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been forced at certain moments to declare his readiness to compromise over controversial programming. This could potentially be perceived as shirking the challenge of direct involvement in contentious social and cultural debates and even encouraging others to avoid them also. However, MBC's need to maximise audiences for the sake of advertising revenue is bound up with the level of risk that Walid al-Ibrahim is prepared to take. Hence, Ali Jaber's thesis is that Sheikh Walid is an institutional entrepreneur, who creates new institutional structures and handles things in new ways. In other words, MBC Group is a relatively complex high-tech Saudi-owned satellite network attempting to operate on capitalist principles in a pre-capitalist traditional society controlled unilaterally by holders of political and religious power. As such, it fits the kind of development that Ghathami describes as *tafra* (economic boom), whereby personal development is left behind and modernity is achieved more in appearance than reality.

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Alwaleed bin Talal: Media Moguls and Media Capital

Marwan M. Kraidy

In *Playing to the World's Biggest Audience: The Globalization of Chinese Film and Television*, Michael Curtin develops his notion of media capital, inspired by work in cultural geography, to capture the complex interactions surrounding media industries in an era of increasing globalisation. As 'a concept that at once acknowledges the spatial logics of capital, creativity, culture, and polity without privileging one among the four,'¹ media capital enables an understanding of media industries that takes into account global structural forces while remaining sensitive to contextual variations. Arguing that media capital works in three ways, Curtin writes that 'the spatial dynamics of media capital have remained fairly consistent, playing a structuring role in the film and broadcasting industries since the early twentieth century [...] media capital operates according to (1) a logic of accumulation, (2) trajectories of creative migration, and (3) forces of sociocultural variation.'²

Although Curtin developed his media capital framework to analyse the globalisation of television and film industries in Greater

China (People's Republic of China, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong) in the late twentieth century, his approach could be helpful in understanding trends in the Arab media industries. In this chapter, I explore the notion that a defining feature of media moguls is their positioning at the intersection of processes inherent in Curtin's three-way logic of media capital. The chapter considers the case of Saudi royal prince and media mogul Alwaleed bin Talal, to explore how a media capital approach enables a new understanding of media moguldom. As is by now well-established, Saudi businessmen were pioneers in the Arab satellite television boom that started in the early 1990s, precisely because of their substantial financial clout and their proximity to political power, which allowed them to pursue accumulation unhindered by economic and political obstacles. Trajectories of creative migration, by which Curtin means the movement of skilled media workers across national boundaries and their concentration in geographical locations where media industries are particularly active, was also central to the rise of Saudi media moguls: media companies that became cornerstones of media empires presided over by moguls did not emerge in Riyadh or Jeddah, but in Rome (Orbit), London and Dubai (MBC and its 24-hour news arm, Al-Arabiya), Beirut and Cairo (Rotana).

Forces of socio-cultural variation, an umbrella concept under which Curtin includes both cultural resistance to foreign media and media policy and content regulation, have been a challenge to Saudi media moguls, especially to Alwaleed bin Talal, who is perceived in his own Saudi backyard as exceedingly liberal. Re-evaluating the notion of the 'Saudi-Lebanese connection',³ this chapter explores how transnational links give media moguls considerable assets in overcoming what Curtin calls socio-cultural variation. Indeed, a combination of media capital accumulation and creative migration enabled moguls like Alwaleed to overcome, or at least manage, constraints imposed by the forces of socio-cultural variation peculiar to Saudi Arabia.

Accumulation and Creative Migration as Pursued by Alwaleed

Alwaleed bin Talal's peculiar parentage, business acumen, vast media holdings and social and political pronouncements make him arguably the most visible Arab media mogul of his generation, and one of a handful of globally influential media moguls. His father, Talal bin Abdel-Aziz Al Saud, advocated constitutional reforms in Saudi Arabia and rebelled against his brothers and cousins in the 1960s, briefly partaking in Nasser's radio campaign against the House of Saud. His mother, Mona al-Solh, is the daughter of independent Lebanon's first prime minister. Most importantly, unlike his numerous cousins, Alwaleed is an ambitious workaholic not content to live a life of passive luxury on a royal stipend.

