Defending Freedom of Expression and Challenging the Press and Media Laws in Lebanon: The Case of the Lebanese Political TV Satire Shows

Avner Asher¹, Dan Naor² and Yossi Mann¹

Abstract

Lebanon is among the most developed Arab countries concerning freedom of expression, and its press and media are famous for their openness and critical approach toward domestic and Arab affairs. The openness and criticism notwithstanding, there are various restrictions, not always formal ones, on the freedom of expression in Lebanon. While much has been written about Lebanese freedom of expression and media, few researches have concentrated on Lebanese political TV satire. This article aims to examine the limits of freedom of expression in Lebanon, as reflected in the various political TV satire shows. The article examined five satire shows: Basmat Watan, La Youmal, Ma Fi Metlo, Chi.N.N. and Awal ‘Ala Akhir. For each show, the article referred to three controversial issues: the attitude toward politics and politicians; the attitude toward Hezbollah and its weapons; and the attitude toward Lebanese presidents, foreign heads of states and Syria. Focusing on the different Lebanese TV satire shows and these contentious subjects reveals how these shows challenge the press and media laws, break taboos and even, to a certain degree, habituate the Lebanese audience to engage with controversial issues.

Keywords

TV satire, Lebanese media, Basmat Watan, La Youmal, Ma Fi Metlo, Chi.N.N., Awal ‘Ala Akhir

¹ Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan, Israel.
² Ariel University, Ari’el.

Corresponding author:
Dan Naor, Ariel University, Ari’el 40700.
E-mail: danaor67@gmail.com
Introduction

In June 2006, the Lebanese satirical show Basmat Watan (“the nation’s smiles” as well as “the death of the nation”) imitated Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah. The TV show interviewed “Nasrallah”, who said that Hezbollah would not disarm. The skit indicated that Hezbollah is looking for farfetched excuses to remain armed. After that episode, Hezbollah supporters “closed the airport road with burning tires…and marched on mainly Sunni, Druse, and Christian quarters in Beirut”. They protested the insulting of their leader, whom they consider not a political leader but a cleric (Young, 2006).

Following that satiric sketch and its aftermath, Charbel Khalil, the producer and lead writer of Basmat Watan, was interrogated by the Lebanese security forces and had to publish an apology in which he stated that he respects Nasrallah and did not mean to insult him. As a result of the “Nasrallah sketch”, the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation International (LBCI)—to which the show belonged—removed Basmat Watan from its schedule, and Khalil moved to France, probably after he received death threats (Bakri, 2006).

Lebanon is among the most developed Arab countries concerning freedom of expression. Its press and media are famous for their variety, professionalism, openness and critical approach toward Lebanese domestic issues and Arab affairs. The openness and criticism notwithstanding, there are various restrictions—not always formal ones—on freedom of expression in Lebanon. As a result, Lebanese journalists and broadcasters sometimes have to censor themselves, namely, to take preventive measures. In addition, after being detained by the authorities, they “are often forced to sign pledges to refrain from writing content viewed as defamatory by the government” (Freedom House, 2019).

While much has been written about the freedom of expression and media in Lebanon (Dajani, 2013; Harb, 2011; Mellor et al., 2011; Rugh, 2004; Saghieh et al., 2010), few researches have concentrated on Lebanese political TV satire. Focusing on the different Lebanese TV satire, this article reveals how such shows challenge the censorship laws, break taboos (both political and social), and even, to a certain degree, habituate the Lebanese audience to deal with controversial issues. In this respect, the “Nasrallah Sketch” of Basmat Watan was merely one more chapter in the struggle of Lebanese political TV satire to sustain the principle of freedom of expression.

This article aims to examine the limits of freedom of expression in Lebanon, as reflected in the various political TV satire shows. Accordingly, this article will try to answer questions such as, what is allowed and what is forbidden to say? Are there “red lines” which these shows do not cross? Are there subjects that are considered taboo? How do these shows deal with controversial political issues?

To answer these questions, we thoroughly examined 1,700 sketches of five satire shows from different Lebanese TV stations: Basmat Watan from LBCI, La Youmal (Not Boring) from al-Mustaqbal TV, Ma Fi Metlo (Matchless) from MTV, Chi.N.N. from al-Jadeed TV and Awal ‘Ala Akhir (Eventually) from al-Manar TV. These shows were broadcast in the first and second decades of this millennium, and some are still on the air. Most of the episodes reviewed were broadcast
between 2009 and 2016. In each satire show, we referred to three subjects: the
text
attitude toward politics and politicians, the attitude toward Hezbollah and its
weapons, and the attitude toward the Lebanese presidents, foreign heads of states
and Syria. All these issues can be considered troublesome, and in the past, have
led to penalties, havoc and even assassinations.

First, we examine the various press and media laws in independent Lebanon
and their application throughout history. We differentiate between two kinds of
censorship, formal and informal, both of which were applied to political satire
shows. Then, we introduce the various TV stations and their satirical shows that
were reviewed here. This section provides details concerning the TV stations to
which the shows belong, their political affiliations and their shareholders. We
also provide information about the writers and casts of the different shows.
Then, we examine the different satire shows according to the issues that were
mentioned above.

Formal and Informal Censorship in Lebanon

The Washington-based Pew Research Center found in 2015 that about 98% of
Lebanese citizens believe that it is essential for the citizens to criticize the
government’s activity and speak out against it (Wike & Simmons, 2015). Possibly,
these findings stem from the fact that Lebanon, unlike most other Arab states, is
familiar with the principle of freedom of expression and recognizes its importance.
Nevertheless, there is a significant gap between the wishes and aspirations of
Lebanese citizens and Lebanese reality. This is because the full implementation of
the principle of freedom of expression faces various obstacles, which are embodied
in two kinds of censorship—formal and informal.

Formal censorship is the censorship that is enforced by the Lebanese authorities.
This kind of censorship is based on several press and media laws that were passed
throughout the years. The first press law in independent Lebanon was legislated
in 1962 and amended in 1977 and 1994. According to these laws, Lebanon enjoys
the freedom of the press, albeit with several restrictions. Thus, the press and media
are forbidden from publishing information that can harm the Lebanese state and
cause communal strife. Moreover, there are bans on insulting religions and
violating public morality, and the law also forbids insulting the Lebanese president
and even presidents of neighboring countries (Ministry of Information, 2015).

The penalties for the violation of these restrictions vary. The government can
censor information that is perceived as violating one of the aforementioned
restrictions and journalists who violate the law can expect a monetary fine or a
jail term. The government can also suspend the publication of a newspaper for
varying periods. Since the wording of the restrictions is quite vague, there is a
wide range of interpretations. This vagueness has led the Lebanese authorities to
selectively enforce these laws in accordance with both internal and external
needs and pressures (Freedom House, 2019; Ministry of Information, 2015;
Saghieh et al., 2010).
Internally, the Lebanese government, establishment and politicians look askance at the criticism published against them in the media. Along with its various institutions, the Lebanese state has used the ambiguous prohibition on harming the state as a pretext to enforce the press laws upon newspapers and journalists. For example, in December 1970, the Lebanese army arrested *al-Nahar*’s editor-in-chief Ounsi al-Hajj for defaming the Lebanese Deuxième Bureau (*al-Nahar*, 1970, December 25). Moreover, the regime of President Suleiman Frangieh tried to restrict the newspapers’ activities by reducing their revenues from advertising. This step came after the various newspapers heavily criticized Frangieh’s regime for its inability to deal effectively with some of Lebanon’s problems (PRO, 1974a; PRO, 1974b; PRO, 1974c; PRO, 1974d; PRO, 1974e).

