study as direct or indirect quotes (note: some of the following interview entries are with the same person but conducted at separate times, while others are with several participants simultaneously):

Interview # 1d: Producer and former correspondent.  
Interview # 2d: Reporter.  
Interview # 3d: Reporter.  
Interview # 5d: Assistant News Director.  
Interview # 4d: Assistant News Director.  
Interview # 6d: Anchor.  
Interview # 1e: Anchor.  
Interview # 9c: Reporter and former anchor.  
Interview # 10c: Reporter.  
Interview # 11c: Assistant News Director.  
Interview # 12c: Reporter.  
Interview # 13c: Reporter.  
Interview # 14c: Producer and former assistant news director.  
Interview # 15c: Anchor and reporter.  
Interview # 16c: Producer.  
Interview # 17c: Anchor and reporter.  
Interview # 18c: Anchor and reporter.  
Interview # 19c: Producer, news director.  
Interview # 20c: Anchor.  
Interview # 1b: Monitor.  
Interview # 1c: Reporter.  
Interview # 2b: Monitor.  
Interview # 2c: Producer.  
Interview # 3b: Monitor.  
Interview # 3c: Programming Manager.  
Interview # 4a: Assistant News Director.  
Interview # 4b: Producer.  
Interview # 5b: Producer.  
Interview # 5a: Reporter.  
Interview # 5c: Advertising Manager.  
Interview # 6c: Advertising Manager.  
Interview # 6a: Reporter.  
Interview # 6b: Reporter.  
Interview # 7a Reporter.  
Interview # 7b: Reporter.  
Interview # 8a: Reporter.  
Interview # 8b: Reporter.  
Interview # 7a: Tape Editor.  
Interview # 7b: Producer.

Interview # 8a: Technical Director.  
Interview # 8b: Reporter.  
Interview # 9a: Anchor and Show host.  
Interview # 12a: Managing Director and PR director.  
Interview # 14a: News Director.  
Interview # 15a: Reporter.  
Interview # 16a: Oratory Advisor.  
Interview # 3a: Manager.  
Interview # 7c: Reporter, anchor and host.  
Interview # 8c: Reporter, anchor and host.  
Interview # 7d: News Director.  
Interview # 8d: Several reporters interviewed simultaneously.  
Interview # 9d: Head of Correspondents.  
Interview # 4c: Reporter.  
Interview # 89: non-journalist.  
Interview # 90a: non-journalist.  
Interview # 91a: Former anchor and reporter.  
Interview # 92a: Former director and media manager.  
Interview # 93a: political official.  
Interview # 94a: Former anchor and reporter.  
Interview # 95a: Director and media manager.  
Interview # 80a: Anchor, reporter and News Director.  
Interview # 81a: Producer and reporter.  
Interview # 82a: Show host, anchor and reporter.

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