Alwaleed moved into the media sector after establishing himself in other sectors, and ventured outside Saudi Arabia after building a strong operational base in the kingdom. Indeed, from relatively modest beginnings in Saudi real-estate development, Alwaleed rose to fame as the investor who rescued Citigroup in the 1990s, consolidated his grip over the Saudi media market, expanded his media holdings to a dominant position in the pan-Arab landscape, became a noted partner and trusted adviser and supporter of Rupert Murdoch, and emerged as a global spokesperson of the Saudi royal family during the Arab uprisings. The prince's fortune increased by 32 per cent in 2011 to US\$22.9 billion, cementing his status as the wealthiest Arab, and putting him in 20th position among global billionaires.⁴ Alwaleed bin Talal thus positioned himself as an always influential, sometimes decisive player at points of connection between global media and financial forces, pan-Arab media, business and political developments and national Arab politics, especially, although not exclusively, in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Lebanon and, more recently, Bahrain.

Alwaleed's membership in the royal family of the Al Saud, and his direct ancestral line to the kingdom's founder, gave him the initial

financial and political advantage with which to build a business foundation. After a start in construction, in 1993 Alwaleed's company, Kingdom Holding, bought two major Saudi companies and 30 per cent of Arab Radio and Television (ART), the latter for US\$240 million. In 1994, Alwaleed bought 25 per cent of Euro Disney. In 1995, he bought 25 per cent of Rotana Audio Visual, 'the largest Saudi soundtrack and music producer';⁵ 50 per cent of Silki La Silki (Wire and Wireless), a Saudi telecom company, and 3 per cent of Mediaset S.P.A, affiliate of Italian Fininvest, for more than US\$100 million. This was followed in 1997 by acquisitions of stocks in Apple computers, Planet Hollywood, advertising giant Saatchi and Saatchi, Sony Entertainment, Netscape and – most famously – 5 per cent of Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation for US\$400 million.⁶

In the following years, Alwaleed focused on building a horizontally and vertically integrated music television conglomerate that became akin to 'MTV, Atlantic Records, and Ticketmaster merged in one entity.'⁷ To do this, the prince increased his stake in Rotana from 25 per cent in 1995 to 48 per cent in 2002 and again to 100 per cent in 2003.⁸ He also bought ART's music channel and its vast Arabic music archive, which included 2,500 music videos and 5,000 recorded concerts. This enabled him to launch four specialised music channels under the name of Rotana, a company then reputedly worth less than US\$1 billion.⁹ The deal cemented Alwaleed's position as the dominant player in the pan-Arab music industry, a clout compounded by Rotana's exclusive production, distribution and marketing contracts with leading Arab singers. By the mid-2000s, Rotana had become a monopolistic giant in music and music video production, its roster encompassing leading Gulf, Egyptian and Lebanese stars.

On 8 August 2007, a Rotana press release featuring statements by Alwaleed bin Talal and LBC's Pierre Daher announced a merger with LBCSat. Daher is quoted saying that 'In today's media landscape only groups able to offer a comprehensive package of targeted channels to advertising markets are expected to grow [...] and we intend to be part of that growth.'¹⁰ In the Saudi media, Alwaleed emphasised the

merger's expected impact on social and cultural development and on propelling Arab media to an international standing.¹¹ In the following days, journalists stressed that the joint venture was less than an actual institutional merger, a 'moving in together' rather than a 'marriage', as a Lebanese advertising executive put it,¹² while the Lebanese leftist newspaper *Al-Akhbar* argued that the whole purpose of Rotana's announcement was to give Daher managerial leeway within Rotana.¹³