This pattern of enforcement increased after the Lebanese civil war ended in 1989 when Lebanon became a Syrian satellite state. There are various instances of the implementation of the media and press laws. In the early 1990s, a few years after the civil war ended, the Lebanese government suspended several Lebanese dailies for mocking both the government and the president (Kraidy, 1999). A prominent example of this kind of enforcement is the case of the late journalist Samir Qassir of the *al-Nahar* daily. Qassir was one of the prominent critics of the Syrian hegemony in Lebanon, as well as the regime of President Emile Lahoud and the kind of police state he had implemented in Lebanon. According to Rola el-Husseini, in 2001,

> [...] in the wake of a series of scathing articles critical of the Syrians and pro-Syria Lebanese intelligence operatives, agents of those same security apparatuses tailed him, harassed his neighbors, and had his passport confiscated on spurious grounds. (el-Husseini, 2012, p. 154)

Externally, the relative freedom of the media in Lebanon was (and in some aspects still is) a threat to other Arab states. The Lebanese press often reported issues that the Arab governments were trying to conceal. Arab leaders appealed to the Lebanese government, asking it to restrain the media. Some of them even threatened Lebanon with various measures, leaving Lebanon no choice but to enforce its press laws. Sometimes, the Lebanese government asked journalists to be careful with their accounts of Arab affairs, describing it as a “responsible freedom of expression” (PRO, 1971). However, the late Michel Abu-Jawdah, one of the prominent journalists in Lebanon, described the Lebanese press as a mirror of the Middle East, and as such, the Lebanese media could not refrain from reporting on Arab affairs. “Responsible freedom of expression”, according to Abu Jawdah, means telling the truth without exaggeration, praise, or defamation (Abu Jawdah, 1971).

When the Lebanese government felt that it could not count on the goodwill of the journalists, it turned to penalties. For example, in January 1970, as a result of Syrian pressure, the Lebanese government suspended the publication of the *al-Jadid* daily for five days. It also prosecuted its editor for defaming the Syrian Ba’ath party (PRO, 1970; al-‘Alaqat al-Lubnaniyya al-Suriyya, 1986). Syria’s
complaints about Lebanese freedom of the press continued until the outbreak of the civil war in 1975 (National Archive, 1973). Even after Syria gained the upper hand in Lebanon, with the signing of the Taif agreement in 1989, it had to deal with intractable journalists (Saghieh et al., 2010).³

In recent years, the Lebanese press and media have experienced various methods of formal censorship. For example, in 2018, Marcel Ghanem, the host of the Lebanese talk show Kalam Enass (People Talk) of the LBCI channel, was “prosecuted for allowing two Saudi journalists to express strong criticism of the Lebanese authorities” (Reporters without Borders, 2018). In September 2019, the editors of the newspaper Nida al-Watan were sued for defaming Lebanon, describing it as “the republic of the Iranian supreme leader, Ali Khamenei” (Freedom House, 2019).

Informal censorship refers to the various informal methods that are applied to impede freedom of expression. Some of them are used by the journalists and newspapers themselves as a kind of preventive measure. Others are used by different players such as politicians and their supporters as well as foreign forces. These measures include self-censorship implemented by the journalists and their editors, demonstrations, acts of vandalism in protests of journalists’ expressions and death threats to journalists. The riots that occurred after the “Nasrallah sketch” in 2006 are just one example.⁴ Journalists are intimidated on social media and attacked by mobs in the streets (Reporters without Borders, 2020, 2021).

Unfortunately, another method has been the assassination of journalists. Since the Lebanese civil war that erupted in 1975 and the Syrian occupation of the country (1976–2005), it seems that Damascus has been responsible for, or at least has inspired, many such killings—Syria’s mercenaries have murdered numerous journalists who dared to criticize the Syrian role in Lebanon. For example, the journalist Salim al-Lawzi, the editor of al-Hawadith weekly, was one of the vehement critics of the Syrian intervention in Lebanon. In the first stages of the civil war, he had to leave Lebanon and find refuge in London due to the Syrian threats. In February 1980, he came back to Lebanon to attend his mother’s funeral, and on his way back to the airport, he was kidnapped by gunmen, tortured and murdered (Ajami, 1999; Nisan, 2012; Zisser, 2009).⁵

Both formal and informal censorship exists in the sphere of Lebanese satire, except for assassinations, apparently: to the best of our knowledge, no satirist has been murdered. Some of the satirical shows have preferred self-censorship rather than dealing with sensitive issues. Sometimes, satirical skits led to demonstrations and even death threats to comedians and writers. This self-censorship notwithstanding, it seems that the satire shows have stood firm against the various obstacles, finding ways to bypass the censorship laws and keep alive the principle of the freedom of speech expression.

The Lebanese TV Stations and Their Satire Shows

The different media outlets in Lebanon are privately owned, mostly by politicians. Thus, newspapers and TV stations regularly represent their owners’ worldview,
opinions and interests (Dajani, 2013; el-Husseini, 2012). Similarly, TV satire shows are bound to the rules set by the owners. Hence, to examine the various satire shows, information about the station owners, their political and even sectarian affiliation, is necessary. It should be emphasized that most of the satire shows are not one-sided nor blindly criticize what their owners want them to. The various satire shows point their arrows toward most of the Lebanese politicians and phenomena. They do so, however, with varying levels of intensity, depending on the station’s orientation.

The Lebanese political arena is roughly divided into two camps: the March 8 coalition and the March 14 coalition. The March 8 coalition supports Hezbollah’s struggle against Israel as well as the Assad regime in Syria. Generally speaking, this camp is more Arab, anti-US and wishes for Lebanon to take an active role against Israel. It comprises members of all the Lebanese communities, and its leaders are the Shiite Hezbollah and the current Lebanese president, Michel Aoun. The March 14 coalition is calling to disarm Hezbollah and adhering to normal diplomatic relations with Syria. In general, this camp is more westernized, wishing a neutral role in the Arab–Israeli conflict. It comprises all Lebanese communities, and its leaders are the Sunni al-Hariri family and Maronite leaders such as Samir Geagea (Hanssen & Safieddine, 2016; Knudsen & Kerr, 2013). In recent years, the boundaries between these camps have blurred, as politicians of the two rival coalitions have formed alliances.

The first satire show we examine is Basmat Watan, which has been on the air since 1995 and remains so to this day. Basmat Watan belongs to the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation International (LBCI), and it is the oldest satirical show in Lebanon. The show’s name is a pun and can be understood either as “the nation’s smiles” or “the death of the nation”. Basmat Watan is broadcast on LBCI, a station that once represented the Maronite Lebanese Forces Party and was its mouthpiece during the late 1980s. In 1992, however, the Maronite businessman Pierre el Daher bought the station and became its manager (Kalam Ennas, 2010). According to the media sociologist Nabil Dajani, LBCI is a “forum for the Maronites and the [Maronite] Patriarch; if he sneezes, they report it” (El Richani, 2013, p.80, f.n. 30). This station is identified with the March 14 camp, bearing a critical approach toward Syria and Hezbollah.

Basmat Watan is based on comic skits that deal with various subjects. It is written and produced by Charbel Khalil, who once said that the show broke all the taboos in Lebanon (Basmat Watan, 2013a). Other writers are Claude Khalil and Jean Bou Gedeon, who are also the show’s leading actors. Apart from them, there are seven more actors and actresses, including Pamela Gergi, Zeina Daccache and Jessy Abdo. It should be mentioned that the cast is comprised only of Christians from different sects. From this show, we examined 418 sketches.

