

An Historical perspective on fundamentalist media:

The Case of Al-Manar Television

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During a social gathering among fellow Lebanese, a friend greeted the twenty-first century with the phrase “welcome to the age of globalization.” While it is common knowledge that globalization has always existed in many forms, what point was my fellow countryman making? Were we celebrating progress and development, or was it simply a cynical comment about globalization in the Middle East? Chan and Ma note that the globalization debate centers between two polar views: one considers the world economy as triumphant, the other regards it as Western imperialism. Either way, it is a struggle for local cultures to assert their autonomy (Chan & Ma, 2002). Sinclair et al. present the tension that ensues in the globalization of media. This tension exists along the axis of homogenization and heterogenization between identities of local and external influences (Sinclair, Jack, & Cuningham, 1996).

The West has a long history of interest in the Middle East, both political and economic. Locals in the region perceive the West as a predatory exploiter of Arab resources and riches. In the mid-twentieth century, this exploitation took the form of military colonial presence. Currently, the region is overwhelmed with a deluge of Western cultural products, a more subtle form of exploitation (Azb, 2002; Saleh, 2001). These products are not merely entertainment; they subliminally promote values advocating secularism, modernity, and capitalism. A one-way flow of cultural products from the US dominated the global television scene throughout the latter half of the twentieth century (Sinclair et al., 1996). As many Arab media scholars note, local communities are concerned that Western values and messages target the fabric of heritage and culture (Armbrust, 2000; Boyd, 1999; Dajani, 1992; Kazan, 1993; Kraidi, 1998; Sakr, 2001).

Zionist plans came to fruition under the British rule causing the displacement of the Palestinian people. The Palestinian Catastrophe of 1948 (as Arabs call it) took place with the blessings of the Allies. These events initiated animosity against the West among Muslim communities. Anti-Western sentiments grew deeper among these groups as Israel invaded Lebanon. Hizbollah (The Party of God) was one of the most active in terms militarily operations and social services. Almost a decade after its inception, Hizbollah

discovered the power of the media. The party launched a television station, Al-Manar (The Beacon), to promote its ideological and military goals.

Al-Manar gained widespread support in Muslim households (Shiite, more specifically) in Lebanon and the Arab world. The station disseminated information about Hizbollah's military actions and catered to communities resisting cultural influence and upholding Muslim beliefs. How was the channel able to appeal to so many viewers in the region? What tools did this station use in order to achieve such success?

To answer these questions, this paper will explore the historical settings, the changes in Lebanese society, and the rise of media in Lebanon that gave Hizbollah the impetus to create Al-Manar. The discussion will trace the origins of conflict in the Middle East to the colonial influences that left the region "politically traumatized" (Hoagland, 2006). Finally, this paper will discuss the means by which Al-Manar has provided its public with an alternative mouthpiece for Hizbollah and its supporters.

Historical Background:

According to Salibi (1998), "for any people to develop and maintain a sense of political community, it is necessary to share a common vision of their past" (p. 216). Not only did the various Lebanese communities see their past differently, they also imagined very contrasting futures. For centuries, different groups saw very divergent historical narratives.

For more than three hundred years, the Ottoman Empire reigned over the region. Having bet on the wrong alliance, the Ottoman rule collapsed after the First World War. Just as the Kemalist revolution reclaimed Turkish territories, "the Arab provinces in historical Mesopotamia and Syria were irretrievably lost, and subsequently divided between France and Britain" (Salibi, 1988, p. 19). The British and the French denied Arabs the privilege of controlling their own national fate.

The Allies ignored pan-Arab national sentiments in the region by dividing the Arab world into smaller states. As a result, the political map of the Arab world suited the Allies and their "imperial" interests while fragmenting the Arab peoples (Saleh, 2001). The British and French victors divided the Middle East in an agreement ratified in the spring of 1920. Of all the Arab states, Lebanon was unique in its structure. The Allies fabricated a state

made up of various religious minorities; however, they failed to create a sense of nationality to go with it (Salibi, 1988).