The global financial recession of late 2008 affected Alwaleed's behaviour in the Arab media sector. In the summer of 2009, production houses in Beirut that had for years churned out music videos for Rotana were complaining that, as one executive put it, 'Alwaleed pulled all his money out of the music video market', with devastating consequences in light of Rotana's size. The pressure of dwindling liquidity exacerbated tensions between Rotana and some of its rivals, with legal proceedings between Rotana and Alam El Phan in Cairo.¹⁴ In the meantime, Rotana was bleeding talent, with numerous singers complaining about the company's alleged monopolistic practices and breaking or not renewing their contracts, encouraged by a trend of self-production and by the distribution and marketing opportunities afforded by the online media environment.¹⁵ By late 2010, rumours increasingly suggested that Rotana was undergoing a deep restructuring and shutting down its Beirut offices.¹⁶

In spite of the financial crisis, Alwaleed increased his media holdings. In 2009, Alwaleed's share of Saudi Research and Marketing Group (SRMG), the mother company of the pan-Arab daily newspaper *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* and one of the largest Arab media companies, was reported to have risen to 35 per cent.¹⁷ Alwaleed also grew closer to Rupert Murdoch and, by 2010, the Saudi prince and Australian tycoon were notable investors in each other's companies, with Alwaleed owning 7 per cent of News Corporation stock, worth around US\$3 billion, and Murdoch owning 9 per cent of Rotana Group, worth around US\$70 million. In December 2011, Alwaleed made a US\$300 million investment in the San Francisco-based, micro-blogging company Twitter Inc. At the time, the company was valued at US\$8.4 billion, making Alwaleed's stake

about 3.6 per cent of the company.¹⁸ Kingdom Holding sent a release to the media emphasising both the expected investment pay-off and the growing influence of Twitter, which had been touted as an important factor in the Arab uprisings that began in Tunisia in December 2010.

Alwaleed's logic of accumulation took full advantage of what Curtin labelled 'trajectories of creative migration'. It is now well-established that the growth of Arabic-language satellite television during the last two decades followed a peripatetic industry that first germinated in London and Rome, before sprouting in Dubai, Beirut, Cairo, Abu Dhabi, Riyadh and Manama.¹⁹ In Curtin's framework, 'trajectories of creative migration' give 'access to reservoirs of specialised labour that replenish themselves on a regular basis, which is why media companies tend to cluster in particular cities'.²⁰ European capitals were attractive for several reasons, including their infrastructure, a concentration of specialised human resources, and distance from political interference. However, they were also more costly in terms of rent and salaries. By giving favourable operational terms and insulating media operations from direct political interference, the advent of media cities, especially in Dubai, attracted Arab media moguls back to the Arab world.

Alwaleed's expansion strategy took full advantage of the mobility of media labour and production within the Arab world. His initial partnership with Saleh Kamel, which launched Arab Radio and Television (ART) as a subsidiary of Arab Media Corporation, began broadcasting in Arabic and English, first from Fucino and then from Avezano, Italy, in 1993. While based in Italy, ART was producing in Cairo, Beirut and Jeddah. After Alwaleed bin Talal bought ART's music archive in 2002 and launched Rotana in 2003, ART relocated to Jordan's Free Media City at a cost of US\$8 million, paid by the Arab Media Holding Company.²¹ Although Rotana's headquarters were initially in Riyadh, until 2008 production was centred in Lebanon, specifically in Naqqash (the location of Michel el-Murr's Studiovision), and to a lesser extent in Cairo, allowing it to sign the Lebanese and Egyptian pop singers who have traditionally dominated Arab airwaves and concert halls. In

contrast to Saudi Arabian locations, Beirut provided a more liberal feel to Rotana programmes, which have systematically attempted to graft Arab sensibilities onto a Western style by including poetry programmes, announcing prayer times five times a day, and ordering video jockeys to dress conservatively during the holy month of Ramadan.²²