The second show is La Youmal (Not Boring), which aired from 2002 to 2011 and belonged to Future TV, owned by the Sunni Hariri family. The late Rafiq al-Hariri established this TV station and a newspaper with the same name to represent his interests and spread his propaganda. According to Jad P. Melki, the Hariri family and its confidants hold 55% of the channel’s shares (Melki, 2008). Al-Mustaqbal is the mouthpiece of the March 14 camp that opposes both Syria
La Youmal was based on comic skits that dealt with various subjects, political and social. It had a varied sectarian cast and staff that was responsible for writing the parodies. The producer was Muhammad Muslimani (Sunni), and the director was Nasser Faqih (Shia). The cast included Adel Karam (Maronite), Abbas Shahin (Shia), Naim Halawi (Druze), Rola Chamieh (Greek Catholic) and Anjo Rihane (Shia). From this show, we examined 422 sketches.

The third show is Ma Fi Metlo (Matchless), aired from 2011 to 2020. This show belongs to Murr TV (MTV) of the Orthodox Christian al-Murr family, which holds the vast majority of the channel’s shares. Although some family members were loyal to Syria while it governed Lebanon, the MTV channel is identified with the anti-Syria camp. In 2002, for example, the station was closed because it criticized the Syrian presence in Lebanon and it re-opened only in 2009 (Baumann, 2016; Melki, 2008). In 2011, MTV bought the La Youmal satire show from Future TV and changed its name to Ma Fi Metlo. The structure of the show, the cast and writers remain same, aside from a new producer, the Maronite Tariq Karam. From this show, we examined 287 sketches.

The fourth satire show is Chi.N.N. (aired 2009–2016), which belongs to al-Jadeed TV. Chi.N.N. was a satirical news show that covered political and social issues. It belonged to al-Jadeed TV (The new TV), under the ownership of the Sunni businessman Ahamd Tahsin al-Khayat. The TV station was established in 1992 by the Lebanese Communist Party. In 1994, however, it was bought by businessmen associated with the party, among them al-Khayat, who was and still is the principal shareholder. Al-Jadeed TV adheres to Arab nationalism and opposes any attempt to harm the rights of the Arab citizens. It is affiliated with the March 8 camp, supporting both Syria and Hezbollah (Melki, 2008; Tarikh Qanat al-Jadid, n.d.).

Chi.N.N., alluding to the famous American channel CNN, was a satirical news program that was aired every evening. In the show, Chi.N.N. aired real interviews of politicians from the various Lebanese TV stations and conducted interviews. Its writers and presenters were Salam al-Zaatari (Sunni) and Fouad Yammine (Maronite). Other actors and actresses were Abbas Ja’fer (Shia), Wissam Saad (Sunni), Abed El Rahim El Awji (Sunni), Lia Hasruti (Greek Catholic) and Rania Bassil (Maronite). Thus, like La Youmal and Ma Fi Metlo, Chi.N.N. had a varied, sectarian cast. From this show, we examined 300 sketches.

The fifth and last satire show is Awal ‘Ala Akhir(Eventually), which aired for two years only (2014–2016) and belonged to al-Manar TV. Awal ‘Ala Akhir was a skit show that dealt with political and social subjects. It was a unique satire show in Lebanon because of its conservatism. Although it criticized the political situation, corruption and the ineffectiveness of the political system in Lebanon, it never mimicked or mocked specific politicians. Furthermore, while all other satire shows that were under review used obscene language, provocative attire and dealt with sexual subjects, Awal ‘Ala Akhir lacked all of these. It had a more moderate view on humor and a religious and even patriarchal attitude toward Lebanon. This conservatism stemmed from the fact that Awal ‘Ala Akhir was broadcast on the al-Manar TV channel that belongs to
Hezbollah (al-Manar website). It seems that *Awal ‘Ala Akhir* was a kind of humoristic mouthpiece of Hezbollah.

The writers of *Awal ‘Ala Akhir*’s were the brothers Nabil and Hussein ‘Abed al-Sater (Shiia), and the director was Morris Rizq (Christian). The main actors were Ahmad al-Zein (Shia), Pierre Jamajian (Christian), Muhammad Shamas (Shia), ‘Abdu Shahin (Sunni) and Dani Harb (Christian). There was only one actress, Rania Mroueh (Shia), who participated in some skits. From this show, we examined 293 sketches.

Our methodology was based on the qualitative, thematic analysis of verbal texts and visual representations within the satire shows. We did not use software but physically observed the available skits. In doing so, we agree with Orit Perlov’s analysis that the output of research based on software “will necessarily be quantitative rather than qualitative…. Computer software can examine vast databases, but cannot understand human intuitions and emotions, which are very important when examining social processes” (Perlov, 2015). Although Perlov referred to social networks, we found her observation suitable for the satire sphere as well.

We categorized the skits in every satire show into three subjects: politics, social affairs and economic affairs. Regarding politics, we classified the various skits into three main topics: the attitude toward politics and politicians, stance toward Hezbollah and its weapons, and the approach toward the Lebanese president, foreign heads of states and Syria. In every skit, we traced explicit and implicit political criticism and the use of puns and double meanings to convey such criticism. Moreover, we examined the visual representations of the characters in these shows, especially of the various politicians that were imitated. It should be mentioned that while all the shows above vehemently criticized the political situation in Lebanon, it seems that every one of them had its own “red lines”. Occasionally, the red line of one show was a “green” one for the other.

### The Attitude toward Politics and Politicians

The vagueness of the Lebanese press and media laws has led to varying interpretations and selective enforcement. In the past, newspapers and journalists suffered substantial penalties for criticizing the Lebanese regimes. It seems, however, that the satire shows have ignored the ambiguous laws and the experience of newspapers and journalists. For most of the shows, there were no red lines concerning criticism of the political establishment and politicians—we found red lines only with regard to clerics.

*Basmat Watan*. The show deals with various political issues. Thus, it criticizes the inefficiency and corruption of the Lebanese political system and administration, and politicians are depicted as liars, disconnected from the public’s needs and interests (*Basmat Watan*, 2013c). Aside from a general criticism of Lebanese politics, *Basmat Watan* criticizes specific politicians for their characteristics and conduct. Since *Basmat Watan* is identified with the
March 14 camp, many of its arrows are pointed toward the rival March 8 camp. For example, General Michel Aoun, one of the March 8 leaders and the current Lebanese president, was depicted in the past, prior to his presidency, as capricious and his supporters as traitors (Basmat Watan, 2009c; Basmat Watan, 2009d). The Druze leader Walid Jumblatt—who was once a March 14 camp member, then switched for a while to the March 8 camp, and after that positioned himself in between the two camps—was depicted as the one who weakened the March 14 camp (Basmat Watan, 2009a).

However, Basmat Watan did not hesitate to criticize the March 14 camp and its leaders as well. The leading example is Saad al-Din al-Hariri, the prominent leader of the March 14 camp and ex-prime minister of Lebanon. Hariri was depicted as a prime minister who engages in petty politics. Thus, instead of dealing with the real problems of Lebanon, such as unemployment, electricity and traffic jams, his primary purpose was to prevent his political rival, the Maronite politician and son-in-law of General Michel Aoun, Gebran Bassil, from entering his government as a minister. He was also portrayed as a politician who spends most of his time abroad rather than in Lebanon (Basmat Watan, 2009b; Basmat Watan, 2011a).

Although not politicians per se, clerics have a political role in Lebanon. The Maronite Patriarch, for example, represented the community when the Maronite political strata were weak. In such a situation, the Patriarch came to the front line as the standard-bearer of the Maronites’ interests (Baroudi & Tabar, 2009). Things are the same in the Sunni community: The weakness of the political leadership has heralded the rise of clerics who have tried to represent the Sunni community (Abdel-Latif, 2008; el-Husseini, 2015). In the Shiite community, Hezbollah’s leader, Hassan Nasrallah, is considered by his supporters a cleric rather than a politician (Young, 2006).