While Muslims were in favor of Arab nationalism, Maronite Christians were very much against such a notion. Maronites advocated an independent state of Lebanon. As a pan-Arab nationalist movement gained momentum, Christians pleaded with the French authorities to aid them in materializing a state independent from Greater Syria. According to Salibi, Maronite Christians would cheer France as the “loving mother” (Ar: al-um al-hanun) after the French granted them a promise to fulfill their wishes (1988). It was quite evident that the French favored one community over another.

During the French mandate (and still apparent to this day) Lebanese Christians enjoyed the Western standards of education provided to them by French missionaries. As Salibi (1988) puts it, “by and large, in rank and file, they [Christians] were socially more developed or, more correctly, far more familiar with the modern world” and therefore, were in a position of power (p. 37). This led to a massive discrepancy in national allegiance and created an economic class system that privileged one religious community over the other.

Foreign interference fueled an environment already struggling with fundamental differences; some advocated Arabism while others called for “Lebanism.” The discrepancies grew deeper and graver as Lebanon gained its independence. Nagel states, “through the 1960s and 1970s, Christian leaders refused to capitulate to Muslim demands for a more equitable distribution of power and resources” (2000). The threats of Israeli expansion further increased the country’s volatility. These factors, conflicts of power, ideology, and identity, culminated in a civil war that lasted over fifteen years. Arguably, a by-product of colonialism was the internal turmoil that plagued the country. Lebanon struggled not only to defend its land and identity from influences outside its borders, but also to resist such influences within the state itself. As a result, a civil war broke out in 1975 that lasted more than 15 years.

Hizbollah

In an environment laden with sentiments of mistrust, inequality and corruption, the Lebanese factions “took arms supplied by various outside interests – Russia, France, Iraq, Iran, Syria – who had their own strategic interests in the region” (Nagel, 2000). Muslim Shiites were the least privileged in the country. A majority of the Shiites in Lebanon lived in the rural south and the Bekaa valley. These areas suffered from a lack of development and social services. According to Nagel, a study conducted on the eve of the Lebanese civil war found that 31% of Shiite men and 70% of Shiite women were illiterate, compared to 13% of Christian men and 20% of Christian women”(2000).

The harsh conditions in the South intensified when Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982. Many who once lived in the south were now refugees settling in the southern suburbs of Beirut. The government’s inadequate response to the Israeli occupation and dire refugee needs created the perfect conditions for the rise of religious fundamentalism. A number of Islamic extremist groups sprouted throughout the country. Some of these groups were Al-Jama’a Al-Islamiyyah (The Muslim Group), Al-Ikhwan Al-Muslimeen (The Muslim Brotherhood) and Al-Ah’bash (followers of Sheikh Al-Habashi). However, the most influential of these groups was Hizbollah.

A group of Shiite religious authorities founded Hizbollah in 1982. They had imagined this organization as a conglomeration of all Shiite religious groups emerging as a resistance to the Israeli occupation. According to Baylouny (2005), “the group benefited from significant Iranian aid, military and financial, and advocated the establishment of an Islamic state” (p. 2).

Hizbollah became infamous in the 1980s for carrying out acts of terror. This includes kidnapping foreign nationals in Lebanon, most of whom were American and British. By the end of the decade, Hizbollah developed a broader politico-socio-economic agenda (Schbley, 2004). In Hizbollah’s view, Lebanon (and the Muslim world) is “an impure realm that must be cleansed [and in which] the Shiite state that found its fulfillment in Iran should be duplicated ... in addition to liberty and freedom from imperialism, Hizbollah’s objectives include Israel’s obliteration and the consolidation of Islamic international liberation movements” (Schbley, 2004). The party believes that the way to sanitize Lebanon from Western values is to follow the rule of Islam.

Hizbollah became the most prominent among all fundamentalist groups in the country, if not in the entire region. In the south, it spearheaded a guerilla movement and carried out suicide missions against The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) (Hamzeh, 1993). In other parts of Lebanon, the party dominated the southern suburbs of Beirut and the Bekaa valley that borders Syria in the East.