With costs rising and security conditions declining, Beirut grew less desirable as a location for Rotana, which by 2008 had moved most of its production work to Cairo. Within a couple of years, plans for a 24-hour news channel called Al-Arab, a channel owned by Alwaleed but technically independent from both Kingdom Holding and Rotana, occupied the Arab press. To be headed by Jamal al-Khashoggi and headquartered in the Bahraini capital of Manama, Al-Arab had still not started normal broadcasting by late 2013, having officially deferred its launch to mid-2014. Nonetheless, it reflected Alwaleed's practice of capitalising on, or creating, felicitous synergies between his logic of accumulation and strategies of creative migration. Indeed, Bahrain's rulers offered such highly beneficial conditions, including rent-free facilities and US\$15 million, that Alwaleed decided to move the headquarters for Rotana to Manama's Media City.²³

Alwaleed and the Forces of Socio-Cultural Variation

Curtin understands 'forces of socio-cultural variation' to encompass a wide gamut of issues, including social values and cultural identities that in turn influence politics and shape policy at local and national levels. Curtin reminds us that '[n]ational and local institutions have remained significant actors despite the spatial tendencies of production and distribution'²⁴ which undergird the global and transnational scale of operations of contemporary media industries. Indeed, Curtin emphasises that social and cultural issues are often instrumentalised for political expediency. '[T]he forces of sociocultural variation', Curtin writes, 'were often influenced by assertions of political will, which no doubt is one of the reasons that Hollywood film companies go to such great lengths to present themselves as apolitical institutions.'²⁵

The constellation of social, cultural, religious and political factors that constitute forces of socio-cultural variation in Saudi Arabia and the broader Arab world have often shaped Alwaleed's media operations. Saudi Arabia is a peculiar country, politically mediaeval, socially conservative and religiously strict. The country's regime, based on a foundational alliance between the Al-Saud clan of rulers and the Al-Shaykh family of religious clerics, has historically been sensitive to media and popular culture. Reactionary elements opposed photography and television, which were allowed only after decades of struggle and royal pressure to introduce them for modernisation purposes. Cinema remains a contested art in the kingdom, with Alwaleed himself spearheading efforts to develop a Saudi film industry.²⁶

The prince's own cultural and political outlook has over the years been reflected in his media outlets, including Rotana and Al-Resalah, a hip, youth-oriented alternative to Iqraa and Al-Majd. This can be clearly seen in the programming content. *Rotana Café*, a daily hour-long programme, is a revealing example of Alwaleed's outlook. Showcasing a motley crew of Gulf and Levantine teenage hosts who casually discuss film, celebrity, music and fashion and provide general social commentary, the conversation is fuelled by calls from viewers, and set in a studio arranged as a coffee shop. The show reflects Alwaleed's liberal – in a Saudi context – leanings by featuring female presenters. Nonetheless, during the Holy Month of Ramadan the hosts' dress and song selections take a decisively more conservative turn, and prayer times are announced during the programme. As such, Rotana is typical of an Alwaleed media operation, overall staying within the socio-political bounds of the Saudi mainstream while introducing new elements from both the global media industry and global youth culture to lure audiences.²⁷

Nonetheless, Alwaleed's increasing prominence and ever closer association with LBCSat (discussed in the following pages) was becoming a liability *vis-à-vis* conservative Saudi elements. The reality television controversies of the mid-2000s generated hostile pronouncements and fatwas (religious rulings) that sometimes included clear, if not explicitly