Unlike politicians, criticism of clerics seems unacceptable. Thus, Basmat Watan revealed a new taboo regarding the freedom of expression in Lebanon: the prohibition on imitation of clerics. In 2006, Basmat Watan imitated Hassan Nasrallah, an imitation that led to demonstrations and destruction. The cleric Nasrallah was not alone. Imitations of other clerics, Christian and Muslims alike, occasionally led to demonstrations, death threats and bans. In a special episode, Basmat Watan broadcast a short clip including all its imitations of clerics, with captions that described what happened after those imitations. On April 11, 2002, for example, Basmat Watan’s episode was banned because of an imitation of the Greek-Orthodox Patriarch Elias Audi. On January 28, 2013, after Basmat Watan imitated the Sunni Islamist Ahmad al-Assir, Charbel Khalil received death threats. After the imitation of the former Maronite Patriarch, Nasrallah Butrus Sfeir, on April 26, 2013, some Maronites blocked roads in protest of the insult to his eminence (Basmat Watan, 2013b).

At the end of the clip, Basmat Watan showed a skit from 2006 in which one of the actors played Maroun, the Christian saint that the Maronites follow. In the skit, Maroun rebukes the Maronite politicians for their opportunism. Maroun’s incarnation notwithstanding, there were no protests, bans, or threats. The caption that ended the clip wonders whether clerics are more important than religion
It should be mentioned that there were several imitations of clerics that passed without evoking any rage. Thus, it could be assumed that Basmat Watan, with its repeated imitations, habituated the audience that clerics are not saints and are not immune to criticism.

La Youmal and Ma Fi Metlo. Both shows frequently dealt with the political situation in Lebanon, criticizing the corruption of the politicians, as well as the ineffectiveness of the Lebanese political system and administration. La Youmal also criticized the unchanging political system, in which the same politicians keep occupying the various offices (La Youmal, 2003–2005). This general criticism is repeated in almost every episode.

Another general criticism revolved around the ineffectiveness of the Lebanese ministries and infrastructure. For example, one of the skits portrayed a Lebanese citizen who wants to extradite himself to the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, which was appointed to investigate the assassination of Rafiq al-Hariri. Although he was not involved in the assassination, he wants to be sent to a European prison, knowing that he will receive excellent treatment and have facilities such as water, electricity and the internet—contrary to the conditions prevailing in Lebanon. For him, a European jail is like a five-star hotel, compared to the situation in Lebanon (La Youmal, 2009–2010a).

Aside from general criticism, La Youmal and Ma Fi Metlo had more specific objections concerning various politicians, especially from the March 8 camp. One of the main objects of criticism was General Michel Aoun before he became president. Both shows portrayed Aoun as a fool who cannot think and as a weasel: from a staunch opponent to Syria, he became its supporter; he objected to the Lebanese political families and the heredity of leadership from father to son, but did not hesitate to nominate his sons-in-law to high positions; he objected to foreign intervention in Lebanese affairs but turned a blind eye to Syrian and Iranian involvement in Lebanon; and he was a staunch supporter of the freedom of expression and press, as long as he himself was not the subject of criticism (La Youmal, 2009–2010b; Ma Fi Metlo, 2011a; Ma Fi Metlo, 2012c). Moreover, La Youmal even portrayed Aoun’s supporters as Nazis as well as drug addicts who do not think logically (La Youmal, 2005–2008; La Youmal, 2009–2010a; La Youmal, 2009–2010d).

Aoun was not the only figure to be ridiculed. For example, the Druze politician Wiam Wahhab was depicted as a liar and as a Lebanese politician who represents Syria’s interests rather than Lebanon’s, so much so that he aims to be elected to parliament in al-Suwayda—a Druze stronghold in south Syria—thus indicating his loyalty and affiliation to Syria and not to Lebanon (La Youmal, 2008–2011; La Youmal, 2008–2011a; Ma Fi Metlo, 2012b).

Chi.N.N. Much the same as other satirical shows, Chi.N.N. criticized both the general political atmosphere in Lebanon as well as specific politicians. For example, Chi.N.N. criticized the fact that for almost 35 years, the same politicians were parliament members. No matter which electoral law would be in force, it would always lead to the same results (Chi.N.N., 2013a). Chi.N.N. also criticized the inefficiency of the Lebanese system and institutes: Hospitals become slaughterhouses, schools become torture chambers, and there are pits on the roads...
and holes in the walls. The citizens pay taxes, but it is unclear where their payments go. The police serve the parliament members and not the people and, according to Chi.N.N., the solution for the Lebanese citizen is always to immigrate from Lebanon (Chi.N.N., 2013h).

Chi.N.N. also directed specific criticism. For example, in different episodes, the show criticized the Sunni community for its impotence in guarding itself: While other communities have armed parties or armed youths, the Sunni community lacks both (Chi.N.N., 2013f). Although Chi.N.N. belonged to al-Jadeed TV, affiliated with the March 8 camp, the satirical show used to criticize this camp’s leaders. In 2013, General Michel Aoun was depicted as senile and unrealistic. Chi.N.N. criticized the fact that Aoun, once an arch-enemy of Syria, described it as the Arab state closest to democracy. According to Aoun, a Syrian citizen has all the freedoms he wants, except for political freedom (Chi.N.N., 2013e). Aoun’s son-in-law, Gebran Bassil, was portrayed as corrupt, inarticulate, and as one who imitates his father-in-law (Chi.N.N., 2015b).

Chi.N.N. did not refrain from denouncing clerics. According to Salam al-Zaatari, one of the show’s presenters, if a Muslim Sheikh would steal and arm himself, Lebanon would defend him. If a priest abuses children, then in Lebanon, he would be considered a saint (Chi.N.N., 2015c). In Lebanon, according to Chi.N.N., there is no possibility that a cleric would sin (Chi.N.N., 2013c). It should be mentioned that sometimes Chi.N.N. preferred not to speak about clerics, such as Hassan Nasrallah and the Sunni Ahmad al-Assir, out of fear of instigating riots and havoc. Notably, they explicitly stated why they refrain from dealing with these clerics, thus criticizing the fact that they cannot speak freely about this subject in Lebanon (Chi.N.N., 2012).

Awal ‘Ala Akhir. Like other satire shows, Awal ‘Ala Akhir vehemently criticized the general political situation in Lebanon. The politicians were depicted as corrupt and disconnected. According to Awal ‘Ala Akhir, the various politicians are unaware of the bad economic situation the Lebanese citizens encounter every day—they are concerned solely with their offices (Awal ‘Ala Akhir, 2014a; Awal ‘Ala Akhir, 2014c). If once upon a time, Lebanese citizens plucked the petals of a flower, asking whether “she loves me or she loves me not”, now they ask whether “there is a government or not”, indicating the inability of the various politicians to form a new government (Awal ‘Ala Akhir, 2014b).

Awal ‘Ala Akhir criticized the ineffectiveness and corruption of the various Lebanese ministries. For example, the Ministry of Public Works and Transport trades in driving licenses and also obliges the Lebanese drivers to have swimming skills. That is because when it rains, the roads are flooded, and the only way to keep going is to swim (Awal ‘Ala Akhir, 2014g). In this skit, Awal ‘Ala Akhir criticized both the corruption of the ministry and the poor condition of the Lebanese infrastructure. The show also criticized the lack of running water and electricity in Lebanon. For example, in one of their skits, Awal ‘Ala Akhir satirically described how a Lebanese citizen uses the rain to take a shower because there is no running water (Awal ‘Ala Akhir, 2014h). In another skit, Awal ‘Ala Akhir described how a Lebanese citizen has to pay for electricity: by giving money
both to the electricity company and to the owner of the neighborhood generator (Awal ‘Aïa Khir, 2014d).

To wit, all the satire shows that were under review fervently criticized the Lebanese political strata, establishment and politicians. Within the political sphere, there is one taboo, that of mocking clerics. Concerning clerics, it appears that Basmat Watan was the most provocative and daring show. It kept dealing with the contested subject, despite demonstrations and threats. Awal ‘Aïa Khir was the most moderate, using only general criticism. It seems that Awal ‘Aïa Khir represented the kind of satire desired by Hezbollah.