On the political front, Hizbollah initiated numerous social services and community programs where the government failed. The party strategically grew over the years in regions densely inhabited by Muslim Shiites. According to Baylouny (2005), Hizbollah had always maintained a “developmentalist”, and a “pro-poor” ideological approach (p. 3). According to Harb and Leenders (2005), “through education the party [was] able to produce a new ‘mentality’—that of a society participating actively in its own reconstruction, in resistance and in economic rebirth...The resistance ‘identity’ and ‘culture’ are thus essential products of Hizbollah’s institutions” (p. 190).

When the Lebanese civil war ended in 1990, the newly established Lebanese government set out to dissolve all armed militias. The party needed to gain national legitimacy as an armed resistance movement against the Israeli occupation in Lebanon. Hizbollah was able to mobilize its popular base to vote in its favor during the parliamentary elections. In the 1992 elections, Hizbollah scored eight out of 128 seats in the Lebanese parliament (Harb & Leenders, 2005). This was the highest number of seats gained in the Lebanese parliament in comparison to other parties (Hamzeh, 1993).

Hizbollah aimed at gaining official recognition as an Islamic resistance movement, and have its military presence in south Lebanon officially recognized as such (Hamzeh, 1993). To maintain this achievement Hizbollah relied on a number of media avenues. In addition to two publications: Al-Ahed weekly (Eng: The Era), and al-Bilad monthly (Eng: The Homeland), two radio stations: Sawt Al-Nidal (Eng: Voice of the Resistance) and Sawt Al-Iman (Eng: Voice of Faith), the Muslim fundamentalist group employed a tool of a different caliber: Al-Manar Television.

Hizbollah and the West

In Hizbollah’s perspective, there was a new form of colonialism and imperialism ushered by the ‘American – Zionist project’ that threatens the entire region (Harb & Leenders, 2005, p. 181). Hizbollah traces the roots of the current wave of “imperialism” to the

earlier European exploits to the region. Saleh states that anti-West sentiments originate from the condescending views of the West toward Arab societies. These views began at the onset of colonialism in the region.

Western depictions of the Middle East portrayed Arabs as uncivilized and backward. This was quite clear in British Prime Minister Arthur Balfour's address to the British parliament in 1917. Balfour proclaimed that the Arab peoples are incapable of constructing their future (Said, 1994). According to Saleh (2001), the West claimed a right to control and to govern the Arab people by identifying their "otherness". Said (1994) states that "the orient that appears in Orientalism is a system enforced of representations framed by a whole set of forces that brought the Orient into Western learning, Western consciousness, and later, Western empire" (p. 203).

Hizbollah believes that the Western view of Muslim cultures, serves as a motive for the West's hegemonic forces in the region. Through missionaries and humanitarian organizations, imperialists began a campaign of implanting an image of a superior West. They painted a modern, developed, and civilized West while picturing Arabs framed as inferior, primitive, nomadic tribes (Said, 1994).

The French and British colonial powers, joined later by the United States, sought to weaken the region and halt its development (Saleh, 2001). As the industrial revolution ushered the West to the modern era, the Ottoman Empire lagged behind. The French and the British were already planning to reconfigure the Middle East. These empires began redrawing the region's borders once it became clear that Ottoman rule was soon to end (Saleh, 2001). In Hizbollah's views, the colonial powers denigrated the Arab peoples' right to create their own nation-states hence planting the seeds of Arab antagonism to the West.

Hizbollah considers the West's view of Middle Eastern cultures as a chronic phenomenon in many media products. According to Ghrrayyib (2002), Hizbollah directly links Western imperialism to the cultural struggle in Arab societies. Hizbollah condemns the US, Britain, and France as the main instigators of this struggle and thus, considers the three as its enemies. For example, to Hizbollah, Hollywood films paint a fictitious image of reality in the West. "America is presented as an image of paradise or the land of "milk and honey" when in reality, this image is grossly embellished" (Ghrrayyib, 2002, p. 122).