phrased, criticism of Alwaleed. It was perhaps to fend off such criticisms that Alwaleed launched Al-Resalah. Established in 2006 with a youth focus as part of the Rotana network,²⁸ its programming grid mixes films, music, talk shows and prayer, striking a balance between hipness and morality. In a press release, Tarek al-Suwaidan, the channel's general manager at the time, said that 40 per cent of the programmes would be youth-oriented, 30 per cent would target women and families, and 10 per cent would focus on children. The cartoons are produced in Turkey, Egypt and Jordan. Alwaleed made the channel's priority to present 'Arab heritage through a modern medium' and to counteract the misconceptions of Islam in other societies, with al-Suwaidan stating that the channel was part and parcel of the prince's 'mission to serve Islam and to change the ideas of the youth about terrorism.'²⁹ Like some of Rotana's programmes, Al-Resalah is positioned as a bridge between East and West.³⁰ As such, it fits Alwaleed's agenda to help bring about a more fashionable, flexible and 'moderate' Islam, and reflected the use of his media empire to promote his own socio-cultural variation for Saudi society.

Thus, the forces of socio-cultural variation impinging on Alwaleed, as well as the opportunities for him to circumvent constraints, are jointly manifest in the Saudi-Lebanese connection, especially with Saudi involvement in LBC. Indeed, Saudi moguls have been major investors in LBC since the company launched a satellite channel in 1996. Saleh Kamel initially owned 49 per cent of the shares of LBCSat, but his involvement did not endure, precisely because of what Curtin called forces of socio-cultural variation. Ostensibly, Kamel's personal religious convictions made him ambivalent about his stake in the socially-liberal and Christian-managed Lebanese channel. When an interviewer asked Kamel how he reconciled his 'dedication to Islamic principles' with his 'investment in LBC', Kamel equivocated:

Our investment in LBC involves the delivery system; we are not responsible for content. Whoever subscribes to it does so of his own free will. We have, nevertheless, *been able to influence the*

*choice of programming at LBC, especially that having to do with their aims concerning the Islamic faith [emphasis added].*³¹

Before long, Alwaleed acquired Kamel's shares in LBC, and exploited this investment to circumvent the constraints of Saudi conservatism, leveraging LBC's liberal ethos for the prince's commercial and political agendas.

When in 2000 Alwaleed paid US\$100 million to acquire Kamel's shares in LBCSat, he benefitted the Lebanese company commercially, by flushing it with liquidity, and politically, due to his excellent relationship with then Lebanese President Emile Lahoud, a Lebanese client of Syria's Assad, which made LBC less vulnerable to Syrian intervention and Lebanese censorship. Coming on the heels of multiple media ventures by Alwaleed, the transaction also confirmed the Saudi prince as a major player in Arab media industries.

Depicting himself as a 'Muslim businessman' – a strategic rhetorical arrow lobbed at the heart of Saudi 'socio-cultural variation' – Alwaleed also regularly reminds his interlocutors of his commitment to Lebanon and the Lebanese.³² Half-Lebanese by birth (through his mother), the prince acquired Lebanese citizenship and regularly made rhetorical interventions in Lebanese public discourse, often to criticise Hariri's economic policies. For a while, this fuelled a rumour that the prince was interested in the Lebanese prime ministership, which, following Lebanese political tradition, is usually reserved for a Sunni Muslim. Alwaleed's portfolio of Lebanese media encompasses interests in Murr Television (MTV) and the *Al-Nahar* newspaper, among others.

LBCSat's decision to add Saudi media personalities and Saudi programmes to its schedule attracted negative attention, with one media critic, for example, chiding LBCSat for airing a Saudi version of the US comedic ambush show *Candid Camera*, which he described as 'primitive', 'incoherent', 'devoid of ideas' and featuring 'poor acting'.³³ As a result, the media critic argued, LBCSat harmed its own reputation by not contributing to an improvement in the quality of Gulf productions, while trying to define itself as 'more Saudi than MBC'.³⁴