**The Attitude toward Hezbollah and its Weapons**

Hezbollah is a Shia group that was officially established in 1985 during the Lebanese civil war. After that war, the various Lebanese militias disarmed, Hezbollah remained armed to fight the Israeli presence in South Lebanon. After Israel retreated from South Lebanon in May 2000, Hezbollah refrained from disarming itself. It considers itself not a militia but a resistance group, essential to the protection of Lebanon. Aside from its military branch, Hezbollah has a political wing represented in parliament, and some of its members are even ministers. Due to its weapons and the fact that it represents what is probably the largest community in Lebanon, Hezbollah is the most powerful party in today’s Lebanon (Alagha, 2011; Azani, 2011; Daher, 2019; Levitt, 2013; Norton, 2007; Saad-Ghorayeb, 2002; Worall et al., 2015).

One of the most hotly debated issues in Lebanon is Hezbollah’s weapons—the fear of them and the prospects for disarmament. The political arena is divided between those who support Hezbollah and its demand to remain armed and those who oppose it. Dealing with this delicate affair could likely lead to demonstrations and death threats. Nevertheless, satire shows do not ignore the subject and deal with it in different ways. Some explicitly criticize Hezbollah, and others used hints and puns.

Basmat Watan. As a show that habitually breaks taboos, Basmat Watan did not neglect the disputed subject of Hezbollah’s weapons, explicitly criticizing Hezbollah for not giving up its weapons. The show also dealt with another controversial issue relating to Hezbollah’s weapons, namely its involvement in the Syrian civil war. Although the imitation of Nasrallah in 2006 led to demonstrations, Basmat Watan continued to imitate him. For example, in November 2013, Basmat Watan interviewed “Hassan Nasrallah” once again. Pamela Gergi, the presenter of the show, asked “Nasrallah” hard questions. At first, “Nasrallah” offered moderate replies, but then his answers became militant. Thus, Gergi asks him if Hezbollah made mistakes and “Nasrallah” answers that even perfect people make mistakes. Then he says that the first mistake is Hezbollah’s weapons. When Gergi displays her astonishment at this answer, “Nasrallah” clarifies that Hezbollah’s weapons should have included jets and submarines; however, Hezbollah compromised on rockets and missiles.
“Nasrallah” continues, saying that the second mistake of Hezbollah is the involvement in Syria: Hezbollah should have intervened at the outset of the crisis (Basmat Watan, 2013d).

According to “Nasrallah,” the third mistake of Hezbollah was the May 2008 events, in which Hezbollah took over parts of Beirut and seized its rivals’ strongholds. “Nasrallah,” says that at these events, Hezbollah should have killed all its rivals. Gergi asks “Nasrallah” if Hezbollah would someday be disarmed. Hezbollah has already decided to disarm, “Nasrallah” announces, but only after Israel is annihilated, meaning never. After this episode, Hezbollah’s supporters took to the streets and blocked roads. However, it did not stop Basmat Watan from continuing to criticize Hezbollah’s weapons and its involvement in Syria (Basmat Watan, 2013d; Yalibnan, 2013).

Basmat Watan also dealt with Hezbollah’s weapons in ways other than Nasrallah imitations. For instance, a married couple visits the doctor, the wife complaining that her husband is not paying attention to her. It appears that the husband’s mind is occupied with Hezbollah’s intervention in Syria and its harmful implications for Lebanon, such as bringing Islamic terrorism into the country. Consequently, because of Hezbollah, the husband is paying more attention to Lebanon than to his wife (Basmat Watan, 2013e).

La Youmal and Ma Fi Metlo. Both shows dealt with the sensitive issue of Hezbollah’s weapons by using hints and imagery. Rarely did they explicitly mention this difficult subject, but it seems that everyone understands what they mean. La Youmal castigated that Hezbollah is still armed and thus has become a kind of a thug that frightens everyone. In any dispute that occurs, this thug shows his gun and everyone becomes silent (La Youmal, 2008-2011c). Moreover, La Youmal criticized the impotence of the Sunni and Maronite communities and their inability to deal with this threat. For example, in one of its episodes, La Youmal presented a dispute over a parking area. Naim Halawi blamed his neighbor, Adel Karam, for parking in his space. Instead of answering the accusation, Karam just shows his weapons. At first, only a pistol; however, as Naim’s accusations continue, Karam exposes increasingly massive weapons. In the end, after exposing a Rocket Propelled Grenade (RPG), Naim leaves the area, relinquishing the disputed space to Karam (La Youmal, 2008-2011b). La Youmal hinted at the fact that instead of taking effective action against Hezbollah, people prefer just to yell and complain.

Ma Fi Metlo, for its part, presented a conversation between ex-prime minister “Saad al-Din al-Hariri” and the Head of Parliament “Nabih Berri”. “Hariri” was injured in a ski accident in the Alps and “Berri” calls to check in on him. “Berri” says that it is a good thing that “Hariri’s” injury came from God and not from God’s Party, hinting at Hezbollah’s involvement in Rafiq al-Hariri’s assassination (Ma Fi Metlo, 2012a). Once again, it was an understandable hint, connecting Hezbollah to various crimes that occurred in Lebanon.

Chi.N.N. The show belonged to the al-Jadeed channel, which is identified with the March 8 camp that supports Hezbollah. This identification notwithstanding, Chi.N.N. dealt with the subject of Hezbollah’s weapons. In one of their episodes, Chi.N.N. aired part of a real interview with Gebran Bassil, who said that from his
point of view, the money (implying the Hariri family) is more dangerous than the weapons (implying Hezbollah). Salam al-Zaatari, one of the show’s presenters, sarcastically said that he never saw someone who died from US$100. Thus, aside from the fear of Hezbollah’s weapons, al-Zaatari criticized the March 8 camp, which ignores this fear (Chi.N.N., 2013b).

According to Chi.N.N.’s political commentator, called “Abu Talal” (portrayed by the actor Wissam Saad), Hezbollah would never give up its principles. Hezbollah would never be disarmed, retreat from Syria, or support a candidate of the March 14 camp for the presidency—because it had a special technique. Abu Talal used the term “technique”, which in the Lebanese dialect sounds like “screw you”. That is, Hezbollah does not care about Lebanon, only its own interests. Although the skit explicitly criticized Hezbollah, the harsh criticism, namely, the use of the word “technique”, was an implicit wordplay, but nevertheless, a criticism that was understandable to all (Chi.N.N., 2015a).

Awal ‘Ala Akhir. The show echoed many of Hezbollah’s principles and beliefs. The various skits emphasized the importance of Hezbollah’s weapons and portrayed the party as the only one that can defend Lebanon (Awal ‘Ala Akhir, 2014e). Lebanon could be protected only by the combination of the people, the army and the resistance (Awal ‘Ala Akhir, 2014f). This trinity is Hassan Nasrallah’s slogan, which has come to justify Hezbollah’s weapons.

Another type of skit concerning Hezbollah’s weapons can be framed as psychological warfare. In these skits, Awal ‘Ala Akhir ridiculed Israeli Defense Force soldiers, portraying Israel as a coward and stressing the positive change that Hezbollah brought to Lebanon (Awal ‘Ala Akhir, 2014k; Awal ‘Ala Akhir, 2014n; Awal ‘Ala Akhir, 2014o). Aside from Israel, this psychological warfare is directed at Hezbollah’s opponents in Lebanon. According to Awal ‘Ala Akhir, Hezbollah’s rivals in Lebanon were sad when Israel retreated from South Lebanon in May 2000. They still believe that the power of Lebanon resides in its weakness and cannot understand that the resistance made Lebanon a strong state (Awal ‘Ala Akhir, 2014p; Awal ‘Ala Akhir, 2014j; Awal ‘Ala Akhir, 2014i).