Furthermore, Ghrrayyib (2002) finds that the West is “pre-occupied with presenting the Islamic civilization in a bad image” (p. 123). Hizbollah maintains that Western media portray Western countries within a utopian frame: the haven for liberty and freedom. The party also claims that not only have the imperialist powers promoted their ideals of civilization, but they have also infused messages that serve Israeli interests (Ghrrayyib, 2002).

Hizbollah argues that Western hegemony succeeded in rendering the Muslim people in a state of confusion and deterioration. Hizbollah’s media experts, Ghrrayyib (2002) reports, attribute this success to the evident “control of Zionists” over American film production companies such as Metro-Golden-Meyer, Paramount, Colombia, Warner Brothers, and United Artists that promote “Zionist propaganda”. These experts draw particular attention to “how Zionist media forces exploit the holocaust to frame Israelis as victims at all times” (Ghrrayyib, 2002, p. 122). Ghrrayyib argues that Western media allowed for a universal vindication for all Israeli crimes against Arabs.

Hizbollah equally implicates Lebanese media in being part of the Western hegemony. The party argues that media in Lebanon compete over the “Westernness” of the content they broadcast. Arguably, Lebanese media practices were quite unsuitable in Hizbollah’s standards. Hizbollah was primarily concerned with setting the agenda to serve the resistance against Israel. Although Lebanese media did address the resistance movement, fighting Israel was never a matter of top priority.

Media in Lebanon

Among the many facets of daily life that carried residues of colonialism, the most obvious were the influences manifested in Lebanese media. Radio Levant (Arabic, Radio Ash-Sharq), a French government-run radio station, was officially handed over to the Lebanese government in 1946. This event came immediately after the French troops withdrew from Lebanon three years after its independence. Lebanon and France signed a protocol that granted the French government 145 minutes of airtime (Dajani, 1992). Furthermore, since the station, now re-named the Lebanese Broadcasting Station, aired French programming, “England and the United States requested similar privileges and were granted 60 and 30 minutes respectively to air daily programs” (Dajani, 1992, p. 72).

“This practice,” Dajani (1992) states, “continued until April 1960 when the British service put on the air a pro-Zionist play” (p. 92). Following a public uproar in reaction to the Israeli propaganda, the Lebanese government stopped broadcasting programs from the US and British embassies. French programs, however, continued under the signed agreement with closer government supervision (Dajani, 1992). In essence, the reality was that although the Lebanese government was able to establish its own media, these media featured significant foreign programming with mostly French, American and British content.

In the wake of the civil strife that revealed its first signs in 1958, Lebanese factions illegally established individual political radio stations. Dajani cites numerous examples: the Voice of Arabism (by the Muslim Coalition, Al-Najjadah), the Voice of Lebanon (by the Christian Maronite Phalangists), and the Voice of the People’s Resistance (by Muslim leader Rashid Karami). Eventually, the government shut down these stations as soon as the situation stabilized. Less than 20 years later, these stations re-emerged as the civil war broke out. The airwaves were once again fraught with sectarian propaganda. Among the many stations that emerged were the Voice of Lebanon (predominantly Maronite Christians), the Voice of the Homeland (mostly Sunni Muslims), the Voice of the Mountain (Progressive Socialist Party representing mainly the Druze community), and the Voice of Free Lebanon (official station for the Maronite Christian “Lebanese Forces”) (Dajani, 1992).

With a dysfunctional government and the severe religious fragmentation, the warring groups created their own channels in a bottom-up model unlike the top-down media structure of media in the rest of the Arab world (Kraidy, 1998, p. 278). Kraidy (1998) points out that the factional strife during the war in Lebanon is the main reason for the privatization of media outlets. Media took the day-to-day warfare to another level. Militias and political parties only fought on the streets, but also took their battles to the airwaves (Dajani, 1992).

Television was another phenomenon that rapidly surfaced in the mid eighties to the early nineties (Kraidy, 1999). According to Dajani, from the very beginning, the Lebanese government’s official station followed a business model. There were no defined goals to serve national interests (Boyd, 1999, p. 11). The priority had always been for profit over

the public's welfare. The notion of viewership revolved around satiating the audience with entertainment shows. Programming was predominantly foreign and bore "little or no attention to its social implications and responsibilities" (Dajani, 2001, p. 2).