Important 'forces of socio-cultural variation' were behind the increasing imbrication of Saudi interests and agendas in Lebanese media. These forces include the USA–UK invasion of Iraq and the geopolitical shifts it created, most notably a scrambling of the power equation between Iran and Saudi Arabia as Iraqi Shia ascended to power at the expense of their Sunni compatriots. The effect of the invasion in terms of the peculiar dynamics of conservative versus liberal politics in Saudi Arabia could be seen in the summer of 2004, when Saudi authorities contacted LBC, asking the channel to feature Muhammad Hussain Fadlallah, the now-deceased Lebanese Shia *marjaa al-taqlid* [source of emulation], who would then, upon the Saudi authorities' urging, call upon Saudi Shia to remain peaceful and not follow in the militant footsteps of their co-religionists in Iraq. Through the convoluted Saudi–Lebanese connection, Saudi princes who rule in the name of Sunni Wahhabiyya were able to circumvent forces of socio-cultural variation by asking a Christian Lebanese channel to feature a Shia Lebanese religious scholar to appease Saudi Shia.³⁵

Such byzantine manoeuvres are needed because of the fierce battle between liberals and conservatives in Saudi Arabia and because of the royal family's precarious balancing role in that conflict. Because LBCSat is nominally a Lebanese channel with a history of Christian ownership, it could host the prominent Lebanese Shia cleric and his message of 'peace' addressed to Saudi Shias, without provoking the ire of Saudi Sunni clerics, who hold sway over the Kingdom's domestic media and are loath to provide a platform for a leading Shia figure. Tawfiq Rabahi, a media critic for *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, captured the roundabout communication practices of the Saudi elite without mentioning LBC by name:

To break the chains imposed by religious institutions, the Saudi approach relies on channels of foreign origin but of Saudi affiliation, the most prominent of which is a Lebanese channel that manages the scheduling and content of its programs according to Saudi timing. Here Saudis, hosts and participants, say what is prohibited in their country's channels because of the power of

religious groups, or maybe because the ruling institution hides behind the putative power of these groups.³⁶

The author went on to call LBC's hiring of Saudi film maker Haifa Mansour in April 2007 to host a show a 'taboo breaker', through which LBC 'prepared a 100 per cent Saudi dish on Lebanese land, out of the reach of the Commission to Promote Virtue and Combat Vice',³⁷ the feared Saudi religious police. Replaying a role the Lebanese press performed in the 1970s and 1980s, when it provided a pulpit for many Arab dissenters, Lebanese satellite channels today provide a platform for various Arab 'reformers'. 'The difference now', Rabahi wrote ominously, 'is that both the Saudi government and the opposition practice reform from the outside', through channels like LBC.³⁸

Saudi Arabia has long supported the Sunni community in Lebanon, represented at the highest political level in the office of prime minister, a post by tradition reserved for a Sunni. Saudi interest and involvement in Lebanese affairs has grown tremendously over recent years, in parallel with the tightening Saudi-Lebanese connection in the media industry. On 5 July 2008, Alwaleed bin Talal increased his stake in LBCSat to 'more than 85 per cent and less than 90'.³⁹ Growing Saudi involvement in Lebanon cannot be reduced simply to the kingdom's desire to protect the Sunni community there; if this were the case, the Saudis would be involved in Iraqi politics in the same way, which they are not. Rather, as leading historian of Saudi Arabia, Madawi al-Rasheed, argued in *Al-Quds al-Arabi*:

[Lebanon] is an intermediary on which Saudi Arabia relies in various fields, a role that no other Arab country, large or small, is able to play. Lebanon, state and people, plays this role in different realms including culture, media, politics, economics, and even religion.⁴⁰

As a tourist destination, Lebanon 'provides Saudi Arabia a social and entertainment space, a mediator between internal Saudi isolation and

external Western openness.'⁴¹ In addition, Lebanese historians, journalists and media institutions were historically able to promote Saudi agendas, regionally and internationally, and in several languages. As Al-Rasheed proceeds to explain, various Saudi 'reform' projects about hot-button issues such as women, religion and politics (discussion of which does not exist in Saudi media) find their way to the Saudi sphere through the Lebanese intercessor, which helps mitigate the impact of domestic socio-cultural variations peculiar to the Saudi environment.⁴² Thus, the author argues:

[Television] programs that focus on the internal Saudi situation have become a Lebanese specialty, while (many) Saudis are kept away from these dialogues by the state. The Saudi person comes to this open, Saudi-owned, media space, carrying his concerns, sharing his private life and the secrets of his society with a Lebanese dialogue partner, on screens that appear to be Lebanese though in fact they are Saudi in both inclination and ownership.⁴³

Since the assassination of Rafik Hariri in 2005, the Saudis have expanded their influence in Lebanon by backing the March 14 political block, led by the Future Movement (founded by Hariri), in its confrontation with the Hezbollah-led March 8 coalition. Concurrently, Alwaleed has boosted his share in LBCSat, which he now controls, as Pierre Daher remains engaged in a protracted battle with Samir Geagea, the leader of the Lebanese Forces, who founded LBC in the 1980s and has been attempting to regain the channel.

The global financial crisis that began in late 1998 had a major impact on Alwaleed's media empire, including its Lebanese components. *Al-Nahar*, Lebanon's veteran daily, owned by the Tueini family, in addition to Alwaleed, faced a severe crisis and initiated deep cuts, which entailed laying off more than 50 members of staff.⁴⁴ As the crisis spread to other media outlets, including Murr Television and LBC, in which Alwaleed had a stake, one newspaper published an article in which it compared *Al-Nahar's* problems spreading to other institutions to

'influenza'.⁴⁵ It soon became apparent that the layoffs had been driven by Alwaleed's cost cutting at his Rotana conglomerate after his Kingdom Holding Company incurred losses in the global financial markets, and that the prince was interested in bringing in his old friend Rupert Murdoch as an investor in Rotana.

Mediating between Global Capital and National Media

Using Curtin's media capital framework, this chapter has attempted to understand a prominent Arab media mogul at the intersection of logics of accumulation, trajectories of creative migration, and forces of socio-cultural variation. Over the years, Alwaleed bin Talal has used his vast cash reserves, global connections and political status to expand his business empire (including his vast media holdings) across national boundaries and media platforms. Through business acquisitions, partnerships with global and local players, and a willingness to extract creative media labour at the best price and under the best conditions from different Arab countries at different times, Alwaleed's case illuminates what it means to be an Arab media mogul.

The partnership between LBCSat, Rotana and News Corporation is a telling example of how a local sectarian outlet has shifted to being a national television station, then morphed into a major pan-Arab channel, attracting Saudi audiences and investors, including Alwaleed, who eventually bent LBC to his business strategy to attract global investors like Murdoch. Indeed, this can be viewed as a microcosm of the local-regional-global entanglements of Arab television. As Curtin put it:

on the one hand capital must concentrate and integrate sites of production to reduce the amount of time and resources expended in manufacture, and on the other hand it must increase the speed of distribution to reduce the time it takes to bring distant locales into the orbit of its operations. These centripetal tendencies in the sphere of production and centrifugal tendencies in

distribution were observed by Karl Marx more than a century ago when he trenchantly explained that capital must 'annihilate space with time' if it is to overcome barriers to accumulation [...] [E]ven though a film or TV program may be founded with the aim of serving particular national cultures and local markets, it must over time redeploy its creative resources and reshape its terrain of operations if it is to survive competition and enhance profitability.⁴⁶

Most importantly for our discussion, the fact that Alwaleed bin Talal is the linchpin of such a national-regional-global partnership highlights the importance of Arab media tycoons as mediators between global capital and national media, and this mogul's particularly developed ability to take advantage of the time-space dynamics described by Curtin above.