To wit, the subject of Hezbollah’s weapons is well presented in the satire shows. Although it is an explosive issue, the satire shows did not hesitate to deal with it, despite the consequences. They did it, however, in various ways, from broad hints to explicit criticism. Once again, it was Basmat Watan, the veteran Lebanese satire show, that went the whole nine yards with its harsh criticism.

The Attitude toward the Lebanese President, Foreign Heads of States and Syria

The Lebanese press and media laws forbid insulting the Lebanese president and heads of neighboring states. Also, past experience has revealed that one should be cautious with criticizing Syria and its regime. It appears that almost all the satire shows were careful about insulting the Lebanese president. However, they did not refrain from criticizing foreign heads of states. As for Syria, almost all the satire
shows criticized it in different ways. Nevertheless, one should bear in mind that a vast amount of this criticism occurred while Syria was sinking into a bloody civil war, in other words, when its grip over Lebanon was slipping.

*Basmat Watan.* We did not find any instances of criticizing an incumbent Lebanese president, but several cases of satire were aimed at former presidents. According to Claude Khalil, one of the actors and writers of *Basmat Watan,* because of political pressures, the show did not deal with the Lebanese president (Hlawi, 2014). However, as far as heads of foreign states are concerned, it seems that *Basmat Watan* had no red lines. *Basmat Watan* mercilessly ridiculed Middle Eastern leaders. They were portrayed as stupid, cruel, disconnected from the people and selfish.

A prominent example is the Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad. *Basmat Watan* “hosted” the Syrian president on several occasions, each time asking tough questions about the Syrian revolt and Lebanese–Syrian relations. In November 2011, a few months after the Syrian revolt erupted, *Basmat Watan* interviewed “Assad”. Pamela Gergi asks “Assad” about using tear gas against demonstrators; “Assad” denies the allegations and says that to every demonstration, he sends soldiers with stovetops; the people cry because they long for gas since, according to “Assad”, there is no gas in Syria. When Gergi asks him whether it is accurate that in a 500-people demonstration, he arrests 1,000; he says it is true and proceeds to explain that the main problem of the detainees is loneliness, so he apprehends their families as well (*Basmat Watan, 2011b*).

*La Youmal* and *Ma Fi Metlo.* Both shows did not mock the Lebanese president, let alone imitate him. Also, we did not find references to foreign heads of states. However, in both shows, there was an implicit criticism of the Syrian regime and its dominance over Lebanon. *La Youmal,* for example, criticized the lack of democracy in Syria, pointing to the presidential elections in which there was only one candidate. It also criticized the lack of civil liberties in Syria, portraying a Syrian citizen turning himself into the secret service. Although he did nothing, he turns himself in “just in case”, because sooner or later the secret services will arrest him (*La Youmal, 2007; La Youmal, 2010-2011*).

*Ma Fi Metlo* presented a press conference with an agent of the Syrian security services. He blamed the Lebanese people for their protests against Syria, which led to the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005. The agent did not understand why the Lebanese people did so. According to this agent, the Turks ruled Lebanon for over 400 years, and there were no demonstrations. Syria, however, ruled Lebanon for 30 years, and the Lebanese people caused trouble. As a result, Syria will close its mutual border with Lebanon and call back home the Syrian workers. *Ma Fi Metlo* criticized the Syrian occupation of Lebanon and also the Lebanese dependence on the Syrian workforce. Hence, its criticism was pointed both toward the Syrian regime and the Lebanese one (*Ma Fi Metlo, 2011b*).

*Chi.N.N.* While the satire shows that were under review abide by the prohibition of mocking the Lebanese president, *Chi.N.N.* deviated from this prohibition at least once. In one of their episodes, *Chi.N.N.* made fun of the then-president Michel Suleiman and his inability to speak English fluently (*Chi.N.N., 2013g*). Aside from this skit, we did not find any other parodies of an incumbent president,
but only former presidents (Chi.N.N., 2013d). Although it belonged to al-Jadeed, which is identified with the March 8 camp, Chi.N.N. criticized the Syrian regime and the Lebanese politicians who cooperate with it. As mentioned above, Chi.N.N. mocked Michel Aoun (before he became president) for seeing Syria as the Arab country that is closest to a democracy. Although Aoun was the focus of the skit, there was also criticism of Syria. According to Chi.N.N., there is no real freedom in Syria, and it is ridiculous even to consider it something close to a democracy (Chi.N.N., 2013e).

Awal ‘Ala Akhir. Although in most of the period that was under review (2014–2016), there was no incumbent Lebanese president, Awal ‘Ala Akhir dealt with the Lebanese president without mentioning names. According to Awal ‘Ala Akhir, the presidency holds together Lebanon, its people, its army and its resistance (once again echoing Nasrallah’s slogan)—which is why not everybody can be a president (Awal ‘Ala Akhir, 2014l). Some of the skits introduced the desirable characteristics of the president. For example, one of Awal ‘Ala Akhir’s actors conducted a street poll asking passers-by what kind of president they want. Unanimously, all of them said they want an upright one. Presumably, their subtext was that former presidents, as well as some of the candidates at the time, were corrupt (Awal ‘Ala Akhir, 2014j). Moreover, Awal ‘Ala Akhir hinted that some candidates would not have been accepted to work as a simple clerk because they did not finish school and have a criminal record (Awal ‘Ala Akhir, 2014m).

To wit, almost all the satire shows that were under review abided by the prohibition on insulting the Lebanese president; we found only one deviation from that principle. Some shows did discuss the desired characteristics of a president, but this took place when the incumbent president was due to end his term, and the process of electing a new one was in progress.

Summary and Conclusions

The genre of political satire is well established in Lebanon. Aside from making people laugh, it seems that the Lebanese political satire shows had another mission: to protect the principle of freedom of expression. It can be safely stated that regarding criticism of the political situation in Lebanon, as well as mocking politicians, there is complete freedom of expression within the satire sphere. All the satire shows that were under review vehemently criticized the Lebanese regime and administration, and except for Awal ‘Ala Akhir, they also ridiculed the various politicians. Complete freedom of expression within the satire shows also exists regarding neighboring heads of states and criticism of Syria.

However, there is only limited freedom of expression regarding clerics and the issue of Hezbollah’s weapons, which is a result of formal and informal censorship. Mocking and imitating clerics have sometimes led to demonstrations and interrogations. As for Hezbollah, the risk of death threats and riots exists. Nevertheless, the satire shows kept dealing with the contested issue, either explicitly or implicitly. Thus, it can be assumed that due to the satire shows’
endeavors, the taboo of mocking clerics and the anathema of criticizing Hezbollah are being eroded.

There is still one taboo, that of insulting the Lebanese president. All the shows that were under review were careful about dealing with this subject. However, the fact that some of the shows dealt with former presidents and others dealt with the desirable characteristics of Lebanese presidents, and based on the conduct of the satire shows with other controversial issues, we are led to assume that this taboo will not persist for long.