Lebanese media took pride in airing the latest shows and films released by Hollywood. Charles Rizk, Director General of Tele-Liban (the official government television) proudly declared that "the Lebanese viewer can 'now' watch the same programs shown 'now' in New York and Paris" (Dajani, 1992, p.102). Media executives associated quality television with keeping up with the latest trends in American and European television. Lebanese officials paid no attention to what foreign programs presented to the public.

As a result, television sets introduced topics such as pre-marital sex and contraceptives to Lebanese households. Dajani recalls his experience watching Tele-Liban in the late seventies. One episode of *Eight is Enough* (a family show produced in the US) featured a conversation between a teenager and her father. The daughter sought her father's guidance as she considered "going on the pill." Following this show, Dajani (2001) notes that *Abu Melhem* (a Tele-Liban production) was next on the channel's schedule. In this particular episode of the show, Abu Melhem, the wise traditional man, was gravely concerned about a fifteen-year old girl who lost her virginity in a bicycle accident (Dajani, 2001). This example demonstrates the government's inability to filter out any conflict of values let alone protecting the Lebanese public from cultural influences. Interestingly, countries that exported media products to Lebanon had established regulations that govern their own media broadcasts. Apparently, the Lebanese practiced a "selective emulation" of the West. Tele-Liban prided itself with broadcasting the latest imports from Europe and the US. However, neither the government nor the station itself followed the exporters' model of content regulation.

In the mid eighties, the Lebanese Forces (a Maronite militia) drastically changed the Lebanese media scene; it founded the Lebanese Broadcasting Station (LBC). As the civil war plunged the country into further chaos, Tele-Liban programming suffered drastically. Leaders of the Lebanese Forces took advantage of the situation. They established the militia's television mouthpiece, thus, breaking Tele-Liban's monopoly of the airwaves (Dajani, 1992).

LBC relied heavily on “imported – mostly pirated – programs” that included French and British series along with US sitcoms, soap operas, and feature films (Kraidy, 2003). Dajani (2001) observes that France and the US tried to gain LBC’s favor especially that the militia running the station had allegiances to the West. Similar to the earlier stages of Lebanese media, these countries competed to control the station:

“[LBC was the] subject of a struggle not only of the warring groups but also between the US and French interests who sought to dominate its programs. The early US influence on LBC did not please the French who consequently were able, early in 1988, to prevail on LBC to devote a special channel for strictly French programs. This channel (C33), however, was on the UHF band that was not widely used in Lebanon at the time” (Dajani, 2001, p. 5).

The importance of LBC in the history of Lebanese media lies in its commercial approach. Prior to any satellite or terrestrial channels in the region, LBC introduced a business model typically followed in the US (Kraidy, 1998). The various parties in Lebanon discovered the potential for lucrative profits in the television industry based on LBC’s success (Dajani, 1992). This resulted in a surge of television stations all over the country. With the low cost of broadcasting pirated material from the US and Europe, viewers enjoyed an abundance of television channels. More than 50 broadcast television stations competed for a market share. “In 2003, terrestrial television penetration was approximately 99 percent of all households. Cable television penetration is among the highest in the world, and is estimated to be as high as 79 percent of all households.” (Dajani, 2006, p. 135).

Hizbollah regarded the support of Lebanese media to Western hegemonic practices irresponsible. Hizbollah saw that Lebanese media promoted very different values than those of its popular base. For instance, media in Lebanon did not advocate for a religious state nor did they call for “jihad” against the US - although some may have expressed concerns about the US policy in the Middle East. Consequently, the party resorted to Al-Manar for providing an alternative to its public.