Nonetheless, even a financially dominant and politically connected media mogul like Alwaleed will encounter resistance when venturing outside of Saudi Arabia, and the ensuing struggles are revealing of media moguls' twinned business and political considerations. From the beginning, Alwaleed's Lebanese ventures were not trouble-free:⁴⁷ in the late 1990s, the prince lost a legal battle over shares in Al-Sayyad publishing group with its owners, the Frayhas. The more recent spat between Alwaleed and LBCI CEO Pierre Daher had business and political ingredients. In terms of business, with Alwaleed controlling LBCSat and production house PAC and Daher controlling LBCI and maintaining some influence over PAC employees, the two found themselves fighting over ownership of specific programmes, including the highly lucrative *Star Academy*.⁴⁸ Politically, it is interesting to observe that tensions between the two men increased dramatically after Samir Geagea, leader of the Lebanese Forces and recently a legal foe of Daher over the control of LBCI, visited Saudi Arabia to bolster his political domestic status in Lebanon and undoubtedly to seek financial support from the kingdom's ruler. It is also important to mention in that regard Geagea was firmly ensconced in March 14, the Hariri-led, Saudi-funded

and Saudi-supported Lebanese political coalition, whereas Daher was increasingly seen to be closer to Michel Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement, whose alliance with Hezbollah created the foundation of the Iran-supported March 8 political block in Lebanon. On balance, Alwaleed's continued involvement in this Saudi-Lebanese connection appears to have brought the prince more benefits than handicaps.

Alwaleed's decision to move Rotana headquarters to Manama and base his Al-Arab news channel in the Bahraini capital also has clear political overtones. It arose against a background of Saudi troops having entered Bahrain in 2011 under the Peninsula Shield Gulf Security Council arrangement, and the Saudi royal family providing aggressive support to Bahrain's Sunni royal family. As one Lebanese journalist wrote of Alwaleed's decision, 'The Saudi tycoon expands his business with a news channel planted in the Bahraini wound.'⁴⁹ The move looked like a masterful convergence of Alwaleed's own business interests with the national interest of Saudi Arabia. Although he has had no qualms about building his media empire on the backs of Egyptian, Lebanese, Kuwaiti and other Arabs, Alwaleed has recently emerged as a high-profile backer of Saudiisation, even supporting a new regulatory regime in Saudi Arabia that imposes financial penalties on companies who employ more foreigners than Saudis.⁵⁰ The prince's vocal support of Saudiisation reveals an important feature of this powerful Arab media mogul – that no matter how global his profile, transnational his outlook, and pan-Arab his customers, his fealty to the Saudi nation state and the royal family of which he is part is a paramount consideration. The case of Alwaleed tells us that financial clout and political connections notwithstanding, media moguls have to remain loyal citizens to their nation states to continue to thrive. To conclude, with Curtin, that '[t]he centripetal and centrifugal tendencies of media capital unfolded within the context of national broadcasting systems, allowing the state to exercise influence over flows of information and culture in public as well as private contexts'⁵¹ enables us to think of media moguls as national agents in addition to being businessmen and political players.

9

Tarek Ben Ammar: The Networked Entrepreneur

Donatella Della Ratta

'The ultimate networker in an industry founded on personal relationships, discreet backroom deals and a capillary system of famous names.'¹ This is how the *Financial Times* portrayed Tarek Ben Ammar, the Franco-Tunisian entrepreneur who started working as a film producer by 'literally renting sand to Hollywood'² and later succeeded in attracting to his home country, Tunisia, the filming of US or US-distributed movies such as Monty Python's *Life of Brian* and George Lucas' *Star Wars*.

From the start of his decades-long career to the Tunisian uprising in 2010–11, Ben Ammar produced more than 70 feature films. Yet his prominent position in global media industries during the latter part of that period was mostly due to the key role he played as personal advisor to multibillionaires such as Rupert Murdoch and Silvio Berlusconi. Ben Ammar's financial assets, estimated in 2006 at up to €550 million³ (US\$726 million), pale in comparison with the wealth amassed by those whose money he has helped to invest. For example, according to Prince Alwaleed bin Talal, *Forbes* underestimated Alwaleed's fortune by US\$9.6