In recent years, many restrictions have been placed on the freedom of expression. Journalists have been arrested, interrogated, and threatened by the masses and by the Lebanese authorities. The restrictions were not confined to journalists but also applied to artists. The findings of this article regarding the role of Lebanese satirists in defending the principle of freedom of expression may provide some hope: The battle for a free press and freedom of expression in Lebanon is not over yet.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests
The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Funding
The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Notes
1. Qassir was murdered on June 2, 2005, probably by Syrian mercenaries.
2. Syria, for example, used to threaten Lebanon with closing their mutual border, thus paralyzing the Lebanese economy.
3. It should be mentioned that the Lebanese government enforced the press and media laws on journalists and newspapers which defamed other Arab leaders and states and not just of Syria (see, Kraidy, 1999).
4. It should be mentioned that Hezbollah’s supporters took to the streets once again after Basmat Watan repeated its imitation of Hassan Nasrallah.
5. Although there is no clear evidence connecting Syria to these assassinations, it should be emphasized that it is a well-known convention, even among academics, that it was the mastermind behind them.
6. Both camps are named after two massive demonstrations held in March 2005, after the assassination of the Sunni leader Rafiq al-Hariri. The demonstration on March 8, 2005, supported Syria and its hegemony over Lebanon. The demonstration on March 14, 2005, was against Syrian rule over Lebanon.
7. For example, Saad al-Din al-Hariri, one of the leaders of the March 14 coalition, supported the candidacy of Suleiman Frnagieh, a prominent member of the March 8 coalition, to the presidency. As a result, Samir Geagea, the leading Maronite member of the March 14 camp, began cooperating with his arch-rival Michel Aoun, the Maronite leader of the March 8 camp (Abdallah, 2015).
8. “The Lebanese Forces” was a Maronite militia during the Lebanese civil war. At first, Bachir Gemayel headed it, and later on Samir Geagea. After the war ended, the militia
disarmed and became a political party. The Lebanese Forces Party is part of the March 14 camp, which is anti-Syria and anti-Hezbollah.

9. All the La Youmal show can be found on YouTube.
10. Aoun has no sons, only daughters.
11. He was probably referring to the Sunni cleric Ahmad al-Assir.
12. Bas-Mat Watan even “interviewed” deceased presidents such as Camille Chamoun and Bachir Gemayel.
13. It should be mentioned that at the time, President Michel Suleiman was still in office, and the various Lebanese political actors were trying to find a suitable candidate for the presidency.

References

Abdallah, M. (2015, December 16). A potential breakup. Now Lebanon. Retrieved on April 28, 2021, from http://eliasbejianinews.com/archives/33810/myra-abdallah/
Abdel-Latif, O. (2008). Lebanon’s Sunni Islamists: A growing force. Carnegie Papers, 6, 1–28.
Jawdah, Abu M. (1971, October 28). Suḥuf Lubnan Maraa al-Wada al-Arabi (The Lebanese newspapers as the mirror of the Arab State of affairs). al-Nahar.
Ajami, F. (1999). The Arab predicament: Arab political thought and practice since 1967. Cambridge University Press.
Al-'Alaqat al-Lubnaniyya al-Suriyya. (1986). al-'Alaqat al-Lubnaniyya al-Suriyya, 1943–1985. Waqa’i Bibliyughrafiyya (the Lebanese-Syrian relations 1943–1985, bibliographical protocol). Markaz al-Tawthiq wa-l-Buhuth al-Lubnani. (Vol. 1).
Alaghja, J. (2011). Hizbullah’s identity construction. Amsterdam University Press.
Al-Manar (n.d.). About us. Retrieved on July 7, 2020, from https://english.almanar.com.lb/about.
al-Nahar. (1970, December 25). Unsi al-Haj fi Sijn al-Raml (Ounsi al-Hajj in al-Raml Prison).
Awal ‘Ala Akhir. (2014a, February 7a). Retrieved on July 7, 2020, from http://programsarchive.almanar.com.lb/pdetails.php?pid=6026&eid=96072&wid=3210. 05:31-07:45.
Awal ‘Ala Akhir. (2014b, February 7b). Retrieved on July 7, 2020, from http://programsarchive.almanar.com.lb/pdetails.php?pid=6026&eid=96072&wid=3210. 16:45-17:37.
Awal ‘Ala Akhir. (2014c, February 14). Retrieved on July 7, 2020, from http://programsarchive.almanar.com.lb/pdetails.php?pid=6026&eid=96083&wid=3232. 04:06-06:48.
Awal ‘Ala Akhir. (2014d, February 28a). Retrieved on July 7, 2020, from http://programsarchive.almanar.com.lb/pdetails.php?pid=6026&eid=97777&wid=3276. 08:20-10:11.
Awal ‘Ala Akhir. (2014e, March 7). Retrieved on July 7, 2020, from http://programsarchive.almanar.com.lb/pdetails.php?pid=6026&eid=98481&wid=3309. 05:33-07:28.
Awal ‘Ala Akhir. (2014g, March 14a). Retrieved on July 7, 2020, from http://programsarchive.almanar.com.lb/pdetails.php?pid=6026&eid=99240&wid=3320. 12:06-15:58.
Awal ‘Ala Akhir. (2014h, March 14b). Retrieved on July 7, 2020, from http://programsarchive.almanar.com.lb/pdetails.php?pid=6026&eid=99240&wid=3320. 09:45-10:46.
Awal ‘Ala Akhir. (2014i, March 14c). Retrieved on July 13, 2020, from http://programsarchive.almanar.com.lb/pdetails.php?pid=6026&eid=99240&wid=3320. 18:38-21:14.
Awal ‘Ala Akhir. (2014j, April 11). Retrieved on July 16, 2020, from http://programsarchive.almanar.com.lb/pdetails.php?pid=6026&eid=106379&wid=3419 11:25-13:11.
Chi.N.N. (2013b, January 21b). Retrieved on June 8, 2020, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GWZoPbFbsd4
Chi.N.N. (2013c, April 29). Retrieved on June 23, 2020, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2NaCl5bs7k.
Chi.N.N. (2013d, May 7). Retrieved on July 6, 2020, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MjxFg7aPXH4
Chi.N.N. (2013e, September 25). Retrieved on June 22, 2020, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nHglezO4uIQ
Chi.N.N. (2013f, October 3). Retrieved on June 22, 2020, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uEDFj57TQC0&
Chi.N.N. (2013g, October 11). Retrieved on June 7, 2020, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zQZmZDQeFBQ
Chi.N.N. (2013h October 15). Retrieved on June 21, 2020, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jt6wnAv1JRy&
Chi.N.N. (2015a, February 17). Retrieved on March 17, 2021, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-l4wjw6_cQ&t=100s
Chi.N.N. (2015b, November 10a). Retrieved on June 22, 2020, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pGFdAvPSTU
Chi.N.N. (2015c, November 10b). Retrieved on June 22, 2020, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pGFdAvPSTU
Daher, A. (2019). Hezbollah: Mobilization and power. Oxford University Press.
Dajani, N. (2013). The myth of media freedom in Lebanon. Arab Media and Society, 18, 1–9.
Richani El, S. (2013). The Lebanese broadcasting system: A battle between political parallelism, commercialization and de-facto liberalism. In Guaybess, Tourya (ed.), National broadcasting and state policy in Arab countries (pp. 69–82). Palgrave Macmillan.
El-Husseini, R. (2012). Pax Syriana—Elite politics in postwar Lebanon. Syracuse University Press.
El-Husseini, R. (2015, August 4). What a garbage crisis tells us about Lebanese politics. The Washington Post. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2015/08/04/what-a-garbage-crisis-tells-us-about-lebanese-politics/
Freedom House. (2019). Lebanon: Freedom of expression and belief. Retrieved on April 29, 2021, from https://freedomhouse.org/country/lebanon/freedom-world/2020
Hansson, J. Safieddine, H. (2016). Lebanon’s al-Akhbar and radical press culture: Toward and intellectual history of the contemporary Arab left. Arab Studies Journal, 24(1), 192–227
Harb, Z. (2011). Channels of resistance in Lebanon: Liberation propaganda, Hezbollah and the media. IB Tauris.
Hlawi, R. (2014, April 5). Klod Khalil: ‘La Na’tamad ‘ala Jins wa’ Basmat Watan Matchless (Claude Khalil: we do not rely on sex, and Basmat Watan Matchless). Elfann. Retrieved on June 16, 2020, from https://www.elfann.com/news/show/1081879/%D9%83%D9%84%D9%88%D8%AF-%D8%AE%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%84-%D9%86%D9%89%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%AF-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%86%D8%B3-%D9%88%D8%A8%D8%B3%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%88%D8%B7%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%AA%D9%84%D9%88 [Arabic].
Kalam, Ennas. (2010, October 21). LBCI ownership. Retrieved on June 4, 2020, from https://www.lbcgroup.tv/watch/14229/lbci-ownership/en
Knudsen, A. Kerr, M. (Eds). (2013). The cedar revolution and beyond. In Lebanon after the cedar revolution (pp. 3–21). Oxford University Press.