Radical Media

Nestor Garcia-Canclini (2001) maintains that in order for media products to succeed globally and/or nationally, there has to be a facilitation that involves “de-folklorization”

of the products that they put into circulation. Messages have to be “intelligible to most spectators, independent of culture, educational level, national history, level of economic development, or political system” (Garcia-Canclini, 2001, p. 92). The closure and openness of these texts evokes reactions in audiences from various communities (Fiske, 1987). Similarly, Barker (1999) contends that television texts can have multiple interpretations that present their viewers with a site for negotiating “cultural struggles” (p. 169).

Lebanese communities interpret television texts differently. On one hand, some communities found that television mirrors their “hybrid identities” (Kraid, 1998). For example, Maronite Christian youth looked favorably on issues such as pre-marital sex in the locally produced television soap opera, *Al-‘Asifa Tahubb Marratayn* (Eng.: *The Storm Blows Twice*). Respondents found “[the show] ‘refreshing’ because it showed ‘a mixed cultural reality’ ” (Kraid, 1998, p.127).

On the other hand, conservative Muslim viewers found these programs inappropriate and offensive. Hasan Al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, summarizes the Muslim conservative view. He describes Western media morals as “[a] wave of atheism and lewdness that started the devastation of religion and morality on the pretext of individual and intellectual freedom” (as cited in Barber, 2001, p. 210). The absence of the desired content on television created the need for these communities to seek other avenues for information and entertainment.

A study found “dissatisfaction with prevailing moral standards and practices, as depicted in non-religious TV fare, was one of the most distinctive bonds between religious programs and their viewers” (as cited in Abelman, 1987, p. 201). Additionally, according to Downing, radical media are “dissonant in the sense that they have posed a genuine alternative to the media patterns of both East and West” (1984). These media, Downing (1984) adds, “articulated and amplified popular challenges to power structures.”

Lebanese media presented a unilateral flow of imported cultural products unfit for its conservative Muslim audiences. Hizbollah maintained that these products, and hence, the media disseminating them, presented a tainted perspective of reality. The only avenue for this party to convey the true reality (according to its standards) was through a self-governed channel. Consequently, Al-Manar became popular among religious Muslims

through a series of programs that suited the beliefs of its underrepresented target audience.

Al-Manar: Hizbollah's Response

From its inception in 1991, Al-Manar was preoccupied with showing defiance to the West by countering the “cultural aggression” and appealing to underprivileged and the voiceless Muslims worldwide (Schibley, 2004). Baylouny (2005) reports that Hizbollah spends \$10-15 million per year on Al-Manar. The Iranian government had specifically allocated monies to subsidize the station. However, funding dropped dramatically when the civil war ended and Ayatollah Khomeini died (Baylouny, 2005).

Al-Manar's policy was to focus the public's attention on the Israeli occupation (Schbley, 2004) and secondly to promote the political and social values Hizbollah upheld. The station divided its grid of programs between news and political shows, and educational entertainment. Chochrane (2007) found that 35% of Al-Manar's programs were politically oriented.

According to Baylouny (2005), Al-Manar helped change viewers' perception of the Israeli military forces. The station succeeded in “[breaking] the myth of the Israeli army's invincibility and resurrect[ed] the idea of resistance for the Arabs” (Baylouny, 2005, p. 7). Live broadcasts covered Hizbollah's guerilla operations targeting Israeli forces in south Lebanon (Azb, 2002). ‘Embedded’ reporters filmed episodes of Israeli troops killed on the battlefield; these images aired later on Israeli television (Baylouny, 2005). According to Azb (2002), in addition to addressing its audiences in Lebanon, Al-Manar demoralized Israeli troops and civilians instilling fear in the Israeli society. Al-Manar's coverage, in Azb's opinion, eventually led to destabilizing the Israeli public opinion provoking Israeli viewers to demand withdrawal from Lebanon.

Furthermore, Al-Manar served to “produce a new ‘mentality’ that of a society participating actively in its own reconstruction, in resistance and in economic rebirth” (Harb & Leenders, 2005, p. 190). The station presented the solution to the struggle in the form of active individual efforts toward a common good. For example, the station promoted women in public life within the Islamic framework. It vowed for the poor and the underprivileged “while emphasizing community solidarity, lobbying for government social services, and solidifying the place of the resistance and its fighters in Lebanese

society” (Baylouny, 2005, p. 6). Even with a need to substitute for the loss of funding from Iran, the station is applied strict rules on the commercial advertising it airs as compared to other Lebanese stations. Al-Manar “turns down 90% of potential advertisers due to their violation of its standards” (Baylouny, 2005, p. 5).