Kraidy, M. M. (1999). State control of television news in 1990s Lebanon. Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, 76(3), 485–498.

La Youmal. (2003–2005). Season 2, Episode 18. Retrieved on May 12, 2020, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8f7Yg7e4f-8

La Youmal. (2005–2008). Season 3, Episode 17. Retrieved on May 17, 2020, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ZUTJp7r-Q

La Youmal. (2007). Season 3, Episode 18. Retrieved on June 2, 2020, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L2F8EIV6Cw

La Youmal. (2008–2011). Season 4, Episode 7. Retrieved on May 23, 2020, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vzeDK6Fnvn8&ab_channel=FutureTVLaYoumal

La Youmal. (2008–2011a). Season 4, Episode 25. Retrieved on May 21, 2020, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kho8XRHuMX8.

La Youmal. (2008–2011b). Season 4, Episode 65. Retrieved on May 21, 2020, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GlIIduGVyOEa

La Youmal. (2008–2011c). Season 4, Episode 87. Retrieved on August 14, 2020, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rJm9y5EhG

La Youmal. (2009–2010). Season 4, Episode 88. Retrieved on May 17, 2020, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2NgjHOBSmee.

La Youmal. (2009–2010a). Season 4, Episode 14. Retrieved on May 17, 2020, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8T1UBS4iEw8&ab_channel=FutureTVLaYoumal

La Youmal. (2009–2010b). Season 4, Episode 22. Retrieved on May 12, 2020, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gsBjAkJXeU

La Youmal. (2009–2010c). Season 4, Episode 22. Retrieved on May 14, 2020, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gsBjAkJXeU&list=PLMrmevZP9VuYcTxUJWS9Q9pOwD_u3PhTV&index=112

La Youmal. (2010–2011). Season 4, Episode 118. Retrieved on June 2, 2020, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z-jPY_cYcqs

Ma Fi Metlo. (2011a). Season 1, Episode 5. Retrieved on June 2, 2020, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L-bZEWZq7hs&list=PLYiZrG0hxxqyYumi7Ndw3TrHrAdZGNgO9t3&index=5

Ma Fi Metlo. (2011b, August 28). Retrieved on June 4, 2020, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DAoAul05gJY&list=PL71bvwn7RGcEx4yjiFRb1giFHUKQ5YPB&index=35

Ma Fi Metlo. (2012a, January 26). Season 1, Episode 14. Retrieved on June 2, 2020, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fs5qCslb9Y&t=1039s

Ma Fi Metlo. (2012b, February 23). Season 1, Episode 18. Retrieved on June 2, 2020, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yBkGADe4pVg&list=PLYiZrG0hxxqyYumi7Ndw3TrHrAdZGNgO9t3&index=23

Ma Fi Metlo. (2012c, March 29). Season 1, Episode 23. Retrieved on June 2, 2020, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yBkGADe4pVg&list=PLYiZrG0hxxqyYumi7Ndw3TrHrAdZGNgO9t3&index=23

Melki, J. P. (2008). Television news and the state in Lebanon [PhD Dissertation]. University of Maryland.

Mellor, N. Rinnawi, K. Dajani, N. Ayish, M. I. (2011). Arab media: Globalization and emerging media industries. Polity Press.
Ministry of Information. (2015, December 29). Lebanese publication laws. Retrieved on April 1, 2020, from https://www.ministryinfo.gov.lb/522

National Archive. (1973, June 14). RG 59 8-30-73: Box 2448/F. POL LEB-SYR Syrian foreign minister criticizes Lebanon. National Archive, College Park, Maryland.

Nisan, M. (2012). Of wars and woes: A chronicle of Lebanese violence. The Levantine Review, 1(1), 32–48.

Norton, A. R. (2007). *Hezbollah—A short history*. Princeton University Press.

Perlov, O. (2015, February 12). Social networks: The gap between quantitative and qualitative research. *The Institute for National Security Studies*. Retrieved on May 4, 2021, from https://www.ins.org.il/he/%D7%94%D7%A8%D7%A9%D7%AA%D7%95%D7%AA-%D7%94%D7%97%D7%91%D7%A8%D7%AA%D7%99%D7%95%D7%A2%D7%9C-%D7%94%D7%A4%D7%A2%D7%A8-%D7%91%D7%99%D7%9F-%D7%9E%D7%97%D7%A7%D7%A8-%D7%9B%D7%9E%D7%95%D7%AA%D7%99/

PRO. (1970, March 10). Public Record Office, Kew, London, FCO 17/1112: Lebanese/Syrian Relations.

PRO. (1971, October 30). Public Record Office, FCO 17/1444: Lebanese/Syrian Relations. PRO. (1974a, May 25). Public Record Office 93/427: FCO The Government and the Press.

PRO. (1974b, June 6). Public Record Office, FCO 93/427: Government and Press.

PRO. (1974c, June 8). Public Record Office, FCO 93/427: Government and Press.

PRO. (1974d, June 12). Public Record Office 93/427: Lebanese Government’ FCOs Measures against the Press.

PRO. (1974e, June 17). Public Record Office 93/427: FCO The Government and the Press. Reporters without Borders. (2018, January 31). Lebanese authorities less tolerant of media criticism. https://rsf.org/en/news/lebanese-authorities-less-tolerant-media-criticism

Reporters without Borders. (2020, October 8). Three Lebanese women journalists hounded on social media. https://rsf.org/en/news/three-lebanese-women-journalists-hounded-social-media

Reporters without Borders. (2021, January 14). Lebanon: Violence against reporters becoming more frequent in Lebanon. https://rsf.org/en/news/lebanon-violence-against-reporters-becoming-more-frequent-lebanon

Rugh, W. (2004). *Arab mass media: Newspapers, radio, and television in Arab politics*. Praeger Publishers.

Saad-Ghoryayeb, A. (2002). *Hizb‘ullah—Politics and religion*. Pluto Press.

Saghieh, N., Saghieh, R., Geagea, N. (2010). *Censorship in Lebanon: Law and practice*. Heinrich-Böll Foundation.

(Tarikh Qanat al-Jadid. The History of al-Jadeed Station). (n.d.). Retrieved on June 18, 2020, from https://www.aljadeed.tv/arabic/about-us/aljadeed-history [Arabic].

Wike, R., Simmons, K. (2015, November 18). Global support for principle of free expression, but opposition to some forms of speech. *Pew Research Center*. 18–19. https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2015/11/Pew-Research-Center-Democracy-Report-FINAL-November-18-2015.pdf

Worall, J., Mabon, S., Clubb, G. (2015). *Hezbollah: From Islamic resistance to government*. Praeger.

Yalibnan. (2013, November 11). TV skit mocking Nasrallah sparks protests in Lebanon. Retrieved on March 17, 2021, from https://yalibnan.com/2013/11/11/tv-skit-mocking-nasrallah-sparks-protests-in-lebanon/

Young, M. (2006, August 4). Hezbollah’s other war. *The New York Times Magazine*. https://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/04/magazine/04lebanon.html

Zisser, E. (2009). Lebanon blood in the cedars: From the civil war to the second Lebanon war. *Kav Adom*. 