In May 2000, Israeli troops pulled out from South Lebanon (except the disputed Sheba’a farms). Framing this as a victory for Hizbollah, Al-Manar no longer aimed at Israel’s occupation. Instead, the station proceeded in focusing on the military and cultural threats that Israel and the United States pose to Islam and the Arab nation (Ghrayyib, 2002).

Al-Manar had its unique set of means to educate its audience about the West’s “intentions” towards the Muslim world. This was quite apparent in my personal experience of watching Al-Manar in 1993. Contrary to one’s expectations, Al-Manar did air American films. However, the station utilized these films only to demonstrate its ideological premises on Western media and reveal the hidden agendas of Hollywood films. One of these films was *Navy Seals* (, a typical film of the action genre where the hero (played by Charlie Sheen) sets out to free America from evildoers - in this scenario Arabs. The interesting part was that the movie started with a live Arabic voice-over analyzing the shot-by-shot images of the film. In his commentary, the Al-Manar announcer pointed out how the film’s producers intentionally juxtaposed the high-rises of an American city with images of camel convoys in the arid lifeless desert of “Arabia.” The voice-over made it clear that the producers depicted the Arab world as a primitive society whereas they portrayed the US as the apex of civilization. This example was one of many of the propaganda stunts that this station used in its early days.

More recently, Al-Manar adopted a variety of creative formats to present its ideological framework while entertaining its audiences. For example, *Al-Muhimma* (Eng.: *The Mission*) is a game show that focuses on contestants seeking to enter Jerusalem. The show’s host asks them questions revolving around historical facts of relating to Israel and resistance movements (MacFarquhar, 2004; Bayulouny, 2005). Al-Manar also produced numerous dramatic series. A notable series, quite controversial in the West,

For example, *Al-Shatat* (Eng.: *The Diaspora*) is a series that attempted to redefine the Israeli historical narrative. Aired during the holy month of Ramadan, *Al-Shatat*

focused on the Zionist movement. The series depicts the creation of Israel as a result of the Zionist manipulation of European leaders. Ghattas recounts one episode in which “Jews speak of a global Jewish government. In one scene an infected prostitute in a European brothel run by a Jewish madam says she doesn’t want any Jewish customers because she doesn’t want to infect them - implying that she would willingly infect non-Jews” (Ghattas, 2003). Eventually, the series stirred worldwide controversy that led to a ban of its satellite signals in various countries in the West.

More recently, during the July 2006 Israeli military campaign against Lebanon, Al-Manar was instrumental to Hizbollah. From the very beginning of the crisis, Al-Manar altered its daily program schedule and focused on news from the frontlines and areas affected by the Israeli bombing. “One frequently run clip depicts U.S.-made missiles superimposed on photos of injured children with blood and tears running down their faces. An image of President Bush appears, labeled ‘The master of state terrorism’” (Solomon & Fam, 2006, para. 7). Hizbollah relied on the live broadcasts of clashes with Israeli tanks and soldiers. Legget stated that Al-Manar reporters “[were] often embedded with Hizbollah guerrillas. Some [reporters] are even trained fighters themselves. No other media [were] allowed such access, making Al-Manar virtually the only source of information on Hizbollah’s military campaign” (2006).

Despite IDF attempts to take Al-Manar off the air, whether through repeated air and sea bombings of its location and transmission towers or through taking over its frequency, the station was able to continue its broadcast within minutes of the interruptions. Solomon and Fam (2006) attribute Al-Manar’s persistence to advance planning. They cite an Al-Manar official who explained:

When the big Israeli air attack came on July 16, Al-Manar had only a skeleton staff of 15 working at the headquarters in Haret Hreik, a Hezbollah stronghold in southern Beirut. When the bombing began, staffers called their bosses and cars dispatched to the building whisked them to safety. Two employees were injured slightly and were treated on the way to alternative locations that had been readied so that the channel could continue broadcasting. At one of these secret locations, other staffers quickly got the channel up and running, Al-Manar officials say... A team of 10 engineers called ‘Al-Manar’s fedeyeen,’ or loyal fighters, try to keep Al-Manar on the air. The team includes

specialists in broadcast transmission and in handling studio equipment. Engineers, some of them Western-educated, are on call around the clock. They are always ready with alternatives for the transmission towers (para. 32).

Having failed to silence Al-Manar through air raids and bombing, Israel “widened its propaganda efforts in Lebanon, showering the country with leaflets, jamming hostile broadcasts and sending recorded voice mail to mobile phones” (Wallis, 2006). In essence, Baylouny explains, all attempts to remove the station (whether bombing it or banning its signals) greatly embellished the station’s image. These efforts “empowered [Al-Manar] as an alternative to US views and propaganda” (Baylouny, 2005, p. 15). More than ten million viewers were looking to Al-Manar for coverage of the war ranking the station among the top five most-watched in the Arab world, according to Al-Manar officials (Wallis, 2006).

In response, Al-Manar depended on its website to reach Arabs and Muslims worldwide. Al-Manar aspired to “give Arabs and Muslims a feeling that they belong to something greater than themselves; something that is pan-human, pan-Muslim, and pan-Arab” (Schibley, 2004, p. 213). Internet and satellite media have the ability to reach and connect immigrants in Europe and the US. Media developments, Sakr (2001) argues, contributed to a ‘new Arabism’. Transnational television broadcasts allowed for a reunion of fragmented communities as is the case of Palestine, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq that have expatriates living in other countries. By “[blurring] social and national identities,” a new form of identification arises: something Sakr describes as a “diasporic allegiance” using Robin Cohen’s term (Sakr, 2001, p. 25).

Conclusion

Much of the Muslim world sees itself under constant attack from the West, whether culturally or militarily. So far, there is no indication that fundamentalism will subside. Nor are there any signs of religious extremist media falling out of favor. As long as the Arab world perceives American and European powers as aggressors, fundamentalists will find “religious” justifications for their hostility toward the West. Fundamentalist media will therefore provide a space for voices silenced by global forces. In turn, these media sites will promote their “cause” and “struggle” within the context of religious obligations.

As was the case in July 2006 Israeli attacks on Lebanon, Al-Manar withstood the multiple Israeli attempts to bomb and obliterate the station. Such incidents have only provided the station with unwavering followers not only among religious fundamentalists in the Arab world but also among citizens all over the region. It is, therefore, of crucial importance to recognize the effect this station has on the Arab people's psyche. However, to claim that Al-Manar is a cause of hateful sentiments toward the West is to ignore a much graver problem: the struggle for defining identity under the current ruling regimes.

Western as well as Lebanese media content provided what Hizbollah considers supremacist Western propaganda. The party believes that these messages serve the West's exploits in the region. Al-Manar offered a vehicle for the voice of the underrepresented people in Lebanon and elsewhere in the Arab world. Al-Manar, is not merely a medium, but rather a symbol of defiance against the aggression of the overwhelming hegemony from the West.

Essentially, the wide acceptance of Al-Manar in Lebanon and other countries in the Middle East is an indication of the volatility of the region. The content of this station in comparison to other channels mirrors an increasing tension among people in the Arab world specifically between sympathizers with the West and those alienated by it. The conditions that the Middle East has endured through past and current experiences are vital to understanding the reasons for broadcasting such fear and hate. Al-Manar mirrors a society that regards itself as a victim of the West's hegemony.

While the West sees the need to democratize the region, Arab citizens' fears are on the rise. People of the Arab world are searching for freedom; the freedom they seek, however, is foremost synonymous with the liberation from Western dominance. In response to the West's military and cultural war on the Arab world, many continue to regard Al-Manar as an icon of steadfastness against Western hegemony and aggression.

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